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## **Academic Librarians' Perceptions of Productivity While Working from Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Amelia Rodarte, NC LIVE, NC, USA

Abby Moore, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, NC, USA

### **ABSTRACT**

This research study assessed academic librarians' perceptions of productivity while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Information was collected via an online survey that was sent out to several Association of College and Research Libraries listservs. Participants were academic librarians who work at large colleges and universities (FTE is greater than 15,000 students). Librarianship is a practice done mostly onsite, and with the sudden transition to remote work, academic librarians were forced to adapt to an unknown work environment with less access to the direct support of supervisors. This research demonstrates that the majority of academic librarians perceived themselves to be highly productive, and generally satisfied with their jobs, while working from home.

**Keywords:** Academic Librarians, Remote Work, COVID-19, Productivity, Job Satisfaction

### **INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown forced academic librarians into an unlikely situation: working from home. Historically, academic librarians have mostly worked on campus (Duncan, 2008) even if the majority of their work could be done off campus. Academic libraries have hesitated to implement remote work in the past because of concerns about "productivity, disruption of service, and other day-to-day factors" (Albro & McElfresh, 2021, p. 1). The COVID-19 pandemic forced academic libraries to implement remote work practices, despite concerns over productivity. With almost all library staff working from home, more librarians than ever participated in conversations about the future of remote work.

Both authors experienced working from home for the first time during the pandemic, and had many conversations about their productivity and general satisfaction with work. These conversations inspired the authors to study the relationship between perception of productivity and job satisfaction, in the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Librarians Working from Home: Historically & Now**

Physical work settings can affect our work “positively, negatively, or not at all” (Kenreich, 2000, p. 67). Academic librarians have almost always worked in the library. In general, “libraries have been slow to adopt programs like flextime and telecommuting” even though “telecommuting allows for greater flexibility of and control over their schedules, solutions for child-care problems, ability to pursue other interests, and a more desirable environment” (Meglio, 1991, p. 30). Duncan, in 2008, argued that, “traditionally, librarians have been tethered to a facility either because their public service role demands face-to-face interaction or because they work with materials housed in the building” (p. 216).

However, as point of need services have transitioned into online forums: chat and text reference, online consultations, and virtual instruction, academic librarians are more available, and savvy, online than ever before. Carr, (2006), surveyed librarians in Jamaican libraries and found that respondents identified the following departments to be suitable for telecommuting: acquisitions, reference, research, reservation, interlibrary loan, cataloging, and librarian instruction. Black and Hyslop (1995) noted that “technological advances in library applications have made the idea of telecommuting in library work increasingly attractive” (p. 319).

Several case studies have been published detailing the teleworking experiences of academic librarians who work in technical services, cataloging, interlibrary loan, and e-resource management. Two notable studies about teleworking and technical services in academic libraries were published in the 1990s. Meglio (1991) conducted a study that focused on teleworking and employee turnover. A case study at Michigan State focused on the implications of teleworking on job satisfaction (Black & Hyslop, 1995). In both instances, academic librarians in technical services were overwhelmingly successful working from home. While job satisfaction and retention were the focuses of the two studies, other benefits to academic librarians and their organizations included increased employee morale, a cut in overhead costs, less stressful work environments, and the ability to attract new, highly skilled employees (Black & Hyslop, 1995; Meglio, 1991).

In the mid-2000s at least three more studies about telecommuting in academic libraries were published. Two studies, one at Florida State University (2008) and one done at Utah State University (2008), focused on specific employees, who, for personal reasons, needed to telework in order to keep their jobs. Both of these librarians worked in technical services. The third study found that public librarians in Jamaica investigated how telecommuting could be adopted to combat the increased costs in real estate and traffic congestion (Carr, 2006). Not surprisingly, all three studies found great benefits in telecommuting: increased productivity, cost savings, decreased travel time, and environmental conservation (Carr, 2006; Duncan, 2008; Smith & Van Dyke, 2008).

Alongside these benefits, academic libraries have themselves shifted into the online realm because of the increase in the demand for online and distance education. Modern library services “have already been purposefully designed with a hybrid approach, with delivery both online and in person” (Walsh & Rana, 2020, p. 238). The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting shutdown has enabled libraries to “assess, modify, and expand existing online offerings, rather than requiring it to start from scratch” (Walsh & Rana, 2020, p. 238). This is all to say that academic librarians

who found themselves working remotely almost overnight were not without the capabilities to transition to virtual work. According to Rysavy and Michalak (2020), “librarians who work in departments that support virtual tools and services can easily transition to teleworking.” (p. 536).

However, work-life balance and stress management are reported concerns of librarians working from home during the pandemic. Although there is evidence that “many employees had a positive experience of remote working during the pandemic, with perceived opportunity to improve work-life balance” (Delany, 2021, p. 7), a study on quality of life while working from home in Austria (Weitzer, J., Papantoniou, K., Seidel, et al, 2021) found that an increase in quality of life did not correlate with increased perceived productivity.

## Productivity

The bulk of the responsibility of maintaining employee productivity when working from home rests with leadership and management. Leaders fear that if they cannot see their employees, then they are not doing any work (Bellomo, 2021), but it is those leaders that must provide their employees with the support they need to be productive. Risely (2020) states that “it is up to the library leaders to provide the right conditions for optimizing performance” (p. 654). Without expectations set by managers, remote workers are likely to fail (Rysavy & Michalak, 2020). Productivity, it seems, is directly linked to performance management. Managers who set clear expectations, schedule frequent check-ins, build strong teams, remove roadblocks, and effectively communicate via technology (Bellomo, 2021; Risely, 2020; Rysavy & Michalak, 2020) will see improved employee performance (Baker, E., Avery, G. C., & Crawford, J., 2007).

Management can only do so much. “Because the home environment can introduce numerous distractions...employees may find it hard to concentrate on the job at hand. This could result in suboptimal performance and decreased productivity” (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021, p. 193). Feelings of isolation, inaccurate expectations of productivity, the absence of on-site training, and technology overload are all drawbacks to working remotely. Because personal interactions and relationships are critical to team community, engagement, and trust (Bellomo, 2021), employees may feel disconnected from the organization and their teams, which can result in feeling undervalued by their managers, peers, and organization as a whole. Therefore, demonstrating productivity while trying to stay connected can be an uphill battle when working from home.

## Questionnaires and Scales

In fields such as management and organizational psychology, researchers have created instruments to measure worker productivity and job satisfaction. One such instrument is the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) version 1.0 created by Koopmans et al. in 2014. The IWPQ 1.0 is a questionnaire designed to measure the “behaviors or actions of employees, rather than the results of these actions” (Koopmans et al., 2014, p. 160). There are three sets of questions that measure different aspects of worker performance. *Task performance* questions measure core task proficiency (Campbell, 1990), *contextual performance* questions measure organizational and social contributions (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993), and *counterproductive work behavior* questions measure behaviors that actively harm the organization (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). All three components are necessary in order to capture the variety of behaviors that contribute to worker performance. As a whole, the IWPQ is an excellent tool for measuring the productivity of workers and tracking productivity changes over time (Koopmans et al., 2014).

