

2015

Flexible Work Schedules, Virtual Work Programs, and Employee Productivity

Kelley Marie Campbell
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Kelley Marie Campbell

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Gene Fusch, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Franz Gottlieb, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Denise Land, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2015

Abstract

Flexible Work Schedules, Virtual Work Programs, and Employee Productivity

by

Kelley Marie Campbell

MBA, Albertus Magnus College, 2009

MSM, Albertus Magnus College, 2007

BS, Salve Regina University, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

May 2015

Abstract

In a workplace marked by increasing change and competing commitments, business leaders require an increased understanding of alternative work programs. Utilizing spillover theory, motivator-hygiene theory, and adaptive structuration theory, this single case study was an exploration of the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. The population consisted of 3 managerial business executives and 6 employees within a midwestern United States division of a global blood management solutions firm. The data collection process included a series of semistructured interviews, a focus group, and the assessment of company documentation. Methodological triangulation identified 5 emerging themes: program assessment and monitoring, standard set of virtual working hours, remote office setup, increased virtual communication, and promotion of quality of life. The transferability of this single case study remains with the reader and future researchers to determine. Future researchers may discover that the findings contribute to social change by better preparing organizations for success while simultaneously positioning individuals to attain optimum balance across life and work responsibilities.

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Dedication

I thank God for giving me the inspiration and strength to persevere through all circumstances over the course of this extremely challenging, yet rewarding journey.

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I gratefully acknowledge Dr. Gene Fusch (chair) for his leadership and diligence over the course of this extensive journey. Your extraordinary guidance and support came at a time in this process when I needed it most. I sincerely appreciate your expeditious reviews, around the clock availability, and exceptional expertise. If I had a question, you had the answer and at lightning speed. I could not have asked for a better mentor.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Productivity affects the financial performance of an organization. Work–life balance and work–life satisfaction may have an impact on productivity in the workplace (Mušura, Korican, & Krajnovic, 2013). Business leaders continue to adopt nontraditional work–life benefit policies, including virtual work programs, in response to the financial savings realized and the unique flexibility these programs offer (Purvanova, 2014). The focus of this study was to explore the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs.

Background of the Problem

Nicklin and McNall (2013) considered family and work the two most important domains within any individual's life. Achieving harmony between work and one's personal life is becoming increasingly important from both the employer and employee perspective (Mušura et al., 2013). The balance between these two domains is critical to any working person or business owner's life as a strong link exists between work–family balance and overall job satisfaction (Rocereto, Gupta, & Mosca, 2011). High rates of employee job satisfaction are associated with high commitment levels and elevated productivity (Rama Devi & Nagini, 2013). Competing work and family commitments have a negative effect on employees in the form of reduced productivity (Ajala, 2013). Work–life balance or quality of life programs pertain to the impact of work on people as well as on organizational effectiveness (Pawar, 2013).

The focus of this study was to explore the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. Flexible work schedules rank high in

supporting employees' desires to manage competing responsibilities (Tuttle & Garr, 2012). Eng, Moore, Grunberg, Greenberg, and Sikora (2010) noted that employees who have more control over their work schedule and location generally experience less work–life conflict, greater job satisfaction, and increased productivity. Furthermore, the option to partake in flexible scheduling yields a more productive and engaging work environment (Wickramasinghe, 2012). Providing employees with the option to customize where and when they work can create positive opportunities for balance, both inside and outside of the workplace; however, business leaders must understand how flexible work models affect productivity within their organizations (Pawar, 2013).

Problem Statement

Work–life benefit programs affect employee job involvement, which can lead to job satisfaction and the overall performance of the organization (Pawar, 2013). Noonan and Glass (2012) indicated that 24% of employed Americans comprise the virtual workforce. The general business problem was that business leaders appear to have a lack of understanding of the effect work–life benefit programs have on employee productivity. The specific business problem was that some business leaders have limited strategies for virtual work programs and flexible work schedules.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, explorative single case study was to ascertain the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. The sample population consisted of three lower- to middle-level business executives and six employees within a midwestern United States division of a global

blood management solutions firm. This population was important to business leaders because it was representative of a global consulting firm that employs work–life benefit programs. The research design included the following data sources: (a) semistructured interviews, (b) focus group, and (c) company documentation. With work–life balance at the forefront of societal value, the implications for positive social change may include the potential to better empower employees to balance both personal and professional responsibilities while maximizing productivity in their professional positions.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I utilized a qualitative research methodology and an exploratory single case study design. Qualitative research develops an understanding of participants' views and experiences (Montero-Marín et al., 2013). Using a qualitative method met the needs of the study, whereas the quantitative method did not, as I sought to explore and capture employee experiences and personal viewpoints. Qualitative research allows the researcher to use interview questions that provide the interviewees with the ability to offer in-depth responses that the parameters of a quantitative method would not (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). In quantitative studies, researchers test preconceived hypotheses (Bishop & Lexchin, 2013; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). In qualitative studies, researchers conduct data analyses of responses to open-ended questions, leading to the discovery of common emerging patterns and themes (Bishop & Lexchin, 2013; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). The intent of this study was not to use any measurement of variables or test objective theories. Therefore, using a quantitative or mixed method would not have met the goal.

I selected the single case study approach based upon the desire to obtain an invaluable and deep understanding of a small number of detailed experiences. Utilizing an exploratory single case study design met the need of the study based upon the research question. Baxter and Jack (2008) stated that, as a form of qualitative research, case studies can inform professional practice or evidence-informed decision making inclusive of policy realms. Prior to selecting the case study approach, I considered several other qualitative study designs, including ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative designs.

Ethnography research design is a form of inquiry targeted toward a specific cultural group over an extended period of time using primarily observational and interview data (Wägar, 2012). A mini-ethnographic study could have potentially satisfied the purpose of this study; however, the intent was not to study (observe) the day-to-day interactions and lives of a specific group. Another point for consideration was the difficulty of observing people working in a virtual environment. Phenomenological researchers focus on describing the details and meanings of personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology partially met the research criteria related to the participants' lived experiences; however, the phenomenological research design was not the most effective design option for my study, given the desired in-depth inquiry of study participants working for one company. The narrative research design did not support the goal of the research, as I did not wish to study the lives of the participants, nor combine those views with personal life experiences to form a collaborative narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Research Question

The central research question was as follows: What strategies do business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs? Exploring this area assists senior business leaders in better defining how corporate policies may or may not be affecting employee productivity or influencing corporate revenue. From these conclusions and recommendations, business leaders may be able to make more effective, informed decisions regarding work–life balance policies.

I informed participants of the intent of this study and defined employee productivity as the ability to meet or exceed agreed upon job objectives with the current set of tools, technologies, and processes (Phipps, Prieto, & Ndinguri, 2013). Employing the semistructured format of the interviews allowed me to elicit further information from the study participants by asking follow-up questions based on each interviewee’s initial answers. Researchers use probing questions to obtain the most relevant, accurate, and in-depth information (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). If the study participant did not fully address the question presented or offered an inadequate answer, the use of probing questions stimulated additional, related responses. As a baseline, study participants answered the following questions.

In-Depth Interview Questions (for Managers)

1. What strategies have you used for implementing flexible work schedules?
2. What strategies have you used for implementing virtual work program policies?
3. What productivity challenges occurred when your employees began working

flexible work schedules?

4. What productivity challenges occurred when your employees began working in a virtual environment?
5. What suggestions do you have for improving virtual work productivity?
6. What are your experiences on how flexible work schedule programs affect job satisfaction?
7. What are your experiences on how virtual work programs affect job satisfaction?
8. What are your experiences on flexible time–space workplace policies and blurred boundaries between work and home life?
9. What additional information would you like to add about flexible work schedules?
10. What additional information would you like to add about working virtually?

Focus Group Questions (for Employee Focus Group)

1. How has participating in a flexible work schedule negatively affected your productivity?
2. How has participating in a flexible work schedule positively affected your productivity?
3. How has participating in a virtual work program negatively affected your productivity?
4. How has participating in a virtual work program positively affected your productivity?

5. What have you experienced regarding flexible time–space workplace policies and blurred boundaries between work and home life?
6. What tools enable your productivity the least when working virtually?
7. What technical issues have you experienced while working virtually?
8. How have these technical issues affected your virtual work?
9. What additional information would you like to add about flexible work schedules?
10. What information would you like to add about working virtually?

Conceptual Framework

The spillover model served as the primary conceptual framework for this study. Pleck (1977) first mentioned the spillover model when he analyzed work–family role systems and the spillover into both domains (Naithani, 2010). Prior to the 1970s, society traditionally considered work and family domains separate entities; however, this notion has evolved into shared, interconnected platforms (Pleck, 1977). Hill, Ferris, and Mårtinson (2013) further supported Pleck’s notions and suggested that what supports (either negatively or positively) the conditions in the work microsystem will spill over into the family microsystem, and vice versa. Hill et al. noted that time, energy, organization, and behavior can be strong determinants of work–life balance. Hill et al. also argued that if work–family dynamics leave little room for flexibility, there is negative spillover in terms of time, energy, and behavior.

Employers who permit employees to integrate work and family responsibilities actively and efficiently produce positive spillover and a healthier, happier, more

productive working staff, resulting in maximized productivity (Hill et al., 2013). Spillover theory dictates that spillover can be either positive or negative (Hill et al., 2013). This explanation includes a multidimensional model, whereby work–family spillover can flow in variation as follows: (a) work-to-family positive spillover, (b) family-to-work negative spillover, (c) family-to-work positive spillover, and (d) work-to-family negative spillover.

Definition of Terms

Employee productivity: Phipps et al. (2013) defined employee productivity as employed workers' ability to meet or exceed agreed upon job tasks with the provided set of tools, technologies, and procedures.

