

# Nurturing Community and Resilience: Four Years of Reflection on Virtual Coworking Among Boundary-Spanning Community-Engaged Scholar-Practitioners

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the practice of community-engaged scholarship and challenged internal and external boundary spanners to maintain and grow authentic and meaningful relationships. Female-identifying scholars and practitioners faced, and continue to face, extra personal and professional demands in the postpandemic era (Purcell et al., 2022). In this reflective essay, four female community-engaged scholar-practitioners reflect on the importance and value of cocreating a weekly, virtual coworking space to support professional and personal resilience. Over 4 years, this coworking space shifted in focus from solely a cowriting accountability time during the COVID-19 virtual work era to more of a “relational pause” (Barton et al., 2022) focused on encouraging, caring for, and uplifting one another. We offer readers practical ideas to organize and lead their own virtual coworking spaces or, for institutional leadership roles, strategies to support others in developing communities of care that sustain boundary spanners.

*Keywords: community of care, whole person development, authenticity, institutional transitions*



**T**he COVID-19 pandemic and the associated political, social, and environmental upheavals of 2020 challenged higher education’s community-engaged scholars and practitioners in multiple ways. Those with community engagement values and commitments found their work, framed in deeply relational ways, difficult to enact. During this time, our communities changed, our work changed, we changed. Female-identifying scholars and practitioners were especially affected by these multidimensional changes (Purcell et al., 2022). Understanding the personal and professional meaning and impacts of these ongoing changes requires time and space for vulnerability, reflection, and compassion.

In this reflective essay, four community-engaged scholar-practitioners share their

experiences cofounding and participating in a weekly virtual coworking space for the past 4 years. We began in June 2020, shortly after mandated state and campus shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our 2-hour coworking sessions initially provided a sense of community, protected time, and accountability for individual writing projects. Over time, the focus organically shifted to include more emphasis on supporting one another through various personal and professional transitions—some hoped-for and some imposed. We sold first homes; moved to new communities; merged households; had babies; lost beloved pets; adopted new ones; took on caregiving roles for aging family members; got sick and healed; changed roles at the institution; coped with national and institutional scandals; weathered leadership changes in departments, colleges, and

central administration; considered leaving academia; and experienced the trauma (and response) of a campus mass shooting in February 2023.

Today, our virtual collaborative has grown from a space focused primarily on productivity to one grounded in collective care for each other. In this essay, we discuss the factors contributing to this deepening sense of community, belonging, trust, encouragement, respect, and mutual support, and how they informed our evolving identities, supported our well-being during times of joy, challenge, and trauma, and created a deep and sustained community of care.

As a fully women-identifying collaborative, we face societal and organizational cultures of gendered and emotional labor. We begin with our personal standpoints as women in higher education (Hill Collins, 2009; Smith, 1992), our community engagement professional roles and status (Dostilio, 2017), and our institutional contexts. We discuss the genesis of the virtual coworking space (Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006; Grant, 2006; Grant & Knowles, 2000; Smith, 2019; Sword, 2017) and the importance of having a supportive space during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (El-Alayli et al., 2018; Squazzoni et al., 2020). Then, we speak to the changing phases of our coworking space, our evolving personal and professional boundary-spanning roles, and the attributes that made this experience so significant for the four of us as whole people.

Throughout this essay, all four of our voices appear autoethnographically as we share insights, reflections, and experiences from our unique personal and institutional perspectives. Representing multidisciplinary fields and departmental experiences, we are threaded together by training and commitment to embracing community-engaged principles and methodologies in teaching and learning, service, and scholarship. These diverse fields of work, orientations to practice, and commitments are woven together as we reflect on our boundary-spanning identities and intersectionality as well as our individual and collective wellness, well-being, and career sustainability. We conclude with lessons learned, especially emphasizing how virtual coworking collaboratives can be adopted as innovative approaches to supporting the personal and professional success of community-engaged boundary spanners (Purcell et al., 2020; Van Schyndel et al., 2019; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