Studies of job satisfaction are equally important in the literature, and many researchers have attempted to measure and define the concept using scales and questionnaires. Job satisfaction can be approached from a highly specific point-of-view or a general perspective (Macdonald & MacIntyre, 1997). While both perspectives have merit, a brief scale which measures general job satisfaction has the greatest possible reach as it can more easily be administered in the workplace. The generic job satisfaction scale developed by Macdonald and MacIntyre in 1997 is an example of a tool which was crafted to be broadly applicable and relatively timeless. Recent studies have used the Macdonald and MacIntyre scale as the basis for more modern applications (Al-Sada, M., Al-Esmael, B., & Mohd, N. F., 2017; Neha, P. S., Sharma, T., & Madhushree, N. A., 2016).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The authors approached this research with the goal of understanding how productive other academic librarians felt while working from home. The authors had different reactions to the remote work environment. One loved working from home and felt highly productive, while the other felt unproductive at home and was eager to return to the office. How did the authors' individual experiences compare to a larger sample of librarians? The two questions which guided this research are:

1. How does working from home impact productivity?
2. How does working from home impact job satisfaction?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Approach

The best way to sample a larger group of librarians was through an online survey. Questionnaires are highly popular in library and information science research. In 2013, researchers performed a content analysis of the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (Luo, L. & McKinney, M., 2013) and found that over 50% of the articles published in the previous decade used questionnaires as the primary research method.

### Survey

The UNC Charlotte and NC State University Institutional Review Boards approved this study. IRB #21-0533 (UNC Charlotte) and #24155 (NC State). Information was collected via an online survey administered through Qualtrics. In July 2021, the survey was distributed to all members of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) College Libraries Listserv and the ACRL Instruction Section Listserv. Approximately 3,000 academic librarians received the survey invitation. The survey questions are included in Appendix 1.

### Criteria

The researchers limited the sample size by creating screening questions to determine eligible participants. There were two criteria for participation. First, participants must be academic librarians who work at large colleges and universities. Large colleges and universities were defined

as institutions with more than 15,000 enrolled students. Both researchers work at institutions with more than 15,000 students and wanted the study to focus on peer institutions. Peer institutions were more likely to have a similar number of library staff, similar departmental structures, and similar institutional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, participants must have been working from home for the majority of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 – July 2021 at the time of the survey). The framework and research questions of this study necessitated that participants be academic librarians who were working from home. Non-remote employees would not accurately contribute to the study.

### **Participants**

107 eligible responses were collected. The screening questions removed a large number of ineligible responses. 112 additional participants were ineligible to participate because they worked at academic institutions with small populations. 6 additional participants did not finish all survey questions so their responses were not counted.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Demographics**

Chart 1 demonstrates the infrequency of remote work for most survey respondents prior to the pandemic. 75.68% of respondents indicated that they “Rarely” or “Never” worked from home prior to the pandemic.

