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Federal Managers' Perceptions on the Implementation of Remote Work for Employees

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Valerie F. DeFeo

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Federal Managers' Perceptions on the Implementation of Remote Work for Employees

by

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MPhil, Walden University, 2021

MS, University of Maryland University College, 2004

BS, College of Notre Dame of Maryland, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Management

Walden University

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Abstract

Federal employees are not working remotely as frequently as they could be even though it benefits them and the organization. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore the lived experiences of leaders as to whether they adopt remote working. The research was focused on the lived experiences of leaders related to their decision to adopt or not adopt remote working for employees in their organization. The conceptual framework for this study was derived from the work of Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership model and Errichiello and Pianese's organizational control model. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 15 managers at a federal department in the Washington, D.C., area who have the authority to implement remote work. Data analysis was performed by coding key quotes from the transcripts into categories and then themes. The key results indicated that team disconnect, work-life balance, and implementation of remote work influence a manager's perceptions on remote work. All managers in the study expressed that the benefits outweigh their past experiences or personal feelings; therefore, they implement remote work. The lived experiences of managers may offer information to address personal feelings or uncertainties on remote work. Managerial training could provide insights to the benefits of remote work and tactics to overcome uncertainties. These insights may lead to positive social change by encouraging managers to consider the full range of issues before deciding on remote work; empowering organizations to standardize policies for remote work; and enabling more workers to work remotely.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Remote work enables organizations to hire a specialized workforce with the ability to keep up with the growing global market without being located in a single building structure. Organizations can cut costs on leasing space and reduce vehicle emissions associated with commuting to work. The U.S. federal government is achieving greater flexibility in managing its diverse workforce through the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, by authorizing agencies the use of *telework* or remote working. Remote work settings are seen as a benefit to both organizations and employees. However, federal employees are not working remotely as frequently as they could be even though it benefits them and the organization (Bea et al., 2019; Lee & Kim, 2018; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018). In general, the inability or prohibition against participating in remote work has been associated with low morale, absenteeism, turnover, poor work–life balance, and low productivity (Gibson et al., 2002; Greer & Payne, 2014; Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Rainey, 2003). Specifically for the federal government, agencies with more remote workers have less turnover (Choi, 2020).

My research was conducted to better understand the views of the people who, ultimately, must decide if employees are able to take advantage of the opportunity for remote work, while continuing to contribute to the success of the organization. Understanding the issues with remote work that concern managers may lead to identifying the drivers of managers' willingness to embrace remote work. Identifying these drivers based on personal experiences may lead to positive social change by encouraging managers to consider the full range of issues before making decisions on

remote work or by empowering organizations to implement a standardized policy for remote work, alleviating the pressure of decision making at the managerial level.

Chapter 1 introduces the study and provides the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research question, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and the significance of the study. Chapter 1 provides the reader a baseline of the study before Chapter 2 addresses the body of work within the scholarly literature.

Background of the Study

Today's economy is the result of the continuous evolution of information technology opening global markets. Organizations that want to hire the best in the industry have implemented human capital plans to recruit and retain specialists outside company offices, resulting in an elite workforce spread across the United States and abroad. Some organizations have also shifted from nine-to-five work onsite to offering employees remote work through teleworking. Teleworking involves working at one's home or another location where employees can connect with the office. This form of alternate worksites provides many benefits beyond recruitment and retention. Some of these benefits found during a review of the literature are directly applicable to both the organization and the employer. There is a reduction of overhead and office space costs (Elshaiekh et al., 2018; Gibson et al., 2002; Greer & Payne, 2014; Rodgers & Teicholz, 2001), increased morale (Baruch, 2000; Dubrin & Bardard, 1993; Gibson et al., 2002; Meier & Hicklin, 2007), reduced absenteeism (Bailey, 1999; Kurland & Bailey, 1990; Nilles, 1998; Rodgers & Teicholz, 2001), wider talent pool (Dubrin & Bardard, 1993;

Gibson et al., 2002; Kurland and Bailey, 1999; Salomon, 1998), work–life balance (Bathini & Kandathil, 2019; Dubrin & Barard, 1993; Kurland & Bailey, 1999), increased productivity (Gibson et al., 2002; Greer & Payne, 2014; Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Rainey, 2003), and a lower tendency to change employers (Baruch, 2000; Gibson et al., 2002; Elshaiekh et al., 2018; Overmyer, 2010).

The federal government’s implementation of remote work has enabled the transformation of traditional working environments that operate within a single designated site. The evolution of communication technologies starting in the 1990s has increasingly supported remote working (Short, 2014), which in turn has the potential to reduce travel and make organizations more flexible (Purvanova, 2014). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2019) claimed that working remotely improves air quality, reduces traffic, reduces the cost of office space, and helps with employees’ work–life balance. In a work environment where 35% of employees would change jobs to have flexible working locations, remote working is increasing (Hickman & Sasaki, 2017) in the private sector. However, the federal sector is not fully implementing remote work (Bea et al., 2019; Lee & Kim, 2018; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019) and potentially missing a recruitment opportunity. Remote work represents an opportunity for attaining more effectiveness, efficiency, and employee satisfaction, benefitting both the organization and the employee (Baruch, 2000; Dubrin & Bardard, 1993; Gibson et al., 2002; Meier & Hicklin, 2007).

There are managers who do not embrace remote work even though there are many recorded benefits to doing so (Bae et al., 2019; Choi, 2020; Lee & Kim, 2018). In 2010, a

major snowstorm brought the federal government to a halt, costing approximately \$70 million a day in lost productivity (Weisberg & Porell, 2011). The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, signed by then President Barack Obama, gave the federal government flexibility in managing its workforce through telework. The 2018 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey showed that of 41,875 employees who took the survey within the USDA, 21.8% did not frequently work remotely (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018). The Telework Enhancement Act is a mechanism for all agencies, yet not all managers take part, as indicated by the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018). Also, the fiscal year 2018 Status of Telework in the Federal Government (STFG) report identified that agencies were not fully implementing remote work, a missed opportunity to achieve various organizational goals (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019). Particularly, the STFG report indicated that a telework-ready workforce can help ensure that essential federal functions continue during emergency situations, which can include weather-related instances.

In the current literature, researchers have explored many aspects of remote work, such as challenges (see, for example, Greer & Payne, 2014; Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Mahler, 2012; Taskin & Bridoux, 2010), comparisons to traditional setting (Purvanova, 2014; Sahay & Baul, 2014), benefits (Bandura & Lyons, 2018), remote work through gender (Bae et al., 2019), and federal managers prohibiting remote work through themes of trust (Brown et al., 2016). Unfortunately, literature is sparse regarding remote work policies and the perspectives of managers who have the authority to implement remote work policies. My study may aid in filling the gap in research, knowledge, and

understanding so that employees, organizations, and society may benefit by adopting remote working practices when appropriate. The study is intended to explore this social issue within one federal department. Although the focus will be on a specific federal department, there may be generalizations with similar federal departments or the private sector.

By exploring the perceptions of managers on remote working, this study may broaden the understanding of the drivers of managers' willingness to embrace remote work. Identifying these drivers may enable managers to make knowledge-based decisions on remote work and to consider remote work as part of human capital plans.

Problem Statement

The social problem was that federal employees are not working remotely as frequently as they could be even though it benefits them and the organization. The 2018 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey showed that of 41,875 employees who took the survey within the USDA, 21.8% did not frequently work remotely (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018).

There is a gap in research exploring the viewpoints of managers in the implementation of remote working. The gap in literature led to the research problem, which was a lack of knowledge and understanding of the experiences of managers on implementing remote work when studies have shown the benefits to both the employee and the organization when remote work is offered. Federal employees do not embrace working remotely due to insufficient technical or managerial support (Lee & Kim, 2018). Bae et al. (2019) connected federal employees not participating in remote work to when

management did not support work–life balance programs. Bae et al. also found that male supervisors were more inclined not to implement remote work. Issues of office coverage and technology challenges were cited as reasons for managers to not allow employees to take part in remote work (Caillier, 2013; Mahler, 2012; Overyer, 2011).

This lack of knowledge and understanding about remote work and the factors that managers consider or should consider, have implications in the workplace. Failure to implement remote work and offering only a traditional brick-and-mortar work environment limit the ability to attract a larger talent pool by focusing on hiring within the local community area. Remote work improves retention and recruitment opportunities through telework, flexible scheduling, and reduced costs associated with commuting (Gibson et al., 2002). A traditional setting risks turnover when an employee must care for a child or an elderly parent (Gibson et al., 2002). Also, the traditional workplace can suffer from productivity issues. Research has shown that remote work employees can be as productive, more productive, or much more productive compared to being in a physical office space (DuBrin & Barnard, 1993; Tolentino et al., 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore the lived experiences of leaders regarding whether they adopt remote working and the reasons behind those decisions. There is a lack of scholarly literature on this phenomenon, and a need was expressed in the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2018) Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey for an increased understanding of federal employees not engaging in working remotely. Management and organizational researchers have

explored themes on control systems after adoption of remote working, behaviors of employees working from remote locations, and perceptions of office employees toward employees working remotely (Errichiello & Pianese, 2016). Existing literature is scant on the viewpoints of managers in the implementation of remote working.

To address this gap and to follow a qualitative phenomenology paradigm, I conducted interviews to identify themes related to the factors that influence managers' decisions regarding adoption of remote working and the reasons behind those decisions. These themes were used to develop an understanding of managers' viewpoints on working remotely. The target population consisted of managers from one federal department in the Washington, D.C., area. By exploring the perceptions of managers on remote working, this study may broaden the understanding of the ways that an agency can train managers on the benefits of remote work to incorporate within a human capital plan or implement consistent policies. Resolving constraints may improve the understanding of the process by which managers decide to implement or not implement remote working. It may also allow for a broader application pool to obtain skilled employees in critical or difficult to fill vacancies.

Research Question

The study was guided by one research question: What are the lived experiences of leaders related to their decision to adopt or not adopt remote working for employees in their organization?

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a system of concepts, assumptions, and beliefs to support the research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The conceptual framework defines a researcher's epistemological and ontological worldview and approach to the study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). In addition to organizations stretching human resources hiring practices to entice specific skillsets and the impacts of the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19), remote work has become a more attractive option for managers. The conceptual framework for my study was derived from the work of Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model and from Errichiello and Pianese's (2016) organizational control model. This framework was the foundation of my research into the lived experiences of managers with the authority to implement or not implement remote working.

The situational leadership model promotes a specific leadership type of flexibility and inclusion. The model suggests that no single leadership style is dominant. Instead, the leader considers components of the situation to select the most feasible style (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013; Hersey et al., 2001; Kozachuk & Conley, 2021; Streck, 2018). Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership model illustrates that successful leadership is dependent on choosing the appropriate leadership style in conjunction with followers' readiness level. The model can explain how and why leaders make decisions regarding remote working, within the specific environment, situation, and conditions that exist in their respective organizations. Specific to my research, the model defines behaviors in leaders adapting to changing situations. According to the model, managers need to

address flexible working environments to maintain employee satisfaction and retention. Organizations can benefit from offering various working options, and in this study I looked at the perceptions of leaders in the implementation of these flexible working environments.

Remote work alters the physical proximity of employees from their organization and impacts organizational control (Errichiello & Pianese, 2016). The transformation of the traditional work setting requires managers to maintain alignment between employees and organizational objectives. Errichiello and Pianese (2016) analyzed how remote work influences the control structures of rules, procedures, and tools and the practices of actions, activities, and processes in an organization. An understanding of remote work to its impacts on organizational control structures influences the outcomes and actions at various organizational levels. These levels are at the individual, group, or organizational hierarchy tiers. Specific to my research, Errichiello and Pianese identified a key control system relating to remote work, which is that of a manager's supervision and leadership style. Again, understanding the lived experiences of leaders on why they do or do not implement remote work is a direct control-related issue influencing an organizational control system. A more detailed explanation of the situational leadership and organizational control models are presented in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore the lived experiences of leaders regarding whether they adopt remote working and the reasons behind those decisions. A qualitative approach was best suited for the study as I aimed to

explore and understand the meaning of individual attributes to a social problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The phenomenological research design is intended for inquiry on the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon described by the participants and involves conducting interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To address the research question in this qualitative study, the approach included semistructured interviews to understand the lived experiences of managers within a federal department in the Washington, D.C., area. This qualitative analysis may improve the understanding of the process by which managers decide to implement or not implement remote working. The semistructured interviews for phenomenological research are based on the work of Karaca et al. (2016) capturing themes from participants.

The research paradigm of social constructivism was the approach of this qualitative research. Social constructivists seek an understanding of the world and develop subjective meanings on experiences. The research of social constructivism is qualitative, inductive, and generates meaning from collected data.

The target population consisted of managers at a federal department in the Washington, D.C., area who can implement remote work locations. Participants for this study were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy. I planned to use snowball sampling to gain access to additional participants to reach saturation. Semistructured interviews were conducted using Zoom for data collection. I captured information by taking field notes during interviews and recording interviews. Recordings were transcribed, coded, and summarized. The analysis strategy was categorization and coding. Qualitative data analysis entails classifying things, persons, and events to categorize them

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through this, researchers seek to identify patterns and themes from participants. To perform coding and ultimately group codes into categories and themes, I used an inductive process. The inductive approach to coding is also called emic, bottom-up, or in vivo (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used a validation process to check for accuracy in captured data from the interviews. Member checking was accomplished by providing a summary and transcript of the interview to each participant to review for accuracy.

Definitions

The following are key terms and definitions used in this study:

Antecedents: Drivers of adoption (Errichiello & Pianese, 2016).

Human capital plan: Comprehensive guidance on the principles of strategic human capital management in the federal government (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2017).

Leadership gender: Representation of a specific gender in a leadership role (Bae et al., 2019).

Organizational control: A system to obtain the alignment of employees' capabilities, activities, and performances to the organization's objectives (Errichiello & Pianese, 2016).

Remote work: Interchangeably used to define a virtual work environment or location not situated at a traditional work location (Hickman & Sasaki, 2017; Liao, 2017; Purvanova, 2014; Short, 2014). Remote work may include home-based telecommuting,

neighborhood work centers, satellite offices, and mobile working (Kurland & Bailey, 1999).