Flexible work schedules (flextime or flexitime): Veeramani and Gayathri (2013) defined a flexible work schedule as a flexible system for permitting employees (within established limits) to control and redistribute their working hours around organizational demands.

Job satisfaction: Mofoluwake and Oluremi (2013) defined job satisfaction as an individual's attitudes and feelings about his or her employment.

Lower- to middle-level executive positions: Dimovski, Skerlavaj, and Man, (2010) defined lower- to middle-level executive positions as junior to intermediate job positions subordinate to senior-level management positions, including chief information officer, chief financial officer, and chief executive officer, within the hierarchical organization.

Telework: Goodman (2013) defined telework as a process of substituting information communicative technology for job travel, in contrast to the main office

location, including but not limited to any one of the following: (a) working out of the home, (b) working from a satellite office location, or (c) working via a telework center or a number of other job stations.

Virtual work: Mulki, Bardhi, Lassk, and Nanavaty-Dahl (2009) defined virtual work as employment configurations outside of the traditional workplace structure.

Work–family conflict: Md-Sidin, Sambasivan, and Ismail (2010) described work–family conflict as incompatibility between family (personal) and job (professional) commitments due to an individual’s inability to satisfy his or her pressures and responsibilities.

Work–life balance: Yuile, Chang, Gudmundsson, and Sawang (2012) defined work–life balance as achieving harmony (equilibrium) and satisfaction across both professional and personal domains.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The study was specific to employees within a global blood management solutions firm located in the midwestern United States. The population consisted of three lower- to middle-level business executives and six employees. I selected both managerial and employee participants as they represent a holistic sample to provide various perspectives on flexible work schedules and virtual work programs strategies.

Assumptions

Assumptions are notions that the researcher believes to be true and accurate (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I acknowledge several assumptions about the conduct and successful outcome of this study. One assumption was that a minimum of three

executives would be available and willing to share their experiences, thoughts, and opinions on flexible work schedules and virtual work programs within their own professional journeys or observations of others. A secondary assumption was that the study participants would answer all of the interview questions pertaining to work–life balance. A tertiary assumption was that the study participants would provide clear and precise responses and would be truthful in their answers.

Limitations

Limitations are potential shortcomings of the study that are typically out of the researcher’s control (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Study limitations are as follows: (a) small sample size, (b) one hour maximum interview time limit, (c) time constraints to conduct the study, and (d) limited researcher expertise. The sample population was limited as the source of the participants was a single business unit in the Midwestern United States. This limitation is common of qualitative research. Another limitation was the amount of time permitted for this study due to the nature of the Walden University Doctorate of Business Administration program.

Yin (2009) noted that researchers require training when conducting case study research. This study was my first qualitative research experience. To prepare for the rigor of case study research, I took preparatory steps to mitigate bias, risk, and error. These steps included the completion of several graduate-level research design courses, reading numerous peer-reviewed articles, and reviewing case study books as well as dissertations. Based on my limited researcher experience, I also worked closely with my chair and committee members to ensure my study’s validity.

Delimitations

Delimitations are design parameters which are within the control of the researcher, such as the study site location (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The study's sample delimitations included lower- through middle-level executives employed by the consulting firm. Three lower- to middle-level executives participated in semistructured interviews to share their perceptions and experiences in rich detail. Using a semistructured interview format allowed me to elicit additional information from the study participants by asking follow-up questions based on interviewees' answers. I captured the study participants' job title, number of years fulfilling his or her current role, total number of years' experience relating to flexible work schedules and virtual work programs, and current percentage of virtual work program involvement (focus group employees only).

For the purposes of this study, I focused on the preselected interview questions and delved deeper into additional questions as the opportunity presented itself. My goal in conducting this study was to explore the experiences and record the thoughts of both men and women on flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. Therefore, the study population required minimal prescreening and preliminary evaluation. However, it was critical that the participant pool possessed the required flexible work schedule and virtual work experiences to effectively contribute to the collection of data.

Significance of the Study

Work-life balance and work-life satisfaction may have an effect on productivity in the workplace (Mušura et al., 2013). Exploring how flexible work schedules and

virtual work programs affect employee productivity allows me to inform business leaders about policies that may influence employee job satisfaction, affect employee productivity, and affect the firm's financial bottom line. Results from this analysis may also suggest changes in corporate workplace policies.

Contribution to Business Practice

Business leaders seek information about how their current policies may or may not affect employee productivity as flexible work schedules and virtual work policies may affect overall productivity and earnings of the company (Pawar, 2013). Chief executive officers seek to understand and consider the effects of productivity and financial performance on their businesses (Giberson & Miklos, 2013). Publishing the results of this study informs business leaders of the potential effects that flexible work schedules and virtual work programs have on employee productivity, with the potential to position employers to better provision work–life responsibilities. Business leaders may also be unintentionally curtailing productivity and financial growth by not optimizing workplace policies. Based on the conclusions and recommendations in this study, leaders can gain relevant work–life benefit policy knowledge, enabling them to review their internal policies based on this information, identify strategies to improve business policies or job requirement approaches, and potentially influence industry policy standards.

Implications for Social Change

Work–life balance is a concern for both corporate leaders and members of society (Kumar & Charkraborty, 2013). Findings from this research added to the existing body of

knowledge by providing information regarding flexible work schedules and virtual work programs and employee productivity, as well as subsequent recommendations. Findings from this study can serve as a foundation for positive social change. Study data supported the conclusion that flexible work schedules and virtual work programs are beneficial to increasing employee productivity. This study's findings can also catalyze awareness in support of related policies.

This study may be of value to society as its findings better position leaders for success while positioning individuals to attain optimum balance between their personal and professional relationships. Findings from this study also demonstrated how work-life benefit programs affect employee productivity. Findings and conclusions from this study may inform leaders about the strategies managers use for flexible work programs and virtual work programs and assist in preparing organizational leaders to assess their current work-life benefit policies accordingly. Data analysis indicated there is a fluid relationship between work and home; business leaders should be aware of how work-life policies affect their organization as well as their employees. Chief executive officers seek to understand and consider the effects of productivity and financial performance on their businesses (Giberson & Miklos, 2013). Data from this study provide business leaders with the foundational knowledge to implement and maintain flexible work schedules and virtual work programs and further assess whether business leaders' current workplace policies maximize productivity within their organization.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Nicklin and McNall (2013) and Rocereto et al. (2011) indicated that work-life

balance is a critical life element, highly valued by both employees and employers. Workers are placing an increasing value on their time. Family and work are generally considered the two most important domains within an individual's life (Nicklin & McNall, 2013). The proportionate balance between these two domains is a critical component of any working person's life; previous research has confirmed a strong link between work–family balance and overall job satisfaction (Rocereto et al., 2011).

Corporate work–life benefit programs may affect employee job satisfaction and subsequently affect employee productivity. The purpose of this qualitative, explorative single case study was to address the following research question: What strategies do business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs? Conducting a thorough academic review of the literature provided the foundation for this study on flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. Moreover, the findings showed how these nontraditional working arrangements can affect job satisfaction and employee productivity. The literature review supported the rationale behind the study and the associated interview questions.

I obtained literature through searching various scholarly databases to locate articles relevant to the identified subtopics. This literature review contains 85% peer-reviewed articles, as well as 85% articles published within 5 years of the expected date of receiving Walden University's chief academic officer (CAO) approval. Several of the databases I searched included Thoreau, different ProQuest databases, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, various EBSCOhost databases, Academic Search Complete/Premier, ScienceDirect, and ABI/Inform Complete.

Examples of related search terms included *work–life balance and/or conflict, work–life benefit programs, quality of work–life and/or programs, family-friendly work practices and/or policies, job satisfaction, employee and/or organizational and/or labor productivity, flexible work arrangement and/or hours and/or schedule, virtual work and/or work program(s), telecommuting and/or telecommuters, data saturation, member checking, triangulation, exploratory case study, spillover theory, and motivator-hygiene theory*. Supplemental information from books, journals, and metacrawler search engines supported an in-depth research inquiry.

I organized the respective literature by subject matter and content. The literature review includes varying perspectives to build a comprehensive, holistic, nonbiased view of the topic. The primary areas of focus included work–life balance, spillover theory, flexible work schedules, and virtual work programs. Nicklin and McNall (2013) noted that family and work are generally considered the two most important domains within an individual’s life.

Work–Life Balance

The intent of this review and summary was to provide relevant information regarding work–life balance and to understand how work–life balance may affect productivity. The realms of personal and professional lives are not always compatible; conflicts between the two domains are often inevitable (Waumsley, Houston, & Marks, 2010). A number of factors pertaining to work–life benefit programs may affect employee job involvement and sense of competence, which lead to job satisfaction and performance (Pawar, 2013). I studied the work–life benefit areas of flexible work

schedules and virtual work programs.

Personal dissatisfaction in one's working life is a problem affecting almost all employees during their career, regardless of position or status (van der Berg & Martins, 2013). Unhappy workers may influence other happy workers by having negative spillover effects on other employee's performance (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012). Job dissatisfaction can also lead to quit intentions if not promptly addressed (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012). Firms employing dissatisfied workers are at a higher risk for absenteeism due to illness and recurring absence from work without illness (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012). Bockerman and Ilmakunnas also indicated that job satisfaction is one area that reflects neglect in current literature. The primary area of neglect includes research pertaining to the relationship between employee job satisfaction and firm productivity (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012).

Time is an increasingly scarce commodity, and employees are placing greater value on their personal time (Lathois, 2011). Employers support maximization of work-life balance by introducing innovative family-friendly policies that benefit both the business and the employee (Kowsalyadevi & Kumar, 2013). The consequences of work-life conflict are detrimental to both the employer and employee (van der Berg & Martins, 2013). The challenging act of balancing work and life shows in various ways and to various degrees among both men and women, almost universally (Evans, Carney, & Wilkinson, 2013).