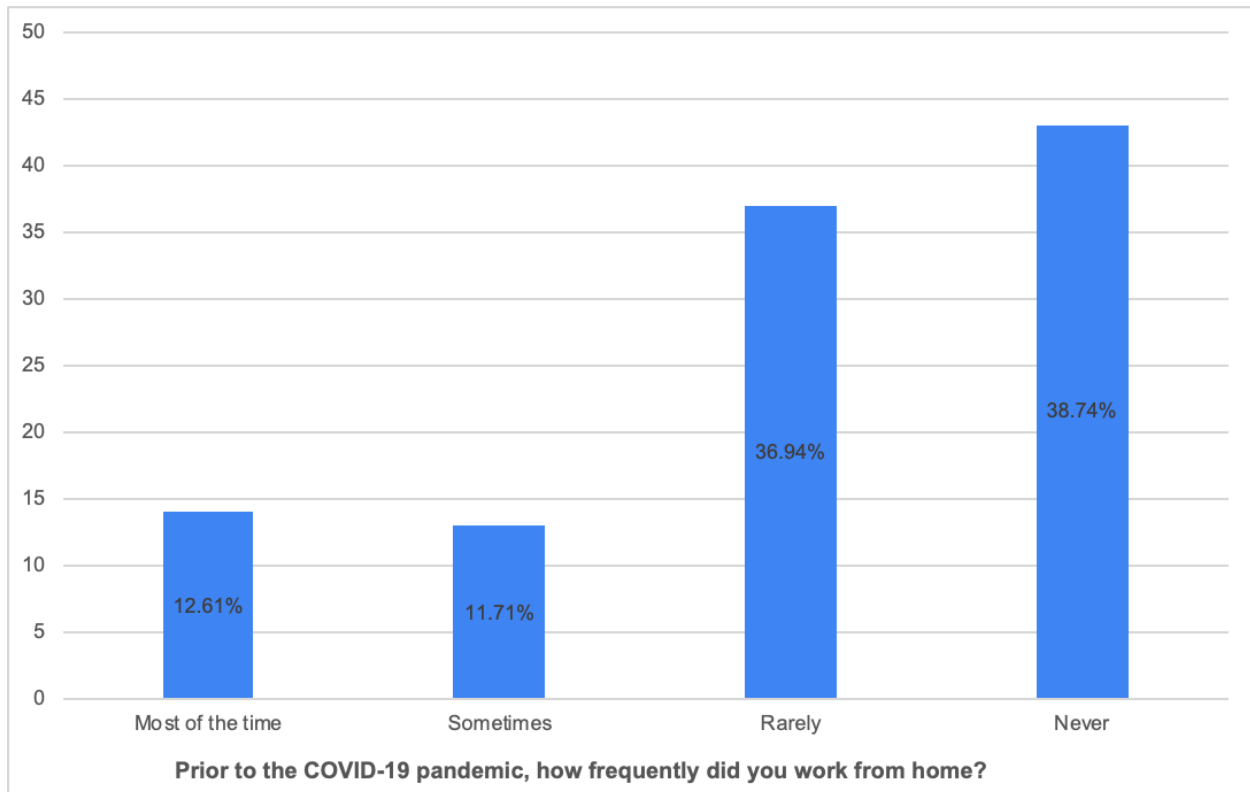
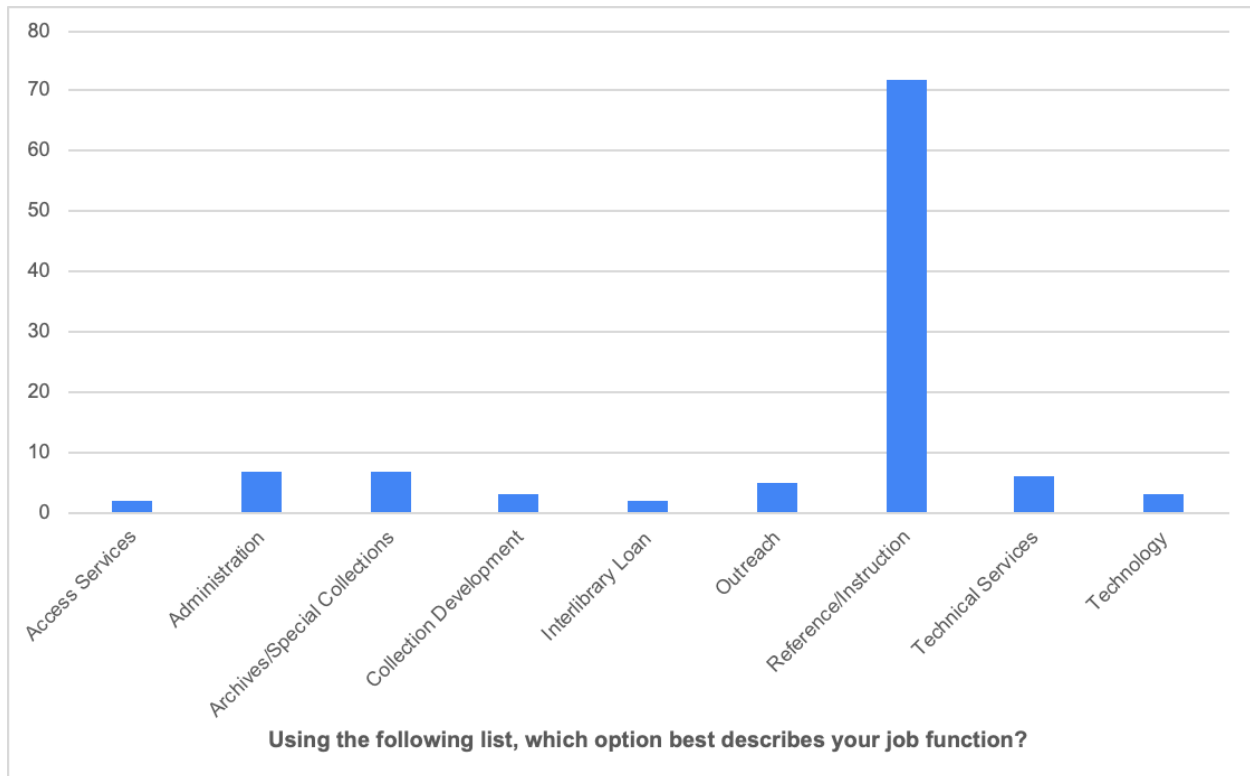
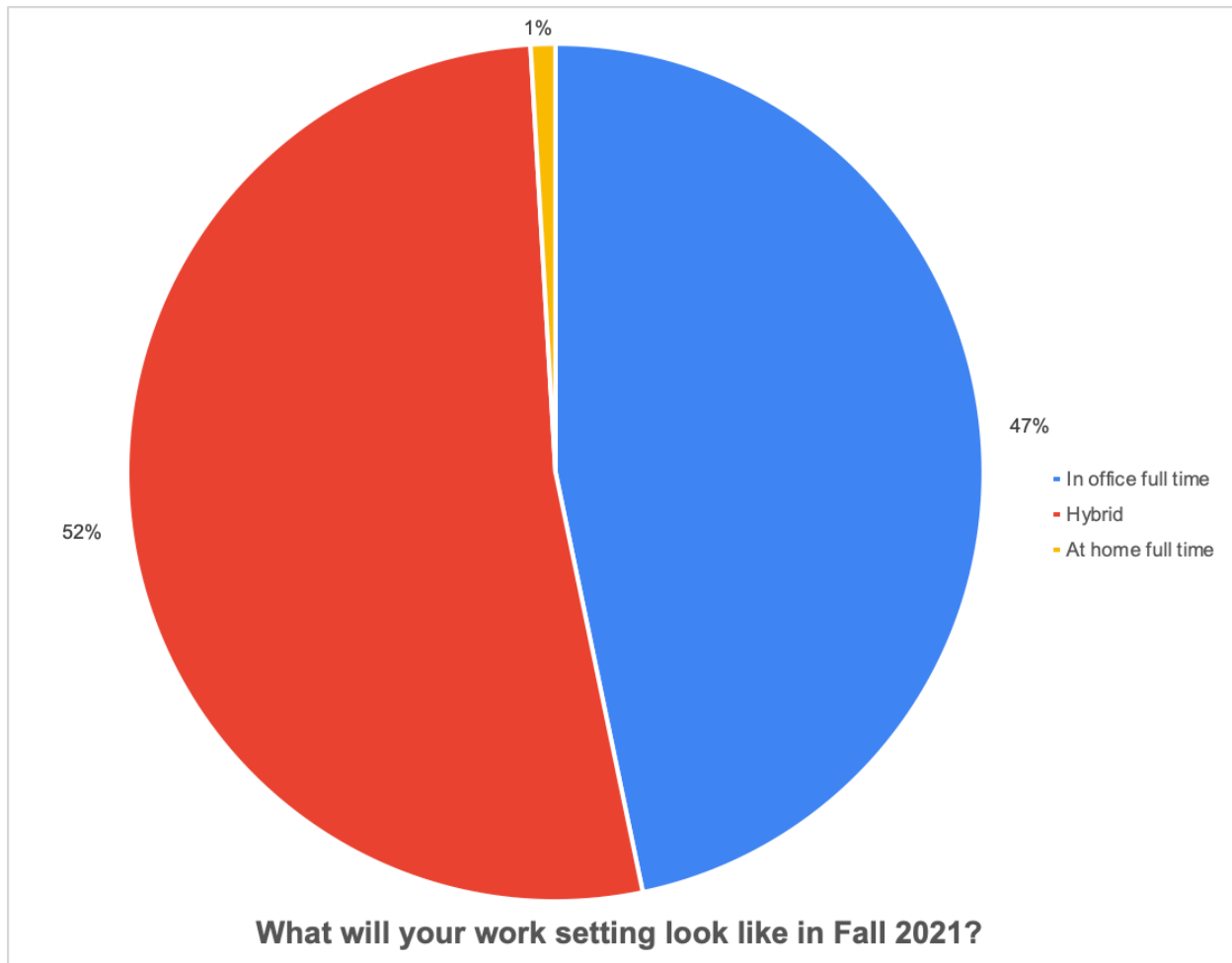
**Chart 1**

Chart 2 demonstrates the variety of job roles of respondents. 67.29% of respondents indicated that they worked in "Reference/Instruction".

**Chart 2**

At the time of the survey distribution, librarians anticipated their work location in fall 2021. Chart 3 indicates that 52.3% of respondents said they would be working in a “Hybrid” environment and 46.7% said they would be “In office full time”. Less than 1% said they would be “At home full time”.



**Chart 3**

The survey included 26 questions on a Likert scale. Respondents were presented with statements and asked to respond with their level of agreement (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Seventeen questions focused on productivity and 8 focused on job satisfaction. The last question asked about overall preference for work location. The productivity questions were based on the IWPQ 1.0 (Koopmans et al., 2014) and the job satisfaction questions were based on the generic job satisfaction scale developed by Macdonald and MacIntyre in 1997.

### **Productivity**

The first 17 questions asked respondents to rate their productivity while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. 15/17 questions were pulled directly from the Koopmans (2014) IWPQ scale. Two additional questions (Q2, Q4) were added by the researchers. Each of the 17 questions fit within the three broad categories defined in the literature review (task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior). To help expand the IWPQ terminology to a broader context, the researchers renamed the categories, and in some cases, added additional subcategories to help explain the types of questions that were asked.

Table 1 maps the survey questions to the IWPQ terminology and the new terminology used in this research study.