## Katie's Story

**Katie:** When my postdoctoral research position ended at the end of 2019, I transitioned into a teaching faculty position in 2020. I loved teaching and was ready to go! Less than 3 months later, we shifted to a fully remote model in response to state pandemic lockdown, and I was the most isolated I had ever been in my personal or professional life. Prior to this shift, I made a pedagogical decision to talk to my students about the importance of acknowledging our “whole personness” in efforts to be more explicit about how I integrate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) into the classroom. Suddenly, instructors, supervisors, chairs, and administrators were all being reminded to consider the competing attentional demands of their students, colleagues, faculty, and staff—their whole personness. As an instructor, that meant spending more time acknowledging and supporting individual students' stressors and needs, as well as adjusting class expectations, redesigning curriculum and assessment. This left me with no time for the other parts of my personhood. My spouse was a first responder throughout the pandemic, and that lived as a low-frequency, constant stressor in the background of my life. It was toward the end of spring 2020 that our virtual coworking session came together, as a way to designate work and colleague “face” time.

These virtual coworking sessions were the first time I had dedicated discussion time with women who were definitively colleagues—we didn't have overlap in our social lives—about the multiple roles we were juggling and the pressure to continue giving more of ourselves, which disproportionately affected women in higher education even before COVID-19 (El-Alayli et al., 2018; Flaherty, 2017; Guarino & Borden, 2017). We started with a 2-hour time block that included about 10–15 minutes of greetings before we committed to our independent writing task. We did not all know each other at the start of cowriting, so we drew on the community engagement training and skills we used as boundary spanners, like empathy, openness, and trustworthiness (Williams, 2002).

We began building trust in each other, then gradually expanded into sharing professional and personal challenges and losses that were making it difficult to bring our best selves to our professional work. I shared our family losses and had space to

share that grief. This small virtual collaboration became a space to share my fears about health and job security. That greeting time grew to 20–30 minutes, and often longer. For me, one of the reasons this collaborative felt like a safe and welcome space to disclose these concerns was because we came from different institutional backgrounds and units, and spanning that internal boundary seemed *more* welcoming than trying to achieve such sharing with colleagues within my unit. This diversity helped me feel more like my whole self. Perhaps this could be a metaphor, but it's the first professional space I showed up in without a full face of makeup!

One of the most draining aspects of teaching remotely, asynchronously, during that time was that I identify as a community-engaged scholar, and I felt so limited in my ability to engage students in that way. When we returned fully in person in 2021, I committed to integrating a community-engaged component into my most relevant course. I was, and still am currently, the lone instructor integrating a semester-long nontraditional community engagement component into a large lecture course. There were no spare departmental resources to help me span the boundary between this community engagement and teaching. Our coworking group was made of community-engaged scholars in four different professional roles, so I was able to draw from lots of examples of how to perform this type of work in ways that could work for my class and felt true to myself. I was teaching about participatory research methods, and I decided to implement a boundary-spanning role for students. The course community engagement component was designed, and advised, by a student advisory board from within the class. They applied course concepts to the structure of community engagement and made recommendations for how to improve the student and community partner experience.

As a very early career scholar in immensely unusual times, I found that this group also served as career mentorship. It was a time where we agreed to meet and work on community-engaged scholarship (and write!). We came from different units and were at different points in our careers. I learned about how my coworking group handled competing demands in their personal and professional lives and how they discussed boundary spanning (or decided not to) with their colleagues. The pandemic was a time

for lots of career changes across academia (Flaherty, 2022). Almost all of us experienced intraunit administrative shifts, which gave me a unique opportunity to learn about different ways to approach that process and how to continue to advocate for myself in a way that helps me build and sustain a career.

