

# Reimagining Our Post-Pandemic Workplace: Sustaining Support, Cultivating Collaboration, Widening Well-Being



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## INTRODUCTION

### What Started it all: "The Coverage Conundrum"

- We want to maintain robust, consistent in-person coverage
- At the same time: there has been a post-pandemic sea-change in work expectations/ culture such that flexibility (in where, when, and how people work) is possible, desired, and valued
- Means: We risk losing employees if we don't allow remote work/flexibility
- Yet: **It's challenging to optimize for coverage AND flexibility!**

### From Conundrum to Opportunity: Reframing the Problem

*How can we ensure faculty are supported and feel that we are fully present to them ... and maintain our collaborations and interpersonal relationship ... while also being leaders for the rest of the campus when it comes to practicing/promoting well-being among our OTL staff?...*

**This is the question at the heart of this work!**

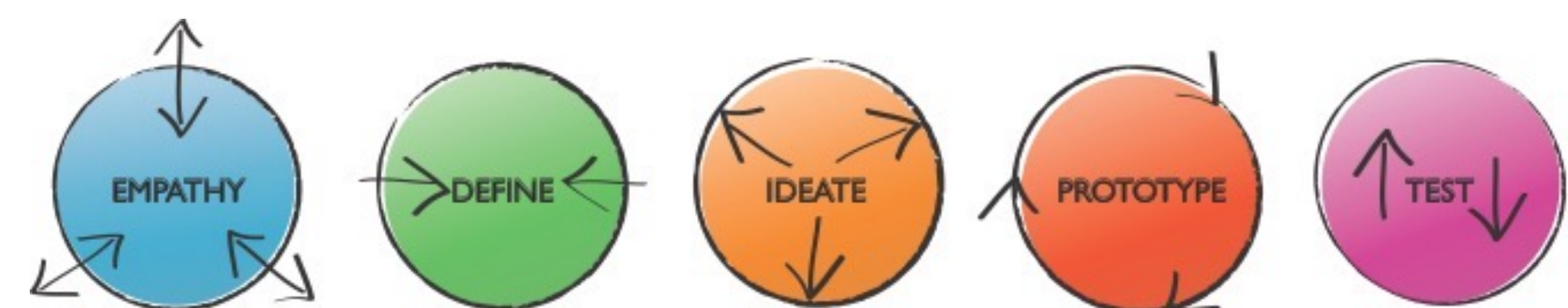
### Our Approach: Design Thinking



Why? Because it's a *user-centered, creative, collaborative, optimistic problem-solving approach:*

- Centers understanding/empathy
- The question matters (what is the real problem?)
- Time for divergent thinking and convergent thinking
- "Lo-fi" prototypes/"tiny little experiments" for early feedback/learning
- Considers viability, feasibility, and desirability
- Diverse perspectives are essential (radical collaboration!)
- Invitation to engage with openness and curiosity
- Emphasizes continuous learning throughout process

### Our Proposed Process



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empathy interviews w/faculty &amp; staff</li> <li>Talk w/other depts.</li> <li>Research what others tried</li> <li>Uncover additional constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compile/interpret learnings from empathy phase</li> <li>Fine-tune focus question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brainstorm possible solutions</li> <li>Identify ideas at sweet spot of desirable, feasible, &amp; viable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do "lo-fi" prototypes or "tiny little experiments"</li> <li>Get feedback from faculty, staff, others</li> <li>Refine solution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement solution and gather data on how it goes</li> </ul>
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**The empathy interviews are the focus of this poster!**

## METHOD: EMPATHY INTERVIEWS

Note: The work of planning, conducting, and analyzing the interviews was a team effort. Special thanks to **Kellie Ferguson, Ellen Hogan, Elise Rosado, and Lexi Schlosser** who were part of the core design team and made this work a joy!

### We interviewed 13 OTL staff members.

Goal: Deepen our understanding of the conditions under which we experience our greatest sense of well-being at work and/or do our best work ... and, most importantly, *why*.