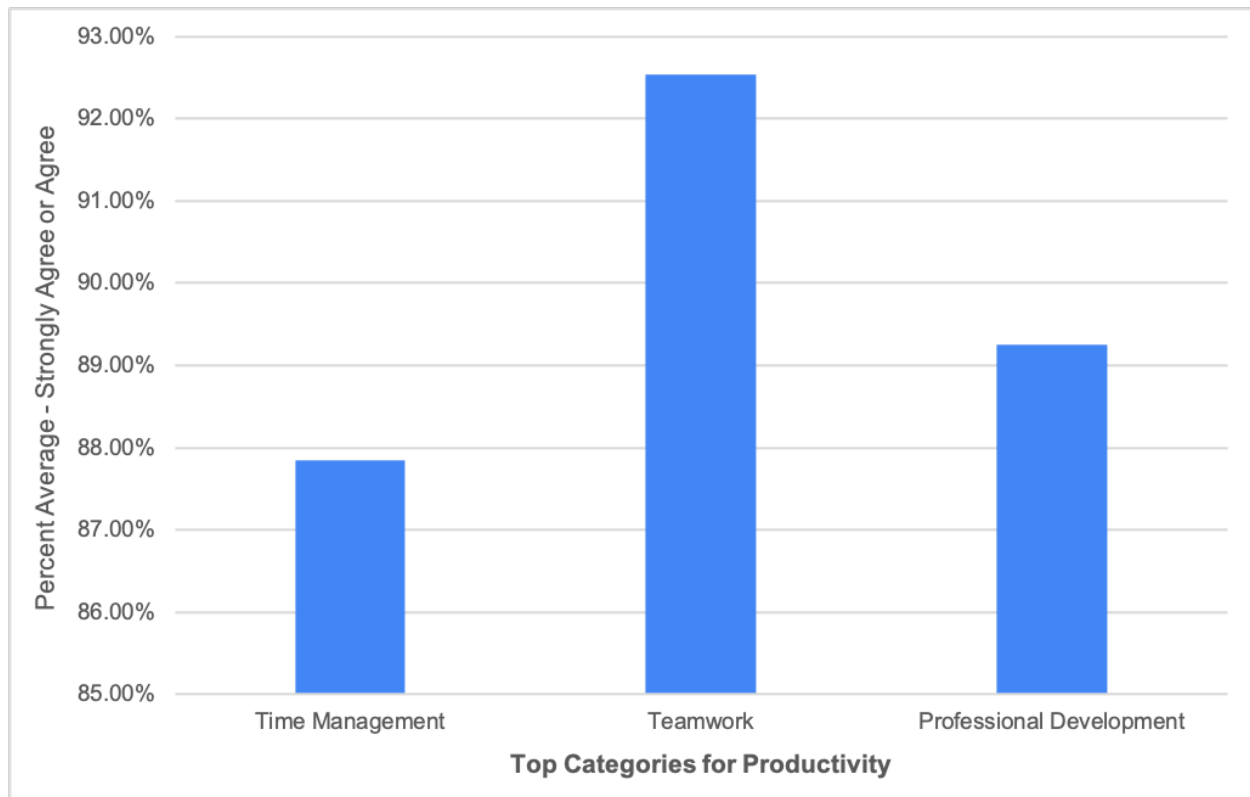
**Table 1**

Questions	IWPQ Terminology	New Terminology
Questions 1 - 5	Task Performance	Time Management
Questions 6 - 15	Contextual Performance	Additional Work (Q6, Q7, Q11, Q12) Professional Development (Q8, Q9, Q14) Teamwork (Q13) Problem Solving (Q10, Q15)
Questions 16 - 17	Counterproductive Work Behavior	Counterproductive Activities

In general, respondents rated themselves as productive. On a scale of 0-4 with 0 being strongly agree and 4 being strongly disagree, the median response was 1 (Agree) and the mode response was 0 (Strongly Agree).

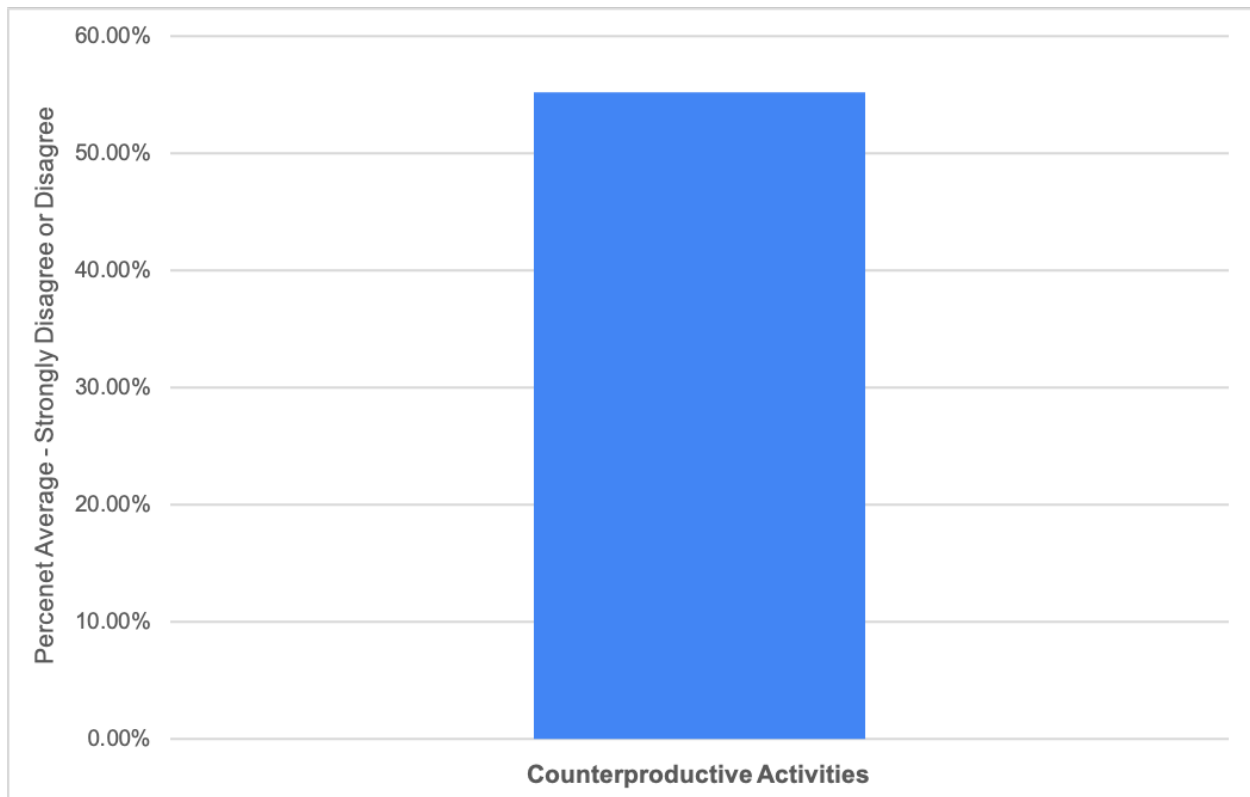
Respondents rated themselves most productive in questions related to time management, teamwork, and professional development (Chart 4).

