What Course Evaluation Practitioners
Need Most Amid COVID-19?

Technologies to Connect, Clear Directions and Transparent Communication

Explorance COVID-19 Higher Education Impact Survey Findings

2020

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Contents

Inspired by suggestions from members of the Bluenotes community (Higher Education Institutions that use Blue for course evaluations), Explorance conducted the COVID-19 Higher Education Impact Survey in April 2020. The survey evaluated how the COVID-19 crisis has affected the roles and responsibilities of course evaluation practitioners across the globe. This report presents the key findings.

Executive Summary

UNESCO reported that as of March 20, 2020, over 1.52 billion students (87% of students across the globe) and 60.2 million instructors were no longer participating in face-to-face learning. This was a measure taken by educational institutions in more than 166 countries to help reduce the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the abrupt shift in the mode of delivering courses, course evaluations remained a requirement for many institutions.

This report, prepared by Research Experts on the Community Engagement and Learning Center (CELC) at Explorance, highlights the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the roles and responsibilities of course evaluation practitioners at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Some impacts are not immediately visible and will require further study to understand them in the medium and long term. The purpose of the report is to provide educational leaders with an overview of the effects of COVID-19 on course evaluation processes and concerns raised by practitioners through their responses. The report also recommends three actions to help educational leaders identify strategic areas to strengthen to make existing course evaluation processes more robust to support the "new normal" as well as reduce the disruption that COVID-19 has caused on course evaluation programs.

The key takeaways from the survey findings include:

Top Priority and Key Challenges:

Not surprisingly, the top priority for Higher Education Institutions during COVID-19 is to move their courses online and quickly. However, respondents reported that the key challenges they face as they make the shift are in the areas of planning and preparing as well as working remotely.

Preparedness:

When asked about their institution's preparedness to handle course evaluation processes during COVID-19, a majority of respondents agreed that their institutions are prepared to gather student feedback, manage response rates, and report results in a remote environment. However, they feel that their institutions lack the necessary resources to interpret and act on the feedback they gather, as summarized in Figure 1.

Technology:

Nearly all respondents indicated that they have the technology needed to perform their work responsibilities remotely. When asked what technology they need now but did not need before, overwhelmingly the responses were related to tool for connecting and collaborating remotely. However, working remotely remains one of their key challenges. These findings may suggest that the barriers are not due to technology, but to the collaborative aspects of their roles or perhaps their proficiency in using new tools.

Help Needed from Institutions:

And finally, given the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 and the uncertainty about its trajectory, we asked respondents what they needed most from their institutions as they transition to remote work. Clear decisions and transparent communication were cited as the most important things according to the majority of respondents.

Reflecting on the Findings and Recommendations of this Survey:

As we reflect on the findings and their implications, Explorance Experts recommend three actions for educational leaders navigating these uncharted waters:

- Provide concrete directions on course evaluation policies and processes, in a timely manner, along with transparent communications to assist practitioners as they shift operations online

- Offer resources that will support instructors and stakeholders in remote student feedback interpretation and action planning processes to close the feedback loop

- Identify the factors that are creating challenges for stakeholders involved in the course evaluation process as they teach and work remotely. If technology itself is not the issue, determine how you can best support them as they teach and work from home, and adapt to using new tools

The rest of the report explores and describes the survey methodology and the survey findings in greater detail.

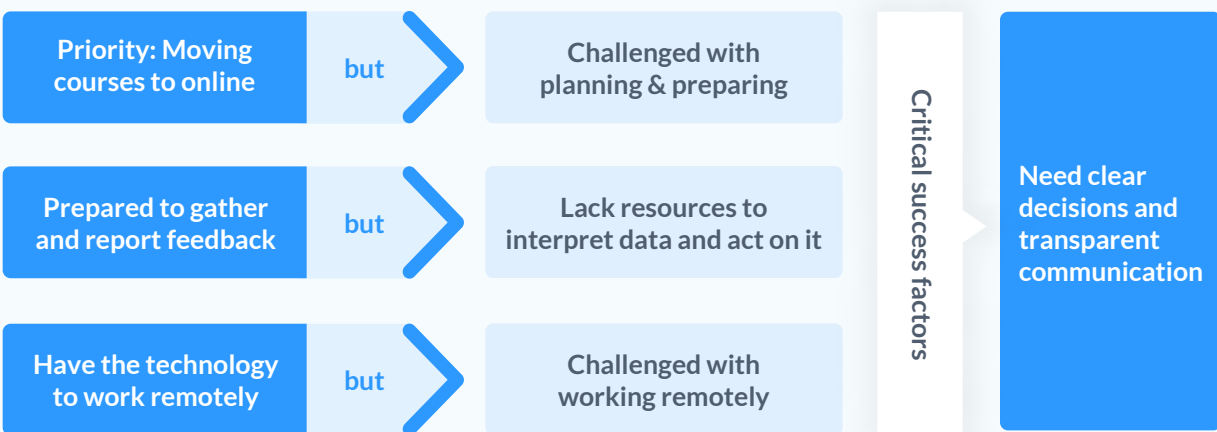| Priority: Moving courses to online | but | Challenged with planning & preparing | Critical success factors | Need clear decisions and transparent communication |
| Prepared to gather and report feedback | but | Lack resources to interpret data and act on it | | |
| Have the technology to work remotely | but | Challenged with working remotely | | |

Figure 1. Key findings of the COVID-19 impact on course evaluations in Higher Education

Survey Objective and Methodology

The survey measured the perceptions of Bluenotes community members during COVID-19 to gain insights into the pandemic's impact on course evaluation processes. The goal of the study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the pandemic's effects on their roles and responsibilities and provide a starting point to help members of the community better understand and manage feedback processes at their institutions. As COVID-19 continues to upend Higher Education in 2020, academic institutions around the world are forced to move their missions, activities, and operations online.

The survey was opened for a period of two work weeks starting on April 7, 2020. Using the BlueX survey software, Explorance invited Bluenotes community members to participate in the study through private email invitations.

Through 17 questions (see appendix), the survey explored the following six areas:

- Changes in work responsibilities and roles, both currently and expectations for the future after the pandemic

- Institutional preparedness to manage course evaluations processes during the pandemic

- Top priorities of respondents for their institutions

- Key challenges of moving courses to an online format

- Technology needs

- Help needed from institutions

We received a total of 190 responses from 142 academic institutions in Higher Education across the globe. This allowed us to analyze survey responses along the following demographic dimensions:

- Higher Education classification

- Institution's FTE size

- Region

- Legal control type – public vs private

- Administration Function

- Job Level

Increased Work Responsibilities

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked three interrelated questions:

- To what degree has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your responsibilities at work at the moment, on a scale of 1-5? (1 = greatly decreased, 3 = no change, 5 = greatly increased)

- To what level do you see your role at work has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, on a scale of 1-5? (1= significantly reduced, 3 = no change, 5 = significantly expanded)

- To what level do you see that your role at work will change after the COVID-19 pandemic, on a scale of 1-5? (1= significantly reduced, 3 = no change, 5 = significantly expanded)

58% of respondents reported increased work responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the reported impact on roles was much lower for most respondents, both during and after the pandemic, as shown in Figure 2.

% Increased/expanded (Scale 4 and 5)
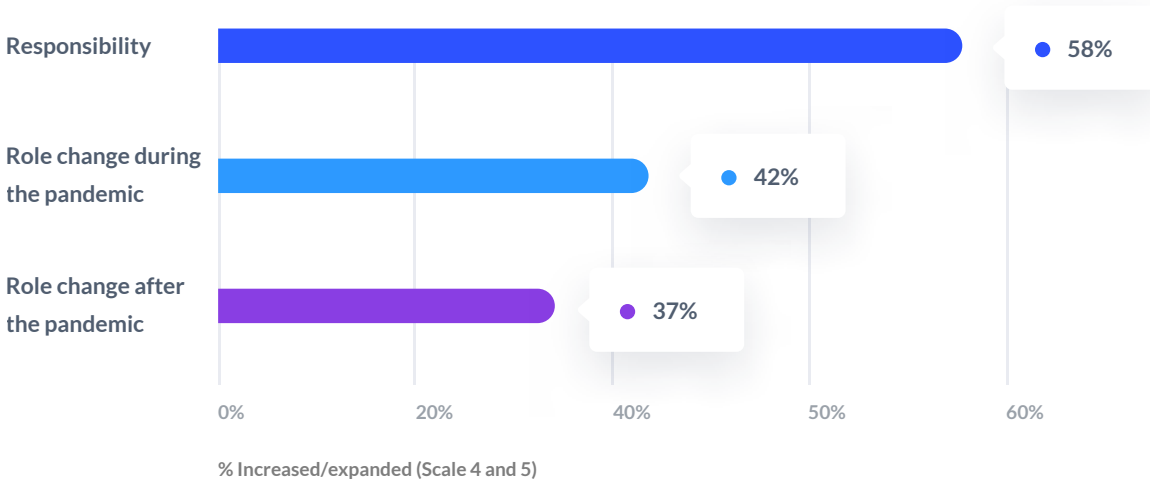
When we examined the results by Higher Education classification, we find that respondents from institutions with graduate programs were more likely to report increased work responsibilities during the pandemic compared to those without graduate programs.