Situational leadership: A model based on three factors: the amount of direction or task behavior provided by the leader, the amount of support or relationship behavior provided by the leader, and the confidence and competence or readiness level (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Meier, 2016; Raza & Sikandar, 2018).

Social constructivism: A process of understanding the world and developing subjective meanings on experiences from the participants in the study (Creswell, 2009).

Traditional work location: Face-to-face work setting within the confines of a brick-and-mortar building (Charlier et al., 2016; Purvanova & Kenda, 2018;)

Trust: The capacity to voluntarily and willingly be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on expectation that the other will perform an action important to the trustor within a manager–employee relationship (Brown et al., 2016; Furumo, 2018).

Assumptions

There are several assumptions related to this study. The first assumption was that the participant leaders had made a conscious decision to implement or not implement remote work based on past experiences and not due to restrictions set forth by the organization. Organizational policies may have placed restrictions on specific types of positions that require physical presence due to the nature of the work. A second assumption was that technology infrastructure existed and was reliable to support remote working for employees with the manager’s organization or unit. The technology infrastructure would have been a designated customer support center or some means for

employees to obtain technical assistance when needed for any issue within the scope of information technology. This information technology infrastructure would have allowed for communication throughout the organization and between employee and supervisor.

A third assumption was that the participants of the study had a homogenous set of leadership competencies. Because participants were chosen from one federal department within the Washington, D.C., area, I assumed that leadership competencies were reasonably consistent throughout the organization. For example, to attain a specific grade or senior executive service level, the manager must demonstrate specific competencies. Once a position is attained, the manager is assessed through a yearly performance review based on these competencies. A fourth and final assumption was that the participants would provide open and honest answers during the interviews. Trustworthy information adds to the validity of the information being collected and allows for the identification of themes during the analysis stage of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative study was limited to managers within a federal department in the Washington, D.C., area. The delimitation included the boundaries of managers at one federal department and their lived experiences to implement or not implement remote work. The sample consisted of managers who have a supervisory role, have a permanent duty station within the United States, supervise federal employees and not contractors, and have subordinates eligible for remote working.

Limitations

I conducted a study to explore the lived experiences of leaders as to whether they implement remote working. One limitation of the study consisted of drawing data from participants from one federal department. This meant that findings may not be applicable to other departments in the federal sector, state governments, or the private sector. Another limitation was that I am employed by the federal government, so I needed to make sure the study methodology and design were planned to address the potential for bias. I incorporated validity procedures such as member checking and triangulation. A final limitation was that participants in the study were selected based on specified criteria that does not include identification of generation. The experience of participants was the focus, and I chose not to consider generational viewpoints of managers. Generational differences may influence leadership styles, but this aspect of the phenomenon was outside the scope of my research.

Significance of the Study

In this research, I examined the factors that impact or influence leaders, whether positively or negatively, regarding the concept of remote working. There was a need for an increased understanding on this phenomenon expressed in the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2018) Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey based on a lack of scholarly research. Management and organizational researchers have explored themes on control systems after implementing remote working, behaviors of employees working from remote locations, and perceptions of office employees toward employees working remotely, the benefits and associated challenges of remote work, and the comparison to

traditional settings. The results of the study may identify the drivers of adoption of managers' willingness to embrace remote work. Identifying these drivers of personal experiences may lead to a significance to practice, significance to theory, and significance to social change.

Significance to Practice

Office spaces are being transformed due to the virtual nature of knowledge-based work (DePaoli & Ropo, 2015). Physical space needed to support traditional working environments is changing, allowing managers to lead in a virtual setting. In addition, modern telecommunication and technology systems can support remote teams (DePaoli & Ropo, 2015; Gilson et al., 2015). There are also significant benefits to work-life balance and the environment to having employees participate in remote working. Remote work increases motivation, work-life balance, and human resource capabilities for recruitment and retention (Mahler, 2012). The General Service Association ran a pilot offering employees the option for remote working up to 5 days a week. The department reported a decrease in absenteeism of 69% and an average savings of 14 hours of work time per employee (Mahler, 2012).

This study may contribute to practice in the federal sector by improving the understanding of the mindsets and behaviors of leaders related to remote working within the federal sector. Knowledge of behaviors may provide greater context for resistance to change from leading a traditional to remote workforce, improvements in training for managers, and greater acceptance of working remotely when there may be benefits to the organization.

Significance to Theory

My research may influence the theory captured in Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model by explaining how and why leaders make decisions regarding remote working, within the specific environment, situation, and conditions of an organization. Situational leadership defines behaviors in leaders adapting to changing situations. These changing situations in the workforce are the advancements in global trade, the impacts of COVID-19, and hiring practices. My research may also influence the concepts expressed in Errichiello and Pianese's (2016) organizational control model. Within a federal government organizational control system regarding remote work, implementation is determined by the manager. Therefore, by understanding the influences of lived experiences of managers on their decision making to implement or not implement remote work, the driver can be influenced by placing controls such as training and standardized policies.

Significance to Social Change

Social change is a change in human relationships and interactions that can transform social and cultural institutions. My study may be a mechanism for improving the federal sector work environment not only for the organization, but for the employees as well. Understanding the lived experiences of managers as to their decision regarding remote work may offer an organization the necessary information to develop training for managers to resolve constraints. The training could offer insights to the benefits of remote work and tactics to overcome challenges. The use of remote work could assist in employee morale, turnover, and work-life balance. The use of remote work could also

assist an organization with cost savings of an office footprint, improve retention, and increase cultural diversity.

Summary and Transition

In Chapter 1, I explained how I used qualitative phenomenological research to gain an understanding from managers on their feelings about and decisions related to implementing or not implementing remote work from one federal department based on lived experiences. The conceptual framework for this study was derived from the work of Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model and Errichiello and Pianese's (2016) organizational control model.

In Chapter 2, I explain my search strategy for reviewing and critically analyzing the literature related to my study and how there was a clear gap in knowledge. Although researchers have investigated remote working, there is little or no literature examining the factors that impact or influence leaders, whether positively or negatively, regarding remote working in the federal government. In Chapter 2, I identify the databases accessed and search engines used, along with key search terms. I also provide a detailed examination of the conceptual framework. The literature review summarizes major themes in the literature, compares and contrasts various points of view, and demonstrates how my study fills a gap in knowledge.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Working remotely improves air quality, reduces traffic, lowers the cost of office space, and helps with employee work–life balance (Bathlini & Kandathil, 2019; Baruch, 2000; Gibson et al., 2002; Kurland & Bailey, 1999). The social problem was that federal employees are not working remotely as frequently as they could be even though it benefits them and the organization. The 2018 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey showed that of 41,875 employees who took the survey within the USDA, 21.8% did not frequently work remotely (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore the lived experiences of leaders regarding whether they adopt remote working and the reasons behind those decisions. By exploring the perceptions of managers on remote working, this study may broaden the understanding of the ways that an agency can train managers on the benefits of remote work to incorporate within human capital planning or to implement consistent policies.

In the literature, researchers have explored topics relating to federal employees not being able to participate in remote work. An area that has hindered participation is the lack of an organization’s technological infrastructure to handle remote work (Caillier, 2013; Lee & Kim, 2018; Mahler, 2012; Overyer, 2011). Also associated with the limitations of an organization is the shortage of work–life balance programs (Bae et al., 2019). Specifically, for managers, Bae et al. found that gender plays a role in supporting employees in remote work. There are also managerial decisions not to implement remote work associated with office coverage, productivity, and resistance to change (Caillier,

2011; Mahler, 2012; Overmyer, 2011). However, there is limited research on managers' past experiences that influence their decisions regarding remote work.

Included in Chapter 2 is the search strategy on scholarly literature, an explanation of the supporting conceptual framework, a review of the literature about the phenomenon, and a summary with conclusion. The literature review demonstrates that existing literature is scant on the viewpoints of managers in the implementation of remote working, but robust in explaining the benefits and challenges of remote work, behaviors and perceptions of employees, and technological requirements. Key search terms and databases were used to identify scholarly articles to support this study.

Literature Search Strategy

Most research included in this study was obtained through the Walden University library from the databases of Social Sciences Citation Index, ScienceDirect, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Business Source Complete, Computers & Applied Sciences Complete, Education Source, Emerald Insight, ERIC, and PsycINFO. I employed a variety of search terms and I focused on scholarly literature published over the last 5 years. When an article was associated with additional research from the author or mentioned other scholarly works, the search was expanded in time to supply a robust literature review. All articles published more than 5 years from the date of investigation went through rigorous scrutiny for appropriateness for my study. Search terms included *virtual leadership*, *situational leadership*, *traditional leadership*, *virtual leadership and traditional*, *virtual leadership and leadership styles*, *virtual leadership theory*, and *telework*.

Some of the sources reviewed cover the concepts of virtual work and leadership theory. For example, the benefits and challenges of remote work were explored by Gibson et al. (2002), Greer and Payne (2014), Kurland and Bailey (1999), Mahler (2012), and Purvanova (2014). Leadership theory regarding situational leadership was explained by Bedford and Gehlert (2013), Hersey and Blanchard (1969), and Hersey and Blanchard (1974). Additional data used for this study were obtained through the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Their government website explains the use of remote work within the federal government and viewpoints for federal workers around the phenomenon.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was derived from the work of Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model and Errichiello and Pianese's (2016) organizational control model. This framework was the foundation of the study looking at the lived experiences of managers to implement or not implement remote working.

Situational Leadership Model

Hersey and Blanchard's (1988) situational leadership model explains that the nature and complexity of a situation enables a leader to exhibit behaviors that are more appropriate to the respondents. Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational model identifies that successful leadership depends on choosing the appropriate leadership style in conjunction with follower readiness level.

For this form of leadership, instead of using one style, successful leaders change their leadership style based on the maturity of the people being led and the details of the

task. Situational leadership also focuses on the role of the follower at a developmental level, working in the specific situation (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Situational leadership implies that a specific style of leadership is selected based on the follower, task, and situation (Salahzadeh, 2017). Leadership effectiveness varies by situation and the effects of any one variable on leadership are contingent on other influencing variables (Kunnanatt, 2016). The application of the situational model in a work setting is based on the flexibility and practical aspects of the leader.

Situational leadership can be a mechanism for blended learning (Meier, 2016). The situational leadership model defines behaviors in leaders adapting to changing situations. The model assumes that leadership effectiveness varies by situation and the effects of any one variable on leadership are contingent on other influencing variables (Kunnanatt, 2016). Managers need to address flexible working environments to maintain employee satisfaction and retention. The situational leadership model defines behaviors in leaders adapting to changing situations, such as remote work. Organizations can benefit from offering various working options. In this study, I examined the perceptions of leaders in the implementation of these flexible working environments.

Organizational Control Model

Errichiello and Pianese (2016) provided an understanding of the role of organizational control in the context of remote work arrangements. The concept links the dynamics of change in organizational control initiated by the adoption of remote work arrangements with its antecedents (drivers of adoption and characteristics of the remote work model) and implementation outcomes at individual, group, and organizational level.

The concept assumes organizational control is not static and is a process of controls and actions over time by the manager and employee.

Advancements in technology through the decades have enabled organizations to create virtual teams spanning physical boundaries and time (Purvanova & Kenda, 2018). The use of technology allows for innovative working models beyond traditional office spaces (Errichiello & Pianese, 2016). Effective managers dealing with distant employees need to address organizational control (Errichiello & Pianese, 2016). The concept of organizational control created by Errichiello and Pianese identifies antecedents and outcomes for the adoption of remote working. Antecedents or drivers of adoption are defined as factors pushing the organization or individuals to embrace remote work. Outcomes of implementing remote work are defined at organizational, group, and individual levels.

More importantly, Errichiello and Pianese's (2016) model provides an understanding regarding if and when an organization decides to adopt remote working. The organizational control model illustrates the complexity of organizational control and how the elements link to antecedents of the adoption of remote work and the implementation outcomes. The antecedents contain both drivers of adoption and characteristics of the arrangement. Drivers are defined by environmental factors, organizational factors, and employee characteristics and preferences. The characteristics of the work model include location, tasks, frequency of remote working, formalization level, technology equipment and capability, and knowledge to perform the task. Outcomes of remote implementation occur at the individual, group, and organizational

levels. The organizational control model is not static and is a “process of mutual constitution between structures of control and actions enacted by both managers and employees” (Errichiello & Pianese, 2016, p. 295). These organizational controls are determined by control systems, managerial levers, employee actions of control, and technology. My research into the lived experiences of leaders as to why they do or do not implement remote work is a direct control-related issue influencing an organizational control system.

Literature Review

The literature review is a critical comparison of scholarly works and provides background and context for the study. I first explore the state of the workforce and how researchers have examined the driving forces of a changing work environment through time, relating to remote work. This leads to a review of the differences between remote and traditional work leadership. Refining literature further, I then review works on the advantages and disadvantages of remote work. Finally, I discuss studies relating to the federal government.

State of the Workforce

Remote work is not a new phenomenon. The preindustrial era had large numbers of people working from home or the immediate area. The industrial revolution was the beginning of centralizing people for work within the institutions of factories and offices. Now with the many economic and social developments, there has been a steady growth of the number of employees who work at home. Baby boomers were seen shift from

established careers to working at home to be with their families (DuBrin & Barnard, 1993).

Balancing a career and family has led to couples establishing businesses at home. Currently, 52% of small businesses in the United States are home based (Chamber of Commerce, 2021). Home-based businesses are a way for individuals to establish a business without the extra business expenses of building leases and commuting. There are also individuals who want to work from home but not own their own business. Businesses offering positions where the functions can be performed from an employee's home fill the job market.

Remote work is an opportunity for skilled workers with a degree of autonomy to have flexibility in performing work (Eurofound, 2021). These job-tasked positions are seen in the fields of self-employed workers, business professionals, and information technology (Milasiet et al., 2021). Organizations are also seeing that offering hybrid work options, such as splitting time between the office and home, offers a variety of options for recruitment and cost savings. With today's technological advancements and affordable home office equipment, employment is no longer confined to a company's premises. Some organizations consider remote work essential and part of continuity practices of a business (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012).

Greer and Payne (2014) outlined the goals of promoting business effectiveness and supporting worker well-being at home and work. Essential to business practices, remote work played a large role when the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. The pandemic has generated shifts in personal and business attitudes and planning.