- Time Management: 92.52% strongly agreed or agreed that they “managed to plan my work so that it was done on time.” 83.17% strongly agreed or agreed that they “set daily or weekly work goals.”
- Teamwork: 92.53% strongly agreed or agreed that they “actively participated in work meetings.”
- Professional Development: 89.72% strongly agreed or agreed that they “worked at keeping my job knowledge up-to-date.” Similarly, 88.78% strongly agreed or agreed that they “worked at keeping my job skills up-to-date.”

**Chart 4**

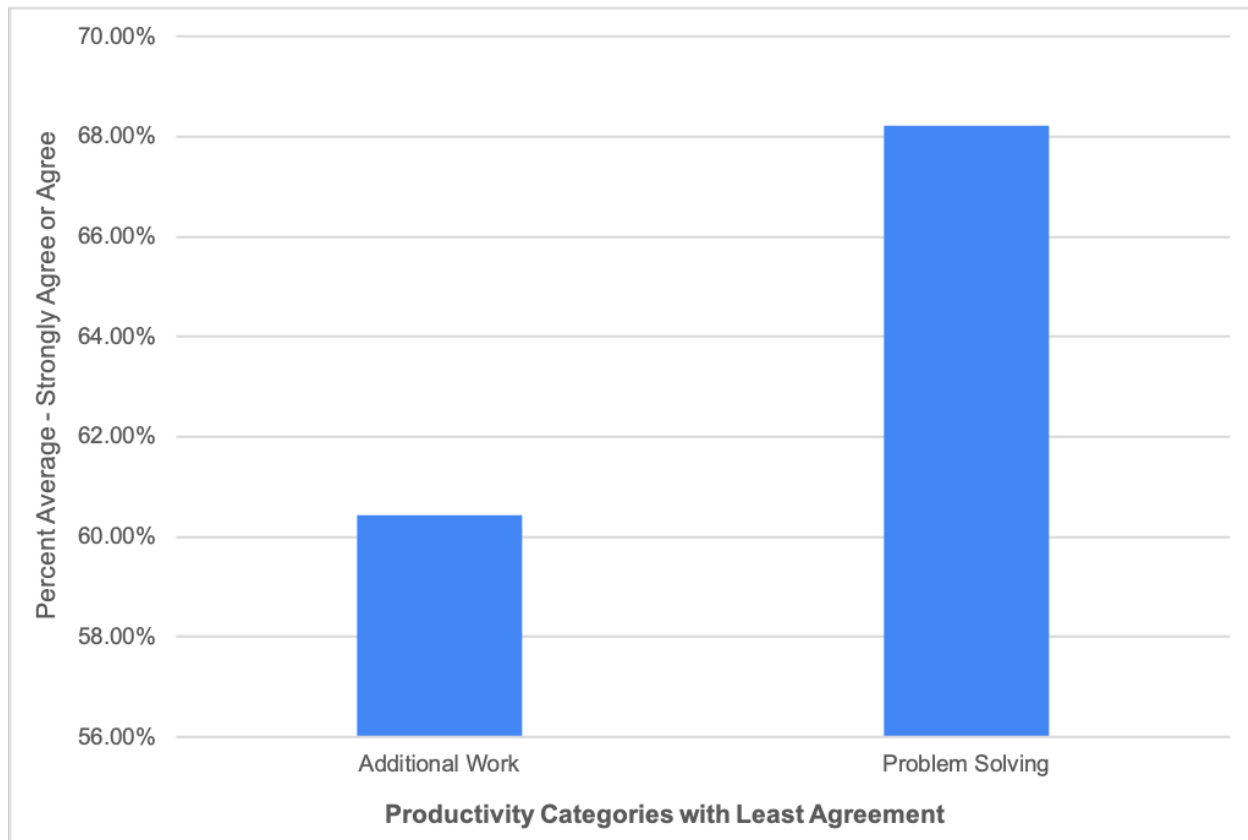
There were two negatively phrased questions in the survey (chart 5).

- Counterproductive Activities: 60.74% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they “focused on the negative aspects of a work situation, instead of on the positive aspects.” 49.53% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they “sometimes did nothing, while I should have been working.”

**Chart 5**

While the overall response indicated a high level of productivity among respondents, some questions had less agreement. Chart 6 describes the productivity categories with lower levels of agreement.

- Additional Work: 60.75% strongly agreed or agreed that they “took on extra work responsibilities.” 54.2% strongly agreed or agreed that they “kept looking for new challenges in my job.” 66.35% strongly agreed or agreed that they “did more than was expected of me.”
- Problem Solving: 68.22% strongly agreed or agreed that they “knew how to solve difficult situations and setbacks quickly.”

**Chart 6**

### Job Satisfaction

The 8 job satisfaction questions asked respondents to rate how satisfied they were with their job while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The nature of these questions is harder to categorize because they focus on emotions and relationships, more so than concrete tasks.

In general, most respondents (>50%) rated themselves as satisfied with their jobs. One question, “I felt close to the people at work”, had a different result, with most respondents responding with neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. The median response for all job satisfaction questions was 1 (Agree) and the mode response for all job satisfaction questions was 1 (Agree). In comparison, the median response for all productivity questions was 1 (Agree) and the mode response for all productivity questions was 0 (Strongly Agree).

Chart 7 demonstrates the top categories for job satisfaction. Respondents indicated the strongest agreement with the following questions:

- Collegiality: 84.11% strongly agreed or agreed that they “got along with my supervisors.”
- Emotions: 71.96% strongly agreed or agreed that they “felt secure about my job.” 68.23% strongly agreed or agreed that they “felt good about my job.”