Associate's Colleges ● 42%

Baccalaureate Colleges ● 48%

Master's Colleges/Universities ● 57%

R1 Universities in US ● 62%

All Other Research Universities ● 64%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Impact of COVID-19 on work responsibility: % Increased (Scale 4 and 5)
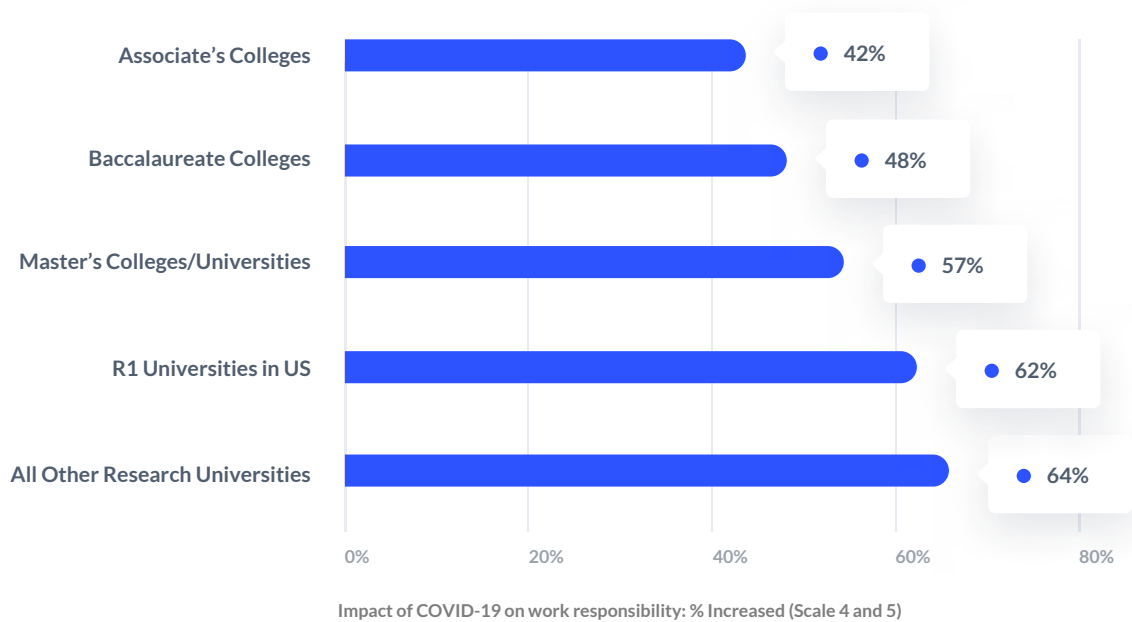
Interestingly, respondents from Associate's Colleges saw less change in responsibilities and roles during the pandemic but reported that they expect their roles to expand after the pandemic - a similarity they share with respondents from colleges and universities with master's programs.

Associate's Colleges ● 58%

Baccalaureate Colleges ● 23%

Master's Colleges/Universities ● 52%

R1 Universities in US ● 29%

All Other Research Universities ● 34%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Impact of COVID-19 on future job role: % expanded (Scale 4 and 5)
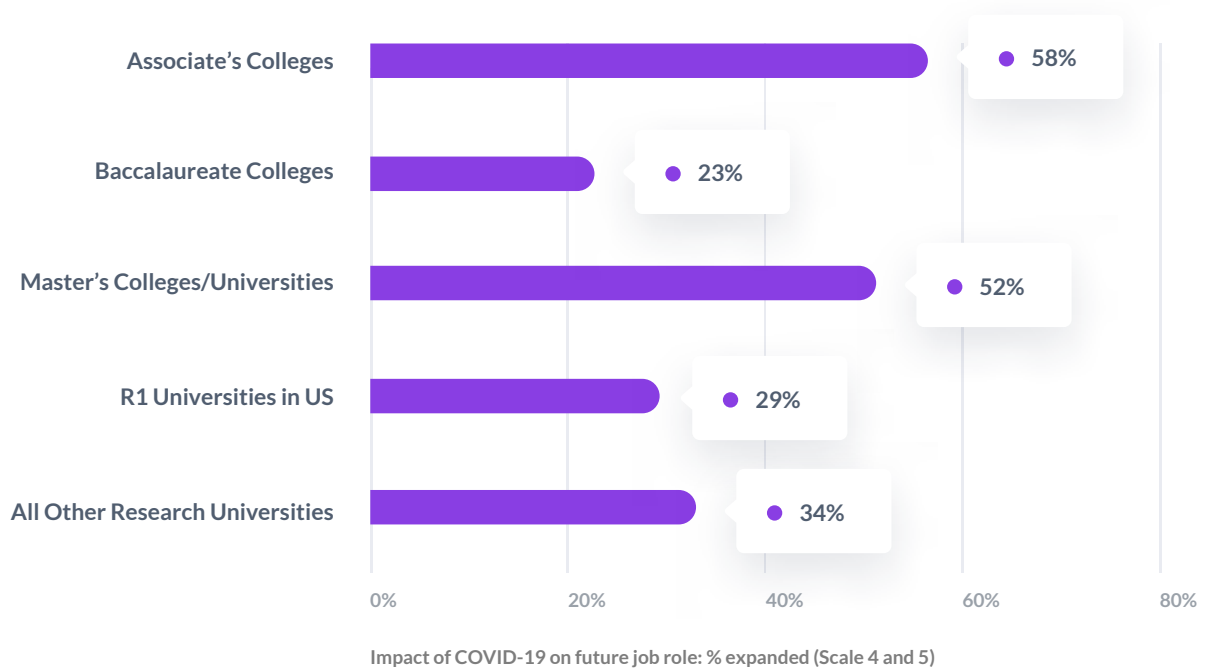
Prepared for Course Evaluations Remotely

The survey asked respondents to rate their level of agreement that their institution was prepared to manage course evaluation processes remotely, from feedback gathering to reporting. Respondents were given seven choices:

- We have effective policies and processes to gather student feedback

- We have the resources to interpret student feedback on new questions

- We have the resources to quickly take action based on student feedback

- We have the capabilities to get real-time feedback from students

- Our course evaluation process can be managed remotely

- Our course evaluation response rate management can be handled remotely

- Our course evaluation reporting process can be managed remotely

Strong Agreement on Institution's Preparedness to Gather Student Feedback

Survey respondents had consistent views about the preparedness of their institutions to gather student feedback. Nearly all (89%) indicated that their institution could handle the feedback process remotely, including data gathering, response rate management, and reporting.

Category	% Agree
Course evaluation progress can be managed remotely	89%
Course evaluation response rate management can be managed remotely	95%
Course evaluation reporting process can be managed remotely	97%
Policies and processes to gather student feedback	76%

% Agree (Agree and Strongly agree)
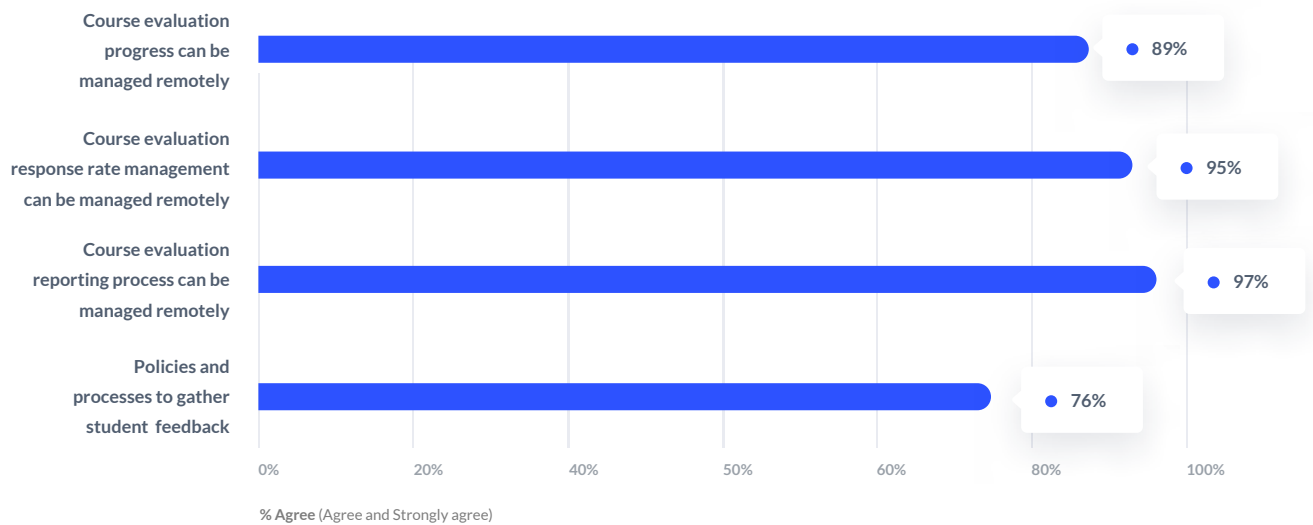
The area with less agreement was related to policy and processes around gathering student feedback. The lowest agreement came from two sources:

- European respondents were less likely than their colleagues in North America to agree that they had the necessary policies and processes.