Organizations have implemented forced adoption of remote work to minimize the impacts of the pandemic (Irimias, 2021).

The federal sector started to implement a form of remote work through telework. The Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1993 mandated the use of telework in the executive branch. Specifically, this law “required each federal agency to establish a policy under which eligible employees of the agency may participate in telecommuting to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance” (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003, p. 9). Almost two decades later, the Telework Act was signed into law in 2010, supporting remote work and adhering to the changing work environment. Specific to the federal sector, the 2010 Telework Act sought to address the natural and human-made crises that could make the government vulnerable to shutting down and provided a continuity of operations during emergencies (Mahler, 2012). The act was responsible for 77% of federal agencies integrating telework into continuity of operation plans (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019). The success of having telework plans in place for emergencies can be seen in the 2010 winter storm in the Washington, D.C., area and the COVID-19 pandemic. These historical occurrences could have halted the daily business operations of the federal government if telework were not available for employees to perform functions remotely.

Differences in Traditional and Virtual Leadership

The literature review for this section is a compilation of how virtual leadership is different from traditional. Virtual leadership takes into consideration morale and trust

building (Barnell et al., 2014; Liao, 2017; Lu et al., 2006; Mancini, 2010), as well as communication (Alrawi et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2007; Madula et al., 2017; Yesil, 2011).

Morale and trust are complicated for a virtual leader. Liao (2017) argued that leading virtual teams is more challenging than leading traditional teams when building trust. Relationships among traditional team members can be organic and happen naturally, while virtual leaders need to proactively guide the relationship building process (Liao, 2017). Barnell et al. (2014) expressed that managing morale is more of a challenge for virtual leaders. Barnell et al. showed that constant contact with team members is needed to decrease isolation and build morale by recognizing accomplishments. Having constant contact could lead to more time constraints on a virtual leader. Lu et al. (2006) and Mancini (2010) claimed that morale was achieved through the establishment of trust. Trust can be attained by setting clear guidelines, selecting appropriate members, setting goals and objectives, having accountability, and acknowledging good performance (Gatlin-Watts et al., 2007). Maduka et al. (2018) argued that trust is easier to build in traditional teams, as face-to-face interactions are more predominant.

Another attribute that makes virtual managers unique is a heightened awareness of *communication* (Madula et al., 2017). Brown et al. (2007) indicated that 70% of communication is nonverbal. Lu et al. (2006) showed that collocated teams are twice as productive as virtual teams due to fluid communication patterns. The lack of nonverbal cues forces virtual leaders to rely on communication skills to effectively lead a remote team (Kirel, 2007; Kuscü & Arslan, 2016; Madula et al., 2017). The dynamics of virtual

teams push the leader to have more creative means of communication as compared to traditional modes using technology (Yesil, 2011). Virtual teams are influenced by the technology used for knowledge-sharing (Alrawi et al., 2013; Ocker et al., 2009). With teams in various locations and time zones, virtual leaders depend on technology to communicate by using email and conferencing software. Communication through technology has been vital for decision making and planning with a dispersed team (Varol & Tarcan, 2000). Communication is impactful for virtual teams when trying to identify clear goals and accountability. Barnell et al. (2014) showed that employees who were communicated clear objectives, responsibilities, and goals were successful in a virtual environment.

Advantages to Remote Work

Researchers have investigated many aspects of the differences between leading in a virtual environmental and leading in a traditional setting. Morale, trust building, and communication present leaders with considerations that may be different in the virtual environment. Research, summarized and assessed in the following, has shown that these differences in remote work can be advantageous to both the employee and the organization.

Employee Benefits

There is considerable, scholarly research to support advantages to employees who participated in remote work. One theme in research was *work-life balance*. Dubrin and Barnard (1993) conducted a survey on remote work which showed that employees were

satisfied with the working conditions, ability to schedule their own work, and ability to take care of family and personal responsibilities during the work day.

Remote work presents an opportunity to better manage the demands of a work schedule and that of managing a home. Particularly employees with children found having the flexibility of remote work a benefit to spend time with children (Bathini & Kandathil, 2019). Remote work provides an opportunity to improve productivity because of the aspect of work–life balance (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). The ability to schedule flexible working hours when the employee prefers, offers the ability for focused work time to complete tasks.

A second theme found in literature was the *reduction of stress* from commuting into work, distractions from co-workers, and financial obligations associated with commuting. Employees respond positively to remote work as it avoids time spent commuting and saves on work-related expenses (Dubrin & Bardard, 1993; Gibson et al., 2002; Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Work-related expenses can be travel, purchasing of business attire, and gasoline cost (Elshaiekh et al., 2018). The reduction of a long commute also allows employees to not consider the financial burden of relocating to be closer to work (Kurland & Bailey, 1999).

Another reduction of stress to remote workers comes in the form of reduced co-worker distractions that are associated with traditional offices. According to Kurland and Bailey (1999), remote work offers relatively distraction-free environments where interruptions from colleagues are reduced. Workers in a remote setting can control the interruptions of co-workers through the use of technology by not answering calls right

away, responding to instant messaging immediately, or replying to emails instantaneously. There are also zero physical interruptions from co-workers entering the employee's work space.

Organizational Benefits

There are some key themes in research on remote work referring to advantages to the organization. One such theme is *financial benefit*. In one case, an organization saved nearly \$3.8 billion as a result of reduced real estate costs, electricity savings, reduced absenteeism, and reduced employee turnover (Overmyer, 2010). Cost-effectiveness and reduction of overhead costs is a primary motivation for organizations to consider remote work (Baruch, 2000; Elshaiekh et al., 2018; Salomon, 1998). These costs can be transferred to the employee if the remote location is the employee's home. Costs such as space, utilities, and office supplies become the responsibility of the employee.

The leading financial corporation, Merrill Lynch, saved \$5,000 to \$6,000 per office in overhead costs switching to remote working in 2001 (Gibson et al., 2002; Rodgers & Teicholz, 2001). Other companies such as IBM, AT&T, and Hewlett-Packard have reduced office space by 35% to 55% (Rodgers & Teicholz, 2001) leading to reduced leasing and purchasing costs of building space. An organization can also have cost savings by distributing work in areas with lower real estate costs (Mehler, 2012; Overmyer, 2011).

A second theme in research is *productivity and morale*. Organizations show an increase in productivity and work quality from remote work (Baruch, 2000; Dubrin & Bardard, 1993; Gibson et al., 2002; Meier & Hicklin, 2007). Dubrin and Bardard (1993)

showed an increase of productivity ranging from 15.7% to 41.5% when employees worked remotely. Improvements to work effectiveness have been shown to improve by as much as 76% due to limited distraction in a typical workplace (Baruch, 2000).

Absenteeism, which is linked to productivity, declines when employees participate in remote work (Kurland and Bailey, 1990; Rodgers & Teicholz, 2001). Remote workers took fewer sick days compared to their office co-workers and had increased productivity (Nilles, 1998; Kurland & Bailey, 1990). These workers express that they were able to do more with the flexibility of remote work which led to a reduction of taking leave to achieve personal tasks. Kurland and Bailey (1999) also added that remote workers had a direct correlation between job satisfaction and higher performance ratings. In a U.S. General Service Administration pilot program, employees were offered the option to participate in remote work for a period up to five days a week. The pilot showed that absenteeism was reduced by 69% or an average of 14 work hours per employee during the year (Mahler, 2012). Employees were perceived to be more loyal, had less absenteeism, and ultimately lower tendency to change employers (Baruch, 2000; Elshaiekh et al., 2018; Gibson et al., 2002).

Related to productivity is the ability of continuity of operations during emergencies. Remote work offers the ability to have flexible operations in operating procedures so that work is not halted due to unforeseen natural disasters or pandemics. In the event of a natural or human-made disaster, organizations can often continue to operate remotely (Mello, 2007).

A third theme in research is *benefits of the job market*. Organizations have seen an increase in applications for job openings when announcements were made for remote work (Dubrin & Bardard, 1993). More applicants allow for the candidate pool to be larger for the hiring official to select the best qualified (Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Salomon, 1998). Remote work allows an organization to improve retention and recruitment opportunities (Gibson et al., 2002). Remote work also reduces turnover and costs (Karnowski & White, 2002; Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2007).

Retaining high-performing employees is essential, particularly for those employees who have high expectations of a workplace that is technologically forward thinking (Mahler, 2012). Microsoft conducted an informal survey in 2011 and found that 50% of permanent and contractor employees would strongly consider another organization if remote work were available (Mahler, 2012). The cost associated with replacing an employee is estimated to be 25% of that position's salary (Nilles, 1998).

The job market also opens up a candidate pool of employees who, for various reasons, cannot commute; and offers a work setting that is already adapted to their needs (Mahler, 2012; Offstein et al., 2010). Remote work assists compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act offering many individuals the ability to hold employment (Caillier, 2011; Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Mello, 2007). There are 43 million Americans with disabilities and only 15% work, according to Kugelmass (1995). This untapped market for recruitment offers organizations a new labor pool when remote work is offered. Remote work also has the potential for organizations to provide flexibility in the design of jobs and technology (Mahler, 2012).

A fourth theme is the contributions to *being positive stewards to society*. Remote work has a direct contribution in reducing the number of vehicles on the road that are commuting to work. Lessening traffic reduces pollution and congestion (Elshaiekh et al., 2018; Salomon, 1998). The City of San Diego in California has an extensive remote work program in response to the Clean Air Act to oversee air emissions from mobile sources (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). The U.S. Department of Transportation (2006) indicated that remote work can reduce energy consumption and automobile accidents. In addition, Caillier (2011) noted that remote working reduces the costs society pays associated with maintaining the infrastructure of roads and bridges due to reduced wear and tear.

Challenges to Remote Work

Previous research has shown that the advantages of remote work for employees are work–life balance and reduction of stress. Organizations benefit from remote work through financial gains, increase to productivity and morale, job market expansion, and contributing to society in a positive way. However, remote work has also been shown to negatively impact employees and organizations. These barriers consist of dissatisfaction, increased distractions, isolation, and lack of promotion for employees. Organizations deal with negative impacts of remote work through inadequate technological infrastructure, lack of a synergetic culture, diminished trust, and continuous turnover.

Employee Barriers

There are also challenges associated with remote work that impact the employee. One theme found in literature is *dissatisfaction among employees*. Glass and Noonan (2016) showed that employees participating in remote work spent 6 hours more per week

working than their on-site colleagues. Employees feel pressured to work longer hours and outside the typical hours compared to their office co-workers (Putnam et al., 2014). The job demands of remote work led to elevated risk of burnout and dissatisfaction (Venkatesh et al., 2021). Raisiene et al. (2021) claimed that Millennial men, unlike other generations and genders, see personal career development problems while working remotely. This in turn leads to dissatisfaction, such as during the 2020 pandemic when workplaces were quickly forced to implement remote work (Raisiene et al., 2021). Kelly and Shoemaker (2021) also showed employee dissatisfaction when there is a lack of formal policies on sick leave and vacation time regarding on-site and off-site workers.

A second theme is *increased distractions* and stress on employees working remotely. A main concern for employees performing remote work are the interruptions and distractions in the home, unfavorable spillover to home life, and the ability to easily procrastinate (Dubrin & Bardard, 1993; Elshaiekh et al., 2018). The interruptions of home life when participating in remote work have found to increase stress levels and loss of wellbeing (Baruch, 2000; Bathini & Kandathil, 2019; Felstead & Jewson, 2000; Putnam et al., 2014).

Although remote work can reduce stress by eliminating commute time, stress can increase by being around personal obligations. Family obligations may produce conflict between work and family responsibilities. When the home becomes the office, family obligations cause interference with work (Baruch, 2000; Caillier, 2011; Mirchandani, 1999; Tietze & Musson, 2005). Hochschild (1997) argued that work can serve as a

sanctuary space to provide separation from family life. Having the two environments together would be disastrous for those seeking solitude and separation.

A third theme deals with *perceptions and isolation*. Orhan et al. (2016) showed that greater isolation while working on virtual teams increased employee feelings of being deprived of information and access to people. This isolation was later associated with negative work satisfaction and performance. Overcoming isolation caused by not being part of a social network in a traditional office can impact an employee's mental well-being. Isolation can have consequences, such as social frustration from lack of co-worker interaction and feelings of professional separation (Kurland & Bailey, 1999).

There is also the perception from other co-workers that the employee does not take their job seriously and the sense of exclusion from social contacts (Dubrin & Bardard, 1993). Remote work impacts social interactions with colleagues to the point where employees are viewed as strangers and feel isolated (Elshaiekh et al., 2018; Felstead & Jewson, 2000; Gibson et al., 2002). Also, office colleagues tend to interpret the seriousness of a remote worker compared to a co-worker who is located on the premise (Bardard, 1993; Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Someone working remotely may be viewed as being able to halt work at any time or is not working as hard as someone in an office building. Remote co-workers are viewed by colleagues as suspicious because they cannot physically see if they were working (Baruch, 2000).

A fourth theme found in literature is the sense of *lack of promotion*. Those working remotely feel that they miss peer interaction, which is linked to professional development (Zernand, 2003). Missing professional development by not being in the

office is perceived by remote workers as impacting their ability for promotions (Felstead & Jewson, 2000; Gibson et al., 2002; Zernand, 2003). Kurland and Bailey (1999) confirmed this fear by interviewing managers on the development of remote workers. Results showed that managers felt that employees who were not on-site miss informal and spontaneous learning opportunities that are not scheduled trainings. Remote workers felt that the lack of face-to-face office engagement impacts their ability for promotions and are passed over for employees with physical interactions with management (Khaifa & Davidson, 2000).

Organizational Barriers

Not all the research regarding remote work is positive for organizations. One theme is the barrier of *technology*. Russell and Frachtenberg (2021) stated that remote work relies on technology to automate tasks and scheduling, which were once performed by on-site employees. Operating efficiencies can be lost when services and equipment are not centralized and distributed across several locations. Supporting multiple locations can result in high costs through infrastructure and maintenance (Teo, 1998; Zernand, 2003). An outdated technology infrastructure impacts timely communication with employees (Baruch, 2001; Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2007; Caillier, 2011). Another technological disadvantage to remote work is the security risk of cyber-attacks (Medina-Rodriguez et al., 2020; Teo, 1998). Employee home offices may not be as reliable as the workplace to prevent such threats.