Chart 7

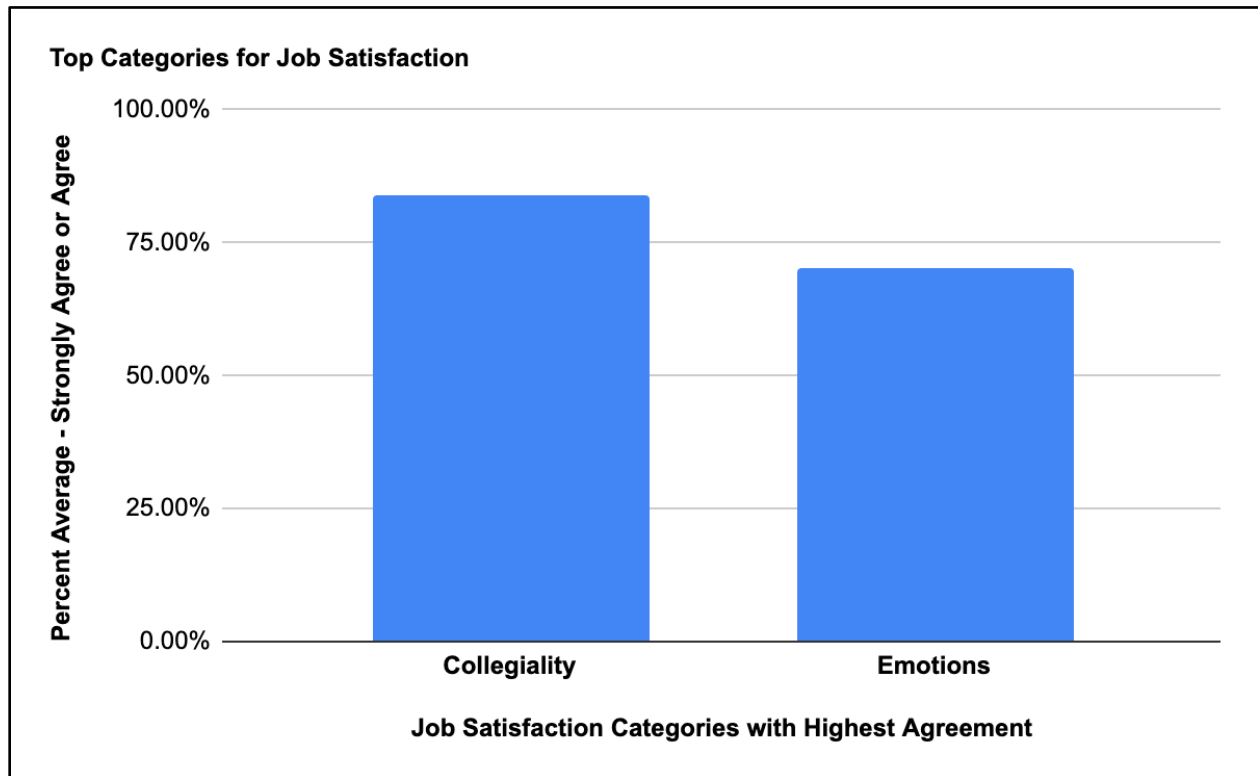
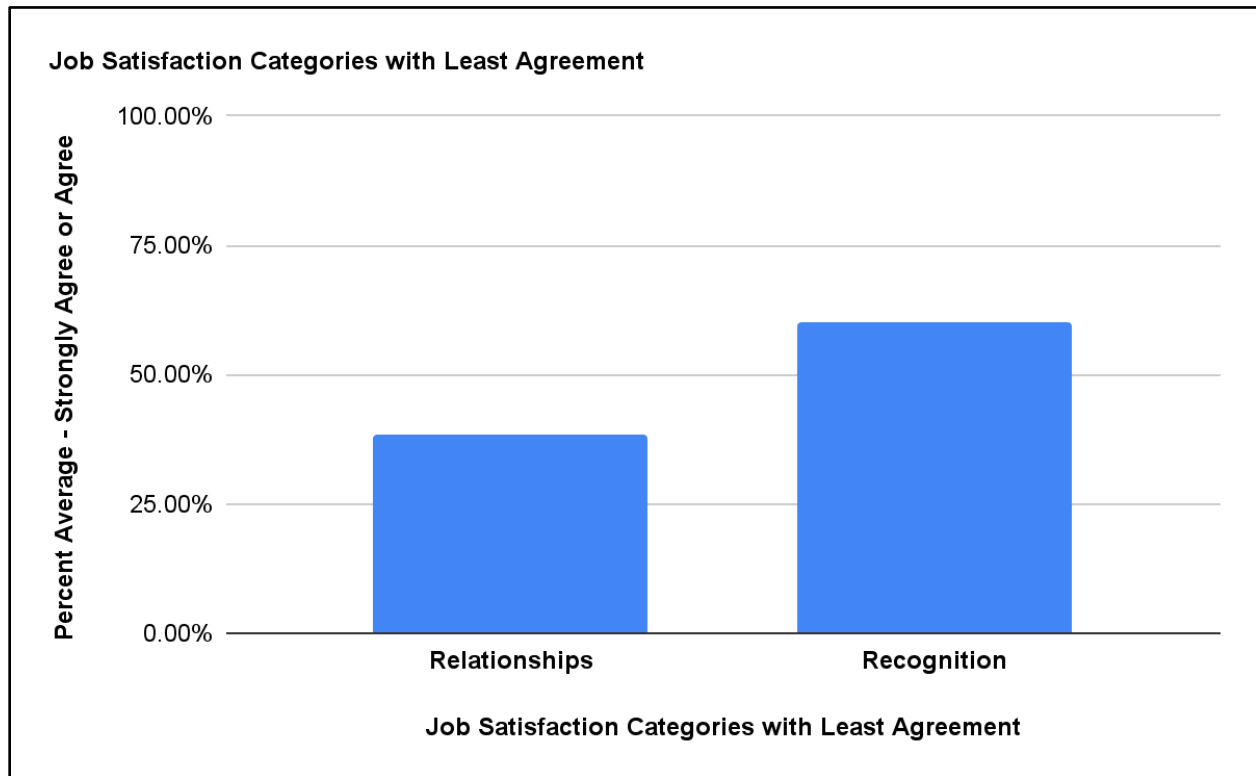


Chart 8 demonstrates the job satisfaction categories with the least agreement. Respondents indicated the weakest agreement with the following questions:

- Relationships: 38.32% strongly agreed or agreed and 34.55% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they “felt close to the people at work.” 50.46% strongly agreed or agreed and 28.04% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they “believed management was concerned about me.”
- Recognition: 58.88% strongly agreed or agreed and 27.1% strongly disagreed or disagreed that “all my talents and skills were used at work.” 61.68% strongly agreed or agreed and 19.63% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they “received recognition for a job well done.”

**Chart 8**

### Productivity vs. Job Satisfaction

As discussed above, respondents indicated a stronger level of productivity than job satisfaction. When asked about job satisfaction, more respondents selected strongly disagree or disagree while their responses to the productivity questions were strongly agree or agree. One can surmise from their answers, and the corresponding numbers, that academic librarians perceived themselves to be highly productive when working from home, however, they're overall job satisfaction suffered somewhat; primarily due to the fact that they were removed from their colleagues. Survey respondents indicated that relationships were negatively impacted by the remote work environment. 34.55% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they "felt close to the people at work" and 28.04% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they "believed management was concerned about me." The relationships that people form with their colleagues and supervisors tend to improve job satisfaction. That job satisfaction suffered somewhat while working from home may be related to the absence of those working relationships.

What happens when we only look at the responses from those that indicated some level of job dissatisfaction? What is the relationship between low job satisfaction and productivity?

Respondents indicated the highest level of disagreement with one survey question in particular. 27.10% (n=29) disagreed and 7.48% (n=8) strongly disagreed with the statement "I felt close to the people at work." This smaller group of responses is known as Segment 1 in our analysis.

When comparing the median and mode responses of Segment 1 to the median and mode responses of the total group, there are notable differences.

How does a negative response to “I felt close to the people at work” change the response to other questions? Table 2 illustrates the difference.

**Table 2**

Q#	Category	Question Statement	Segment 1 Median (n=37)	Segment 1 Mode (n=37)	Total Median (n=107)	Total Mode (n=107)
6	Productivity	I took on extra work responsibilities	2 Neutral	2 Neutral	1 Agree	1 Agree
8	Productivity	I worked at keeping my job knowledge up-to-date	1 Agree	1 Agree	0 Strongly Agree	0 Strongly Agree
11	Productivity	I kept looking for new challenges in my job	2 Neutral	1 Agree	1 Agree	0 Strongly Agree
13	Productivity	I actively participated in work meetings	1 Agree	1 Agree	0 Strongly Agree	0 Strongly Agree
14	Productivity	I actively looked for ways to improve my performance at work	2 Neutral	2 Neutral	1 Agree	1 Agree
15	Productivity	I knew how to solve difficult situations and setbacks quickly	2 Neutral	2 Neutral	1 Agree	1 Agree

Segment 1 (n=37) expressed weaker agreement with productivity statements.