- Managers and individual professionals were also less likely to agree than senior-level academic administrators (director and up).

Less Agreement on Institution's Preparedness to act on Student Feedback

Responses around the institution's preparedness to act on student feedback were more variable on three key dimensions:

- Does the institution have the resources to interpret student feedback from newly added course evaluation questions?

- Do they have the capabilities to gather student feedback in real-time?

- Do they have the resources to quickly take action based on feedback?

As illustrated in the graph below, while 2/3 respondents agree that their institutions have the resources to interpret student feedback remotely, fewer than half felt they have the resources to take action based on that data.

% Agree (Agree and Strongly agree)
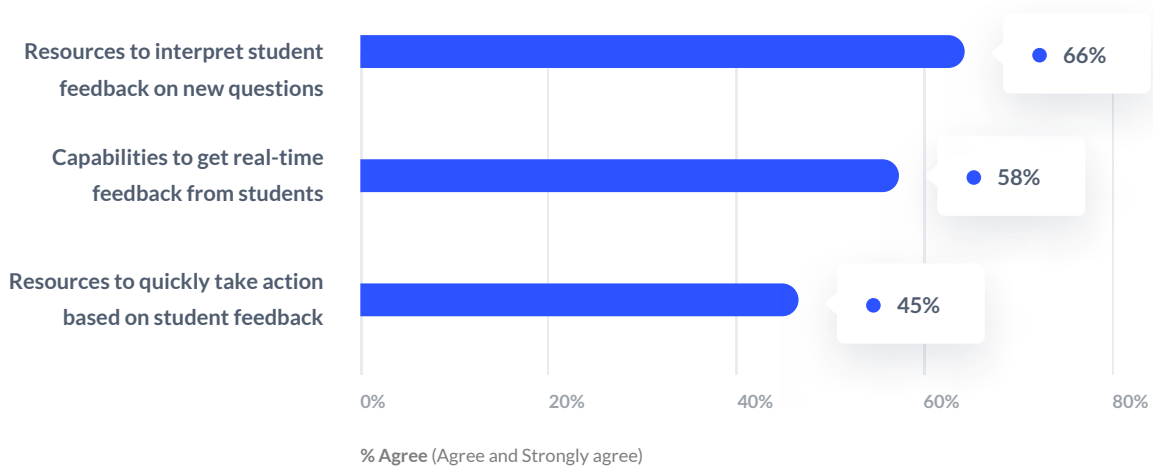
Furthermore, the survey results reveal that more senior-level administrators and managers than individual professionals agreed that their institutions have the resources to interpret feedback data on new course evaluations questions relating to moving courses online.

Resources to interpret student feedback on new questions: **% Agree** (Agree and Strongly agree)

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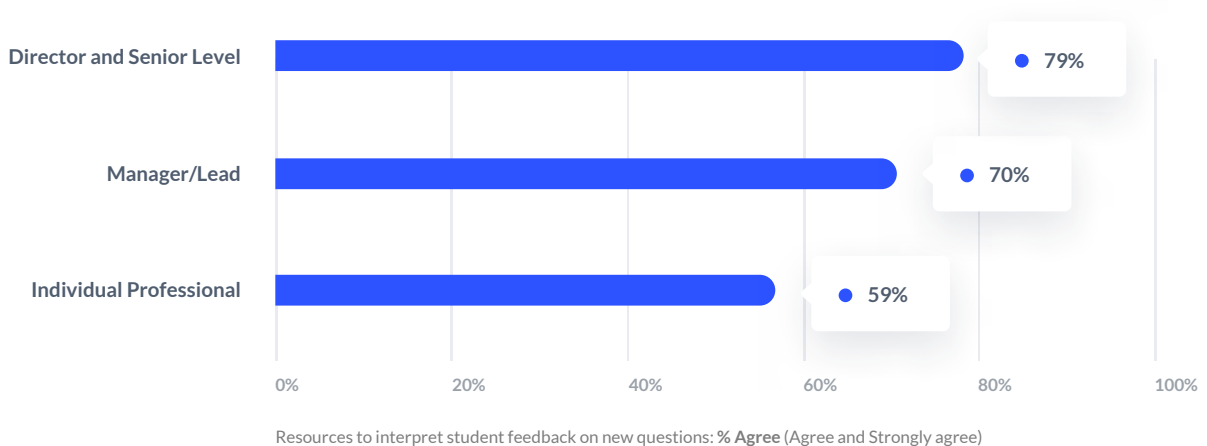
A similar disparity emerges when asked if their institutions have the resources to quickly take action based on student feedback

Resources to quickly take action based on student feedback: **% Agree** (Agree and Strongly agree)
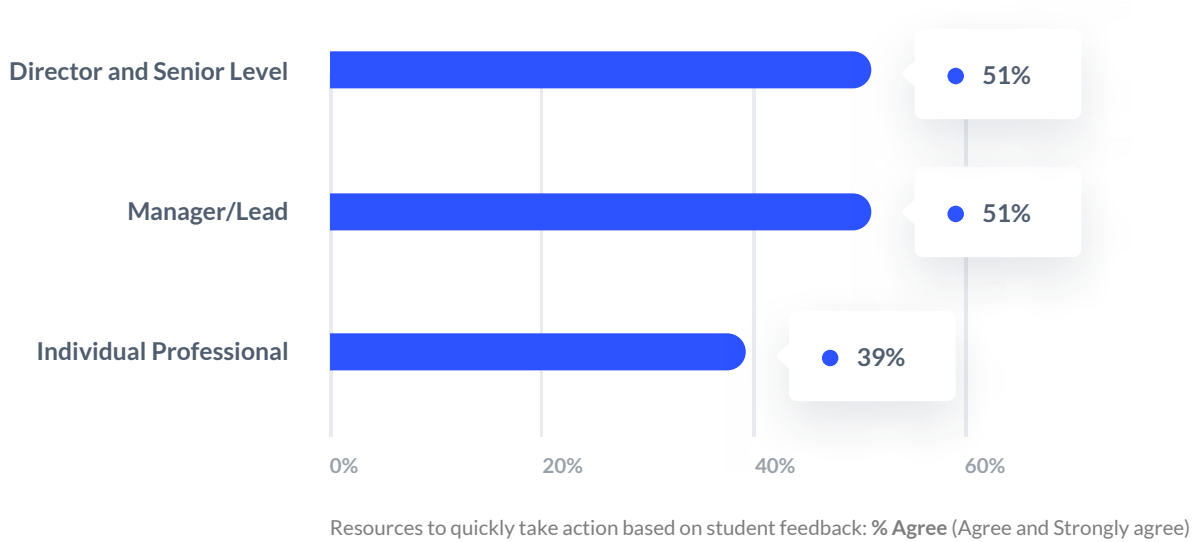
However, when we examine the results pertaining to the institution's capabilities to get real-time feedback from students, individual professionals are more optimistic than the institutional leaders. Perhaps this is because individual professionals are the ones on the front lines receiving this feedback directly.

Capabilities to get real-time feedback from students: **% Agree** (Agree and Strongly agree)

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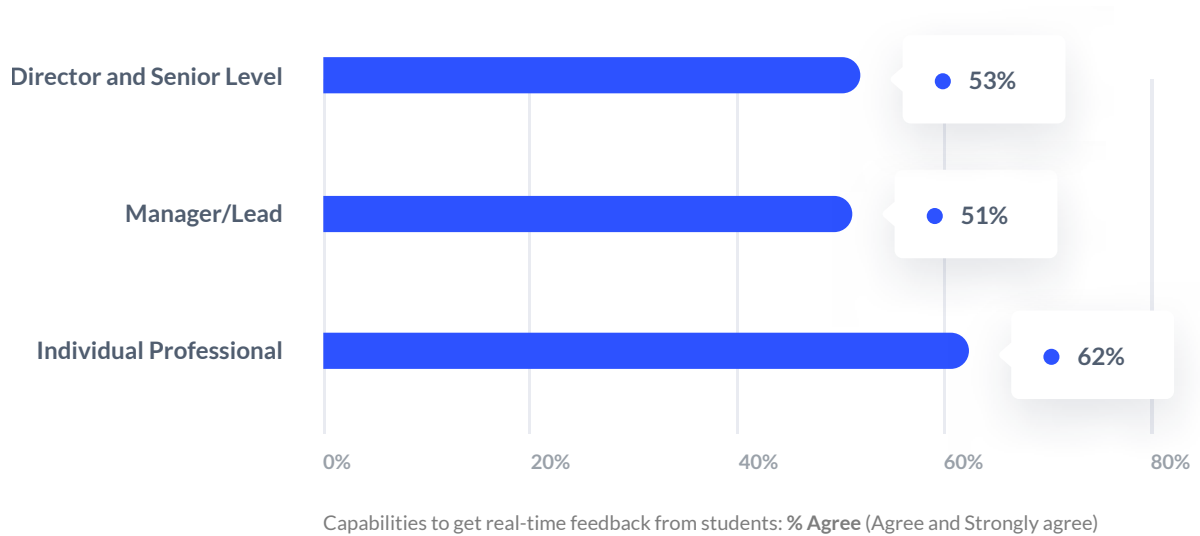
Moving Courses Online and Working Remotely as Top Priorities

The survey asked respondents the following question: What is your top priority for your institution at this moment?