Work-life balance has the potential to affect all employed individuals across all types of industries within the workforce. Historically, it would appear that the focus of

the work–life balance topic was strongly placed on women. Khan and Agha (2013) explained that the concept of work–life balance is not confined to one specific gender; the concept is relative and applicable to the entire working population. Dash, Annand, and Gangadharan (2012) supported Khan and Agha’s sentiments and argued that work–life balance affects all classes of employees, is no longer considered to be solely a women’s issue, and that men have difficulty in finding balance between their personal and professional responsibilities as well. Evans et al. (2013) stated that work–life balance issues are relevant and highly important to men. Men typically deal with work-related issues at the cost of their family and personal lives (Khan & Agha, 2013). However, as women generally tend to fulfill the majority of the household duties, women tend to experience greater work–life balance issues than men (Cross, 2010).

Jogulu and Wood (2011) supported Khan and Agha’s (2013) conclusions, noting that women feel an overwhelmingly intense responsibility to fulfill gender-specific roles within the household. Although men have increased their participation in household and family responsibilities, historical and recent literature indicates that women feel as though they still carry the majority of the burden (Jogulu & Wood, 2011). Consequently, women may have a more difficult time balancing the demands of their daily routines; however, work–life conflict can affect both men and women’s careers (Cross, 2010).

Work–life balance is a critical component of any working individual’s life, and previous research has confirmed a strong link between work–family balance and overall job satisfaction (Rocereto et al., 2011). Job satisfaction consists of the attitudes and feelings an individual possesses about his or her employment (Mofoluwake & Oluremi,

2013). Job satisfaction may have the potential to influence employee productivity. High rates of employee job satisfaction are associated with high commitment levels and high productivity (Rama Devi & Nagini, 2013). It would appear that high rates of job satisfaction, coupled with high levels of productivity, might have the potential to affect corporate financial gain.

Job satisfaction may affect employee productivity. Healthy working conditions have the potential to influence job satisfaction (Mohammadi & Shahrabi, 2013). Mohammadi and Shahrabi (2013) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effects of quality of work life on job satisfaction in two Iranian organizations. Using a Likert scale, Mohammadi and Shahrabi distributed a standard survey to a sample of 86 managerial full-time employees of two governmental agencies. Mohammadi and Shahrabi reviewed and critically examined 12 hypotheses pertaining to the survey, examining job satisfaction and quality of work life. Mohammadi and Shahrabi found that various working components, including quality of work life and working conditions, influenced employee job satisfaction (Mohammadi & Shahrabi, 2013). The sample size of 86 employees was an adequate number of participants; however, researchers have not accepted the study results and conclusions as widely applicable to the workforce based on the limited number of companies that participated in the study. Mohammadi and Shahrabi's study results and conclusions were indicative of a positive spillover from a high degree of satisfaction in the study participants' quality of personal life, crossing over into their professional working domain and vice versa. This concept further supports the spillover-crossover conceptual model (Hill et al., 2013).

Work–life imbalance typically arises as a result of a workers’ inability to effectively manage both personal and work commitments due to an inadequate amount of time and support (Odle-Dusseau, Britt, & Bobko, 2012). With the majority of U.S. workers facing work–life issues, this desired, delicate balance continues to pose a great challenge for many corporate employees (Odle-Dusseau et al., 2012). While it appears that men and women perceive balance differently, balance can play a critical role in establishing harmony, both inside and outside of the workplace. A significant number of employees report work–family conflicts, reflective of a labor force in need of balancing work and life demands (Lahamar, Glass, Perrin, Hanson, & Anger, 2013).

Evolving personal and professional demands have the potential to deepen competing stresses between home and work. Family-friendly work practices include flexible work schedules, telework, elder care, parental leave, dependent care, job sharing, and promote organizational attachment and performance (Ko, Hur, & Smith-Walter, 2013). Business leaders continue to consider and reassess work–life benefit, quality of work life, and family-friendly work strategies in response to changing and evolving expectations in the workforce, as well as family life (Ko et al., 2013). Even so, many business leaders and managers are reluctant to promote family-friendly work practice initiatives (Stout, Awad, & Guzmán, 2013). It would appear that business leaders have limited strategies for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs.

Stout et al. (2013) conducted a mixed methods online study that focused on managerial perception of work–life benefit programs. Stout et al. found that managers’ support of work–family programs directly influenced their perception of their employees’

level of personal responsibility. The researchers used snowball sampling to recruit a national sample of 63 participants (36 men and 27 women) employed in U.S. private-sector companies (Stout et al., 2013). Study criteria included managers who supervised two or more employees and offered flextime or telecommuting workplace opportunities.

Stout et al. (2013) sent an online questionnaire to study participants via SurveyMonkey consisting of specific quantitative and qualitative items from the Work and Family Questionnaire. Stout et al. used a modified grounded theory approach to analyze the qualitative data. The researchers considered this analysis a modified grounded theory approach because they used specific questions to gather responses, as opposed to posing open-ended questions (Stout et al., 2013). Results of the study indicated that managers' attitudes toward flextime and telecommuting varied based upon how their employees perceived responsibility (Stout et al., 2013). Stout et al. found that work-life benefit programs could be a positive, beneficial option for both the employer and employee, as long as the worker is a responsible worker. In contrast, if the employee is irresponsible, work-life benefit programs could be to blame.

Sathyanarayara Rao and Indla (2010) indicated that individuals experiencing increased work-life balance reap the following benefits: (a) better health, (b) increased job dedication, (c) greater job satisfaction, (d) clearer goal achievement, and (e) overall family happiness. Individuals who have satisfactory work-life balance experience positive work-to-family spillover and vice versa (Hill et al., 2013). Work-life balance supports greater stability within the family, marital cohesion, employment success, and personal happiness (Sathyanarayara Rao & Indla, 2010). It would appear that these

benefits translate into a joyful, well balanced, and fulfilled life.

Employees may not be the only ones who benefit from a highly balanced work and home life. From a professional perspective, employers experience improved performance and productivity, reduced turnover, and decreased absenteeism and tardiness (Sathyanarayana Rao & Indla, 2010). Veeramani and Gayathri (2013) supported Sathyanarayana Rao and Indla's (2010) conclusions and noted that employers experience greater commitment to quality and productivity when organizations institute quality-of-work-life programs. Chimote and Srivastava's (2013) work-life benefits study also supported Veeramani and Gayathri's notions.

Chimote and Srivastava (2013) studied the benefits of work-life balance among organizations and employees. They collected data for their quantitative study via a structured survey distributed to 100 call center employees of one organization. Multiple regression analysis followed data collection. Based on the analytical results analysis performed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the researchers reached the conclusion that organizational and employee perspectives differed on the benefits of work-life balance programs (Chimote & Srivastava, 2013). Chimote and Srivastava concluded that organizational positive perspectives of work-life benefits included reducing absenteeism and turnover, improving productivity and image, and ensuring loyalty and retention. In contrast, employees' perceptions of the primary benefits of work-life balance were autonomy, improved health, stress reduction, job security, and job satisfaction (Chimote & Srivastava, 2013). Satisfied, well-balanced employees influence productivity in the workplace (Rocereto et al., 2011). The study I conducted

represents an alternative approach to researching work–life balance via a qualitative method. I reviewed a large number of previous studies on this topic and the majority of the studies presented utilized quantitative study methods.

S. J. Jang, Zippay, and Park (2012) studied the relationship between flexibility and employee stress among 2,769 study participants drawn from the 2008 NSCW, a representation of national working adults. Specifically, S. J. Jang et al. examined the role of negative work–family spillover. The original data collected from the NSCW were qualitative in nature and included 50-minute interviews. Study participants included both men and women, and the average age of participants was 45 years. S. J. Jang et al. performed a quantitative analysis to test a variety of flexibility and stress hypotheses on the qualitative data. They concluded that flexibility in work schedules was strongly correlated to minimizing stress and negative work–family spillover (S. J. Jang et al., 2012). One perceived limitation of this study was that it only focused on negative work–family spillover. Another limitation included testing a primarily Caucasian subject population.

Armache (2013) concurred with S. J. Jang et al.'s (2012) conclusions and noted that managers who implement work–life balance practices have the potential to increase productivity. Implementing work–life balance policies tends to increase productivity by decreasing employee tension levels and increasing employee drive and commitment (Armache, 2013). Doble and Supriya (2010), Sathyanarayara Rao and Indla (2010), and Ueda (2012) suggested organization leaders need to enact and improve work–life balance policies. Employees face the constant act of juggling both personal and professional

obligations, trying not to fail any one of their responsibilities. When both personal and professional interests are appropriately balanced and in sync, it would appear that the individual, employer, and entire family reap the benefits.

D'Agostino (2011) discussed the preliminary results of a broader quantitative research project (D'Agostino & Levine, 2010), the purpose of which was to examine the use of work–life balance practices across 50 states. D'Agostino and Levine (2010) asked the purposive sample of 600 administrative agency executives to complete an online survey to assess work–life benefit policies. Based on preliminary results, the participants did use specific work–life practices, such as flexible hours (D'Agostino, 2011). Fifty percent of the employees who worked in a remote location embraced the opportunity to participate in a flexible work hours program (D'Agostino & Levine, 2010). One potential weakness of this study was that, while D'Agostino found employees desired flexible work programs, the researcher did not include how these types of programs have an impact on employee productivity. The research I conducted provided a fresh qualitative perspective on the effects of flexible work schedules and virtual work programs on employee productivity.