### Makena's Story

**Makena:** At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had just had my first baby, moved to a new city, and was writing the final components of my dissertation . . . all with a partner who had recently completed chemotherapy (making him immunocompromised and at high risk for COVID). I know *isolation* was the name of the game for most folks, but I can honestly say I'd never felt more alone. When our virtual coworking began, we met with the aim of protecting time and space for mutual commitments, for work relating to community engagement. As time in the pandemic passed, the nature of our time together shifted. What started out as a collegially supportive group for professional productivity morphed into a community of practice, "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). We were a group of women in academia, engaging in conversation about *both* the practice of being community engaged *and* how to navigate and negotiate the context of life in the academy.

It was the first space where I felt truly seen, heard, and valued for the experiences I'd had (and was having). In all my time, across all my roles, this collaborative became the place I knew I could bring everything—my whole, authentic self, without question or judgment. As administrative shifts at the university level sent my unit cascading into a state of almost constant transition, I found myself depending on my time with women in our virtual coworking collaborative to share stories, seek assurances and validation, and solicit advice on tackling tough situations in my work.

With my "educator developer" hat on, I was filling gaps, being proactive on behalf of my unit, and taking on additional leadership roles and responsibilities. With my "university employee" hat on, I found myself working harder to demonstrate the value of my work to supervisors who were in regular turnover, while advocating for equitable pay and role designation, and ensuring

my previously agreed-upon remote work arrangement would be honored. With my “partner and parent” hats on, I was setting, maintaining, resetting boundaries in a way I had never practiced before while keeping my household running smoothly and often providing child care to my kids. Who I was as a professional—who I was striving to be as a person—was constantly being challenged as I navigated major identity transitions and, let’s face it, wore all these hats simultaneously.

hooks (2009) said it best in *Belonging: A Culture of Place*: “Communities of care are sustained by rituals of regard” (p. 229), centered in friendliness and gratitude. Each week, it was the time spent with my virtual coworking colleagues that reminded me to [re]center equity and empathy across all aspects of my life. Despite multiple, ongoing experiences of situational and global trauma, their whole human care and consideration was integral to my personal well-being as well as my professional poise and passion.

### Michele’s Story

**Michele:** The COVID-19 pandemic shutdown occurred on March 16, 2020, just 3 months after I started a new position. I was transitioning from a research assistant position in which my primary responsibilities were project management and implementation to a faculty/academic specialist position of curriculum development and consulting. Not only had my work responsibilities and university position changed, but my primary work culture and environment was drastically different; I moved from a midsized academic department that fostered academic growth and welcomed contribution across diverse roles and professional backgrounds (tenured faculty, junior faculty, interns/fellows, visiting faculty, graduate students, staff, etc.) to a much larger, clinically focused college with a profession-driven hierarchical culture of power, authority, and autonomy. Due to unmet workplace expectations, I earnestly reflected on my career aspirations and transitioned to another faculty/academic specialist position in 2023 that also proved to propagate an unhealthy work environment, compounding disappointment, burnout, and loss of confidence in finding my career fit.

Parallel to my career changes, I was also experiencing transition within my academic journey. I had finished my epidemiology

master’s thesis in 2019 while in a full-time career job but was still in the process of completing my Graduate Certificate of Community Engaged Scholarship (CES) portfolio project. Since my graduate-school writing accountability partnership naturally dissolved after graduation, I joined this coworking group with the intent of completing my CES portfolio by committing to regular writing time, gaining support from community-engaged mentor and peer scholars, and creating healthy writing accountability. Our weekly focused sessions were critical for me in accomplishing my academic writing goals.

Organically, our collaborative became a trusted space to share professional experiences as women in higher education dedicated to continuous quality improvement in our work, institution, and communities. As an emerging community-engaged scholar within the veterinary and human medical fields, promoting the core engagement principles of colearning, capacity building, and collaborative decision-making, especially within higher academic communities, has been extremely difficult. In my experience, these fields are grounded in a culture that often, counterintuitively, fails to practice community engagement principles. Our coworking collaborative has provided important growth and support opportunities integrating interdisciplinary relationship building, leadership discussions, and CES support from a female perspective that does not exist within my current professional networks, in which leadership roles are persistently male dominated (Mousa et al., 2021; Tindell et al., 2020). Perhaps most importantly, we supported one another in our encounters with unprofessional workplace behaviors, unmet expectations, disappointments, systemic organizational failures, and “small wins,” processing these experiences from a holistic, value-guided perspective. In conjunction with navigating the inherent losses and opportunities in my academic and career transitions, I was experiencing many personal changes within family relationships, new financial and property investments, social activity loss due to the pandemic, a new romantic relationship, the loss of my beloved pets, training to enhance my well-being, and navigating serious family health events. To say the past few years were a roller coaster ride might be an understatement—especially in the face of our domestic and global social, medical, and political contexts.