Not surprisingly, the number one priority for respondents was moving courses online (52%). While considerably lower, engaging with students and instructors was the second most reported priority (15%).

Survey Areas Explored

- Charge in work responsibilities
- Institutional preparedness
- Top priorities
- Key challenges
- Technology needs
- Institutional help

Priority	Percentage
Moving courses to digital formats quickly	52%
Engaging with students and instructors	15%
Adapting course evaluation questions	9%
Implementing policy changes on course evaluations	7%
Finding budgets to support the transitions	4%
Other (Specify)	13%

Other top priorities reported by respondents were related to keeping processes and systems running smoothly to ensure continuity for students, instructors, and other stakeholders; ensuring quality assurance to stakeholders at the institution despite COVID-19; providing administration inside and outside the institution with the information they need to make decisions; and setting up remote proctoring for exams.

Differences in top priorities emerged when we look at responses by specific demographic categories.

• At private not-for-profit institutions, 44% of respondents indicated that moving to a digital format was a top priority, while 20% selected engaging with students and instructors as their priority. This is in contrast with findings from the public institutions where engaging with students and instructors only garnered a 12% response.

• A larger percentage of respondents in private institutions reported finding budgets to support transition to online as their top priority than that in public institutions.

● Public Not-For-Profit   ● Private Not-For-Profit

Moving courses to digital formats quickly
- 55%
- 44%

Engaging with students and instructors
- 12%
- 20%

Adapting course evaluation questions
- 2%
- 10%

Implementing policy changes on course evaluations
- 9%
- 4%

Finding budgets to support the transitions
- 7%
- 12%

Other
- 15%
- 10%

% of Total   0%   20%   40%   60%
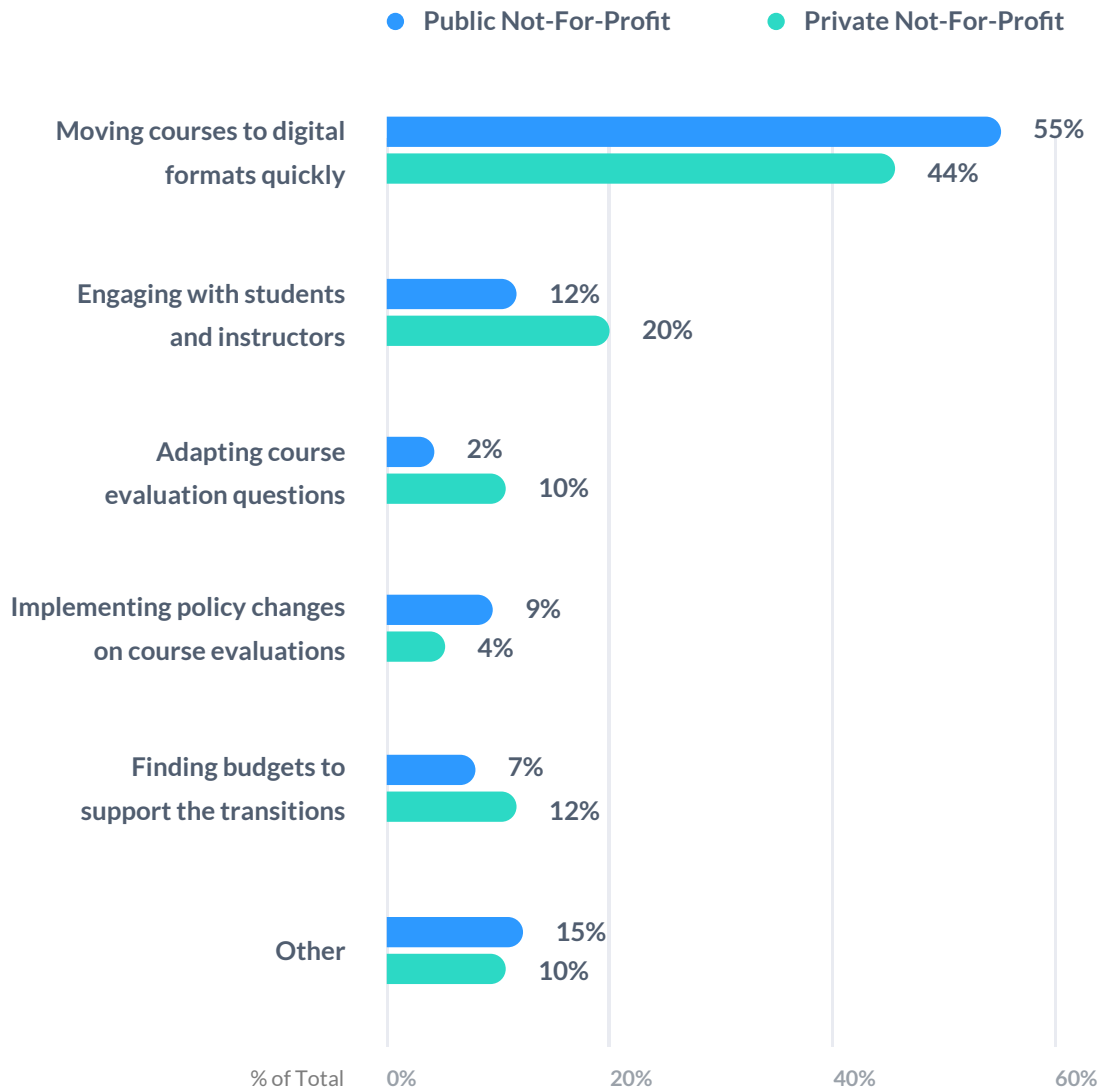
Planning/Preparing and Working Remotely as Key Challenges

Another question asked respondents: As courses are being moved online, what are the key challenges for you at this time? Planning/preparing and working remotely were reported as the two key challenges, followed by securing resources to respond to the transition, and then getting the decisions about evaluation policy changes quickly.

Survey Areas Explored

- Charge in work responsibilities
- Institutional help
- Institutional preparedness
- Technology needs
- Top priorities
- Key challenges

Planning and preparing — **49%**

Working Remotely — **45%**

Getting the resources to respond the changes in a timely manner — **35%**

Getting the decisions on the evaluation policy change quickly — **33%**

Getting in touch with those whom I need to collaborate with — **21%**

Other — **10%**

0%   20%   40%   60%

When we look at the institution sizes, the top challenge for smaller institutions (<2,000 student FTE) was "getting the resources to respond to changes in a timely manner" (55). In comparison, larger institutions (>20,000 student FTE) reported their top challenge as "getting the decisions on the evaluation policy change quickly." (42%).

Legend: 0-2000, 2001-5000, 5001-10000, 10001-20000, 20001+

Getting in touch with those whom I need to collaborate with
- 0-2000: 23%
- 2001-5000: 16%
- 5001-10000: 26%
- 10001-20000: 18%
- 20001+: 21%

Getting the decisions on the evaluation policy change quickly
- 0-2000: 19%
- 2001-5000: 28%
- 5001-10000: 17%
- 10001-20000: 33%
- 20001+: 42%

Getting the resources to respond the changes in a timely manner
- 0-2000: 55%
- 2001-5000: 28%
- 5001-10000: 30%
- 10001-20000: 28%
- 20001+: 31%

Planning and preparing
- 0-2000: 45%
- 2001-5000: 36%
- 5001-10000: 43%
- 10001-20000: 63%
- 20001+: 44%

Working remotely
- 0-2000: 48%
- 2001-5000: 40%
- 5001-10000: 52%
- 10001-20000: 48%
- 20001+: 37%

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Technology to Connect and Collaborate – Technology That Wasn't Needed Before but is Needed now

This section includes three different questions that address:

- Access to the technology necessary to perform responsibilities remotely

- Specific technologies needed now that were not needed pre-COVID-19

- The top three technologies that are most important to help perform current work responsibilities during this pandemic