A review of the literature indicated that work–life benefit programs have both benefits and drawbacks. Kumar and Chakraborty (2013) noted the following benefits of work–life benefit programs: (a) improved performance, (b) increased productivity, (c) employee satisfaction, (d) sound well-being, (e) enhanced organizational image, (f) improved employee retention, and (g) improved quality of life. The drawbacks of poor work–life balance from both an employee and employer perspective include (a) low level

of morale and motivation, (b) increased number of grievances, (c) work–family conflict, (d) poor wellbeing, (e) low employee retention, (f) low performance and productivity, (g) poor organizational image, and (h) poor quality of life (Kumar & Chakraborty, 2013).

While an increasing number of senior leaders within organizations may be considering work–life benefit policies, leaders that effectively implement work–life benefit programs may have the potential to offer their employees the opportunity for personal flexibility in balancing their everyday personal and professional responsibilities. With more and more employees working outside of the traditional office, employees can also decide when they work (Coenen & Kok, 2014). Given the flexibility and nontraditional nature of these policies, it is important to ensure that such programs do not negatively impact employee productivity. Virtual work and flexible work schedules are the most commonly known and applied workplace programs (Coenen & Kok, 2014).

Verma and Mangaraj (2012) stressed that employees place increasing value on striking the right balance among their personal, professional, and social lives. Both women and men prefer working in positions that accommodate and support work–life balance (Doble & Supriya, 2010). While many previous studies involved an exploration of the benefits and drawbacks of work–life benefit programs, fewer studies have explored the specific relationships between flexible work schedules and employee productivity, as well as virtual work programs and employee productivity.

Spillover Theory

The primary conceptual framework for this study focused on the spillover model. Pleck (1977) was the first researcher to mention the spillover model in his analysis of

work–family role systems and the spillover into both domains (Naithani, 2010). Prior to the 1970s, members of society traditionally considered work and family domains separate entities; however, this notion has since evolved into shared, interconnected platforms (Pleck, 1977).

Hill et al. (2013) further supported Pleck’s notions and suggested that what supports (either negatively or positively) the conditions in the work microsystem will spill over into the family microsystem and vice versa. Hill et al. added that time, energy, organization, and behavior can be strong determinants of work–life balance. Hill et al. argued that if work–family dynamics leave little room for flexibility, then negative spillover in terms of time, energy, and behavior results. Employers who permit employees to integrate work and family responsibilities, actively and efficiently produce positive spillover and a healthier, happier, more productive working staff, resulting in maximized productivity (Hill et al., 2013). Spillover theory dictates that spillover can be both positive and negative (Hill et al., 2013). This theory includes a multidimensional model, whereby work–family spillover can flow in variation as follows: (a) work-to-family positive spillover, (b) family-to-work negative spillover, (c) family-to-work positive spillover, and (d) work-to-family negative spillover (Hill et al., 2013). Perrone, Wright, and Jackson (2009) assessed family-to-work and work-to-family spillover to gain a better understanding of employed individuals’ work–family relationships.

Perrone et al. (2009) studied 661 employees from six firms via a web-based questionnaire and found that more women reported increased family-to-work spillover than did men. This increase in family-to-work spillover is mainly because women remain

the primary household caretakers, raising the potential for negative family-to-work spillover (Perrone et al., 2009). Schneider (2011) concurred and supported Perrone et al.'s findings, agreeing that more women than men spend a disproportionate amount of time on gender-specific tasks outside of work. Schneider found correlations that each area is closely related and likely to influence the other. For example, if an individual experiences family-to-work spillover, he or she is more likely to experience work-to-family spillover.

Performing multiple roles (e.g., spouse, parent, and employee) that require conflicting expectations may have the potential to lead to conflict between roles and affect both personal and professional expectations (Naithani, 2010). However, when properly balanced, it would appear that assuming dual roles could foster or mimic positive outcomes for all involved. Konrad and Yang (2012) argued that the availability and usage of work-life benefits allows employees to perform effectively in both their work and family roles. Based on this finding, Konrad and Yang concluded that equal balance or harmony in fulfilling both roles produces positive and productive outcomes. Spillover is a process by which one person's experience in one domain affects his or her experiences in another domain (Naithani, 2010). Negative spillover at work may carry the strains produced by stressful professional experiences into the home environment, making it challenging to participate in personal endeavors. The spillover theory related to this study as I sought to explore and understand the relationship between work-life benefit programs and employee productivity.

Supporting the spillover theory, scholars have also previously utilized the role

conflict theory (conflict theory) as a foundational means to complement and ground research pertaining to work–family balance and conflict (Buonocore & Russo, 2013). Conflict theory promotes the notion that work–family relationships are bidirectional, in that family has the potential to interfere with work responsibilities, and work has the potential to interfere with family activities (Naithani, 2010). Conflict theory includes time, strain, and behavior based conflict (Naithani, 2010). Time based conflict occurs when an individual has difficulty or cannot complete the activities associated with more than one role (Naithani, 2010). Strain based conflict refers to when the stress, anxiety, or fatigue experienced in one role reduces the effectiveness of the secondary role leading to emotional exhaustion (Naithani, 2010). Behavior based conflict arises when actions that are effective in one particular role are not functional for the secondary role (Naithani, 2010).

In contrast, according to segmentation theory, an independent relationship exists between work and family (Piotrowski, 1979). This independent relationship exists whereby work and personal domain experiences thrive independently of each other (Piotrowski, 1979). Proponents of segmentation theory argue that each distinct environment supports itself and that individuals can function successfully in each environment without any influence or spillover from the other (Piotrowski, 1979).

Similarly, Staines (1980) suggested that compensation theory supports an inverse relationship, whereby work and nonwork relationships are inconsistent with each other. Staines also suggested that what an individual lacks in one setting, they will try to make up for in another. This could explain why an individual would become more involved

with their work when experiencing personal issues. When compensation occurs, one would anticipate elevated involvement within one sphere accompanied by low involvement in another sphere (Staines, 1980).

Although the role conflict theory was a supportive foundational theory applicable to this research, the spillover theory related best to this study as I sought to explore and understand the relationship between work–life balance and employee productivity. Work–life balance may be a prominent topic to both employers and corporations. This area may have the potential to affect balance and productivity both inside and outside of job professions.

Flexible Work Schedules

Flexible work schedules rank high in supporting employees' desires to manage competing responsibilities (Tuttle & Garr, 2012). Employees may respond well to employers who are sensitive to the demanding challenges that personal and professional commitments bring. It would appear that alternative work arrangements might alleviate some of the pressures placed on the employee; however, business leaders may have an interest to understand how nontraditional workplace policies affect their organizations.

Nadler, Cundiff, Lowery, and Jackson (2010) explained that flextime programs support the ability to work a defined number of predetermined hours, leaving flexibility for the remaining hours. Job flexibility remains a prominent theme in improving work–life balance. Both employees and employers place an increasingly strong value on the option of flexibility in work schedules when negotiating job contracts (Nadler et al., 2010). Employees find this flexibility attractive when seeking new potential job openings

(Nadler et al., 2010). Employees value the opportunity to create their own working hours to support personal responsibilities, relieving some of the pressure experienced inside and outside of their place of employment (Nadler et al., 2010). Employees use flexible work hours to manage the day-to-day commitments between their personal lives and professional careers efficiently (Nadler et al., 2010). This attractiveness has the potential to benefit organizations by attracting high-quality employees (Nadler et al., 2010).

Organizations that model flexible work arrangements display to employees the value that managers place on employee personal time (Lathois, 2011). Employees engaged in flexible scheduling have a greater opportunity to better manage and assess the time required to complete their tasks (Lathois, 2011). This commitment engages respect and trust among employees and supervisors, while also fostering employee loyalty to the organization, thus reducing employee turnover (Lathois, 2011).

Available research suggested that flexible timing in work schedules results in improved job satisfaction and overall balance of work and family commitments (Tuttle & Garr, 2012). Employers who support variations in work schedules may promote a healthier and equal balance between employees' personal and professional responsibilities. This flexibility may have the potential to lead to a reduction in employee stress by honoring work as well as family obligations. The minimization of stress may also foster a reduction in employee illnesses, resulting in less employee sick time. Flexibility in working hours can also enhance employee retention (Nadler et al., 2010). Several additional benefits to flexible work schedules may include (a) positive outcomes in productivity, (b) reduced absenteeism, and (c) higher job satisfaction (Nadler et al.,

2010).

Downes and Koekemoer (2012) conducted a qualitative, exploratory study in South Africa to explore the perceived challenges and benefits associated with implementing work–life balance policies, placing a strong focus on flextime. Utilizing semistructured interviews, Downes and Koekemoer drew a purposive, voluntary sample of 15 study participants from an international auditing and consulting organization within the financial sector. Downes and Koekemoer found four main themes from the data collected: (a) individual challenges, (b) general challenges, (c) aspects firms need to successfully implement flextime effectively, and (d) the benefits from implementing flextime. Downes and Koekemoer found that some of the benefits from implementing flextime included work–life balance, employee loyalty, and job commitment. Potential challenges included maintaining productivity, understanding flextime, and a shortage of critical resources (Downes & Koekemoer, 2012). One potential limitation of this study is that it solely focused on one organization and therefore may only be applicable to that organization as opposed to the field (Downes & Koekemoer, 2012). Research inclusive of more than one firm may have strengthened the study. Another point for consideration is that this study focused on one work–life benefit policy (Downes & Koekemoer, 2012). A follow-up study inclusive of additional work–life benefit policies such as virtual work programs and job sharing may expand upon this topic.

McNall, Masuda, and Nicklin (2010) conducted a study of 220 participants to examine the relationship between flexible work arrangements and associated work–life balance. McNall et al. recruited participants from an Internet site called StudyResponse.

The focus of this nonprofit recruitment site is supporting work–life studies aimed at soliciting research participants. McNall et al. captured data for the following demographics: (a) gender, (b) age, (c) marital status, (d) education, (e) number of children, and (f) hours worked. Study participants had a broad range of job experience. Out of the selected 220 study participants, 116 reported that their employer offered flexible work arrangements. Study participants used a Likert-type scale to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each item.