I have deep gratitude that our collaborative offered relief from day-to-day challenges where my authentic self was frequently unwelcomed and disrespected in the workplace. In contrast, I was welcomed, respected, and, in the true spirit of collaboration, have both contributed and received support and encouragement from other cowriters. The impact of our “writing” time became an invaluable haven of authenticity and care that I looked forward to each week. I strongly believe our cowriting collaborative has mitigated loneliness, defeat, despair, and has helped me cope with burnout.

### Diane’s Story

**Diane:** In spring 2020, I was teaching in the Graduate Certification in Community Engagement (Grad Cert), a program that supports master’s and PhD students’ learning about community engagement. In addition to in-person Friday afternoon workshops, Grad Cert learners are required to complete mentored community engagement projects with off-campus community partners. In mid-March, I traveled home to walk my dog at lunchtime and received a text message not to return to campus that afternoon. The next day, the official university announcement was made—we would be remote for the rest of the semester. Abrupt does not even capture that moment. I didn’t even have my laptop with me (after all, I was heading back to campus right after lunch).

In the days and weeks that followed, I had to learn so many things. Up until that time, I had never taught online and rarely had online meetings via Zoom or Teams (many of my community partners were still meeting in person or on telephone conference calls). The camaraderie I felt in my community partner meetings, classes, and workshops dissipated. Our institution’s work-from-home orders, and eventually our state’s stay-at-home orders, meant my days were isolated and isolating. As an introvert who craves quiet downtime, I found this situation not so bad at first. After a time, however, the lack of structure made it easy to drift through the days. As a countermeasure, Katie and I started meeting, mostly as a writing accountability space. Through my other institutional responsibilities, I knew the value of write-ins (monthly, 3-hour collective writing spaces) and initially thought of our time together that way (Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006; Grant, 2006; Grant & Knowles, 2000). At

the start, we’d say hi and then get down to the business of writing. Then Michele and Makena joined us. It was great to have “work buddies” during a time when there was so little company of any kind. I found myself looking forward to these standing weekly meetings and started prioritizing certain tasks for those 2 hours of shared work time. During those early 18 months of our coworking time together, my coworking partners helped me focus on the many new tasks at hand. From them, I learned different tricks for our online teaching platform and community-building activities for the virtual world. We compared notes and shared ideas about community engagement, especially how to navigate respectful and ethical community engagement with our partners, who themselves were experiencing great turmoil, stress, and losses. We asked questions: What was appropriate to expect from our community partners and from our students? What does authentic and meaningful community engagement look like during these challenging times? How are our boundary-spanning roles shifting as we navigate the loss of in-person connecting time with our community partners? My coworking colleagues’ wisdom improved my practice more than any university-sponsored workshop I attended or had organized for others.

During our coworking time, we extended grace to one another. We had glimpses of each other’s lives. Dogs, plants, partners, and children were welcome; they grew and changed in the backgrounds of our Zoom meetings, and then in the foregrounds of our conversations over the 4 years. Questions about how we were doing COVID-19-wise shifted to how we were doing in general. Conversations grew deeper, more vulnerable, more real. When one of us was struggling, the others listened, shared similar experiences, and offered advice gently.

