

## Chapter 21

# Using a Connectedness Cycle to Create a Paradigm Shift in Work and Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*If the global pandemic has taught us one thing, it is that humans have an innate need for connection. Many people sought connections within work communities, neighborhood groups, faith-based groups, communities of like-minded educators, or communities of post-secondary students. Often, these communities took to the internet in order to remain connected, using digital resources and virtual platforms, including social media, that allowed for interpersonal communication and feelings of connectedness. Regardless of the type of community to which members of society strived to belong, or the methods chosen in an attempt to maintain connectedness, this need for connection was, and is, inherent to all of society. The purpose of this chapter is to present the notion of the connectedness cycle, clarify its subcomponents, and provide clear and specific examples and strategies as to how connection can create a paradigm shift in both the workplace and in education environments.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The need for meaningful relationships arguably begins in infancy. Newborns seek out attachments with one or two predominant caregivers. As children progress through school and into adulthood, connections with family, friends, teachers, coaches and the like become essential. This need for connections has been exacerbated by the global pandemic. While society as a whole is certainly made up of differing personalities and temperaments, everyone, at some point during the past year or so, needed to feel as though they belonged to a community beyond just that of themselves. The groups sought out for connection may have included work communities, neighborhood groups, faith-based groups, communities of like-minded educators, or communities of post-secondary students, among many others. Often, these

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communities took to the internet in order to remain connected, using resources such as Google Meets, Zoom, Facetime, and other platforms that allowed for interpersonal communication and feelings of connectedness. Even social media could have been considered an avenue for connection. Regardless of the type of community to which members of society strived to belong, or the methods chosen in an attempt to maintain connectedness, this need for connection was, and is, inherent to all of society.

The need for connection is so paramount to basic well-being that society would be remiss if we simply dismissed its importance and returned to what many dub as our old ways of doing things prior to the pandemic. As society moves beyond the pandemic, ensuring continued feelings of connectedness in workplace and education environments is absolutely necessary for both well-being and productivity. Connectedness is a multi-faceted construct, and can be best thought of as a cycle. This chapter will describe the conceptual underpinnings that make up the connectedness cycle. Objectives of this chapter are to present the notion of the connectedness cycle, clarify its subcomponents, and provide clear and specific examples and strategies as to how connection can create a paradigm shift in both the workplace and in education environments.

## **BACKGROUND**

The notion of connectedness is not something new. In the late 1960s, John Bowlby's attachment theory presented the idea that the mother and infant bond is paramount to healthy development, and later research expanded upon this idea to incorporate the parent and child bond, along with the primary caregiver and child bond (Palm, 2014). A key component of Bowlby's attachment theory was the notion of "attunement" (Meyer et al., 2013, p. 166), or a shared experience in which the child begins to understand emotions based upon the reaction of the caregiver to emotions presented by the child. These types of shared emotional experiences are, in essence, precursors to the development of self-regulation (Colmer et al., 2011). The idea of attunement will be discussed further when strategies for supporting students and employees are discussed.

As children grow and develop into adulthood, then, the relationships that they continue to build drive both well-being and success. Once into adulthood, and in the higher education or work environment, relationships with fellow students or colleagues have the potential to set the tone for either the learning environment or the work environment. Quality relationships with other students and professionals have the ability to improve our productivity and create an overall positive school and work environment, complete with greater satisfaction (Jacobs, 2012). Jacobs (2012) further noted the importance of creating relationships with administration, executives, policy makers, or those in leadership roles. This facilitates an open-door approach, potentially creating more meaningful outcomes for all stakeholders.

In looking more closely at these relationships, it can be said that they essentially create feelings of connectedness, or a sense of belonging to a particular group. In the higher education setting, Crowe (2020) clarifies that connections occur when students feel they fit within a student group or community, that they are important to one another, and that, essentially, they belong. Connections such as these can presumably apply to the workplace, as well. Thus, connectedness spans multiple contexts. For example, employees may feel a greater connection to their colleagues, therefore becoming more intrinsically motivated to successfully perform their jobs. Students may feel greater connection to their colleges or universities if they are a part of a cohort of students within the college, therefore becoming more intrinsically motivated to graduate. In fact, Crowe also noted that connections in higher education likely increases the chance

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