McNall et al. (2010) discovered a common theme: flexibility appeared to be a clear driver with respect to overall job satisfaction. High levels of commitment and productivity are associated with increased levels of employee job satisfaction (Rama Devi & Nagini, 2013). Rama Devi and Nagini (2013) echoed McNall et al.'s findings and concluded that flexible work arrangements support positive organizational outcomes. Specifically, McNall et al. found that flexible work arrangements and compressed workweek schedules directly correlated to work-family satisfaction and balance. Satisfied, well-balanced employees influence productivity in the workplace (Rocereto et al., 2011). Healthier, happier employees with minimized stress levels may be more apt to generate higher levels of productivity and output.

Furthermore, the option to partake in flexible scheduling yields a more productive and engaging work environment (Wickramasinghe, 2012). Moreover, supervisor support moderates the relationship between job flexibility and employee stress in the workplace (Wickramasinghe, 2012). Conversely, placing a focus on flexible work options, reduced hours, and working remotely does not result in less work–life stress (Burg-Brown, 2013).

Using work–life balance policies could result in career burnout (Burg-Brown, 2013). Changing work environments, coupled with increasing access to technology, can result in gray lines between life and work (Burg-Brown, 2013). Flexible time–space workplace policies often result in blurred boundaries between work and home life (Fonner & Stache, 2012; Valoura, 2013). Using information and communication technologies can further enhance these blurred lines (Sayah & Sues, 2013).

McNall et al. (2010) found that flexible work schedules permit employees to better manage and balance both professional and personal obligations. Managing competing responsibilities through flexible workplace models resulted in lower stress, healthier relationships, lower absenteeism, and greater job satisfaction (McNall et al., 2010). Although flexibility is important to both men and women in the workforce, generally speaking, flexibility is essential for women because women are the primary caretakers of the household (Baxter & Chesters, 2011).

Baxter and Chesters (2011) indicated that women require personal control over the duration and scheduling of their working hours. Carlson, Grzywacz, and Kacmar (2010) concurred with Baxter and Chesters and supported the notion that women, as a standard, benefit more from flexible work arrangements than men do. Carlson et al. conducted a quantitative study of 607 participants in which 443 study participants fulfilled traditional work arrangements and 164 followed some form of a flexible work arrangement. As with McNall et al. (2010), Carlson et al. also derived the sample population for their study from the StudyResponse academic service website, the purpose of which is to align researchers with participants willing to complete surveys in response

to research-related inquiries.

Carlson et al. (2010) distributed a survey to study participants to examine the relationship of schedule flexibility with job performance and satisfaction in the personal and professional domains. The researchers also explored variations in gender differences. Carlson et al. performed a regression analysis on the collected data and found that flexible work arrangements, specifically flexibility in scheduling, contributed to enhanced job performance and satisfaction at work and in the family. According to the study results, flexible scheduling minimizes work-family conflict and maximizes work-family enrichment. Specifically, Carlson et al. concluded that schedule flexibility plays a stronger role in women than in men in terms of the work-family interface. In an additional study on flexible work arrangements, Nadler et al. (2010) found that 43% of employees received the opportunity of a flexible work arrangement. In this same study, 79% of the female employees took advantage of the flexible work arrangements, whereas only 63% of the male employees opted to (Nadler et al., 2010).

Based on these studies, it was not clear on how flexible work schedules affect employee productivity. McNall et al. (2010) argued the need for additional research as to virtual work and the effect on employee work-life balance. Chief executive officers are interested in understanding and considering the impacts of productivity and financial performance on their businesses (Giberson & Miklos, 2013).

Virtual Work Programs

Virtual work may be becoming increasingly popular across all industries. A report prepared by the Telework Research Network (Goodman, 2013) indicated that

approximately 3.1 million American workers work from home exclusively, with an even larger percentage working out of the home part-time. Modern communication technologies enable organizations to go virtual by relying primarily on Internet and phone capabilities.

Greer and Payne (2014) explored high performing teleworker strategies, supervisor perception of teleworker challenges, and successful teleworker strategies relating to work-family facilitation and turnover intentions. In addition to their supervisors, 86 high performing virtual workers provided both qualitative and quantitative data (Greer & Payne, 2014). Greer and Payne used a combination of open-ended questions as well as a series of survey questions to support their data collection strategy.

The study results indicated that the use of advanced technology, communicating, task planning, and striving for heightened productivity all contributed to virtual success (Greer & Payne, 2014). This study is not without limitations. One major study limitation included that these study results may not be applicable across other industries (Greer & Payne, 2014). Another limitation was that the study is not inclusive of nonteleworker perceptions (Greer & Payne, 2014).

Mamaghani (2012) reported that the U.S. Census Bureau documented a 61% jump in virtual work from 2005 to 2010. Operative and effective technology is a primary enabler in the design and execution of a successful remote workforce program that benefits both employees and businesses (Rodriguez, 2013). Managers may question the productivity of employees who are not physically present in the office. Mamaghani

suggested examining virtual employee commitment and productivity, with productivity including hours, intensity, and efficiency.

Researchers at a center in Stanford University explored virtual work programs and employee productivity (Goodman, 2013). Stanford University researchers ran a nine-month controlled study at CTrip, the largest travel agency in China, which employs 13,000 individuals. The researchers split the sample population of 255 employees with similar qualifications and team supervisors into two groups: home-based workers and office-based workers. The study results showed that the home-based workers had a 13% increase in productivity, a \$2,000 savings per employee, and staff attrition was half that of office-based workers (Goodman, 2013). As evidenced by this study, cost savings are one of the primary benefits of virtual work programs (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). Nieminen, Nicklin, McClure, and Chakrabarti (2011), Tremblay and Thomsin (2012), and Aboelmaged and El Subbaugh (2012) also noted that organizations have resorted to virtual work to increase productivity.

Productivity outcomes can vary depending on the type of task the employee is performing. Dutcher (2012) used an experimental methods research approach to explore the effects of virtual work on employee productivity, focusing on the role that dull and creative tasks play. Dutcher (2012) recruited participants from Florida State University to take part in multiple tests that included both dull and creative tasks. The experiment included 125 research participants, 52% of which were men. Dutcher asked participants to complete a short behavioral questionnaire. Regression analysis on various hypotheses followed data collection. Dutcher found that out-of-office productivity results were low

for dull, repetitive tasks, whereas creative tasks produced high productivity levels.

Published scholarly literature does not clearly assess the productivity of virtual workers (Dutcher, 2012).

Virtual work may be becoming increasingly popular across various industries. It would appear that businesses are seeking alternative work model options that increase productivity and reduce costs. Organizations continue to adopt virtual work programs in response to the financial savings realized and the unique flexibility of nontraditional workplace policies (Purvanova, 2014). Globalization may be prompting business leaders to implement effective, advanced strategies to gain unmatched competitive advantage. AT&T, Dow Chemical, Nortel, and Sun Microsystems are among a few U.S. firms offering virtual work programs who have benefited from the cost savings. Sun Microsystems and AT&T save \$70 million and \$25 million each year, respectively, on real estate costs alone (Goodman, 2013). While leaders of some corporations hesitate to consider new models of working, virtual work may be becoming an increasing topic of interest in the fresh and innovative trends of large businesses.

As the professional world continues to evolve, the corporate sector can expect dramatic shifts in how and where businesses choose to operate. Virtual work is synonymous with telework (Goodman, 2013). *Telework* is the substitution of information communicative technology for job travel, in contrast to the main office location, including but not limited to any one of the following: (a) working out of the home, (b) working from a satellite office location, or (c) working via a telework center or a number of other job stations (Goodman, 2013). Computer-based technology is an unconventional

alternative to working outside of the conventional job location. Martin and MacDonnell (2012) insisted that a large number of supervisors are hesitant to embrace telework because they see no need or rationale for this type of work.

Goodman (2013) cited the Telework Research Network, who reported that approximately 3.1 million American employees work out of their homes exclusively, with an even greater percentage of part-time remote workers. Telework requires manager trust of employees because managers can have little oversight on a daily basis (Clark, Karau, & Michalisin, 2012). Effective telecommuters are equipped with distinctive traits and are likely to be self-motivated, organized, strong communicators, task-oriented, trustworthy, and have limited need for face-to-face interaction (Clark et al., 2012). Communication, allowing for autonomy, finding a balance between micromanagement and macromanagement, and the increasing role of trust are essential requirements for managing alternative work styles (Richardson, 2010). Clark et al. (2012) and Moser and Axtell (2013) further supported Richardson's (2010) notions and indicated that trust is a critical factor for members of a virtual team. Employers who employ trustworthy, autonomous teleworkers may be more likely to see higher levels of productivity and positive organizational outcomes.

C.-Y. Jang (2013) considered trust to be one of the most challenging and essential aspects of virtual work. Using a quantitative research method, C.-Y. Jang studied factors critical to awareness and trust in virtual work teams. C.-Y. Jang tested a number of hypotheses with seven virtual engineering design teams from universities in the United States, Mexico, and Russia. Each design team consisted of scholars from two locations

presented with the following communication tools: (a) video conferencing systems, (b) telephone and fax, (c) a process-specific e-mail account, and (d) a web-based groupware tool. The results of the regression analysis indicated that communication frequency, task interdependence, and awareness level were both positively associated with trust in virtual teams (C.-Y. Jang, 2013). Trust is an important factor that influences team collaboration and group productivity (C.-Y. Jang, 2013).