- Segment 1’s median response to “I took on extra work responsibilities” was 2 (Neutral) and mode response was 2 (Neutral).
- Segment 1’s median response to “I worked at keeping my job knowledge up-to-date” was 1 (Agree) and mode response was 1 (Agree).
- Segment 1’s median response to “I kept looking for new challenges in my job” was 2 (Neutral) and mode response was 1 (Agree).
- Segment 1’s median response to “I actively participated in work meetings” was 1 (Agree) and mode response was 1 (Agree).



- Segment 1's median response to "I actively looked for ways to improve my performance at work" was 2 (Neutral) and mode response was 2 (Neutral).
- Segment 1's median response to "I knew how to solve difficult situations and setbacks quickly" was 2 (Neutral) and mode response was 2 (Neutral).

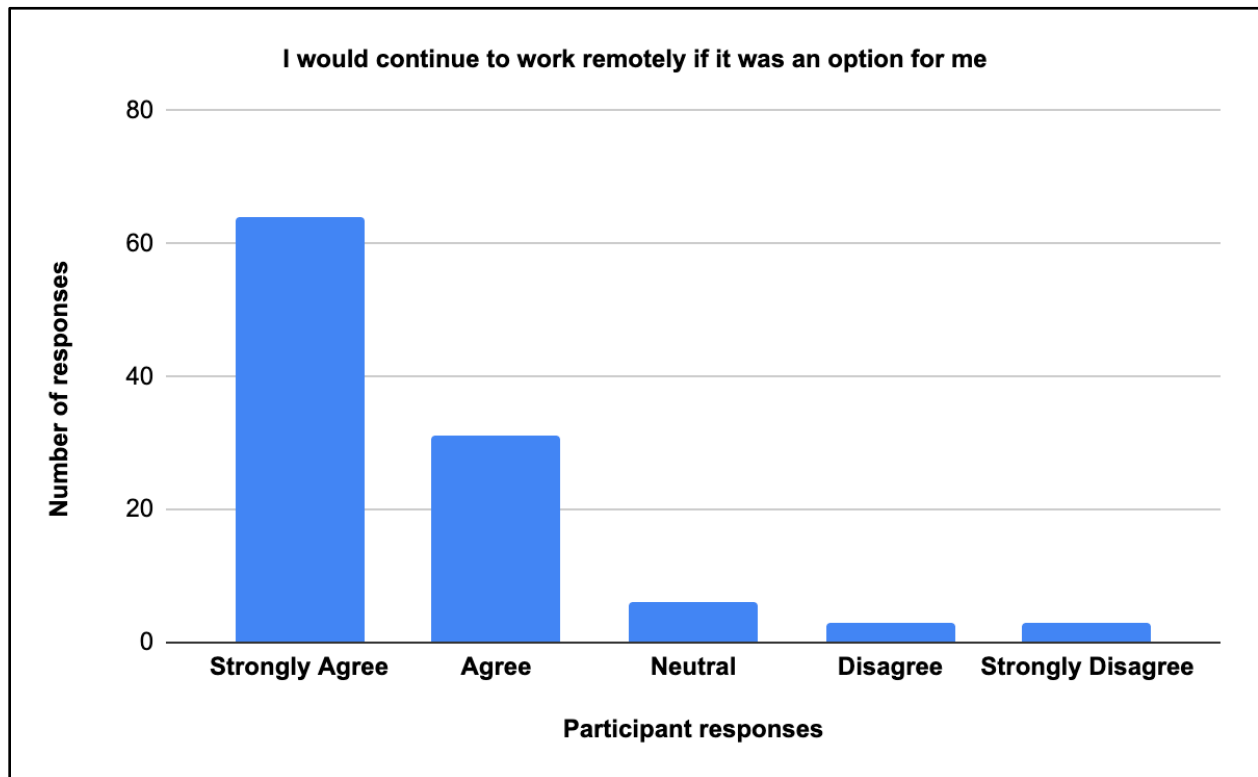
In comparison, the total group (n=137) expressed stronger agreement with the same set of productivity statements.

- The total group's median response to "I took on extra work responsibilities" was 1 (Agree) and mode response was 1 (Agree).
- The total group's median response to "I worked at keeping my job knowledge up-to-date" was 0 (Strongly Agree) and mode response was 0 (Strongly Agree).
- The total group's median response to "I kept looking for new challenges in my job" was 1 (Agree) and mode response was 0 (Strongly Agree).
- The total group's median response to "I actively participated in work meetings" was 0 (Strongly Agree) and mode response was 0 (Strongly Agree).
- The total group's median response to "I actively looked for ways to improve my performance at work" was 1 (Agree) and mode response was 1 (Agree).
- The total group's median response to "I knew how to solve difficult situations and setbacks quickly" was 1 (Agree) and mode response was 1 (Agree).

These results indicate that feeling distant from colleagues negatively impacts a librarian's capacity for extra work responsibilities, professional development, active participation, and problem solving.

### **Future Outlook**

The last question of the survey was about the respondents' preference for future work location. 88.68% of respondents "Strongly agree" or "Agree" that they would continue to work remotely if it was an option for them (chart 9).

**Chart 9***I Would Continue to Work Remotely If It Was an Option for Me***DISCUSSION**

Historically, academic libraries have hesitated to introduce remote work practices because they feared workers would be less productive (Albro and McElfresh, 2021). This study supports the conclusions of previous research that remote work does not limit productivity (Carr, 2006, Duncan, 2008, Smith & Van Dyke, 2008). In fact, this study demonstrated that academic librarians perceived themselves to be highly productive while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the change in work location, librarians managed their time, participated in meetings, and expanded their professional development.

The questions by which participants rated themselves as most productive make sense given the context of the pandemic. While working from home, librarians were able to maintain basic productivity measurements such as meeting deadlines and setting goals. These foundational markers of productive behavior, similar to the *task performance* concept from the IWPQ 1.0 (Koopmans et al., 2014), are not necessarily connected to physical location. However, it is possible that the tasks themselves that librarians were completing were different from the tasks they would normally have performed in-person at their libraries. They were meeting deadlines and setting goals, but did the content of those goals and deadlines change?

The rapid rise in virtual conferencing software such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams allowed academic librarians to quickly adjust to remote work without compromising teamwork and

communication. Survey participants indicated that they “actively participated in work meetings” and we can assume that almost all of them took place in a virtual software platform.

For many, COVID-19 offered librarians the opportunity to pursue professional development. Without their standard in-person work duties, and with greater flexibility in how they spent their workdays, librarians turned to professional development. This was reflected in the survey results. Around 90% of respondents actively pursued professional development to keep their “job knowledge” and “job skills” up to date.

Librarians may have been pursuing professional development, but they may not have been as interested in additional work beyond what was normally asked of them. In a time of great upheaval both professionally and personally, did librarians really have space for extra work responsibilities and challenges? From the survey results, it would appear that while many librarians did take on additional work, it was not as common as other aspects of productivity. Just 54.2% “kept looking for new challenges in my job”, compared to the 89.72% that “worked at keeping my job skills up-to-date”.