A second theme in the literature is *organizational culture and support* for remote working arrangements. Remote work is part of an organization's culture. It is difficult for

an organization to establish a collective culture when remote workers become “strangers” to office regulars (Elshaiekh et al., 2018; Zernand, 2003). Kurland and Bailey (1999) showed that organizations have concerns over how to effectively communicate and instill values and norms to remote workers. A culture enables organizations to have a collective workforce and buy-in on a strategic vision (Kurland & Bailey, 1999).

Remote workers have reported that loyalty and commitment to an organization diminishes because they are not around like a traditional office (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Isolation from a traditional office inhibits an individual’s ability to embrace or learn about the organization’s culture (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Managers have also expressed that to provide a culture of developing employees, the manager would need to physically be with the employee to provide performance feedback (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). The ability to measure and monitor performance is a source of concern (Kurland & Bailey, 1999).

Some managers feel that staff need to be physically together to achieve productivity and team synergy (Zernand, 2003). The creation of team synergy can be difficult to overcome in the absence of informal and interactive learning. Team synergy takes place in the hallways and over lunch (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Kurland and Bailey showed that managers feel that remote workers are the least in touch with concepts and ideas going on in the organization.

A third theme is *trust*. In work situations where employees would change jobs to have flexible working locations, the number of remote teams is increasing (Hickman & Sasaki, 2017). Hickman and Sasaki (2017) showed in one case that only 33% of

employees felt engaged at work and 51% of employees were seeking employment elsewhere from their current organizations. One cause of lack of engagement is distrust among employees in virtual teams (Hickman & Sasaki, 2017; Purvanova, 2014). Short (2014) indicated that lack of face-to-face contact reduces trust. This ability to develop a sense of trust in others is impaired in virtual teams (Purvanova, 2014). Crandall and Gao (2005) pointed out that managers do not trust employees working remotely as they are difficult to manage and can compromise information that is sensitive, and there is a loss of control relating to safety.

A fourth theme is *turnover*. Orhan et al. (2016) showed that higher isolation within virtual teams increases an employee's feelings of being deprived of information and access to people. Isolation has the ability to lead to employee turnover (Orhan et al., 2016). The loss of employees through turnover affects overall organizational performance (Tariq et al., 2013). Bandura and Lyons (2014) pointed out that turnover creates increased costs when finding a suitable replacement.

Research Specific to the Federal Government

Recent research has examined telework in the federal sector: the impacts of telework include Lee and Kim (2018) for eligibility, participation, technical and managerial support, and fairness; Caillier (2013) and Choi (2020) on turnover intention; and Mahler (2012) and Overmyer (2011) on managerial perceptions. Bae et al. (2019) researched the managerial aspect of telework in the federal sector, except it was through the lens of gender.

Caillier (2013), Mahler (2012), and Overmyer (2011) explored federal telework, but did so in reference to the division between managers and employees. Managers have denied employees from telework for reasons associated with the need for office coverage or associated technology challenges (Mahler, 2012). The rationale would appear to be outside the control of the manager as they relate to functions of a position or the ability for the organization to adequately provide technical support for telework. Other reasons for the resistance to implement telework that Mahler discovered were managerial driven, such as the past work performance of employee and difficulty making eligibility decisions. Overmyer also found that managers questioned productivity studies that supported the claim of telework benefits.

A major challenge of implementing telework in the federal government is management attitude and organizational culture. A 2009 survey of federal executives and decision-makers indicated that while 83% personally support telework, 42% felt that their direct manager did not, and 31% felt that their agency leadership were not supportive of telework programs and alternative work arrangements (Overmyer, 2011). Caillier (2011) found that managers within federal agencies did not offer telework to employees because they were resistant to change. Resistance to change was the largest barrier hindering the implementation of telework among managers where they had to go from managing by observation to managing by results (Caillier, 2011).

Bae et al. (2019) researched gender aspects within managers when implementing telework in the federal sector. Bae et al. examined the effects of female supervision on employee eligibility and participation in telework. U.S. Office of Personnel Management

(2013) has defined telework as “a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of such employee’s position and other authorized activities from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work” (pp. 17-18). The 2010 Telework Enhancement Act enables federal agencies to establish defined eligibility and participation in a telework program. Bae et al. found that employees were eligible to participate in telework, yet many were unable or unwilling.

During the timeframe of Bae et al. (2019) research, the 2013 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) reported that 199,423 (59.7%) of employees were notified of their eligibility to telework. From this, a total of 148,373 (52.1%) of the respondents participated in telework programs, and 58,274 (15.5%) of sampled employees were unable to use existing telework programs. Bae et al. sought to explore if female supervisors were more inclined to create a workplace environment that was women-friendly to combat discrimination surrounding family obligations. In other words, Bae et al. wanted to see if female supervisors were more likely to support telework to help eliminate family-unfriendly environments that result in employees being unable to participate in telework programs for which they are eligible (p. 5). If so, female supervisors would increase telework participation for those eligible employees. Results of the study concluded that being female did not impact telework participation.

However, Bae et al. (2019) indicated that female supervisors who adopt a supportive leadership role may help decrease the discrepancy between telework eligibility

and participation. Therefore, supervisor support was more important than gender in reducing decoupling between eligibility and participation in telework programs.

Surveys Specific to the Federal Government

Much of the literature review on remote work was general and few specific to the federal government. Articles on the public sectors captured the benefits and challenges of remote work for both the organization and employees. These benefits and challenges can be generalized as potentially being applicable and transferable to the federal sector, but there is limited research focusing specifically on the federal workplace for remote work. There are plenty of data on telework relating to the federal government through surveys from the Office of Personnel Management, the Merit Systems Protection Board, the Federal Viewpoint Survey, and the Future of Government Work (Mahler, 2012). These surveys explore the perceptions of federal employees on the impacts of telework in relation to productivity and engagement.

Though these surveys offer a wealth of information, they only provide a glimpse of one form of remote work option which is that of telework. Two popular federal government surveys that are cited often in literature on telework are the Federal Viewpoint Survey (Bae & Kim, 2016; Bae et al., 2019; Caillier, 2013; Kwon & Joen, 2020) and Status of Telework in the Federal Government (Bae et al., 2019; Greer & Payne, 2014; Kwon & Joen, 2020; Mahler, 2012).


Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

Each year the U.S. Office of Personnel Management engages federal employees to take part in an anonymous survey to capture perceptions on work experience, work

unit, agency, supervisor, organizational leadership, and work-related satisfaction. The survey is known as the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and is reported each year explaining survey results from the previous year. Because the report is issued the following year, data for the 2019 report were collected during fiscal year 2018. The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey is a government-wide survey that captures the opinions of employees across agencies. The data can be used by agencies as a leadership tool to improve the workforce. Specifically related to my study, participants were asked about telework within their agency relating to the work-life program. Employees were asked to respond to telework frequency (Figure 1) and satisfaction (Figure 2) with the program. Results showed that federal employees were not teleworking fully or in some instances were not approved even though they were eligible.

Figure 1*2018 Fiscal Year Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Telework Schedule Results*

Telework Schedule



Item	2019 Percentages
Please select the response below that BEST describes your current teleworking schedule.	
I telework very infrequently, on an unscheduled or short-term basis	14
I telework, but only about 1 or 2 days per month	6
I telework 1 or 2 days per week	16
I telework 3 or 4 days per week	5
I telework every work day	2
I do not telework because I have to be physically present on the job (e.g., Law Enforcement Officers, Park Rangers, Security Personnel)	27
I do not telework because of technical issues (e.g., connectivity, inadequate equipment) that prevent me from teleworking	4
I do not telework because I did not receive approval to do so, even though I have the kind of job where I can telework	13
I do not telework because I choose not to telework	12

Note. The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Adapted from *Government Management Report*, by U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019 (<https://www.opm.gov/fevs/reports/governmentwide-reports/governmentwide-management-report/governmentwide-report/2019/2019-governmentwide-management-report.pdf>). In public domain.

Figure 2

2018 Fiscal Year Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Telework Satisfaction Results

Telework Satisfaction		
Item	% Satisfaction	% All Responses
How satisfied are you with the Telework program in your agency?		
Very Satisfied	29	17
Satisfied	31	18
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	21	12
Dissatisfied	10	6
Very Dissatisfied	9	5
Item Response Total	100	59
I choose not to participate in this program	—	6
This program is not available to me	—	31
I am unaware of this program	—	5
Total	100	100

Note. The sum of percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Adapted from *Government Management Report*, by U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019 (<https://www.opm.gov/fevs/reports/governmentwide-reports/governmentwide-management-report/governmentwide-report/2019/2019-governmentwide-management-report.pdf>). In public domain.

Status of Telework in the Federal Government

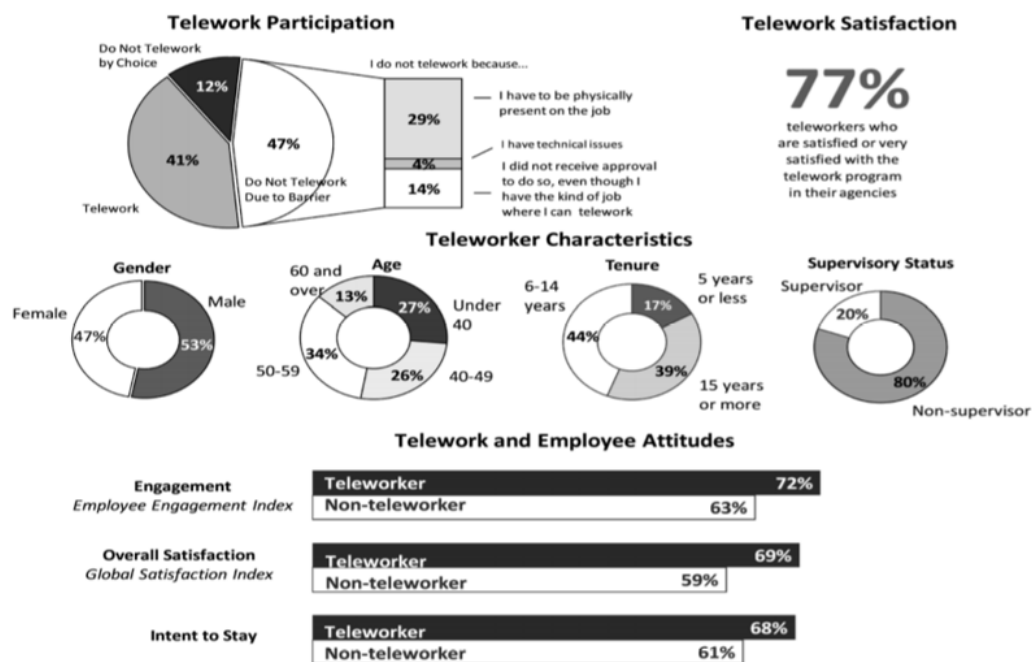
The fiscal year 2018 Status of Telework in the Federal Government report provided telework data showing that federal employees are not utilizing a remote work program (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019). Information was collected through an online survey during the beginning of the 2018 fiscal year on telework eligibility, participation, frequency, goal setting and achievement, cost savings, agency management efforts to promote telework, and best practices for the year (U.S. Office of

Personnel Management, 2019). There were 87 out of 89 agencies that participated in the survey.

The 2018 Status of Telework in the Federal Government report (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019) also includes information from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (Figure 3). The report captured the number of employees, those eligible to telework, and frequency of telework (Figure 4). The report found that telework has stabilized, employee eligibility to participate remains steady, agencies maintain progress in setting telework goals, agencies continue to improve capacity through cost savings, and agency management continues to leverage telework to support mission (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019).

Figure 3

Employee Perceptions from 2018 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey



Note. Adapted from *Status of telework in the federal government: Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 2018*, by U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019

(<https://www.telework.gov/reports-studies/reports-to-congress/2019-report-to-congress.pdf>). In the public domain.

Figure 4

2018 Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report Results for Telework Eligibility, Participation, and Frequency

	Number of Employees	Number of Responding Agencies
Total number of employees	2,148,804	85
Employees deemed eligible to telework	905,882	84
Employees teleworking		
Fiscal year data	468,528	80

Note. Number of responding agencies varies as some agencies did not provide information for every question. Adapted from *Status of telework in the federal government: Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 2018*, by U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019 (<https://www.telework.gov/reports-studies/reports-to-congress/2019-report-to-congress.pdf>). In the public domain.

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 2 provided the conceptual framework using the work of Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model on a leader's adaptivity to changing situations. Hersey and Blanchard claimed that organizations can benefit from offering various working options and this study will look at the perceptions of leaders in the implementation of these flexible working environments. The conceptual framework also included Errichiello and Pianese's (2016) organizational control model. Managerial decisions are part of an organizational control system. My research into the lived experiences of leaders regarding why they do or do not implement remote work is a direct control-related issue influencing an organizational control system.

I described the search strategy encompassing the various databases used for this study. It was imperative to begin the literature view with an understanding of leadership in a remote or virtual environment to understand the complexities of managerial styles. I captured a brief historical review on the state of the workforce and how remote work started to gain popularity. I next reviewed articles on the differences in leading remote teams compared to traditional teams. I then, reviewed scholarly articles associated with the phenomenon of remote work that produced themes on the benefits and challenges to both the employee and the organization. The literature concluded with a specific focus to scholarly articles on the federal government.

A review of current scholarly literature reveals that there is research covering remote working benefits such as air quality, work–life balance, job satisfaction, employee attitudes, challenges, and remote leadership. Previous studies have provided mixed results on the impacts of remote work in these areas suggesting there are both benefits and challenges to implementation. The literature review confirmed that although researchers have investigated remote work, there is very little or no literature examining the factors that impact or influence leaders, whether positively or negatively, regarding the concept of working remotely in the U.S. federal government.

In Chapter 3, I describe the research method. This includes sections on the rationale for the research design, role of the researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore the lived experiences of leaders regarding whether they adopt remote working and the reasons behind those decisions. There is a lack of scholarly literature on this phenomenon, and a need was expressed in the 2018 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018) for an increased understanding of federal employees not engaging in working remotely. Management and organizational researchers have explored themes on control systems after adoption of remote working, behaviors of employees working from remote locations, and perceptions of office employees toward employees working remotely (Errichiello & Pianese, 2016). Existing literature is scant on the viewpoints of managers in the implementation of remote working.