As I had to think through Grad Cert teaching online and community engagement projects for my students during a lockdown, it was my coworking colleagues who had innovative and thoughtful ideas for “pivoting” (our institution’s favorite word at the time) the curriculum and community experiences. We talked through shifting expectations and needs from the perspectives of community partners, our students, our families, and ourselves. We critiqued what was respectful, meaningful, and impactful in light of what was possible during these times. We

discussed what it meant to span boundaries when we knew our institution's more transactional productivity expectations seemed inappropriate to our community partners whose bandwidth to do more for us was diminished by their own leadership challenges and personal losses. We worked to forefront relationships, care, and a slower pace with our partners in spite of pressures to carry on with business as usual.

As the immediate tasks of pivoting diminished, our coworking group kept meeting. Even after the work-from-home orders were lifted, we continued to meet virtually because it better accommodated our work-life balance needs. I noticed that our conversations shifted. We were all trying to sort out the collateral damage and emerging opportunities (we hoped) related to the ripple effects of the pandemic and the environmental, social, and political unrest. In my work life, multiple layers of leadership above me changed and then changed again—often causing uncertainty and anxiety. My coworking colleagues reminded me to advocate for myself and stay true to my values during this institutional turbulence. In my home life, my caregiving responsibilities increased significantly with the move of out-of-state aging parents to my town. My coworking colleagues reminded me that “you can't pour from an empty cup” and to take care of myself even more. When burnout from the constant juggling of so many responsibilities loomed (my work life never returned to prepandemic levels—I now have both in-person and virtual activities), my coworking colleagues provided a “relational pause,” a break from the constant push of work to step back from, reflect on, and “discuss the emotional and relational realities of work” (Barton et al., 2022).

Although I was initially more emotionally reserved, over time I grew to feel more and more comfortable sharing the messy parts of my life with them. Every time I shared difficulties, my coworking colleagues responded with kindness, care, and encouragement—even when we might not have completely agreed. Our virtual coworking time evolved into a community focused on sense-making, reflection, and care. This community of caring allowed us to navigate the emotional dynamics of institutional and life disappointments, misalignments, and ambiguities—as well as celebrate accomplishments big and small with our community partners, our students, our families, and ourselves.

Counterintuitively (for me at least), the more I shared the “hard stuff” with the group, the easier both work and life became. In a season of my life when juggling personal and professional responsibilities during unceasingly uncertain and challenging times had become the norm, my coworking colleagues and our two weekly hours of compassion, care, and, when needed, challenge, gave me the gifts of perspective, perseverance, and self-compassion. This entire experience, in turn, has strengthened my capacity to collaborate with community partners and students with compassion, grace, and authenticity at the center.

## Conclusions

Our four perspectives shed light on the significant impact of virtual coworking collaboratives in supporting the personal and professional well-being of community-engaged scholars and practitioners. These impacts span encouraging and supporting productivity; navigating change; sustaining whole-person development; reimagining internal and external community partnerships; and mitigating the effects of burnout through care, authenticity, and compassion. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was the primary impetus of coming together, we moved well beyond the unique individual needs created by COVID-19, bringing what we've learned personally and professionally to other boundary-spanning contexts.

This coworking collaborative has further highlighted the importance of equity and empathy spanning our personal and professional lives and created a space made possible by the authentic, whole human care and consideration to [re]center these priorities in our lives and careers. The authors are early and midcareer professionals with backgrounds in health sciences, higher education, Extension, teaching and learning, research, community engagement, and community psychology. Fine and Torre (2021) affirmed the value of participatory spaces where “differently positioned people come together, with distinct relationships to power and vulnerability, where our differences are cultivated as resources” (p. 8). As a result, lessons learned from our experiences may be translated more broadly into other informal, interdisciplinary communities of care for those in boundary-spanning roles. For example, this support helped strengthen Michele's confidence to continue engaging internal and external partnerships despite ongoing barriers and, perhaps most

importantly, to advocate for her own needs within these partnerships. It has also contributed to making value-guided career decisions, igniting hope for discovering roles with boundary-spanning opportunities. The reliable and consistent time established and protected by this space allowed for ongoing exploration, reflection, and vulnerability with one another, ultimately resulting in important self-discovery and growth that have influenced how we advocate for ourselves, our institution, and our partners. By drawing on the important characteristics of boundary spanners (Williams, 2002) within ourselves, we strengthened our individual and community-engaged identities.