Survey Areas Explored: Charge in work responsibilities, Institutional help, Institutional preparedness, Technology needs, Top priorities, Key challenges
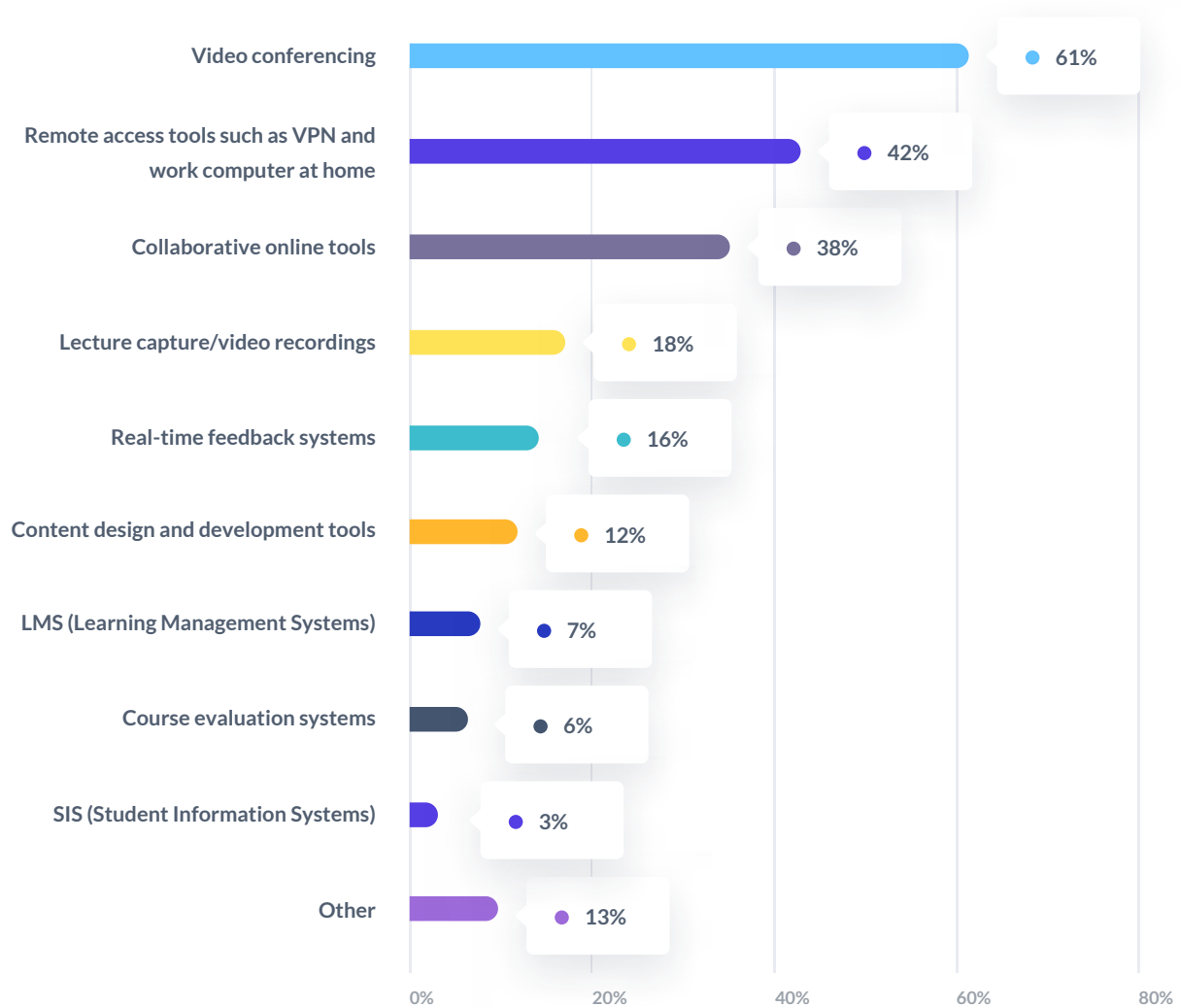
96%
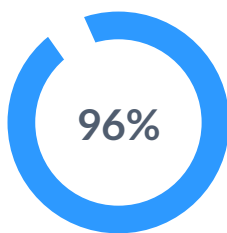
Access to technology to perform responsibilities remotely

96% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they have the technology necessary to perform their responsibilities remotely during this pandemic. No demographic group had scores that are lower than 85% favorable to this question.
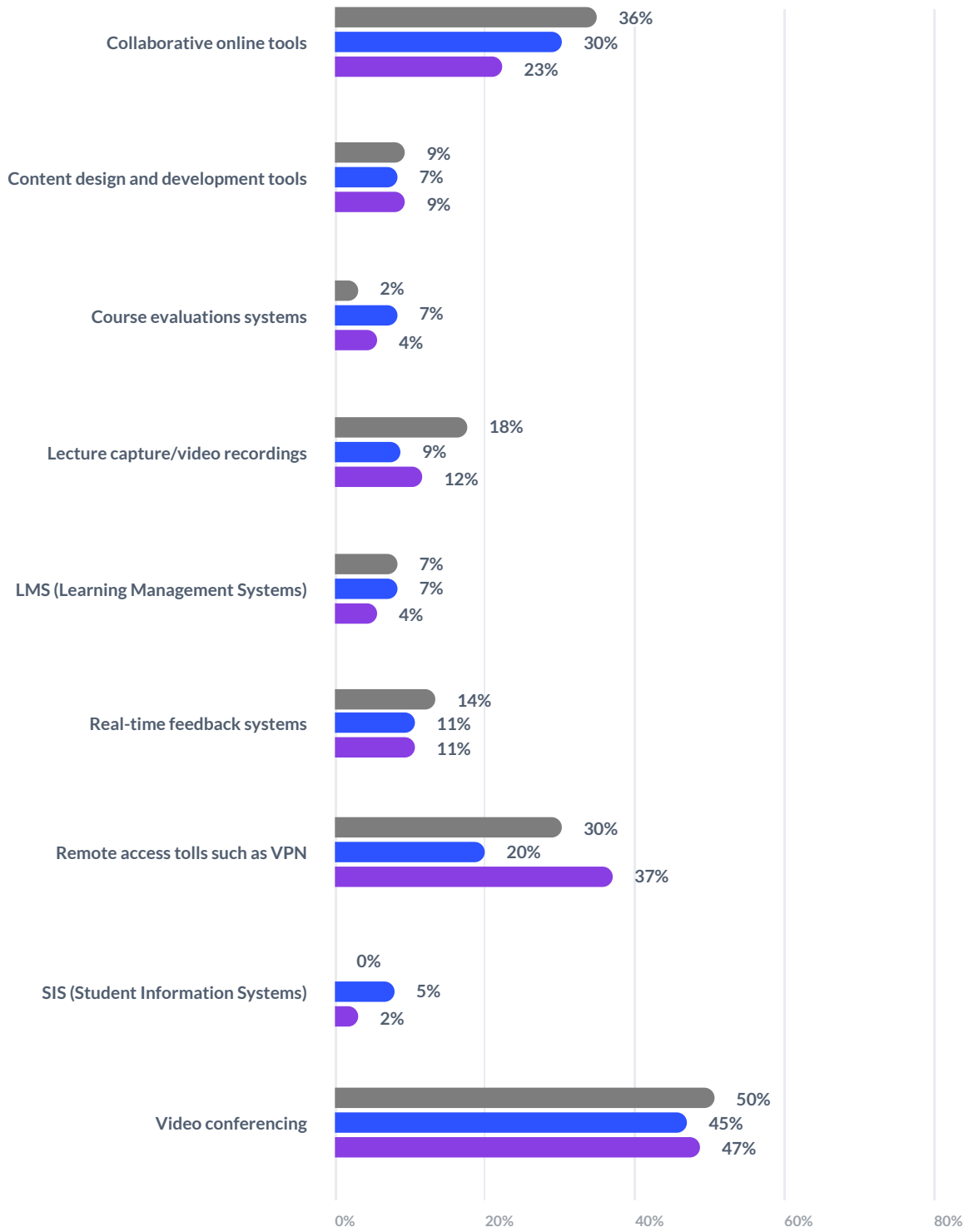
Technologies needed now that were not needed before COVID-19

The top two tools reported by respondents included the basics for remote work: video conferencing and remote access tools to enable connectivity. 38% of respondents also selected online collaboration tools as something they need now but didn't need before. This seems to indicate that tools to facilitate remote group work are an important part of this new reality, and should therefore be front and center for institutions.

Technology	Percentage
Video conferencing	61%
Remote access tools such as VPN and work computer at home	42%
Collaborative online tools	38%
Lecture capture/video recordings	18%
Real-time feedback systems	16%
Content design and development tools	12%
LMS (Learning Management Systems)	7%
Course evaluation systems	6%
SIS (Student Information Systems)	3%
Other	13%

A closer look at the data is even more informative. Individual professionals expressed a greater need for remote access tools that they didn't need before (37%) than managers (20%) and senior leaders (30%), as shown in the graph below. A larger percentage of those at the senior level than managers and individual professionals indicated that online collaborative tools are the technology they need now but didn't need before.