Chapter 3 includes the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and methodology. Specifically, for methodology, the logic for selecting participants, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, procedures for participation, procedures for data collection, and a data analysis plan are discussed. The chapter further identifies issues of trustworthiness surrounding credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. Finally, a summary is provided to capture the main concepts of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The study was guided by one research question: What are the lived experiences of leaders related to their decision to adopt or not adopt remote working for employees in their organization? A qualitative approach was best suited for the study as I explored the

meaning of individual attributes to a social problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The phenomenological research design is intended for inquiry on the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon described by the participants and involves conducting interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Giorgi, 2009). To address the research question in this qualitative study, the approach included semistructured interviews to understand the lived experiences of managers within a federal department in the Washington, D.C., area. This qualitative analysis may improve the understanding of the process by which managers decide to implement or not implement remote working. The semistructured interviews for phenomenological research are based on the work of Karaca et al. (2016) capturing themes from participants. The research paradigm of social constructivism was the approach of this qualitative research. Social constructivists seek an understanding of the world and develop subjective meanings on experiences. The goal of the research method is to rely on the views of the participants being studied (Creswell, 2009). The research of social constructivism is qualitative, inductive, and generates meaning from collected data.

Although there are other alternative research designs for qualitative studies, they were considered less effective for the research question in this study. Narrative research allows a researcher to study the lives of participants through their stories (DeCosta et. al., 2021; Greenier & Moodie, 2021; Martin-Alonso et. al., 2021). A narrative is then written combining the views of both the participants and the researcher. This strategy was inappropriate as I was interested only in the participants' experiences and not my own relating to the phenomenon.

Grounded theory is a design in which a researcher derives a theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded by participants' views (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Grounded theory approach builds a theory or concept justified by the data collection (Liu & Tseng, 2021; Markey et al., 2020; Wang et. al., 2021). Based on my research question, I was interested in experiences of the participants and then developing themes. My research did not derive from identifying a theory of process for why managers do or do not implement remote work.

Another option for qualitative research is ethnography design. This approach is used to study the shared patterns of behavior in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time to understand human behavior (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rapp, 2021; Rebernik et al., 2021). This design was not selected due to time constraints in data collection and the inability to perform observations during the participants' workday.

The final option is a case study in which a researcher completes an analysis of a case. This approach was not feasible, as the design is restricted to a period of time and activity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I was interested in the lived experiences without being bound by a timeframe. A case study also uses various sources of evidence with a variety of data collection, such as interviews, observations, focus groups, surveys, and reviews (Nilmanat & Kurniawan, 2021; Patterson, 2015). I planned to collect data using semistructured interviews and not a variety of collection procedures. The use of multiple data collections is not practical for this study, especially the use of observation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the federal government is still on maximum telework for the District of Columbia area.

A quantitative approach was not suitable for my study. Quantitative research is conducted to examine relationships between variables, which can be measured numerically. The collected information is then analyzed through statistical methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). My study was intended to explore and understand the meaning of individual attributes to a social problem and does not contain numerical variables.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to gather and analyze the information from the participants' interviews to develop themes related to the topic and to address the research question. In qualitative research, a researcher's role as a collection instrument necessitates the identification of assumptions, biases, and personal values prior to the onset of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In qualitative research, a researcher is part of the data-gathering process with participants, so the researcher must reflexively identify within themselves their values, background, and biases that contribute to forming interpretations. The research questions, interpretation of the data, and the relationship to the participants are part of a wider epistemological context when a researcher conducts a qualitative study (Karagiozis, 2018). Therefore, reflexivity is essential within phenomenological research. Researcher positionality can be an influential aspect during the research process for participants and the researcher through identities and characteristics. This is because of human perceptions of how an individual perceives others and how they think others see them, which in turn forms identities. Underlying assumptions and beliefs exist in research to cause biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Understanding biases of the researcher is part of the preparation process. A researcher's biases could affect the lens used to approach the study, which is why reflection is critical.

My perceptions of remote working were shaped by my personal experiences. From May 2016 to January 2021, I served as a supervisor within the federal government overseeing nationwide programs. As a supervisor, I was involved with hiring practices for positions located in the same physical building I was. My hiring practices within my specific unit were bound by senior leadership's vision of position placement within my agency's policy on telework. I have used maximum telework during the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought with it the challenges and benefits of remote work. I believe this understanding of the context of position placement and the dynamics of remote work enhances my awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity to the many factors placed on leaders regarding not having employees physically located with the manager. I bring the knowledge of the hiring process, the leadership structure within a department, and the role of the manager.

Due to my own experiences with remote work, I needed to make sure reflexive thinking was incorporated into my study. I wrote notes regarding my personal experiences during the study, which included observations on the data collection or my reactions to responses to the interview questions. Field notes assist researchers with reflecting on personal experiences and how that may influence the interpretation of results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Also, I needed to be mindful of making connections between myself and the research site. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) cautioned the use of

studying the researcher's work setting, which could lead to influencing the interpretation of the data.

Methodology

The methodological approach emerges from the purpose, research question, and goals of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The methodology for my study was developed from the research question: What are the lived experiences of leaders related to their decision to adopt or not adopt remote working for employees in their organization? I planned to select participants based on criteria, collect data through an instrument, and then analyze the data. My Walden University's approval number for the study was 01-06-22-0554929 and expires on January 5, 2023.

Participant Selection Logic

Target Population and Criteria

The planned target population consisted of experienced managers at a federal department in the Washington, D.C., area who have the authority to implement remote work locations and who had completed the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP). Federal departments tailor the SESCO to meet particular succession planning needs and organizational missions (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2021). By sampling from this group, I planned to conduct an investigation among people with similar experiences and roles within the federal government.

Inclusion criteria are defined as the critical features of the target population that investigators use to answer a research question (Patino & Carvalho-Ferreira, 2018).

Inclusion criteria can include demographic, clinical, and geographic characteristics (Patino & Carvalho-Ferreira, 2018). The more similar participants in a sample are in their experiences, the sooner a researcher can reach data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). The criteria for inclusion in this study were managers who have a supervisory role, have a permanent duty station within the United States, supervise federal employees and not contractors, and have subordinates eligible for remote working. All participants were from one federal department. Before a manager could participate in the study, all criteria had to be met.

Exclusion criteria are defined as features of the potential study participants who meet the inclusion criteria but present with additional characteristics that could interfere with the success of the study or increase their risk for an unfavorable outcome (Patino & Carvalho-Ferreira, 2018). Common exclusion criteria include characteristics of eligible individuals who make them highly likely to be lost to follow up, miss scheduled appointments to collect data, provide inaccurate data, or could have bias. Criteria for exclusion in my research included nonsupervisors, supervisors who manage employees abroad, supervisors who manage a nonfederal workforce, and supervisors who manage positions not eligible for remote work.

Sample Size

The sample size for a qualitative phenomenology study is documented in literature as ranging from three to 15 participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Guest et al., 2006). Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that the larger the sample size, the more

accurate the inferences made, but recruiting is time consuming and costly. Creswell and Creswell suggested a sample size based on analysis plans.

For a qualitative phenomenology study, Creswell and Creswell suggested a range of three to 10 participants. Guest et al. (2006) showed how inconsistent sampling size has been represented in research. Guest et al. stated that researchers such as Bertaux (1981) felt that 15 was the smallest sample size for a qualitative study, while Morse (1994) recommended six participants for phenomenological research. Tanca and Unal (2018) conducted a phenomenology study conducting interviews on nine participants. The sample size proved to be sufficient to achieve saturation looking at student views about lifelong learning. Tarlazzi et al. (2015) interviewed six participants for a phenomenological study. Saturation was reached once new data were not being received looking at labor pain experience from the father's point of view. Morse (1994) suggested a purposive sample size of six participants for a phenomenological qualitative study. I planned to interview no fewer than 12 participants and then to add participants through snowball sampling until saturation was reached.

Instrumentation

I planned to use several instruments to collect data. My primary collection tool was a semistructured interview following an interview guide (Appendix B). I planned to use field notes and document reviews as supplemental to my primary tool for triangulation to challenge or confirm my interpretation of the data collected.

Interview

According to Hughes et al. (2016), an accurate description of the sample is important to determine if the participants are those the researcher wishes to recruit, to give the reader the ability to compare other studies, to give other researchers the ability to replicate the findings, and to compare the sample to the target population. Understanding the sample enables the findings to be generalized to a larger group of people (Hughes et al., 2016).

To obtain an accurate description of the sample, the first section of the interview guide focused on demographics. I planned to collect information on demographics regarding the participants' generational group, gender, highest level of education, and ethnicity. The second section of the interview guide focused on the interview questions relating to the participants' experience with remote work. The questions were neutral, not leading, and consisted of a main question with follow-up questions. I planned to ask five interview questions.

Field Notes

Field notes assist in giving the researcher the opportunity to catalogue body language or tone for follow-up questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I planned to take field notes during the interviews to prompt me to ask follow-up or clarifying questions when the participant's response was not clear.

Document Review

I planned to review several government documents relating to telework. The documents allowed me to have a sense of remote work in the federal government and the

current statistics of employees utilizing the benefit. One such source was the U.S. Office of Personnel Management report on the status of telework in the federal government (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2019). This is a required report to Congress, summarizing information provided by agencies on the status of their telework programs. Another source document was the fiscal year 2018 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey to obtain information on the views of federal employees on telework (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018).

Field Test of Instrument and its Questions

I planned to field test the interview guide (Appendix B) prior to conducting the study to make sure the instrument was clear, logical, understandable, and responsive to my purpose and research question. A field test can help estimate the time needed to complete the interviews. Testing provides an initial evaluation of the interview guide to make adjustments to the questions, format, and instructions for relevance and clarity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Testing the questions with a similar population provides important insider information that make an interview guide more efficient (Jacob & Furgeson, 2012).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment and Participation

I planned to select participants using purposive and snowball sampling using a department's SESCDP candidate list. I planned to reach out via email soliciting participation through a recruitment letter (Appendix A). The recruitment letter explained the purpose of the study and identified the criteria for participants. The invitational letter

was accompanied by an informed consent form for those who agreed to participate.

Consent is important in qualitative research to make sure transparency and ethics are followed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). If an individual agreed to participate in the study, the individual responded to my email with “I consent.” This consent notification began the process of setting up one-on-one interviews. I planned to verify that all participants met the criteria before scheduling the interviews.

I planned to interview participants until saturation was reached. Data saturation takes place when analyzing patterns reveals nothing new is being learned (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that when gathering fresh data no longer reveals new insights, the researcher has reached an adequate sample. If the SESCDP roster with snowballing did not produce enough participants, I planned to reach out to others within the department to increase the number of participants.

Data Collection

Using the Interview Guide, I planned to thank participants for their participation, explain the purpose of the study, ask the demographic and interview questions, request references for snowballing, and then remind participants that their identity was protected. I planned to conduct and audio record the interviews virtually through Zoom. If a participant could not access Zoom, the participant was not included in the study.

Using my field notes, I planned to capture observations on similar responses among the participants. I planned to review my field notes throughout the process of data

collection and data analysis. This was done to remain neutral and not draw conclusions based on my previous experiences.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data analysis entails classifying things, persons, and events which categorize them into codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Coding is a method of recognizing patterns in qualitative data and turning those patterns into meaningful themes and categories (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I planned to use an inductive process to perform coding by grouping key quotes from the transcripts into categories and then themes. The inductive approach to coding is also called emic, bottom-up, or in vivo (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In vivo coding applies the words verbatim that participants use to examine the possible dimensions or ranges of categories (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016). Using the inductive approach of hierarchy coding provides a relationship between the codes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). From this, the researcher can identify multiple codes and show how codes diverge from each other (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I planned to analyze the data from the interview transcripts. All interviews were planned to be coded in Microsoft Word by capturing quotes. Once quotes were captured, I planned to use categories to group similar quotes into themes.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Validity and trustworthiness are the attributes the researcher seeks to ensure that the findings are true to the participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The terms are used to show credibility and rigor in qualitative research. Trustworthiness also relies on ethical standards surrounding the participant relationship and use of data (Rallis et al., 2007). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are critical for researchers when purposing trustworthiness (Guba, 1981; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). These areas can be implemented by researchers through basic strategies. Credibility can be pursued by continuous questioning during data gathering, triangulation usage, and peer review (Shenton, 2004). In each of the following sections I describe how I planned issues of trustworthiness.

Credibility (Internal Validity)

Internal validity, or credibility, is related to the research design, the instrumentation used in the study, and the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I proposed to implement validity strategies of triangulation and member checking. Member checking and triangulation are a means to check the reliability of data (Fong, 2018).

Through data triangulation I planned to take different sources, such as my field notes, interviews, and document review to challenge or confirm my interpretation of the material. I planned to use Denzin's (2009) data triangulation method to use data sources from different time, space, and individuals. Time was covered by using the 2018 Federal Viewpoint Survey and interviews conducted in 2022. Space was covered by having different places the participants could be located, as interviews were virtual. Individuals

were covered from various levels within a managerial role in the federal government, genders, and ethnicities.

I also planned to conduct member checking, also known as respondent validation (Barbour, 2001). Member checking is achieved through checking in with the participants from my study to gain their feedback on the data gathered during the interview. This method allows the participants to challenge my data collection process and the interpretation of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability (External Validity)

Transferability occurs when findings can be applied to other situations. This can be achieved through the technique of establishing specific information on the boundaries of the study that could include timeframe of data collection, collection methods, organization information, and number of participants (Shenton, 2004). I proposed to achieve transferability by having detailed descriptions of the data so that the reader can make comparisons to other contexts. This method allows the reader to transfer aspects of the design and findings instead of replicating (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability

Dependability refers to reliability and can be implemented through research design, details on data collection, and reflective appraisal (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). I planned to achieve dependability by creating an appropriate data collection plan based on the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My data collection plan used an interview guide (Appendix B), recorded interviews in Zoom, and

transcription with Otter.ai software. In addition, I planned to field test the interview guide by a third party.