### We interviewed 12 DU faculty members across departments/lines.

Goal: Deepen our understanding of faculty members' needs and experiences related to teaching and well-being, and learn more about where, when, and how they would most like support with their teaching.



## WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN THE CONVERSATION

When have you felt your greatest sense of well-being at work?  
(Please write your answer on a post-it and share it in the space below. ©)

This work was supported by a 4D Infusion Grant. Thank you to the 4D Team for helping to make this work possible!

## FINDINGS

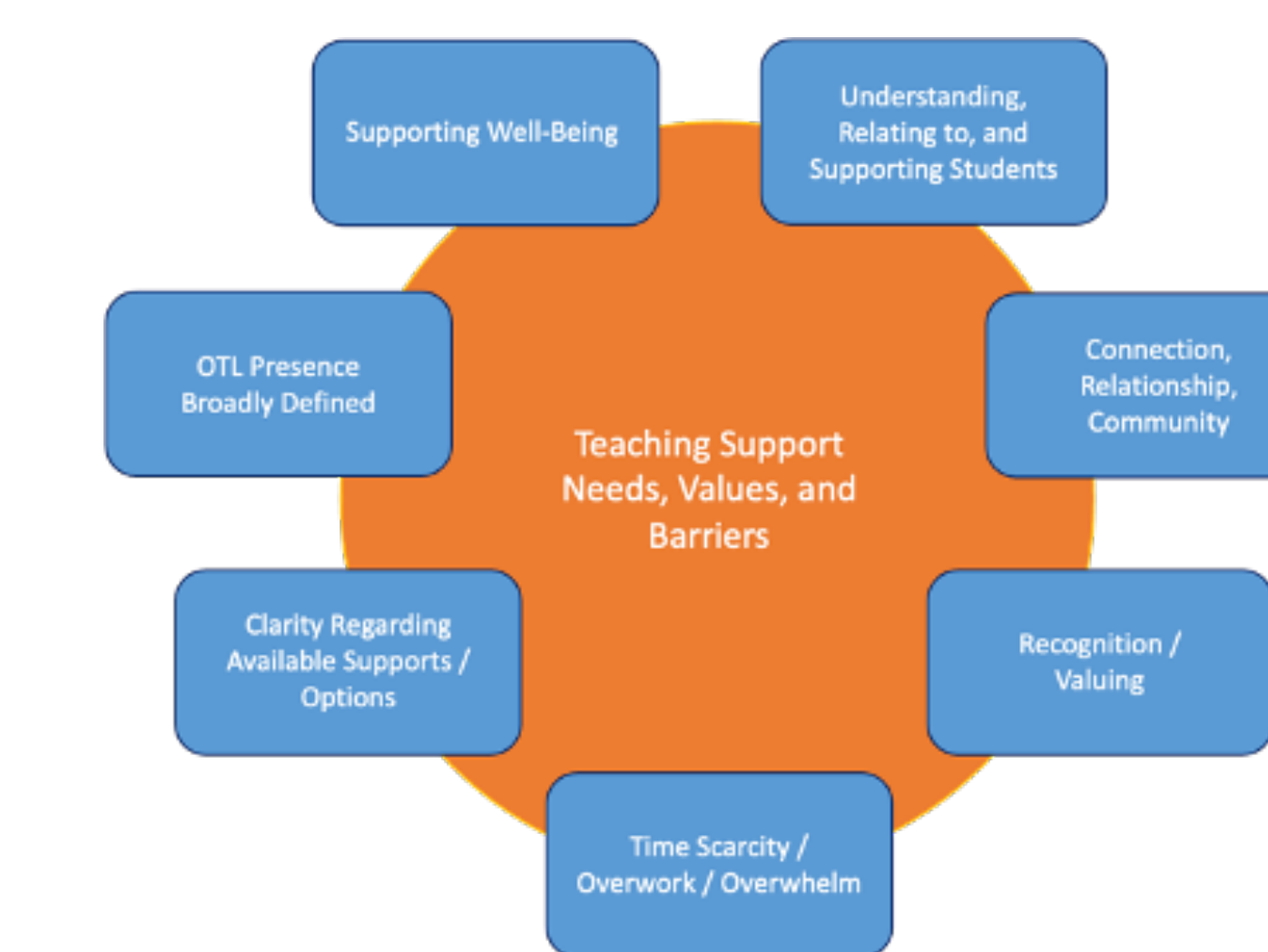
### Staff Empathy Interview Findings

- Interviews with OTL staff deepened our understanding of the needs, values, and barriers related to our OTL staff well-being. The graphic below represents the themes that emerged, each of which contained several important insights.
- One striking insight: It's *not* that people don't care about their work, and it's *not* that people are expecting work to make them "well" ... rather, they desire the *ability to make the choices that will allow them to keep themselves well and do good work*.
- Another striking insight: Institutional policies and structures can exacerbate inequities when it comes to accessing well-being and ability to do one's best work, particularly for those who are caretakers, neurodivergent, disabled, or struggle with health issues.
- We now wonder: What it would look like to take a "Universal Design for Well-being" approach to this work, where, as with Universal Design for Learning (which seeks to accommodate the needs and abilities of all learners and eliminate unnecessary hurdles in the learning process), we seek to design a solution/workplace that allows *all* of us to access well-being.



### Faculty Empathy Interview Findings

- Faculty interviews were incredibly insightful. The graphic below represents the themes that emerged, each of which contained several important insights regarding faculty support needs and the barriers to their getting that support.
- Some of our key insights emerging from these interviews:
  - Connection/relationships play an essential role in teaching innovation, sense of support, and well-being ... so much so that we believe this work has the potential to shift the focus from coverage to connection/relationship, leading to questions such as:
    - "How might we provide our essential services in a way that fosters relationships and encourages connections?"
    - "How might we help faculty feel less isolated/more 'seen' in both community and teaching support efforts?"
  - Lack of time/heavy workloads are recurring pain point ... and can be a barrier to connection/relationship and exploration/innovation.
  - Meaningful in-person engagement is desired (and even preferred), but digital/virtual presence is needed too (due to lack of time/heavy workloads)
  - Mental health and well-being of faculty and students is as issue, the two are inextricably linked, and there's a need to (a) support faculty in supporting students, and (b) support faculty in dealing with effects on their well-being.



### Overall Findings

This work is still in progress, yet we have already found this to be an incredibly learning-rich and worthwhile process. Overall insights include:

- Empathy interviews can be a valuable practice *in-and-of themselves*, in that they can both support our learning about stakeholder needs and help faculty members and staff feel more seen/heard/valued

*"I feel light ... this was so good to talk about all of this! I don't think I've talked to openly with someone - or felt so seen and heard - since I've started at DU."*

*"This was the first time in 20+ years at DU that anyone has asked me about my teaching experience and needs. That, in and of itself, speaks volumes."*

- Not only might it be *possible* to optimize for well-being and impact ... but designing for well-being may in fact be a *key* to achieving impact.

## NEXT STEPS

In the immediate term:

- Identify cross-stakeholder insights/needs that reinforce, or are in tension with, each other.
- Refine existing question or generate new, more specific questions to use as brainstorming prompts
- Convene OTL staff/stakeholders to brainstorm possible approaches to new question; prototype/conduct "tiny little experiments"
- Experiment with "OTL pop-ups" (one tiny little experiment already emerging from this work!)

Longer term/ongoing:

- Consider ways in which we might make these empathy interviews a part of our ongoing practice
- Possibly turn themes/insights into framework that can be used on an ongoing basis to generate questions that lead to *many* "tiny little experiments", further supporting a learning culture in which we are constantly interating and learning from our iterations.