Martin and MacDonnell (2012) argued that research shows little correlation between telework and largely positive organizational outcomes. Telework can often be a source of work–life imbalance (Morganson, Major, Oborn, Verive, & Heelan, 2010). Morganson et al. (2010) also noted that working remotely can influence permeability between personal and job domains, subsequently resulting in longer working hours. Quite often, employees may find themselves tied to their cell phones, checking e-mail at all hours of the day and night. This attachment to work may have the potential to cause an unnecessary and conflicting overlap between the two important domains.

Drew (2013) concurred with Morganson et al. (2010) and presented additional drawbacks of telework that include (a) feelings of a lack of camaraderie among employees, (b) minimized knowledge sharing across the team due to the variance in locations, (c) lacking the required technical skills to thrive in a virtual space, (d) maintaining work–life balance, and (e) dealing with distractions. Virtual workers report feelings of a lack of camaraderie as their main challenge (Drew, 2013). In addition to these drawbacks, teleworkers report ergonomic challenges (Ellison, 2012). Leaders of corporations may have the ability to mitigate virtual risks by setting up corporate work

functions for employees to interact in person, fully educate, build relationships, and strengthen team unity.

In contrast, Pyöriä (2011) disagreed with Morganson et al. (2010) and Drew (2013), and explained that telework is worth careful consideration. Telework can foster a more flexible, cost-effective, and ecological alternative working method (Pyöriä, 2011). Societal and individual research has shown positive benefits of telework; however, some modern organizational business leaders have not fully embraced this alternate method of working (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). These benefits include, but are not limited to (a) increased productivity, (b) strengthened organizational commitment, (c) employee retention, and (d) improved performance (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). Additionally, Eng, Moore, Grunberg, Greenberg, and Sikora (2010) supported Martin and MacDonnell (2012), noting that employees who have more control over their work schedule and location generally experience less work–life conflict, greater job satisfaction, and increased productivity. Organizational leaders may have interest to continue to explore the potential benefits of telework, as well as continue to weigh the drawbacks.

Employees may often view working at home and flexible scheduling as valuable and attractive alternatives as they have the option to plan their day around their personal and professional obligations. This planning can minimize sacrifices within both domains and ensure all working components receive the required attention. Hayman (2010), Julien, Somerville, and Culp (2011), Clark et al. (2012), and Maruyama and Tietze (2012) supported the notion that flexible workplace options support job satisfaction. Satisfied, well-balanced employees influence productivity in the workplace (Rocereto et

al., 2011). These options may permit employees to better manage their daily work and family obligations. Employees who successfully manage their everyday responsibilities may experience increased quality of life and decreased levels of stress. Telecommuters report less work-family conflict (Goodman, 2013). Alternatively, a significant proportion of workers report that they work a number of hours at home, which may foster balance, but can also be a source of infringement on the employee's personal life (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012).

Virtual work programs may foster a greater sense of work-life balance and increased productivity in the workplace. However, remote workplace policies can cause negative spillover into the home domain (Adkins & Premeaux, 2014). Technological advances are providing workers with increased location flexibility; however, it is equally important to discuss potential drawbacks and work-life conflict issues (Adkins & Premeaux, 2014). Employees may feel an obligation to check e-mail and work all hours of the day into the evening, on the weekends, and while on vacation (Adkins & Premeaux, 2014).

Often, employers are hesitant to permit employees to work remotely because there can be little oversight and minimal supervision on a regular basis. This resistance indicates a diminished level of trust that could provoke suspicions surrounding an employee's work habits outside of the traditional office environment. Elsbach and Cable (2012) suggested that nontraditional working arrangements, such as telecommuting, could often have negative connotations. Some of these pitfalls include lower quality performance reviews, minimal raises, and fewer promotions (Elsbach & Cable, 2012).

Supervisors must pay critical attention to the following areas: (a) finding the right work–life balance, (b) overcoming workplace isolation, (c) compensating for lack of face-to-face communication, and (d) compensating for lack of visibility (Mulki et al., 2009).

Conversely, passive face time can influence an employee’s professional career. Passive face time includes simply being present on site (Elsbach & Cable, 2012). Being present on site may not account for interactions with other employees, exchange of information with management, or employee productivity. Elsbach and Cable (2012) found that even when employees are equally productive, managers might pass judgment on the remote staff. Managers may even pass judgment on remote employees’ capabilities and their potential for higher-level positions.

Despite resistance from a number of firms, virtual work arrangements have become increasingly prevalent, generating benefits for both employees and companies (Hubers, Schwanan, & Dijst, 2011; Mulki et al., 2009). Benefits to employees include flexibility, increased job autonomy, and availability to respond to family commitments (Hubers et al., 2011; Mulki et al., 2009). According to Kazemi, Shaemi, and Vakili (2011), companies reap the benefits of work–life benefit programs. Drew (2013) concurred with Kazemi et al. and suggested that company benefits include lowered real estate costs, higher productivity, and the convenient ability to hire employees despite their geographical location, with the potential for greater compensation based on the virtual savings. Many Fortune 500 firms, including IBM, Accenture, AT&T, and Procter & Gamble, take increasing advantage of remote work setups, either partially or completely eliminating traditional offices (Mulki et al., 2009).

Based on a review of literature published to date, it appears that virtual work programs could have a positive impact on balancing competing personal commitments with job commitments. Chief executive officers are equally interested in understanding and considering the impacts of productivity and financial performance on their businesses (Giberson & Miklos, 2013). A review of the literature indicated that to date, more researchers conducted quantitative analyses than conducted qualitative analyses. The qualitative nature of this study contributed a fresh, in-depth, holistic perspective to the field of work–life balance and employee productivity research.

Transition and Summary

In this study, I included an overview of work–life balance and theoretical underpinnings of how flexible work schedules and virtual work programs can affect employee productivity. Literature on previous studies regarding work–life benefit programs and employee productivity set the foundation for the study topic. Section 1 introduced the background of the problem that elicited further research on this topic, both the intention and significance of the anticipated research, as well as information defining the population, format, and conduct of the study. A thorough review of historical and current academic literature further supported the subject. The contents of Section 2 address the focus of the project and provide further detailed information surrounding the research method and design, population sample, and data collection and analysis techniques. Section 3 provides (a) data results from the preceding interviews, (b) study conclusions, (c) application to professional practice, (d) implications for social change, and (e) personal recommendations.

Section 2: The Project

In this section, I describe the plan for the research design: (a) study method, (b) population and sampling, (c) data collection techniques, and (d) data analysis. Section 2 includes the actions I took to enhance reliability and validity, as well as the tools for collecting the data. This section sets the foundation and transition into Section 3, which includes data results from the (a) interviews, (b) study conclusions, (c) application to professional practice, (d) implications for social change, and (e) personal recommendations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, explorative single case study was to ascertain the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. The sample population consisted of three lower- to middle-level business executives and six employees within a Midwestern United States division of a global blood management solutions firm. This population is important to business leaders because it is representative of a global consulting firm that employs work–life benefit programs. The research design included the following data sources: (a) semistructured interviews, (b) focus group, and (c) company documentation. With work–life balance at the forefront of societal value, the implications for positive social change included the potential to better empower employees to balance both personal and professional responsibilities while maximizing productivity in their professional positions.

Role of the Researcher

I was the primary data collection instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) first

introduced the notion of humans acting as a research instrument to convey the uniqueness of the qualitative researcher's role throughout the data collection and analysis process. Only human beings can bring the responsiveness, flexibility, and sensitivity needed for scientific inquiry, making humans the most appropriate instrument for inquiries targeting understanding, meaning, deconstruction, or critical awareness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As the key research instrument, I employed an interview protocol (see Appendix E) as the foundation for semistructured, qualitative interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2011) argued that semistructured interviews are the most effective strategy for the researcher to gain a deep understanding of an individual's experience and fully address the research question. My role included performing the following tasks: (a) analyzing the current literature surrounding this topic; (b) constructing a series of relevant, useful interview questions; (c) interviewing preselected participants; (d) collecting and analyzing the data; and (e) presenting the research findings to make solid conclusions and recommendations.

As Turner (2010) noted, it is critical to view data without personal bias to ensure accurate, reliable, and valid conclusions; data coding processes are a helpful technique to mitigate researcher bias. Incorporating a focus group as well as the assessment of company documentation also mitigated the chances for introducing bias that can sometimes occur when the researcher relies on just one data source or method. Methodological triangulation mitigates the chances for introducing bias that can sometimes occur when the researcher uses only one data source or method.

The primary data sources for this study were study participants who met the

predefined eligibility criteria necessary for answering the research question. Secondary and tertiary data sources included a focus group and company documentation, respectively. I have some experience with flexible work schedules and virtual work programs, having participated in both types of programs over the course of my career. The participants did not work at the same company as me. No prior relationship existed between the research participants and me. However, the participants may have known each other within their common company.

Using a qualitative, exploratory single case study design, I facilitated a series of three face-to-face interactions with managerial study participants via semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. Turner (2010) recommended following the same interview techniques for all study participants. Therefore, I created my own interview protocol and employed the same interview techniques and procedures for all research participants. During the interview process, researchers must pay close attention to their conduct to ensure they do not cross ethical boundaries and they maintain participants' protection (Gibson et al., 2013). Maintaining ethical boundaries enforced the protection of human subjects. In further support of assuring ethical conduct, I adhered to the Belmont Report protocol, supporting respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

A transcriptionist read and signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix G) and subsequently transcribed the interview data. Follow-up questions helped me to clarify the data. To assign meaning to the data, I performed a manual mind-mapping analysis to narrow emerging themes and trends. Ethical standards required careful consideration. As Gibson, Benson, and Brand (2013) noted, researchers must pay close attention to study

conduct procedures to assure the ethical protection of all participants.