Confirmability

Confirmability occurs when results are based on the experiences of the participants and not the preferences of the researcher. Sinkovics and Alfoldi (2012) conveyed that the researcher needs to remain open to possible modifications that arise from data collection. Ravitch and Carl (2016) expressed that confirmability should explore prejudices in interpreting results and mediate through reflexivity.

I planned to achieve confirmability by acknowledging potential biases in my interpretations through member checking and reflexivity. Member checking involves sending interview summaries and transcripts to the participants to ensure they accurately captured the interview. Reflexivity was planned by remaining neutral and being self-aware of biases, and by frequent reviews of notes and transcripts throughout the data collection process. I also planned to reduce the potential for bias by assigning each interviewee a participant number to mask their identity.

Ethical Procedures

The institutional review board (IRB) makes sure that research complies with a university's ethical standards in addition to U.S. federal regulations. I planned to follow the IRB's ethics review process, and gained approval prior to any recruitment of participants, data collection, or dataset access. I completed *Form A: Description of Data Sources and Partner Sites*, prepared and submitted any documents the IRB staff

requested to have resolution on any ethical issues, obtained approval on the proposal, and then commenced recruitment and data collection.

All electronic data collected were kept on a flash drive and password protected. Only I had access to the data, beyond sharing the interview summaries and transcripts to the participants during member checking. All electronic and physical files are stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office for a duration of 5 years at which point will be destroyed.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided the design and rationale of using a qualitative phenomenology study to answer a single research question. I explored my role as a researcher in the study to develop themes from the responses of the participants from the semistructured interviews and how reflexivity is essential to counteract biases. I outlined the methodology on the criterion to be used for selecting participants and the saturate point at which data collection would commence. I described the collection tool and field testing prior to use. I explained the recruitment, participation, and collection process to give the reader background on how I was obtaining participants and using semistructured interviews to gather the data. Once the data were collected, I detailed how the information was to be analyzed and the method for coding. Finally, I went into detail about trustworthiness and complying with IRB requirements.

In Chapter 4, I describe the results. This includes sections on the field test, research setting, demographics, and data collection. I also include the data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and study results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore the lived experiences of leaders regarding whether they adopt remote working and the reasons behind those decisions. The study was guided by one research question: What are the lived experiences of leaders related to their decision to adopt or not adopt remote working for employees in their organization?

Chapter 4 begins with the field test and the impacts to the main study including changes to instrumentation or data analysis strategies. I then explain the research setting where the study was conducted and the demographics of my participants. I describe the data collection process and any changes made to the original plan. I share the data analysis process for transcribing the interviews and identifying categories and themes. Evidence of trustworthiness is then presented to describe credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The results of the study are shared last. I present the analysis through themes and corresponding quotes captured during the interviews and coding process. The chapter is then closed with a summary and introduction of Chapter 5.

Field Test

To prepare for conducting the interviews, I completed a field test of the interview guide. Using the field test, I made sure the instrument was clear, logical, understandable, and responsive to the purpose and research question. The field test also helped me estimate the time needed to complete the interviews. The field test allowed me to adjust the questions, format, and instructions for relevance and clarity.

I tested the interview guide on two people who were not part of my study but who met the participation criteria. Recruits were colleagues I asked directly to participate and who received a field test consent form. The recruits were to play the role of a study participant and provide feedback on the questions. I also timed the interviews to determine the length of time needed.

The feedback from the field test resulted in removing questions related to the type of functions overseen by the manager, the performance level of employees, and communication methods used with employees. The participants felt that collecting this information would not answer the research question and made the length of the interview go over 1 hour. The remaining interview questions were found to be appropriately focused on the previous experiences of managers on remote work when they were employees, general perceptions of remote work, and current experiences of managers on remote work implementation.

Setting

I conducted interviews via Zoom using the application's audio recording functionality, as planned. No interviews were video recorded per the recommendation of the IRB. Participants did not receive the questions ahead of time, beyond the example questions associated within the informed consent form. I followed the interview guide (Appendix B) for each participant. I relied on careful listening and field notes to know when to ask clarifying questions to make sure the interview questions were being addressed.

The participants' availability dictated the interview schedule. A flexible scheduling platform allowed participants to select timeframes during business hours, in the evenings, or on weekends. I offered a scheduling period of 3 weeks for participants to choose based on their preferred days and times. All participants conducted interviews at their home location either during business or personal hours. I was also at my home location for all interviews.

Demographics

The 15 managers who participated in the study met the inclusion criteria outlined in the recruitment letter (Appendix A) and were from one federal department. I collected the demographics during the interview and organized the information in a Microsoft Word table. I collected information on participants' generation, gender, education level, and ethnicity.

For generation, 14 participants were from Generation X (93%) and one participant was a baby boomer (7%). Gender was more distributed with nine women (60%) and six men (40%). The education levels were diverse: six participants held a doctorate (40%), five a master's degree (34%), three a bachelor's degrees (20%), and one a high school diploma (6%). The ethnic diversity of the group was primarily White or European American, making up 11 of the participants (73%). There were two Black or African American (13%) participants; one Asian or Asian American (7%) participant, and one Hispanic or Latino (7%) participant. My sample was primarily Generation X and White or European American.

Data Collection

Data collection took place after receiving IRB approval and followed the methodology outlined in Chapter 3. I sent out 24 recruitment emails and received nine responses of interest. I reviewed the criteria with each of the nine interested participants to verify eligibility, and seven qualified. Two participants were deemed unqualified: one for not being a supervisor and the other for not having employees in the same location. Once the initial seven participants were identified, I used snowball sampling after each interview to obtain additional participants until saturation was reached. Snowball sampling assists with recruitment as interviewees can provide references for other participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Interviews were conducted over 3 weeks. All participants elected to conduct their interviews at their home location where privacy was controlled. Some participants scheduled their interviews after hours or over the weekend to not interfere with work commitments. I conducted interviews with 10 participants during work hours and five were performed on personal time. The unusual circumstances encountered during scheduling involved the busy schedules of high-level managers in the federal government where mission critical activities are a priority. Two participants who wanted to schedule their interviews during business hours had to reschedule due to work conflicts. I also had another participant not show up for the interview and following up to reschedule took 1 week to confirm a new date and time. Interviews ranged between 40 minutes and 1 hour.

The interview guide consisted of five interview questions. Because my study was focused on the lived experiences of the participants, I collected data that reflect their

experiences regarding remote work as an employee and as a manager. All questions were asked in the order outlined in the interview guide (Appendix B) and recorded using the Zoom audio recording feature. The IRB recommended that the interviews not be video recorded, and real-time verbal cues were recorded in my field notes. During the interviews, I noted verbal tone or hesitant responses to determine if specific responses needed follow-up questioning. All clarifying questions were asked prior to moving to the next question.

After each interview, the audio recording was transferred to Otter.ai for transcription. The transcription was double checked against the Zoom audio as a precaution to make sure the software dictated accurately. I masked each participant's identity by assigning a participant number. For example, the name of my first interviewee was Participant 1 or P1. A summary and transcript of each interview was sent to each participant for member checking, and feedback was requested via email. Changes were made to one transcript. Participant 5's audio was faded for question four regarding how they felt about remote work and did not transcribe fully through Otter.ai. This was not noticed until I sanitized the transcripts and checked against the audio. Participant 5 was able to make the correction though the member checking process and the transcript and summary were adjusted.

I was confident that I reached saturation at 15 participants, as described in Chapter 3. I reviewed each transcript after member checking and captured significant responses with short quotes or key words. I followed this process and analyzed patterns

across all interviews until no new insights were being reached and I had, therefore, reached an adequate sample size.

Data Analysis

The manual coding process followed a regimen to make sure a consistent process was maintained (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Coding Process



First, I reviewed the transcript after the interview and identified noteworthy quotes and words from the questions. Initially, the noteworthy words and quotes were copied from P1's interview in Microsoft Word, but I quickly determined the flexibility of manipulating the information was limited. I then used Microsoft Excel, which allowed me to sort and find information more easily. In Excel, I created a worksheet for each interview question. Within each of those worksheets, the first column was designated for the participant's identity (e.g., P1, P2, etc.) for each row. Then the second column was designated to record the noteworthy quotes and words from the transcripts from each participant. This step was performed after each interview to continuously check against previous transcripts to identify when saturation was reached. I no longer sought additional interviews after P15, as the noteworthy quotes and words for the questions became repetitive.

Second, once all 15 interviews were completed and the noteworthy quotes and words were captured in the spreadsheet for each question, I determined which responses were to continue within the coding process. This was accomplished by assessing the frequency of the noteworthy quotes and words across the participants for each question. If a response was recorded more than twice, I considered it relevant. These responses were then moved to the third column in the spreadsheet and designated as codes.

Third, similar or related codes were grouped together into a category using concept mapping and recorded in the fourth column of the spreadsheet. Concept mapping allowed for a visual display to suggest relationships between codes to identify categories. For example, when asked about the experience of employees working remotely, P2 responded to having “motivated and independent employees.” P3 responded with a key quote of liking remote work due to “professional series not needing particular location.” These codes, along with others, were grouped in the category *independence*. The top two categories for each question were considered significant.

Fourth, similar or related categories were grouped together into themes and recorded in the fifth column of the spreadsheet. Again, concept mapping was used to allow for a visual display suggesting relationships between categories to identify the themes. Tables 1 through 5 display the significant categories identified for each interview question, number of participants who mentioned noteworthy quotes and words (codes) within each category (frequency of use), and associated theme for top two categories.

Table 1*Interview Question 1 Categories and Themes*

Category	Frequency	Theme
Work and personal time separation	6	Work–life balance
Independence	4	Autonomy

Note. Question 1 asked the following: Looking back in your career before you were a manager, have you ever worked remotely as an employee? If yes, tell me about your experience working in a remote environment. If no, tell me the circumstances in which remote work was not offer to you.

Table 2*Interview Question 2 Categories and Themes*

Category	Frequency	Theme
Work and personal time separation	10	Work–life balance
Travel time	8	Commute
Financial savings	5	
Happy employees	5	
Increase hiring pool	5	
Productivity	5	
Flexibility	4	
Health	2	
Retention	2	

Note. Interview Question 2 asked the following: From what you have read or have been taught about remote work, can you explain the benefits to an organization?

Table 3*Interview Question 3 Categories and Themes*

Category	Frequency	Theme
Disengagement	11	Team disconnect
Lack of team cohesiveness	10	Team disconnect
No supervisory oversight	5	
Lack of direction	2	
Productivity	2	

Note. Interview Question 3 asked the following: From what you have read or have been taught about remote work, can you explain the challenges to an organization?

Table 4*Interview Question 4 Categories and Themes*

Category	Frequency	Theme
Personal feeling	7	Personal preference
Lack of team cohesiveness	6	Team disconnect
Independence	4	
Disengagement	2	
Flexibility	2	
Increase hiring pool	2	

Note. Interview Question 4 asked the following: As a manager, how do you personally feel about remote work?

Table 5*Interview Question 5 Categories and Themes*

Category	Frequency	Theme
Engagement	4	Team synergy
Productivity	3	Team synergy
Functioning teams	2	
Team cohesiveness	2	
Work and personal time separation	2	

Note. Interview Question 5 asked the following: Do you implement remote work? If yes, why? If no, why?

Finally, I reviewed the top two themes across all questions and added up the frequency that the codes occurred within each theme to identify significance. I then calculated the theme frequency from all 75 responses: 15 participants answering five questions (Table 6). The themes of *commute*, *personal preference*, *team synergy*, and *autonomy* were significant. However, the themes of *team disconnect* at 36% participant response and *work–life balance* at 21.3% participant response had a significantly greater frequency of use among participants and are considered key findings. These key findings relate to the study purpose and contribute to answering the research question.

Table 6*Significant Themes*

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Team disconnect	27	36
Work–life balance	16	21.3
Commute	8	10.7
Personal preference	7	9.3
Team synergy	7	9.3
Autonomy	4	5.3

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In Chapter 3, I shared that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are critical for researchers when purposing trustworthiness (Guba, 1981; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Credibility can be pursued by triangulation and member checking (Shenton, 2004). Transferability is achieved by implementing methods to allow the reader to transfer aspects of the design and findings without the need to replicate these aspects of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability is accomplished through the creation of a data collection plan based on the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability is obtained by member checking and reflexivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012).

Credibility (Internal Validity)

Fong (2018) recommended member checking to ensure credibility and means of checking reliability of the data. Member checking was completed for all 15 participants

by sending interview summaries and transcripts for verification and feedback. Any adjustments were sent in writing back to me via email to make the corrections. A final copy of the summary and transcript was sent back to the participant as a record.

Triangulation is also a means to obtain credibility. I was able to use my field notes that were taken during the interviews, the transcripts, and public data on remote work in the federal government to reflect on my interpretation of the material. This was especially helpful when drawing connections between all three. My field notes captured follow-up questions surrounding past experiences in the interview of working or not working remotely as an employee. The option of working or not working remotely may have to do with the type of job functions required. I triangulated the field notes and interview answers with some of the aspects of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey of employee not participating or participating based on work functions.

Transferability (External Validity)

Transferability occurs when findings can be applied to other situations.

Transferability was achieved through specific information on data collection and number of participants (Shenton, 2004). I have achieved transferability through detailed descriptions of my population and data collection, as depicted in Chapter 3.

Recruiting took place by soliciting candidates that completed a SESCO.

Participants eligible for the study must meet all of the following criteria: supervisory role, permanent duty station within the United States, supervise federal employees and not contractors, and subordinates that are eligible for remote working. In addition,

participants cannot know me professionally or personally. Data saturation occurred after interviewing 15 participants, as no new information was being obtained.

Data collection was detailed on the use of Zoom to audio record the interviews, which were then transcribed using Otter.ai. Field notes were taken to indicate follow-up questions based on the participants tone or hesitation in responses. All participants were asked the same questions following the Interview Guide (Appendix B).

Dependability

Specific to my data collection plan was the use of an interview guide. I began by collecting data on demographics to include generational group, gender, educational level, and ethnicity for each participant. Then, I asked questions focused on the participant's life experiences regarding remote work. These questions focused on prior experience as an employee, general perception, and experience as a manager implementing remote work.