The virtual cowork time created social connections of being seen and heard, resulting in energy necessary to thrive, thus mitigating burnout (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019, pp. 152–153). Sources of such support may be especially helpful as the complexity of boundary spanning increases (Purcell et al., 2020). The sessions also contributed to sharing institutional knowledge sometimes held by gatekeepers that helped us think about career sustainability in new ways. Over time our collaborative focus shifted from progressing writing products to navigating workplace stressors, to coping with institutional hardships, and then naturally evolved to sharing the bidirectional, holistic impact and intersectionality of our personal and professional lives, including the joys and challenges of our boundary-spanning roles. As we gained trust through vulnerably sharing our professional goals and experiences, we began to share more deeply personal experiences of our community partners, relationships, finances, physical and mental health, and future aspirations.

Women in academia face additional demands and expectations in the workplace, especially in service roles (El-Alayli et al., 2018; Flaherty, 2017; Guarino & Borden, 2017). Through our virtual coworking, we talked through the signs of burnout we experienced and helped “fill our cups” together. Celebrating with a group of women whose interest is primarily in one another’s well-being has profound positive impact. It provides encouragement for facing challenges, practicing self-compassion, developing resilience, and building professional identities that reflect personal values—all important aspects of mitigating burnout.

The relational pause Barton et al. (2022) described contributes to sustained well-being because this type of emotionally focused conversation acknowledges the collective institutional experiences of work and reframes adversity as belonging to the collective (not the individual). Instead of framing well-being as something achieved through individual efforts alone, this perspective frames it as a collective responsibility for caring for one another. These relational pause spaces encourage authenticity, support complex identities, and are grounded in the lived experiences of those who participate. Fine and Torre (2021) also spoke of the importance of similarly relationship-focused environments where participants can “speak and listen, argue differences and disagreements, develop trust together, stumble and say I am sorry, learn from mistakes, challenge each other, grow new analyses, and build a more critical and imaginative knowledge base” (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019, p. 9). Our coworking space engendered the “holding space” attributes of Fine and Torre’s critical participatory practices, a natural practice for community-engaged scholars and practitioners since we often hold space for our community partners.

### **Virtual Coworking Communities of Care at Your Campus**

Our interdisciplinary, virtual coworking space has been an important and meaningful way for us to sustain our individual and collective well-being and to inform respectful and ethical ways of collaborating with our internal and external partners. For others interested in convening similarly supportive communities of care for boundary-spanners, we would like to note that there is no standard recipe for developing these spaces because they are deeply rooted in the lived experiences of the individuals involved (Neal, 2020). As a result, we do not have exact, easy-to-replicate recommendations; instead we offer these suggestions as starting points for fostering an emergent, organic experience that honors the collective wisdom of potential participants.

#### **For Individual Community-Engaged Scholars and Practitioners**

Seek out (or cocreate for yourself) spaces that are supportive and nurturing. Remember that these spaces are not a luxury, saved for that mythical moment when you have extra time or when things get back to normal (Chabon,



2009); they are essential to your personal and professional well-being (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019, p. 135). Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2008) affirmed that building supportive on- and off-campus networks is a key practice in successful academic careers, especially for junior faculty of color. Prioritize and value this kind of community and space for yourself. Seek out others who are like-minded, share a common commitment or identity—ultimately, people who value authentic time together, friendship, trust, community, vulnerability, empathy, diversity, respect, and learning—to form a group (Babcock et al., 2022; Neal, 2020). Colleagues (internal and external) who share a scholarship or practice orientation, such as solidarity or feminist theory and literature, may find that such networks are an important asset in other virtual coworking spaces, and we encourage like minds to integrate this advice as it speaks to them.