There is no doubt that librarians perceived themselves to be highly productive, but how did others measure their productivity? What sort of work were they engaged in? Were supervisors happy with their performance? Did libraries meet institutional and departmental goals? These are questions which this study did not seek to answer. The authors chose to focus on the self-perception of productivity and job satisfaction as a starting point to future research. Further studies may expand upon this work and learn more about objective measurements of productivity and evaluations from others.

What this survey can shed some light on, is the relationship between productivity and job satisfaction. As mentioned previously, academic librarians perceived themselves to be overwhelmingly productive in the work from home environment, yet their job satisfaction suffered somewhat. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the survey respondents disagreed with the statement “I felt close to the people at work” while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. And of those 35% of respondents who did not feel close to their colleagues while working from home, their answers to productivity questions (see Table 2) were at least one median level lower than the total number of respondents. For example, the median response from all survey respondents to, “I took on extra work responsibilities” was 1 (Agree) and the response from Segment 1 was 2 (Neutral). Similarly, the mode response to the same question yielded the same results.

Table 2 also reveals that librarians who do not feel close to their colleagues are less likely to take on extra work responsibilities, look for new challenges, or quickly problem solve. Engaging in challenging work is an essential component of employee growth, innovation, and creativity (“Harnessing the drive”, 2021). The lack of workplace relationships, however, may impact this drive to seek new challenges and think creatively at work because those relationships “affect workplace attitudes and performance” (Wax et al. 2022, pg.4). Indeed, research shows that co-worker support is “positively predictive of workplace creativity” (Wax et al., 2022, pg. 4). Highly productive employees who push their boundaries and pursue difficult tasks “are more likely to take risks and feel comfortable facing resistance, making them more likely to initiate and support innovative decisions and activities within the organization” (“Harnessing the drive”, 2021). If job satisfaction, in particular having meaningful relationships with colleagues at work, negatively impacts this type of productivity, then libraries, not just individuals, may feel the consequences.

That productivity does not equal satisfaction is unsurprising. While one recent study found that “overall productivity level of office workers did not change during the WFH experience ... relative to their productivity before the pandemic” (Awada et al. 2021, pg. 1183), another study that examined the emotional complexities of working from home during the pandemic determined that even though people felt safe and happy working from home, they could still feel a sense of loss and sadness at missing “their morning coffee ritual with their colleagues, because such rituals could lead to positive moods” (Gabriel, et al., 2021, pg. 86). Why is feeling close to colleagues, even in terms of proximity, important for job satisfaction? Recall that Bellomo (2021) says, “team is synonymous with personal interaction” (36) and “personal interactions and relationships are a critical facet of team community, engagement, and loyalty” (38). Perhaps then, we must acknowledge that even though the academic librarians who participated in our study mostly reported a positive and productive experience while working from home, the absence of a team environment and the lack of authentic (read: not online) interactions with colleagues impacted the way they felt about their jobs more than they expected.

This study was designed to measure self-perception of productivity and job satisfaction. This focus provides valuable insight into the emotions of librarians during COVID-19. The downside to this approach is that it is difficult to establish the nuances of what respondents reported. For example, respondents appeared to loudly denounce the idea that they “sometimes did nothing, while I should have been working” (49.53% strongly disagreed or disagreed). This response surprised the authors. In this case, the study’s methodology prohibited a fuller understanding of how the statement was interpreted and responded to.

The authors recognize potential limitations to this study. While the number of total responses was adequate (107), there were also a considerable number of ineligible responses (112). While the authors were disappointed with the number of ineligible participants, they were encouraged by this demonstration of interest among a larger population than originally expected. Subsequent studies should expand the scope to include academic librarians at institutions of any size.

This survey was released at a pivotal time in the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2021, most academic libraries and their parent institutions were in the process of transitioning work practices from a primarily remote environment to a hybrid or in-office location. This is reflected in the survey. All respondents worked from home for the majority of the pandemic (from March 2020 to July 2021) and 99% of respondents indicated they would be transitioning back to the office full time, or working hybrid in the office and at home. Collecting responses at this moment of transition allowed participants to reflect on their remote work experiences, while considering what their future work environment may be.

What was this transition like for academic librarians? How have their attitudes changed since completing this survey? By checking back in with this community periodically, we may be able to better understand how productivity and job satisfaction have changed since the return to a more rigid work environment. Additionally, recognizing the implications of “returning to the office” could help researchers study and practitioners create more satisfactory organizational policies.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that those responding academic librarians, at institutions with more than 15,000 enrolled students, perceived themselves to be highly productive, and generally satisfied with their jobs, while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, levels of productivity correlated with reported job satisfaction. Future research should aim to discover how returning to onsite work impacted librarian productivity and job satisfaction. Subsequent studies could inform organizational policy change surrounding work location and flexible work arrangements.

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## Appendix 1

### Survey Questions

#### *Screening*

Which type of library do you work in?

- Academic (only accepted response)
- Public
- School
- Special
- Other

How many students attend your university or college?

- Less than 5,000
- 5,000-15,000
- More than 15,000 (only accepted response)

Have you been working from home (i.e. remote work) for the majority of the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Yes (only accepted response)
- No

#### *Demographics*

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, how frequently did you work from home?

- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

What will your work setting look like in Fall 2021?

- Hybrid
- In office full time
- At home full time

Using the following list, which option best describes your job function?

- Access Services
- Administration
- Archives/Special Collections
- Collection Development



- Interlibrary Loan
- Outreach
- Reference/Instruction
- Technical Services
- Technology

*Likert Scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)*

While working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic...

1. I managed to plan my work so that it was done on time
2. I set daily or weekly work goals
3. I was able to separate main issues from side issues at work
4. I was able to perform my work within standard work hours
5. Collaboration with others was very productive
6. I took on extra work responsibilities
7. I took on challenging work tasks, when available
8. I worked at keeping my job knowledge up-to-date
9. I worked at keeping my job skills up-to-date
10. I came up with creative solutions to new work problems
11. I kept looking for new challenges in my job
12. I did more than was expected of me
13. I actively participated in work meetings
14. I actively looked for ways to improve my performance at work
15. I knew how to solve difficult situations and setbacks quickly
16. I focused on the negative aspects of a work situation, instead of on the positive aspects
17. I sometimes did nothing, while I should have been working
18. I received recognition for a job well done
19. I felt close to the people at work
20. I felt good about working at my library
21. I felt secure about my job
22. I believed management was concerned about me
23. All my talents and skills were used at work
24. I got along with my supervisors
25. I felt good about my job

Finally...

26. I would continue to work remotely if it was an option for me

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**About the authors**

Amelia Rodarte is the Community Engagement Librarian at NC LIVE, North Carolina's statewide library cooperative. Previously, she worked at UNC Charlotte, UNC Chapel Hill, and the Greensboro Public Library. Amelia holds a MSLS from UNC Chapel Hill and a BA in History from The American University.

Abby Moore is an Associate Professor and the Education, Honors, and Global Engagement Librarian at UNC Charlotte. She graduated from Lehigh University and in 2003 began teaching English in the Bronx after being accepted into the New York City Teaching Fellows program. She earned her Masters in Education in 2006. She transitioned to academic librarianship in 2011 after earning her Masters in Library Science from Queens College.