Prior to setting up interviews, I field tested the interview guide with a third party. This was done to make sure the questions were clear, as well as test the length of time to complete the interview. From the field test, I removed questions not related to my research question to allow for adequate length of time to complete the interview. All interviews were Zoom audio recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai.

Confirmability

Confirmability was completed through the use of member checking and reflexivity to reduce potential biases. Member checking was the result of sending the interview summaries and transcripts to the participants to check for accuracy and allow

for feedback to make edits. By allowing the participants to review the material, any bias that I may have unintentionally placed in the summaries could be identified and corrected.

In addition, I used reflexivity to make sure my study was not impacted by bias. Berger (2015) highlighted that age or gender might influence a researcher's viewpoint. To make sure I was not influencing the analysis of the data, I masked all names by assigning a participant number. This allowed me to separate the demographics from the responses. Reflexivity also reminded me to review my field notes where I stated to perform follow-up questions. The follow-up questions were intended to obtain more detailed information and not to influence the participant to answer in a specific direction.

Results

I conducted interviews to identify themes related to the factors that influence managers' decisions regarding adoption of remote working and the reasons behind those decisions. Through the coding process, I identified the following themes: autonomy, commute, personal preference, team disconnect, team synergy, and work-life balance. These themes were used to develop an understanding of managers' viewpoints on working remotely. However, two themes were significant and were considered key findings: *team disconnect* had a 36% participant response and *work-life balance* had a 21.3% participant response from the 15 participants. There was one specific result of the study that was beyond the identification of a theme. It was important to include the results of Q5 pertaining to whether or not the manager implements remote work. I have included one case within the study results to capture the information, as well as including it as a key finding.

Theme 1 (Key Finding): Team Disconnect

The theme of *team disconnect* was associated with Q1, Q3, and Q4. I identified *disengagement, lack of direction, lack of team cohesiveness, no supervisory oversight, time management,* and *disengagement* as the dominant reasons managers had less than favorable experiences as employees participating in remote work, associating remote work as a challenge, and having personal feelings on disliking remote work.

This theme was seen as a negative aspect of remote work. When asked about prior experience participating in remote work as an employee, P12 stated that there was a lack of team environment and felt “disconnected from fellow co-workers.” The response of having a disconnected team was predominantly witnessed when participants were asked about the challenges of remote work. P4 had a strong stance that employees are reluctant to pick up the phone or felt that not all employees are capable for working remotely. A particular comment made by P4 was that remote work “adversely affects the mental health of employees.” P5 expressed that remote employees were not available as often as in-person employees because those participating in remote work started their days too early and were unavailable at core hours. P5 also stated that remote employees miss out on in-prompt to conversations that that place in the office and that “engagement is challenging.” P10 echoed this sentiment by stating that in-person employees creates “synergy of ideas” and that there are “more informal interaction.” P1, P8, and P12 had simultaneous responses that expressed the concern over collaboration and teamwork. From a supervisory standpoint, there was a sense of not being able to manage appropriately a remote employee. P13 stated that orienting a new employee to the team

and the organization's culture was difficult. P2 felt like they did not have the ability to have oversight with remote employees. P15 expressed that it is "not easy to have supervisory controls or have firsthand knowledge someone is working." When asked about personal feelings on remote work as a manager, P7 stated that they saw more interpersonal conflicts impacting the team. P4 has a more difficult time getting remote employees in "battle tempo" and updated, where P6 felt a balance of "office and remote work" could assist with disconnect within a team.

Theme 2 (Key Finding): Work–Life Balance

The theme *work–life balance* was associated with Q1, Q2, Q4, and Q5. I identified *flexibility, health, time management, and work and personal time separation* as the dominant reasons managers participated in remote work as employees, associating remote work as a benefit, having an overall personal feeling of liking remote work, and reason for implementing remote work.

Those who participated in remote work as employees saw the option as an opportunity to have work–life balance. Flexibility was a reoccurring word during the interviews that was mentioned by many participants, such as P6, P10, P14, and P14. P15 elaborated by stating that remote work offered "flexibility to take care of personal matters." P9 stated that personal matters were also involved expressing that they "didn't have to run home to make appointments." There were also many benefits given by the participants for remote work. Again, the value of flexibility was cited by P3, P4, P5, P6, P10, P13. Outside of flexibility some participants determined that benefits had a direct impact on the employee's well-being. P13 stated that remote work "reduces stress," while

P4 stated that employees were “more well-adjusted.” There was an overwhelming sentiment that remote work did offer the ability to have a clear separation between work and personal time. P4 stated that remote work can balance an employee’s life. P6 stated that it “allows more flexibility in personal lives” and P14 stated that it “helps balance work with home life.” When asked about personal feelings on remote work, P5 repeated that it “allows for flexibilities,” so they liked it. Those managers who did implement remote work believed it improved work–life balance as stated by P9 and that employees could select a more conducive schedule per P6.

Theme 3 (Key Finding): Implementation of Remote Work

Beyond the themes, there was a specific result of the study that helped answer the research question. Question five pertained to whether the manager implements remote work. Every manager, regardless of their experience or personal feelings on the subject, implemented remote work. Table 12 identifies the result of managers implementing remote work.

Table 7*Managers' Implementation of Remote Work*

	Worked remotely as employee	Managerial feelings on remote work	Implementation of remote work
P1	No	Like	Yes
P2	Yes	Like	Yes
P3	No	Like	Yes
P4	Yes	Undecided	Yes
P5	No	Like	Yes
P6	Yes	Undecided	Yes
P7	No	Undecided	Yes
P8	Yes	Undecided	Yes
P9	Yes	Like	Yes
P10	Yes	Undecided	Yes
P11	No	Undecided	Yes
P12	Yes	Undecided	Yes
P13	Yes	Like	Yes
P14	No	Like	Yes
P15	Yes	Like	Yes

Regardless of the managers' previous remote work experience as an employee or how they personally felt about remote work as supervisors, all 15 participants implemented remote work for their employees. Examining the past experience with remote work, 33.3% of the participants did not participate in remote work. These five managers were prevented from remote work due to their job responsibilities. Only one participant, or 7% of the managers, did not participate in remote work due to personal preference even though the option was available. Nine managers, or 60%, did participate in remote work as an employee. For those nine managers who participated in remote work, 78% liked the experience, while 22% were undecided. Examining how the participant personally felt about remote work as a manager, the results were almost equally split. Eight managers, or 53%, personally liked remote work. Seven managers, or

47%, were undecided if they liked remote work. Finally, when asked about implementation of remote work, 100% of the managers stated they do. All managers felt that the benefits to remote work for the employee and the organization were important, regardless of personal feelings as cited in the responses to Q2 and Q4.

Theme 4: Commute

The theme of *commute* was associated with Q1, Q2, and Q4. I identified *travel time* as the dominant reason managers participated in remote work as an employee, associated not having to commute into work as a benefit, and personally likely remote work.

The theme of *commute* was seen as a positive impact to the employee. When a manager responded that they participated in remote work as an employee, the main reason for liking the experience was the lack of commuting. P12 stated that they did not have to travel for work because they were at home. Commuting was a benefit to many participants. P2 responded that benefits included cutting down on transportation costs, not spending time traveling to office site, and that employees have more time to themselves. P8 detailed the benefit of commuting by stating “not having to be frustrated by traffic jams or road rage.” Traffic was duplicated in P12’s response to personal feelings of remote work by stating “saves time and no traffic.”

Theme 5: Personal Preference

The theme of *personal preference* was associated with Q1 and Q4. I identified *personal feeling* as the dominant reason managers had not participated in remote work as an employee and not fully wanting to support remote work.

When asked if the manager had participated in remote work, P8 stated that they did. Though the participant took part in remote work, P8 did not have a remote schedule full time and would “rather be in a room with folks.” This feeling was carried over when asked about personal preference on remote work. P8 liked the feeling of stepping into a room and having individuals there, but also recognized that this sentiment is not a “one size fits all.” P11 felt that they are effective remotely, but preferred to only be away from the office part of the time as they “preferred face-to-face interaction.” Understanding the challenges of remote work, P9 still liked the option and stated that “there are ways to manage it.”

Theme 6: Team Synergy

The theme of *team synergy* was associated with Q5. I identified *engagement*, *functioning teams*, *productivity*, and *team cohesiveness* as the dominant reasons managers implement remote work, while also having reservations.

Team synergy was evident when managers were asked if they implement remote work. Managers felt that a team environment was developed through engagement that they initiated. P4 set up weekly meetings and P15 had established one-on-ones with employees. Others felt that their teams were already working well enough to be comfortable with remote work. P5 stated that the team was “able to successfully do the mission,” while P14 saw “higher levels of collaboration.” P1 saw remote employees as “still functional parts of a team” and did not see a difference between those and on-site employees when it came to teamwork.

Theme 7: Autonomy

The theme of *autonomy* was associated with Q1, Q2, and Q4. I identified *focused time* and *independence* as the dominant reasons managers participated in remote work as employees, associating remote work as a benefit, and having an overall personal feeling of liking remote work.

When participants were asked if they participated in remote work as employees, those who were offered the option participated. P15 expressed that remote work gave the ability to have focused time on work to complete tasks. For P12, there was a sense of independence and freedom with remote work. P4 responded as having “flexibility to find a space where I could be uninterrupted.” The theme carried over when participants were asked if there were benefits to remote work. P13 stated that remote work gave an opportunity for having “free mental space.” The personal feelings of remote work were seen in responses associated with autonomy by P2 when stating that they had employees who were independent workers and P3 stated that their employees are professional and don’t need oversight. P12 stated that there was a sense of “freedom to work from home.”

Summary

In Chapter 4, I described the field test during which I solicited participants to test the interview guide. The feedback allowed me to make adjustments to the interview guide used for my study. Next, the research setting was detailed, which relied on Zoom for the interviews. The description of demographics followed, including gender, age bracket, educational level, and ethnicity. I then described the data collection process which followed the approved IRB method during which I interviewed 15 participants.

Following that, I explained the process to analyze the data. I outlined how my interview questions captured prior experience, general perceptions, and managerial experience on remote work. I explained how I masked the participants and coded for categories and themes. The evidence of trustworthiness was next, describing how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were accomplished. Finally, I identified seven themes, of which three were key findings: *team disconnect*, *work–life balance*, *implementation of remote work*.

In Chapter 5, I interpret the key findings in light of previous research and professional experience. I describe the limitations of the study and recommendations for future study. Lastly, I provide the implications of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore the lived experiences of leaders regarding whether they adopt remote working and the reasons behind those decisions. I chose a phenomenological research design because the intent was to inquire about the lived experiences of managers about the phenomenon within a federal department in the Washington, D.C., area. Data were collected from 15 interviews, field notes, and public documents on government remote work. I found that regardless of personal employee experience or managerial feelings, all participants implemented remote work. Setting aside personal opinions, the managers in the study expressed that remote work was a benefit to the employee and the organization. In this chapter, I discuss the interpretations of the key findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Interpretation of Findings

The key findings in the study of team disconnect and work–life balance were consistent with previous research that I found in the peer-reviewed literature on remote work evaluated in Chapter 2. The key finding of implementation of remote work extended knowledge in the discipline when comparing the managers’ decision making to the models of situational leadership and organizational control, as well as previous research on the topic.

Key Finding of Team Disconnect

The first key finding was the theme of team disconnect, which was consistent with previous research. Remote work can create employee barriers and unintentionally

create a mental and physical divide. There is no denying that remote work can produce an environment of distraction, especially if an employee's remote workplace is their home. My participants expressed that employees have experienced interruptions in the home and procrastination, a finding consistent with previous research (see, for example, Dubrin & Bardard, 1993; Elshaiekh et al., 2018). This was expressed by P7, as the participant struggled with their personal feelings on remote work. P7 believed that conflicts between the team increased and those who were remote had a tendency to "get lost" and be unresponsive due to home distractions. P4 also expressed that remote workers do not "pick up the phone" due to taking care of personal errands at home. These types of personal or family obligations can create conflict between work and family responsibilities. When the home becomes the office, family obligations can cause interference with work is a finding consistent with previous research (see, for example, Baruch, 2000; Caillier, 2011; Mirchandani, 1999; Tietze & Musson, 2005).

Team disconnect is also associated with the feeling of isolation and separation. Orhan et al. (2016) showed that greater isolation occurs with remote workers who feel deprived of information and access to people. This conclusion was corroborated in my research. When discussing their experience of remote work, P12 enjoyed it but felt more disconnected from fellow colleagues. P4 reported a lack of physical human connection leading to isolation, stating that remote work "adversely affects mental health." P5 described "isolation feelings" among remote workers compared to on-site teams they manage. My research was consistent with the view that isolation can lead to frustration and can adversely affect employee well-being (see Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Bardard

(1993) and Kurland and Bailey (1999) showed that remote workers are not taken as seriously compared to on-site employees, which contributes to team disconnect and isolation. In this study, P10 stated that teams should “work in the same place where you can have informal interactions,” and P8 stated, “when not in a room with someone you can miss out.”

Team disconnect has been identified in previous research as a disadvantage for career advancement as well. For example, Elishaiekh et al. (2018) and Zernand (2003) showed that remote workers become strangers to those who work in the office. Khaifa and Davidson (2000) showed that remote workers feel overlooked for promotions because of being unseen. Kurland and Bailey (1999) further showed that managers believe employee development is more difficult for remote workers because they are not on site. These views were substantiated by several of participants’ responses in this study. P11 stated that remote work posed a challenge for team cohesion, and P12 stated that it was difficult to build a team with remote workers. P13 expressed that building and maintaining networks was more difficult for remote employees. Finally, P14 explained difficulties with performing succession planning and training when someone is remote.

Key Finding of Work–Life Balance

The second key finding was the theme of work–life balance, which was consistent with previous research. Previous researchers identified work–life balance as the flexibility for remote workers to complete home and work tasks. For example, Dubrin and Barnard (1993) showed that remote employees could care for family and personal responsibilities during working hours. The flexibility in working hours allows employees

to care for children and perform other household chores (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). My participants corroborated these views. P15 stated that remote work gives flexibility to take care of personal errands, and P14 stated that remote work gives more flexibility for scheduling appointments. P9 added that remote work provides the option to not have to “deal with the stress of running home to make appointments.”