Legend: ● Director and Senior Level ● Manager/Lead ● Individual Professional

Collaborative online tools
- 36%
- 30%
- 23%

Content design and development tools
- 9%
- 7%
- 9%

Course evaluations systems
- 2%
- 7%
- 4%

Lecture capture/video recordings
- 18%
- 9%
- 12%

LMS (Learning Management Systems)
- 7%
- 7%
- 4%

Real-time feedback systems
- 14%
- 11%
- 11%

Remote access tolls such as VPN
- 30%
- 20%
- 37%

SIS (Student Information Systems)
- 0%
- 5%
- 2%

Video conferencing
- 50%
- 45%
- 47%

X-axis: 0% — 20% — 40% — 60% — 80%

Top 3 most important technologies to perform your responsibilities

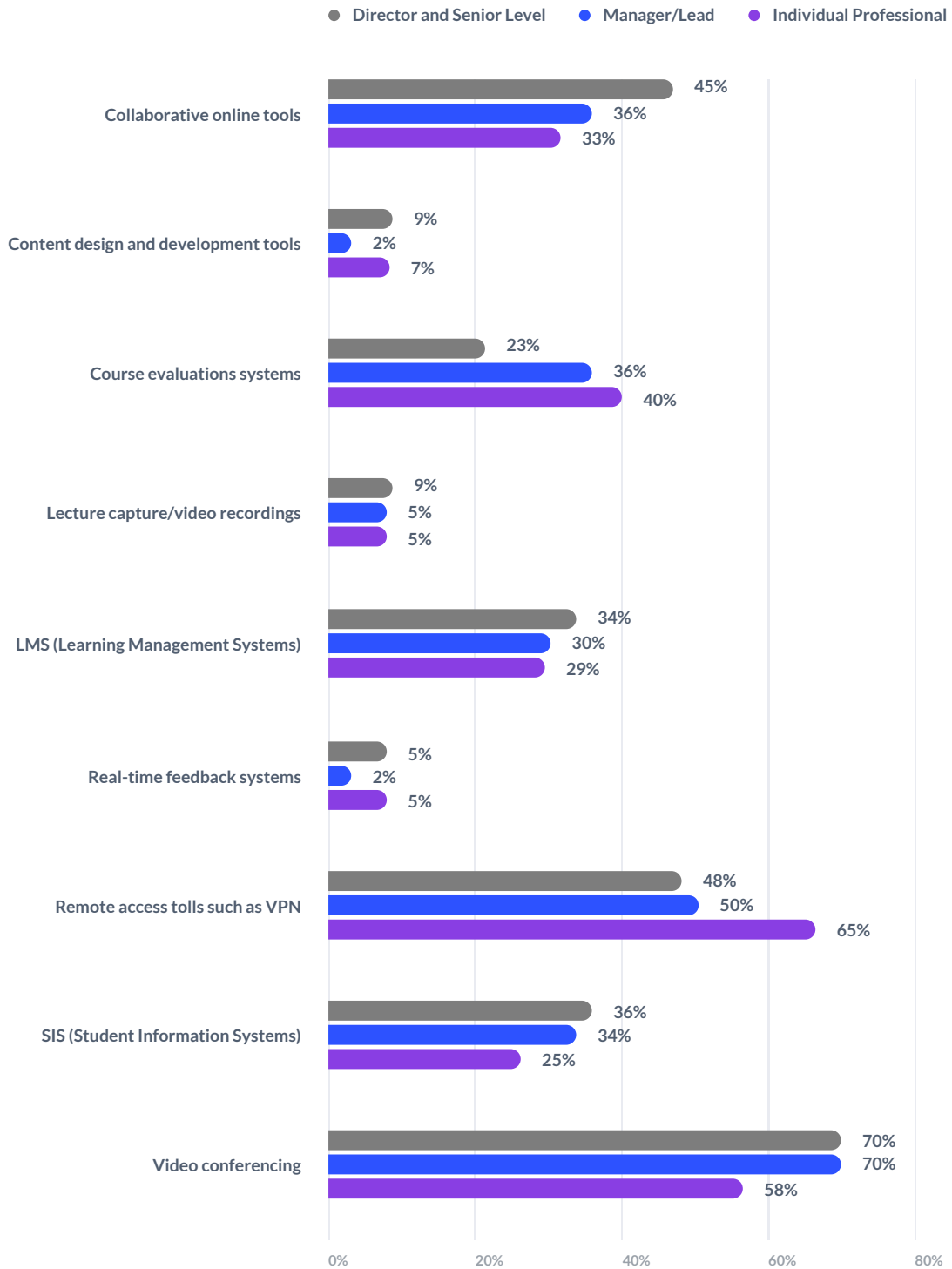Response to this question had similar patterns as the previous question (the technology needed now but not before the pandemic). Video conferencing and remote access tools top the list.

Technology	Percentage
Video conferencing	63%
Remote access tools such as VPN and work computer at home	58%
Collaborative online tools	37%
Course evaluation systems	36%
LMS (Learning Management Systems)	32%
SIS (Student Information Systems)	30%
Lecture capture/video recordings	6%
Content design and development tools	6%
Real-time feedback systems	4%
Other	5%
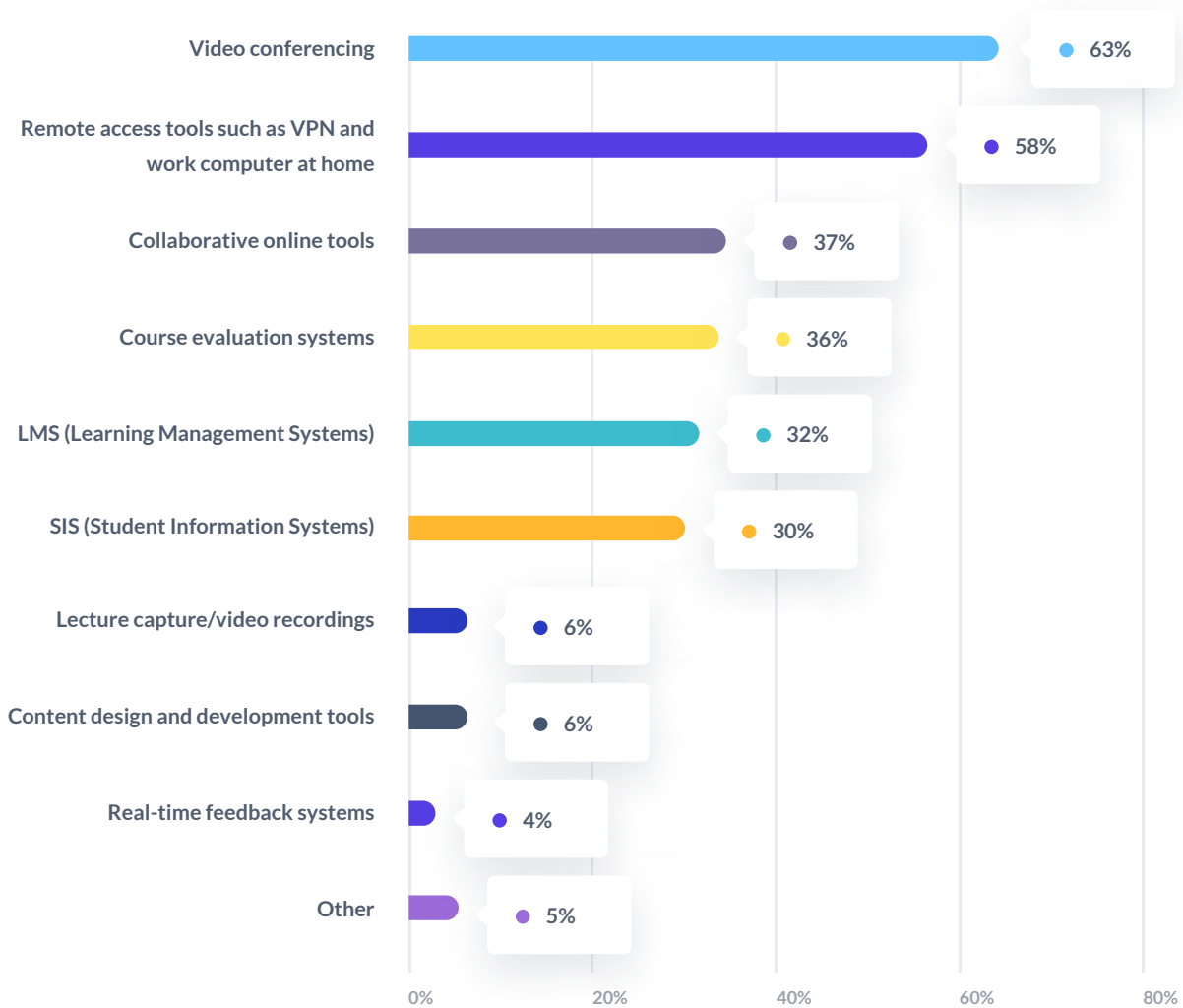
An interesting difference is that 70% of managers and senior leaders selected video conferencing as one of their top three important tools compared to 58% of individual professionals.