Participants

Moustakas (1994) suggested that in qualitative research, experiences of the phenomenon serve as the basis for selection of study participants. Miles and Huberman (1994) added that a smaller sample size, as opposed to a larger sample size is sufficient in qualitative research. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggested that guidelines for determining nonprobabilistic sample sizes are virtually nonexistent. Therefore, I asked three lower- to middle-level executives with related flexible work schedule and virtual work program experiences to participate in semistructured interviews to share their rich, detailed experiences and perceptions on employee productivity. Additionally, a focus group of six employees provided their experiences with flexible work schedules and virtual work program effects on productivity. The study participants were all employed within the same organization. To improve the quality and relevance of the data, preselected participants partook in the study via personal networking within the consulting firm. Pre-existing contacts within the firm assisted with gaining access to the appropriate lower- to middle-level executives and focus group employees to ensure that the study participants possessed the required experience. Initial working relationships were established via e-mail.

I conducted multiple interviews to collect the data. Three mid-level managers participated individually in three semistructured interviews in which they recounted their personal experiences and perceptions regarding flexible work schedules and virtual work programs, as well as two follow-up *member checking* interviews. A total of six

employees participated in a 2 hour focus group session that generated a lively discussion and produced an abundance of data.

To protect the privacy of the research participants, all confidential information, including the company name and study participant names were intentionally omitted from the study. At the time of the interviews, I assigned a research participant code to each of the participants. The mid-level managers were assigned research codes ranging from M01- M03. All employees within the focus group session were assigned research codes ranging from E01-E06. However, in the transcription there was no way to differentiate each focus group participant; therefore, in the presentation of the findings, all focus group participants are referred to collectively as *FG01*. Although infrequent, I deleted any inadvertent mention of specific names from the transcripts.

The study sample formed a diverse group of individuals with varying gender, ethnicities, backgrounds, and experience. All participants reported to a central office located in the midwestern United States, where the interviews and focus group sessions took place. Study participants possessed various backgrounds spanning across new product development, software engineering, and customer support. The managerial participants all possessed related experience implementing or maintaining flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. The demographics of the managerial study sample revealed a male to female ratio of 2:1. The manager participants presented flexible work schedule and virtual work program experience ranging from 5 years to 18 years.

Establishing initial working relationships with the participants was essential for collecting valuable, reliable data. I articulated study expectations during the beginning of

the interview process to support the desired outcomes of the study. Establishing credibility with the participants, respecting opinions, perceptions, and experiences, as well as maintaining clear and open communication contributed to building a successful, ethical working relationship (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). Maintaining ethical principles throughout research process is critical (Gibson et al., 2013). To protect participants' rights, I utilized coded data and stored all electronic information on a password-protected laptop and currently store hard copies locked in a cabinet in my home. Keeping participant information private maximized a confidential working relationship with each interviewee. I will retain data related to the participants via electronic and hard copy for 5 years. After the 5 year retention period has passed, I will destroy the portable USB device and shred the relevant hard copies.

Research Method and Design

A review of current research methods identified three methodologies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). All three methods were viable research options, equal in preference, each with its own inherent strengths and pitfalls (Case & Light, 2011). After a thorough evaluation of the three available research methods, based on the research question, I selected a qualitative method and explorative single case study design.

Method

The qualitative method was the research approach for this study as I sought to explore and capture managerial experiences and personal viewpoints. The qualitative method provides researchers with an understanding of the participants' beliefs, values,

and perceptions (Montero-Marín et al., 2013). Moustakas (1994) supported Montero-Marín et al.'s conclusions, and offered that qualitative research allows for vibrant, frank discussions enriched with personal experiences. Qualitative studies also incorporate open-ended questions that represent the basis for the in-depth exploration of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The primary intent of conducting this study was not to test objective hypotheses or theories; therefore, quantitative methodology did not meet the purpose. Researchers conduct quantitative studies to address a problem by testing objective theories through examining the relationships and differences among sets of variables (Frels & Onweugbuzie, 2013). The goal of this study was not to test objective theories, but rather to explore the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. Frels and Onweugbuzie (2013) further explained that in quantitative research, the researcher quantifies the results and highlights issues based on testing of the preconceived hypotheses. The qualitative research method met the goals of this study (versus the quantitative approach) because the intention of this study was to capture participant conjecture in response to open-ended inquiries.

Mixed methods research is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry within a single study (Thomas et al., 2011). The purpose of the present study was not to support quantifiable results based on preconceived hypotheses, but rather to explore and capture detailed information regarding the experiences of managers and employees. A mixed method approach might have provided a further intensive view into the research topic; however, the mixed-method approach was not the most viable

research option for this study given the additional complexity that mixed-method study approaches entail. A mixed method approach would not have fully aligned with the intent of the study which was to explore the research phenomenon comprehensively using a qualitative, exploratory approach.

Research Design

I chose the exploratory single case study design based upon the research question. Yin (2003) suggested considering the case study design when attempting to answer questions of *how* and *why* regarding a particular phenomenon. Additionally, Yin (2009) suggested that the case study design supports retaining holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as work–life balance and employee productivity. Conducting a qualitative, case study approach permitted the participants to describe their experiences in-depth and at length (Groenewald, 2004). Further supporting the research design I selected, Baxter and Jack (2008) stated that, as a form of qualitative research, case studies could inform professional practice or evidence-informed decision making inclusive of policy realms.

Prior to selecting the case study approach, I considered several other qualitative study designs, including ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative designs. Ethnography research is a form of inquiry targeted toward a specific cultural group over an extended period of time using primarily observational and interview data (Wägar, 2012). A mini-ethnographic study could have potentially satisfied the purpose of this study; however, the intent was not to study (observe) the day-to-day interactions and lives of a specific group. Another point for consideration was the difficulty of observing

people working in a virtual environment. There were also time and resource constraints that would have prevented a mini-ethnographic type of design implementation. The phenomenological approach focuses on describing the details and meanings of personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Through phenomenology, the researcher encourages the participant to describe his or her individual lived experiences on specific subject matter and, in turn, interpret these data to form conclusions and recommendations (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) described the phenomenological research design as that in which the data provide real, personal life experiences of the individuals involved pertaining to the subject matter. Phenomenology partially met the research criteria related to the participants' experience; however, the research design would not have been the most effective option for my study, given the desired in-depth inquiry of study participants working for one company. The narrative research design did not support the goal of the research, as I did not wish to study the lives of the participants, nor combine those views with personal life experiences to form a collaborative narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Yin (2003) grouped case studies into three distinct categories: (a) descriptive, (b) explanatory, or (c) exploratory. Yin (2003) noted that descriptive case studies are focused on propositions about a phenomenon where the researcher carefully scrutinizes the phenomenon from the onset of the research. Explanatory case studies differ from descriptive case studies as explanatory case studies aid in the explanation of causal relationships used to develop theory (Yin, 2003). Exploratory case study research aids the

researcher in investigating distinct phenomena; often where there is minimal preliminary research in the field (Yin, 2003). I was not looking to describe a phenomenon or to examine how particular events occurred with supportive cause-and-effect relationships. Since my goal was to explore a phenomenon that had no clear set of outcomes (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011), the exploratory single case study design was the appropriate design option.

I reviewed and considered several alternative types of case study designs including historical case study design and Stake's (1995) intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case study designs. Historical case study analysis was not required because the purpose of this study was not to draw conclusions from past events over time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Stake (1995) and Baxter and Jack (2008) noted that intrinsic case study design is not appropriate for studies in which the intent is understanding a phenomenon that supports generalized research findings to the broader populations. Intrinsic case study research is specific to individual situations or events and does not meet the purpose of this study. The intent of instrumental case study research is to understand a theoretical question better or problem and the actual case under investigation is of secondary importance (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The goal of using instrumental research is to understand the theoretical underpinnings of the issue (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Instrumental design was not appropriate as exploring and understanding the case, not an underlying issue within the case, was the objective.

Stake (1995) stated that collective case study design is similar to that of multiple case study design because it enables the researcher to compare and discover variances

within and between cases. The intent of this single case study was to explore a phenomenon, focusing on one case study, and not to compare and contrast between multiple scenarios. In summary, I selected the exploratory design over the other possible designs in support of exploring a phenomenon that did not have a clear set of outcomes.

Population and Sampling

The population consisted of a purposive sample of three low to midlevel business executives for semistructured interviews and six employees for a focus group. The participants were employed at a midwestern United States division of a global blood management solutions firm and provided information on flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. Patton (2002) and McMillan and Schumacker (2005) agreed that there are no implied restrictions in qualitative inquiry regarding sample size; instead, data are the personal perceptions of the study participants. McMillan and Schumacker further suggested that the insights generated from a purposive sample via qualitative inquiry rely heavily upon the information richness of the individual experiences and the analytical capabilities of the researcher, rather than on the sample size. However, a smaller sample size was preferable when conducting exploratory-focused interviews (Patton, 2002). Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2013) agreed that purposive sampling within a qualitative study included using a small number of individuals and locations to collect information to generalize the findings to a larger population. Using a purposive sample aided in capturing rich and varied data in support of the study conclusions, resulting in a maximized representation of participants' views (Montero-Marín et al., 2013).

I conducted three interviews with each individual middle level executive. The first

interview served to capture in-depth data, with the second interview serving as a follow-up interview, while the tertiary interview provided an opportunity for member checking.

Data saturation occurs when no new data add findings or themes (Bowen, 2008).

Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that additional interviews might be required to assure the researcher achieved data saturation. Additional interviews were not required as data saturation occurred by the close of the third interview. Utilizing 60 in-depth interviews, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) used data saturation as a qualitative research technique to ensure exhaustion of new data information or themes. Follow-up and member checking interviews assisted to achieve data saturation and to ensure an information-rich case. The population was sufficiently narrow to produce a clear outcome based on the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and the availability of data sources was sufficient to enable flexibility to support data saturation.