Previous research has also found that work–life balance can reduce stress for employees participating in remote work (see, for example, Dubrin & Bardard, 1993; Gibson et al., 2002; Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Stress can be triggered by distractions from coworkers and financial obligations associated with commuting. Remote working also avoids work-related expenses. Elshaiekh et al. (2018) determined that a work-related expense is the purchasing of business attire. In my study, P13 mentioned that remote work “reduces stress” and the need to not have to “figure out wardrobe.” P4 expressed that work–life balance through remote work helps employees be well-adjusted and not exposed to unnecessary stress with commuting. P3, P5, P6, P9, P10, and P14 stated there is more flexibility in creating a schedule, which lessens pressures of personal commitments.

Key Finding of Implementation of Remote Work

The third key finding was the theme of implementation of remote work, which was consistent with previous research on managerial lack of implementation of remote work. For example, Mahler (2012) showed that federal managers have denied subordinates remote work for reasons associated with office coverage and job responsibilities. Caillier (2011) and Overmyer (2011) showed that managerial decisions

not to implement remote work were associated with office coverage, productivity, and resistance to change.

The option of remote work was not offered to five of the participants when they were employees due to job responsibilities. P1, P3, and P13 stated that when they were hired, the position was not eligible for remote work because of the functions of the job. P11 stated that remote work was only available for emergency purposes. However, regardless of past experiences of being or not being offered remote work as an employee, all 15 participants implement remote work as managers. The participants found that the benefits to the organization and the employees were more important than their individual personal feelings.

Previous research on the implementation of remote work identified a need for communication. For example, Madula et. al (2017) indicated that leading remotely requires managers to have increased communication to build teams. Yesil (2011) showed that remote managers need to be more creative in communication using technology. Technology is seen as a form of knowledge sharing and a tool for making decisions within remote teams (Alrawi et al., 2013; Ocker et al., 2009; Varol & Tarcan, 2000).

My research corroborated previous research on managing remote employees through communication and use of technology. Implementation of remote work encourages participants to embrace creative communication mechanisms to stay connected to employees. P1 implements weekly staff meetings to connect with employees who work remotely. This allows team members to share information across the team and have dialogue. P11 and P12 schedule one-on-one sessions with employees

to develop relationships and provide guidance. P2 and P4 stated that communication is ad hoc and takes place when direction or project guidance is needed. Many of the participants mentioned technology as a means to communicate with employees. P2 stated that technology is used to connect with employees through video conferencing to obtain a face-to-face setting. P2 and P4 stated that technology allows them to be accessible to employees and vice versa. P5 stated that due to technology, communication on the team seems to be better. P7 expressed that communication is more effective using technology to create a meeting space, collaborate on documents, and share information.

Support of Conceptual Framework

My study was consistent with Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model. The situational leadership model suggests that there is no single leadership style and that the leader should consider components of the situation when selecting the style that is most feasible (Hersey et al., 2001; Kozachuk & Conley, 2021). The leadership style selected is aligned with the followers' readiness level.

Regardless of personal feelings on remote work, all 15 managers in my study adapted leadership styles to meet the readiness level of their employees. For example, P4 was undecided on remote work because it was more difficult to get employees onboarded. P7 preferred a hybrid approach with in-person and telework, as the manager felt remote work enables employees to disconnect. P10 felt that productivity decreases when employee work remotely and it was difficult to maintain a team environment. However, each of these three managers decided to implement remote work to improve employee satisfaction and the ability to complete the mission remotely. My research

confirms that participating managers mimicked the situational leadership model by adjusting their behavior to adapt to changing situations.

My study was also consistent with Errichiello and Pianese's (2016) organizational control model. Errichiello and Pianese provide an understanding of organizational control by identifying antecedents and outcomes for the implementation of remote work. Antecedents, or drivers of implementation, are defined as factors pushing the organization or individuals to embrace remote work. The outcomes of implementing remote work are defined at organizational, group, and individual levels.

The drivers of remote work from the study were the benefits to the organization and employees. The benefits to employees and the organization influenced the managers to embrace remote work, regardless of personal feelings. The outcomes recorded during the interviews included having happier employees, providing work–life balance, and financial savings. For example, P9 stated that the benefits of remote work improved and supported employee work–life balance. P13 expressed that remote work gave employees more flexibility in schedules and increases productivity. P12 stated that the government reduces costs with leases and utilities, while employees save on gas and parking. The combination of benefits pushing managers to embrace remote work and the outcome impacting both the employee and organization supports the organizational control model.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study was limited to federal managers who have a supervisory role, have a permanent duty station within the United States, supervise federal employees

and not contractors, and have subordinates eligible for remote working. The participants were from one federal department in the Washington, D.C. area.

There were a few limitations to the study that were identified in Chapter 1 that limited the extent of my research. The first was having participants from one federal department take part in the study. If I included managers from other departments, the study may have produced different results. Also, my findings using only one department may not be applicable to other federal departments, state government, or the private sector.

The second limitation to the study was that I am a federal employee and could have bias impacting the results. I made sure that my research design contained procedures, such as member checking and reflexivity, that enabled me to detect my own bias and to remain objective. Through member checking, the participants were able to review the interview summary and transcripts to ensure accuracy. Reflexivity was a mechanism to remain neutral and self-aware of biases by frequently reviewing notes and transcripts throughout the data collection process.

A third limitation mentioned in the study was that participants were not screened based on age. Participants were selected by meeting managerial experience, which did not include identification of the participant's generation beyond collecting demographics. Generational viewpoints on remote work may influence implementation. However, having a criterion on generational representation was outside the scope of the study.

Recommendations

I used a qualitative phenomenology design for the study. Future research might involve restructuring the research question to guide the design to be quantitative. A correlational design is one such option. This quantitative approach is used to describe and measure the relationship between two or more variables (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Future research could identify variables and see if there is a correlation to implementing or not implementing remote work.

Future research might also address the limitation of only conducting interviews with participants from one department. As previously stated, the findings of the study may not be applicable to other departments in the federal sector, state governments, or the private sector. Future research might expand the participant criteria beyond one department.

Also, future research might address the limitation in the study on not understanding generational views on remote work. A consideration of generations may provide insight into why managers do or do not implement remote work. This phenomenon may be associated with generational viewpoints.

Another recommendation for future research is to examine selective permission for remote work by the manager. My study did not investigate which employees received remote work or if there were requirements to participate in remote work. Future inquiry could be conducted to assess the benefits and impacts of selective permission.

Finally, future research should examine the reliability and honesty of remote workers. There could be uncertainty from managers on employees working remotely with

the time dedicated to work. A study could examine the time when a work day begins and ends, as well as the hours per week worked. Time spent working can also relate to productivity and if there is a lower rate for remote workers. Further research could contribute to better decision making on remote work based on a more accurate perception of honesty and productivity, and a better understanding of the time spent working by remote employees.

Implications

The study provides insight into a small population of federal managers as to why they do or do not implement remote work, regardless of personal feelings. My research indicated that managers embrace remote work, as a result of acknowledging the benefits to employees and the organization. The findings of my study may be significant to practice, to theory, and to social change.

Significance to Practice

The study may contribute to changes in management practice in organizations. With today's technology, employees can work from multiple locations. The ability for employees to work remotely based on technological advances can provide work-life balance. Also, organizations can decrease costs for leases by not occupying large building spaces and lessen costs for hiring by increasing the recruitment pool. The use of remote work could also yield cost savings by improving retention and may also increase cultural diversity. It is important for organizations to offer training to managers on the benefits of remote work, as well as how to lead in a nontraditional environment. This type of training may assist managers in their decision making on remote work.

The study may also lead managers to consider internal policies on remote work. Managers may be constrained on implementing or not implementing remote work based on internal policies that set standardized practices. A review of remote work policies pre- and post-COVID-19 in the federal sector could result in an understanding of the 2018 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results.

Significance to Theory

My research may contribute to Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model by explaining why leaders make decisions regarding remote working, within the specific environment, situation, and conditions within the organization. Situational leadership defines actions for managers adapting to changing situations. The participants in my study implemented remote work with the changing situations in human capital planning and employee satisfaction. Managers adjusted their leadership styles to lead remotely to gain a larger hiring pool of skilled employees, as well as understanding the impacts of having a happy and productive workforce. Organizations can use my study to establish training on remote leadership. The results can also be used to influence future human capital planning through the designation of remote positions and establishing a robust recruitment process.

My research may also contribute to Errichiello and Pianese's (2016) organizational control model. Within a federal government organizational control system regarding remote work, implementation is determined by the manager. Though there were many challenges identified by participants on remote work, and many personal feelings on the subject, managers in the study implemented remote work because of the

benefits to the organization and employees. By understanding the influences of managers on their decision making to implement or not implement remote work, training could be developed on the benefits of remote work. Also, the control system can be influenced by not having the managers decide on remote work and for the organization to standardize policies.

Significance to Social Change

The study can contribute to improving the working environment for federal employees. A greater use of remote work could improve employee morale, productivity, turnover, and work–life balance. Understanding the lived experiences of managers as to why they implement or not implement remote work may offer information to address personal feelings or uncertainties on remote work. Managerial training could provide insights to the benefits of remote work and tactics to overcome any uncertainties.

Conclusions

In the U.S. federal government, the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 granted agencies to use telework, or remote working. Even though there are numerous benefits to both the employee and the organization, federal employees are not participating in remote work as often as expected. The 2018 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey showed that out of the 41,875 employees who took the survey within one department, 21.8% did not frequently work remotely (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018).

Remote work enables organizations to hire a specialized workforce with the ability to keep up with the growing global market without being located in a single building structure. It also allows organizations to cut costs on leasing space and lessen

environmental impacts by reducing vehicle emissions associated with commuting to work. Employees also benefit from remote work through work–life balance, having the capability to set their own work schedule. The financial implications associated with remote work for employees is a reduction in travel costs, parking, and wear and tear on their vehicles.

My study was conducted to better understand the experiences of managers who, ultimately, must determine the implementation of remote work. My research showed that regardless of past experiences or personal feeling on the subject, all 15 managers implemented remote work. The managers' decision to implement remote work was determined by the driving factor of understanding the benefits to the employee and the organization. I conclude that decision-makers may need to consider the full range of benefits and challenges before making decisions on remote work. Training could be implemented to assist managers on understanding the benefits of remote work, as well as how to lead in a nontraditional environment to address uncertainties. I also conclude that organizations may want to implement a standardized policy for remote work to alleviate decision making at the managerial level. Standardization across an organization could influence human capital planning through the designation of remote positions and establishment of a robust recruitment process.

There are no solutions available for organizations and managers to create perfect workplaces and working conditions for their employees, while remaining true to their missions, objectives, tasks, and stakeholders. There will never be a *one-size-fits-all* approach that meets the needs of everyone. However, there is a sufficient amount of

research showing the benefits of remote work, benefits that overall may exceed the costs and detriments of remote work policies. Perhaps the answer is not binary—it is not a matter of *remote work* or *no remote work*. There may be measures, such as hybrid working arrangements, that incorporate some remote work, while overcoming some of its negatives. There is certainly a need to make such managerial decisions following situational leadership principles. In any case, part of exploiting the benefits of remote work lies in a better understanding of all the components and factors related to remote work policies; part of it lies in objective and thoughtful decision making. My research may be a significant contribution to that understanding, to objectivity, and sound yet empathetic management.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Greetings,

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a research study that explores the lived experiences of leaders as to whether they implement or not implement remote work. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University in the Management Program specializing in Leadership and Organizational Change. I am conducting a study to examine the factors that impact or influence leaders, whether positively or negatively, regarding the concept of remote working. There is a need for an increased understanding on this phenomenon expressed in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and based on a lack of scholarly research. The results of this study may identify the drivers of adoption of managers' willingness to embrace remote work to offer an organization the necessary information to develop training for managers to resolve constraints.

Participants eligible for this study must meet all of the following criteria: supervisory role, permanent duty station within the United States, supervise federal employees and not contractors, and subordinates that are eligible for remote working. In addition, participants cannot know me professionally or personally. To collect data, I am conducting individual 60-minute interviews that are audio recorded via Zoom. Your identity will be masked and all information is confidential.

If you agree to participate, kindly read the attached informed consent form and reply to this email with the words "I consent." If you have any questions, please reply back to this email and I will contact you within 24 hours.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Valerie F. DeFeo
Ph.D. Candidate, Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Participant Code:

Date of Interview:

Hello, my name is Valerie DeFeo. Thank you for taking the time to answer questions regarding my study, *Federal Managers' Perceptions on the Implementation of Remote Work for Employees*.

I will be utilizing an empirical phenomenological approach for my study. The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of leaders regarding whether they adopt remote working and the reasons behind those decisions. The study will examine the factors that impact or influence leaders, whether positively or negatively, regarding the concept of remote working.

The interview should take about 60 minutes to complete and will be audio recorded using Zoom. Interviews are transcribed to conduct data analysis on themes. You are assigned a participant code that is used in my analysis, so your identity is masked.

Before we begin, I would like to collect a few demographics. It is acceptable to have a response of “prefer not to answer” for any question.

1. What is your generational group?
2. What is your social identity (gender identity)?
3. What is the highest level of education completed?
4. What ethnicity do you identify as?

Thank you for the information. If you are ready, we can begin the interview portion, which should take 60 minutes. When a question refers to “remote work” this definition includes telework and offsite locations.

1. Looking back in your career before you were a manager, have you ever worked remotely as an employee? If yes, tell me about your experience working in a remote environment. If no, tell me the circumstances in which remote work was not offer to you.
2. From what you have read or have been taught about remote work, can you explain the benefits of this type of working environment to the organization?
3. From what you have read or have been taught about remote work, can you explain the challenges to an organization?
4. As a manager, how to you personally feel about remote work?

5. Do you implement remote work? If yes, why? If no, why?

That concludes the interview portion of the study. I would like to ask you one more question. Based on the criteria for the study, would you recommend anyone for my study? If so, can you please supply me with their contact information?

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in my study. After 5 years, all physical data will be shredded and electronic files will be deleted. I would like to reiterate that your identity will remain anonymous and only known to me. I will contact you if any additional information is needed and appreciate you taking the time to assist me in my doctoral study.