Director and Senior Level ● **Manager/Lead** ● **Individual Professional**

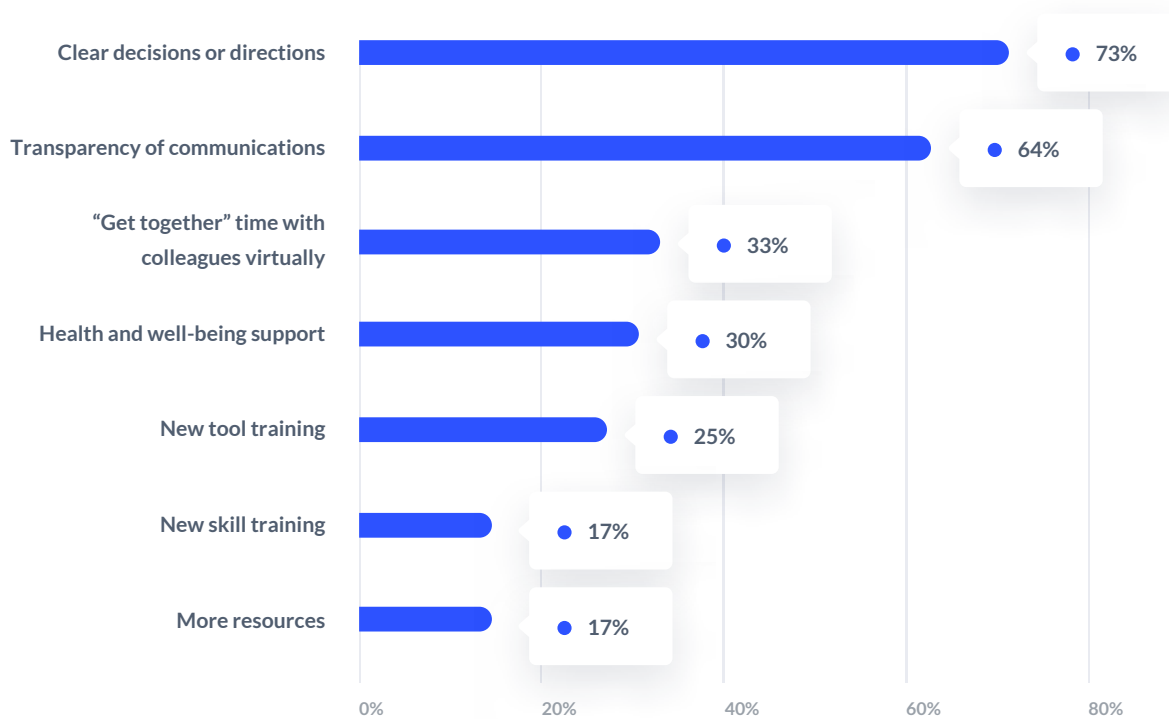|	
Collaborative online tools	45% / 36% / 33%
Content design and development tools	9% / 2% / 7%
Course evaluations systems	23% / 36% / 40%
Lecture capture/video recordings	9% / 5% / 5%
LMS (Learning Management Systems)	34% / 30% / 29%
Real-time feedback systems	5% / 2% / 5%
Remote access tolls such as VPN	48% / 50% / 65%
SIS (Student Information Systems)	36% / 34% / 25%
Video conferencing	70% / 70% / 58%

On the other hand, 65% of individual professionals selected remote access tools as the most important technology for them to do their work remotely. In comparison, 50% of managers and 48% of senior leaders selected remote access tools as one of their top three important tools.

The need for these tools now that weren't required before, and their importance in getting the work done raise some interesting questions and concerns. The results seem to indicate the need for institutions to identify factors that are creating challenges to remote work. If technology is not the issue, it's important to determine how best to support stakeholders as they work from home.
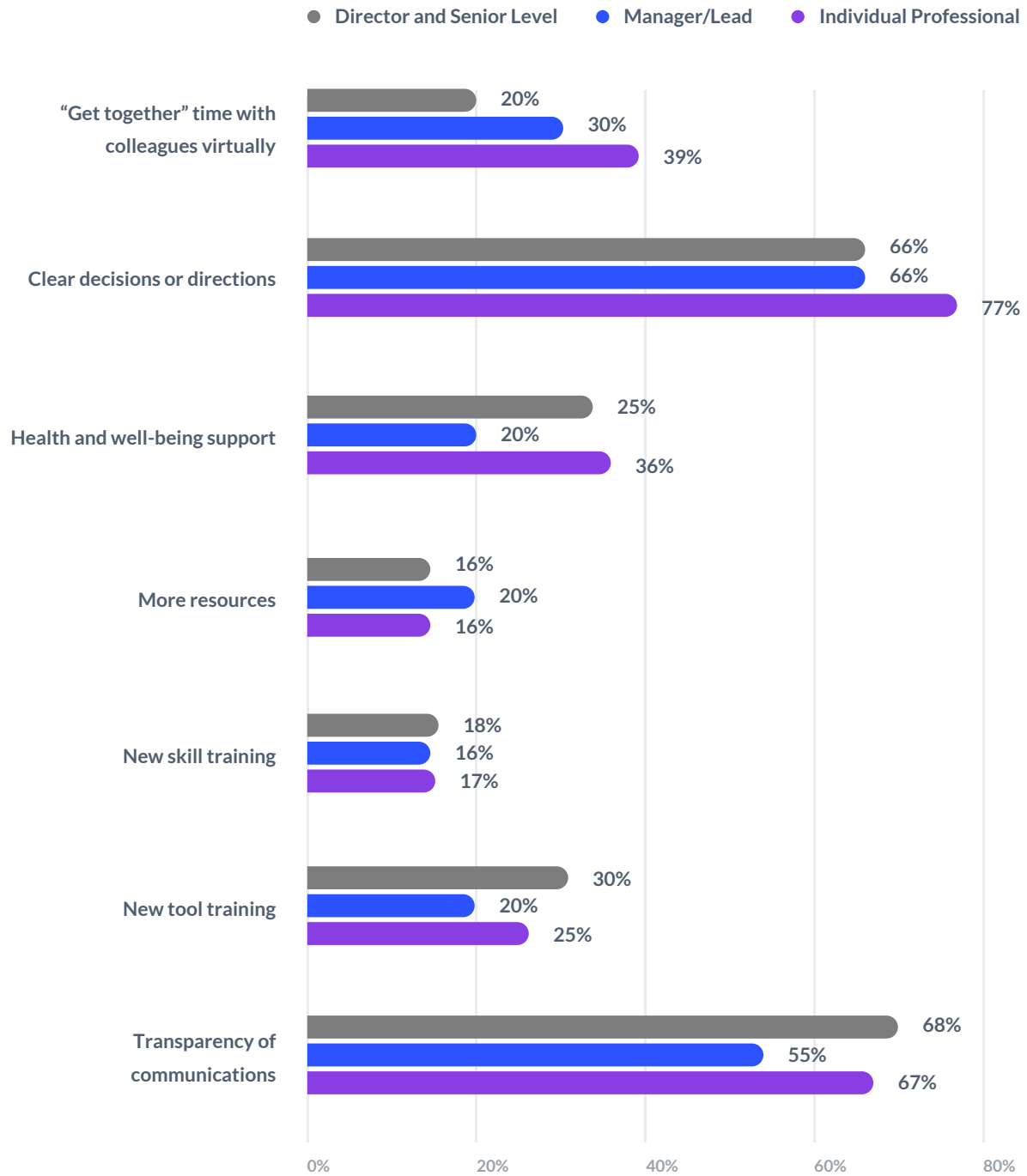
Clear Decisions and Transparent Communications – Most Needed Institutional Help

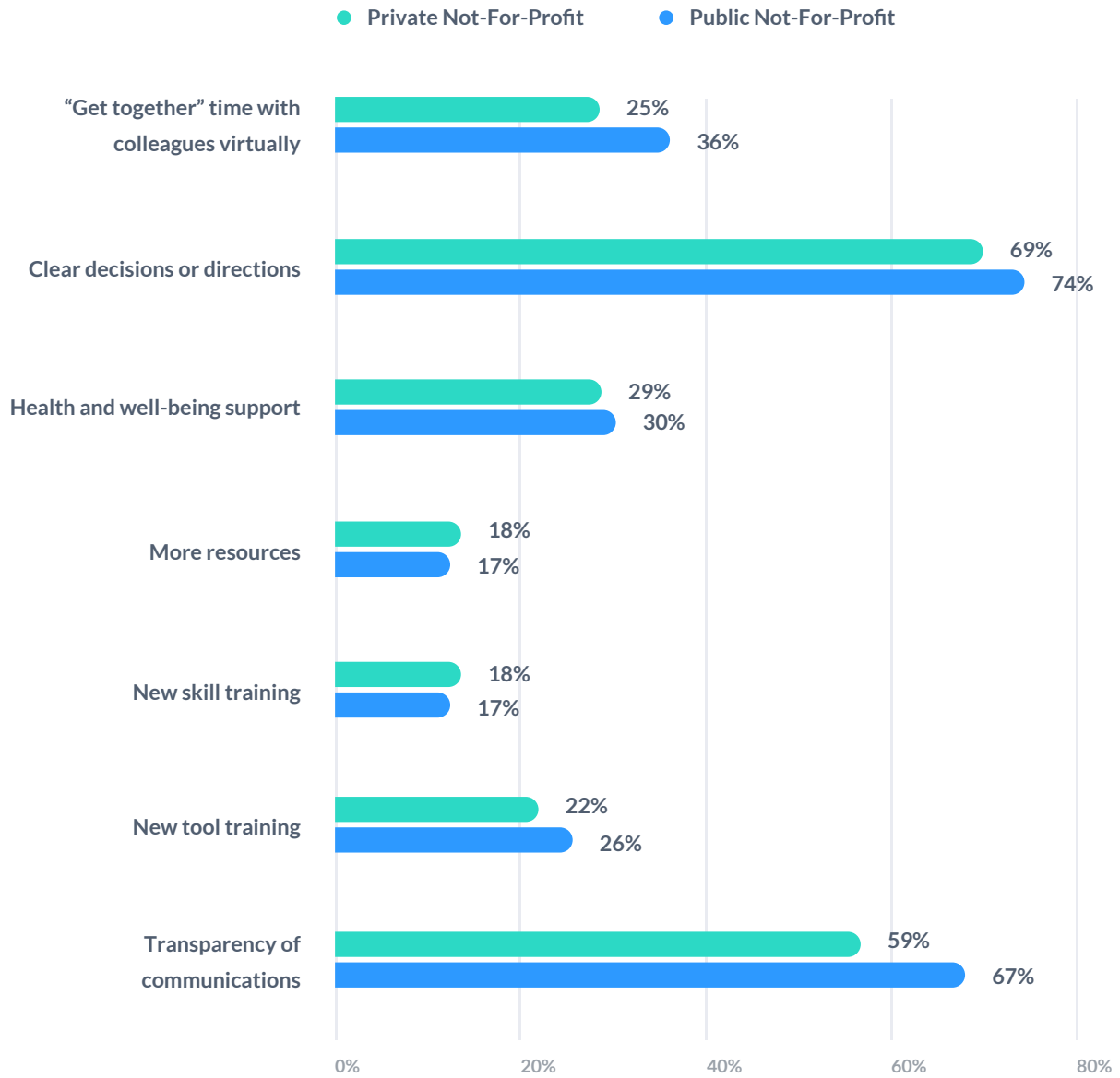The survey asked, "How can your institution help you perform your responsibilities well during this period?"