If you are unsure whom to connect with, ask around about who is doing interesting community work and then reach out for an initial coffee (virtual or otherwise). Do not be shy about asking who else your initial contact might recommend you connect with. Consider a consultation with your faculty development office, writing center, outreach and engagement office, or teaching and learning center with the goal of identifying potential community of care coparticipants. As your group forms, build trust early on, which will naturally and organically shift through different phases (Fine & Torre, 2021; Wenger et al., 2022). Communities of practice are inherently engaged in a constantly iterative process of evolution as the groups' activities, members, sociocultural contexts, and meaning-making are in constant flux (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Remember that having collective times and places to navigate through challenges together builds resilience in more sustained ways than individual mindfulness practices (though they are also beneficial—just different in impact; Babcock et al., 2022; Barton et al., 2022).

#### **For Institutional Leaders Supporting Individual Boundary Spanners (e.g., Unit Directors, Department Chairs, College Deans)**

Consider the identities of such individuals as “long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice,” which means “identity, knowing, and social membership” are explicitly interlinked

(Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Make it a point during your informal conversations, annual reviews, and mentoring meetings to ask whether your community-engaged scholars and practitioners are participating in supportive spaces that sustain their well-being. If they do acknowledge being a part of such communities, vehemently acknowledge the value of their participation for their own personal and professional growth and wellness. If they do not have supportive networks, make some introductions, then encourage them to form and participate in nurturing communities of care. Boundary-spanning community-engaged faculty report that institutional support is needed for promotion of competencies related to boundary spanning (Purcell et al., 2020).

It is important for practitioners to give themselves permission to prioritize these activities, which is easier when supported and encouraged by leadership since these activities are often countercultural (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019, pp. 196–212). Remind your boundary-spanning colleagues that tending to their own well-being, their own selves as whole people, has been shown to be a key practice for nurturing and sustaining careers over time (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2008; Wenger et al., 2022). Tending to those more relational and community aspects also translates into strengthening relationships with community partners.

#### **For Institutional Leaders Who Develop and Lead Programs (e.g., Faculty Development, Teaching and Learning Centers, Community Engagement Offices)**

Organize small groups “to celebrate and respect the spaces that foster friendship, trust, community, vulnerability, empathy, respect and learning across diverse individuals through time in informal groups” (Neal, 2020, p. 111). Promote access to resources, training, and support for these coworking communities to increase awareness, develop skills, and encourage a culture of resiliency. The beauty and benefits of these caring communities are bounded by their organic and evolving nature (Neal, 2020). Unlike diamonds, they cannot be synthetically produced by pressure. Instead, these groups are more like a freshwater pearl . . . under supportive conditions, with specific inputs and time, something truly unique is formed.



Emphasize the value of diverse job positions, roles, and stages as well as disciplinary expertise in forming the groups and attend to power differences in the trust-building process (Fine & Torre, 2021). Encourage conversations about the joys, challenges, and strategies of boundary spanning during ever-changing times by modeling in team and group spaces, and publicly sharing gratitude to others who bravely share with candor and vulnerability. Realize that individual mindfulness practices and resilience efforts fall short when workplace burnout, the toll of continuing turnover of colleagues and leaders, and isolating and dehumanizing institutional cultures are collective experiences (Aronsson et al., 2017).

Remember that communities of practice, learning communities, and writing groups focused solely on academic productivity may reinforce the values that lead to burnout.

Instead, Lave and Wenger (1991) advocated for increasing participation in communities of practice that explore “the whole person acting in the world” (p. 49). Developing spaces that support a more relational (versus productivity) focus enables vulnerability, authenticity, and resilience to flourish, and is especially fitting for boundary spanners who foster relationships and connections as part of their core work. These group qualities can result in “deep and meaningful wisdom being constructed” among group members (Neal, 2020, p. 111) and are often values community-engaged boundary spanners advocate for and practice with their community partners. Turning those well-honed community engagement practices inward nurtures our own sense of community and our resilience to maintaining community-engaged boundary-spanning commitments.



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