The top two responses were clear decisions or directions, followed by transparent communications. While "Get together time with colleagues" was the third most cited area for institutional support, the frequency of this request varied by key demographics.

Survey Areas Explored
- Charge in work responsibilities
- Institutional preparedness
- Top priorities
- Key challenges
- Technology needs
- Institutional help

Category	Percentage
Clear decisions or directions	73%
Transparency of communications	64%
"Get together" time with colleagues virtually	33%
Health and well-being support	30%
New tool training	25%
New skill training	17%
More resources	17%

When we analyzed the responses by demographics, some differences emerge. For example, senior leaders selected "get together' time with colleagues virtually only 20% of the time, in comparison to individual professionals at 39%.

● Director and Senior Level   ● Manager/Lead   ● Individual Professional

"Get together" time with colleagues virtually
- Director and Senior Level: 20%
- Manager/Lead: 30%
- Individual Professional: 39%

Clear decisions or directions
- Director and Senior Level: 66%
- Manager/Lead: 66%
- Individual Professional: 77%

Health and well-being support
- Director and Senior Level: 25%
- Manager/Lead: 20%
- Individual Professional: 36%

More resources
- Director and Senior Level: 16%
- Manager/Lead: 20%
- Individual Professional: 16%

New skill training
- Director and Senior Level: 18%
- Manager/Lead: 16%
- Individual Professional: 17%

New tool training
- Director and Senior Level: 30%
- Manager/Lead: 20%
- Individual Professional: 25%

Transparency of communications
- Director and Senior Level: 68%
- Manager/Lead: 55%
- Individual Professional: 67%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Respondents at Private Not-For-Profit Institutions selected "get together" time only 25% of the time, while public institutions chose it 36% of time.
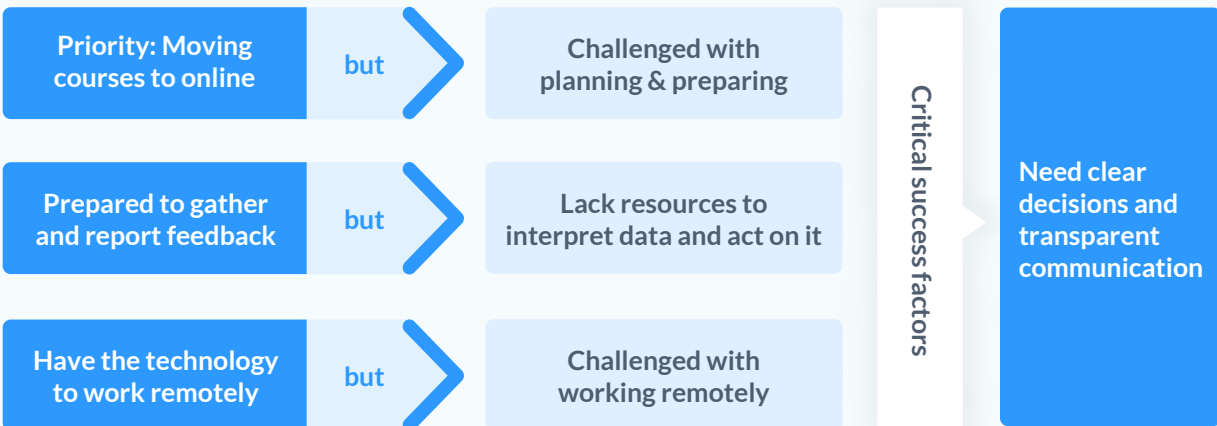
● **Private Not-For-Profit**   ● **Public Not-For-Profit**

Category	Private	Public
"Get together" time with colleagues virtually	25%	36%
Clear decisions or directions	69%	74%
Health and well-being support	29%	30%
More resources	18%	17%
New skill training	18%	17%
New tool training	22%	26%
Transparency of communications	59%	67%

These differences likely reflect varying needs by roles as well as cultural norms for certain types of institutions in different geographies.

Putting the Findings Together with Concluding Thoughts

In this survey, respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on course evaluation processes, within the following six key areas:

- Change in work responsibilities and roles both currently and expected in the future

- Institutional preparedness to manage the feedback processes

- Top priorities of respondents for their institutions

- Key challenges of moving courses to an online environment

- Technology needs including new and top priority needs

- Help needed from institutions

The key findings are summarized below:

Priority: Moving courses to online	but	Challenged with planning & preparing		
Prepared to gather and report feedback	but	Lack resources to interpret data and act on it	Critical success factors	Need clear decisions and transparent communication
Have the technology to work remotely	but	Challenged with working remotely		

Three Recommendations to Support Course Evaluation Practitioners During COVID-19

As we reflect on the findings, Explorance Experts have come up with three recommendations for educational leaders to consider while navigating these uncharted waters. These recommendations are based on the key themes of the findings. They are intended to assist course evaluation practitioners, and other stakeholders in the feedback process better manage their roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 crisis:

• Provide concrete directions on course evaluation policies and processes, in a timely manner, along with transparent communications to assist practitioners as they shift operations online

• Offer resources that will support instructors and stakeholders in remote student feedback interpretation and action planning processes to close the feedback loop

• Identify the factors that are creating challenges for stakeholders involved in the course evaluation process as they teach and work remotely. If technology itself is not the issue, determine how you can best support them as they teach and work from home, and adapt to using new tools

The survey findings indicate that Higher Education Institutions are, for the most part, succeeding in managing the top priorities and key challenges that this pandemic is imposing on course evaluation programs. However, as stakeholders adapt to this new remote reality, they will begin to rely more on their institutional leaders to remove obstacles and empower them to manage course evaluation processes better.

Explorance has more than 15 years of experience helping Higher Education Institutions successfully transition course evaluations and other feedback processes online. **Get in touch with us**, and our experts will help support you and your team as you respond to the circumstances through the lenses of these three recommendations.

Appendix: Questions Asked

- To what degree has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your responsibilities at work at the moment, on a scale of 1-5? (1 being greatly decreased, 3 being no change, and 5 being greatly increased)

- To what level do you see your role at work has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, on a scale of 1-5? (1 being significantly reduced, 3 being no change, and 5 being significantly expanded)

- To what level do you see that your role at work will change after the COVID-19 pandemic, on a scale of 1-5? (1 being significantly reduced, 3 being no change, and 5 being significantly expanded)

- What is your top priority for your institution at this moment? (select one)

- As courses are being moved to online, what are the key challenges for you at this time? (Select all that apply)

- Please indicate your level of agreement

  - We have effective policies and processes to gather student feedback
  - We have the resources to interpret student feedback on new questions
  - We have the resources to quickly take action based on student feedback
  - We have the capabilities to get real-time feedback from students
  - Our course evaluation process can be managed remotely
  - Our course evaluation response rate management can be handled remotely
  - Our course evaluation reporting process can be managed remotely

- Please indicate your level of agreement: I have the technology necessary to perform my responsibilities remotely at this moment.

- What specific technologies do you need now that you didn't need before? (Select all that apply)

- Please select the top three technologies that are most important to you in performing your responsibilities at this moment. Select up to three

- How can your institution help you perform your responsibilities well during this period? Select all that apply

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