McMillan and Schumacker (2005) indicated that the proposed sample size be shared and reviewed with other scholars. The doctoral study committee reviewed the proposed sample size. The eligibility criteria for participants included (a) over the age of 18 years, (b) currently employed by the targeted consulting firm, (c) occupied at a minimum an associate level position or at a maximum a midlevel manager position, and (d) willing to share their personal experiences or perceptions of flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. I captured each study participant's job title, number of years fulfilling his or her current role, total number of years' experience relating to flexible work schedules and virtual work programs, and current percentage of virtual work program involvement (focus group employees only).

Ethical Research

I conducted this study under the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number 11-24-14-0167383. Researchers must be mindful of their conduct to ensure they do not cross ethical boundaries and they maintain participants' protection (Gibson et al., 2013). Interviewees must provide informed consent for their participation in the research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). As part of the participant recruitment process, I e-mailed the invitation to participate in research communication (see Appendix B) with the informed consent form (see Appendix C). E-mailing the invitation to participate in research communication provided the participants with ample time to review the study procedures in advance and reply with any questions or concerns the participants may have had in regard to their role in the study. Study participants reviewed and provided their consent to participate in the research via e-mail, acknowledging their voluntary participation and agreement to participate in the interviews. Providing participants with the opportunity to consent in advance of the interview prevented undue pressure on the potential participant to join the study. Study participants did not receive any incentives for study participation.

I maintained company and participant confidentiality and continued to engage with participants, negotiating and reaffirming informed consent throughout the process (Pollock, 2012). All participants maintained the right to withdraw from the study at any time. No participants withdrew from the study. However, if a participant chose to withdraw from the study, the study participant would have witnessed the destruction of any personal study records (e.g., audio recordings, memory device, notes) that had

surfaced. Coded data remains on a password-protected laptop and hard copies locked in a cabinet within my home. Data related to the remaining participants exists in electronic and hard copy form for 5 years. After the 5 year retention period has passed, I will destroy the portable USB device and shred the relevant hard copies.

Data Collection

Data collection was a key component of this doctoral research. It was imperative to formulate a master plan that clearly identified and articulated critical strategies for data collection, organization, and analysis. I created the study plan to ensure accurate and reliable study results.

Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) first introduced the concept of humans acting as a research instrument to convey the uniqueness of the researcher's role throughout the qualitative data collection and analysis process as only human beings can bring the responsiveness, flexibility, and sensitivity needed for scientific inquiry. As the key research instrument, semistructured, qualitative interviews occurred, while utilizing an interview protocol (Appendix D).

The decision to conduct qualitative interviews followed from the need to obtain rich, personalized insight into the lived perceptions about the phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1994). In qualitative research, the researcher uses interview questions that enable interviewees to offer in-depth responses that the parameters of a quantitative method would not. I utilized three sources to support data collection: (a) semistructured interviews, (b) a focus group, and (c) company documentation.

Employees participated in a focus group to provide a variety of employee viewpoints to enrich data collection in support of methodological triangulation. Existing type of company documentation served as the tertiary data collection source. Semistructured interviews consisted of open-ended, follow-up, and probing questions.

The semistructured format proved useful in collecting in-depth information regarding flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. Marshall and Rossman (2011) argued that semistructured interviews are the most effective means for the researcher to gain a deep understanding of an individual's experience and fully address the research question. An interview protocol (see Appendix C), sometimes referred to as an *interview guide*, was the secondary instrument throughout the interviews with all participants. Using the same interview guide helped me to establish and ensure the reliability, consistency, and validity of the semistructured interviews.

Member checking served as a tool to assure data validity. Marshall and Rossman (2011) defined member checking as a process whereby the researcher provides selected representatives with the opportunity to review the interpretation of the participants' personal responses in support of data completeness and interpretation accuracy. Study participants had the opportunity to member check my data interpretation to ensure correct explanation of the information they shared during the previous interview. Following data collection and analysis, researchers may wish to integrate member checking to provide research participants with the opportunity to contribute new or additional perspectives on the issue under study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). No study participants wished to alter the documented information captured. The transcript remains as originally written and I

captured additional notes as required. Member checking also assisted in establishing *dependability* in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Incorporating a focus group, as well as the assessment of company documentation, also mitigated the chances for introducing bias that can sometimes occur when the researcher relies on just one data source or method. Methodological triangulation is a combination of information sources, such as individuals or data types, used as evidence to analyzing data as a premise that enhances internal validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Methodological triangulation assisted in the assertion of data themes. The data were indicative of associated themes across multiple data sources that aided in the assessment, interpretation, and development of conclusions from the information collected.

Data Collection Technique

The primary data collection technique was semistructured interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2011) concluded that semistructured interviews are the most effective strategy for the researcher to gain a deep understanding of an individual's experience and fully address the research question. Researchers use probing questions to obtain the most relevant, accurate, and in-depth information (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). If the study participant did not fully address the question presented or offered an inadequate answer, rephrasing strategies and probing questions stimulated additional, related responses.

Downes and Koekemoer (2012) found that semistructured interviews were an effective approach to learn about how flexible work programs have an impact on employee productivity. Similarly, S. Y. Jang et al. (2012) used semistructured interviews

to explore the various roles of flexibility in workplace schedules. Therefore, I utilized semistructured interviews to explore how flexible work schedules and virtual work programs affect employee productivity.

Pre-existing contacts within the firm assisted with gaining access to my study's participants. The pre-existing contacts ensured that the participants were low-midlevel managers (in-depth interviews) or associates (focus group) and possessed the required experience. E-mail served as the initial contact method with all participants. The *low-pressure* e-mail included high-level information about my study's conduct procedures as well as the informed consent document, which the participants reviewed and consented to prior to the first in person meeting. Participants provided consent via e-mail in advance of the interview. The process required to complete the face-to-face semistructured interviews included a review of study processes and participant roles, agreement to participate in the study by providing e-mail consent, and answering a series of questions to probe the participants' mind and elicit information. I also requested company documentation during the in-depth interviews.

Audio file transcription occurred upon completion of the interviews. Following transcript and note interpretation, I scheduled time with the interview participants for member checking procedures to assist with ensuring the reliability and validity of the data. Study participants had the opportunity to member check my data interpretation (synthesis) to ensure correct explanation of the information they shared during the previous interview. Conclusions and recommendations followed data analysis. The following community stakeholders will receive a high-level summary of the study results

via e-mail: (a) research participants, (b) immediate family, and (c) the research site contact.

In addition to conducting three semistructured interviews with low to mid-level business executives, I used a focus group to capture a consensus of employee experiences pertaining to flexible work schedules and virtual work program to enhance data collection for methodological triangulation. Existing company documentation served as the tertiary data collection source. Case study researchers often opt to review existing documentation related to the research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). During the facilitation of the in-depth interviews, I requested copies of the company's related documentation.

I reviewed the current work-life benefit workplace documentation of the employer, focusing on flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. Case study researchers benefit from incorporating multiple forms of sources into their data collection strategies. Assimilating more than one data source helped assure the findings' validity as the various units of data are merged together to support a greater understanding of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Including semistructured interviews and a focus group, coupled with a review of current policy documentation, strengthened the findings and lead to a greater understanding of the case.

The selection of the appropriate method, design, and instrumentation ensured the assembly of accurate data and enabled the formation of accurate conclusions (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Interview protocols serve as one of the most popular instruments in qualitative research (Turner, 2010). An interview protocol (see Appendix E) served as a secondary instrument throughout the interviews with all participants. As Marshall and

Rossmann (2011) noted, using the same guide helped me to establish and ensure the reliability and validity of the semistructured interviews. The interview process assisted in measuring the personal perceptions of the participants.

Data saturation occurs when no new data add findings or themes (Bowen, 2008). Marshall and Rossmann (2011) stated that additional interviews might be required until the researcher achieves data saturation. Utilizing 60 in-depth interviews, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) used data saturation as a qualitative research technique to ensure exhaustion of new data information or themes. Therefore, I performed member checking interviews to gain more in-depth information and reach data saturation.

The population was narrow enough to produce a clear outcome based on the qualitative data obtained throughout the interviews and ensured flexibility to support data saturation. An hour maximum time limit was set for each of the semistructured interviews. I carefully considered the length of the interview time based upon the quality and content of the information provided and introduction of new perspectives. I used flip charts to assist me in capturing the focus group data, which with the agreement of the six employee participants, I synthesized throughout the working session.

Data Organization Techniques

Data organization was a critical component for analyzing and interpreting my study's data. Case study research requires ongoing organization, examination and interpretation of the data, unlike other forms of research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). I organized the data from the study using an electronic filing system to support simplicity and ease of data retrieval. The data and supporting document components included (a)

informed consent agreement, (b) company permission letter, (c) interview transcripts and interpretation of each interview data for member checking, (d) focus group data, and (e) company documentation.

Data organization and analysis assists the researcher in answering the research questions (Basurto & Speer, 2012). A transcriptionist transcribed the data into Microsoft Word. I stored the data on a password-protected laptop and retained hard copies locked in a cabinet within my home. I am storing data in both electronic and hard copy format within my home for 5 years. After the 5 year retention period has passed, I will destroy the portable USB device and shred the relevant hard copies.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis and interpretation are two important components of the research process (Basurto & Speer, 2012). An audio recorder (and backup recorder) captured the conversations of each in-depth interview and focus group session. A hired transcriptionist transcribed the data into Microsoft Word. After data collection and post member checking, I triangulated the interview data, focus group data, and company documentation. Data analysis assists researchers in answering the research questions (Basurto & Speer, 2012). Methodological triangulation assisted in my identifying themes that aided in the assessment, interpretation, and conclusions of the information collected.

Participants may be more inclined to produce open and honest results if they are aware that the recorded interview responses will remain confidential (Ivey, 2012). The organization name, along with participant names were not disclosed. Demographic details and site descriptions were limited to maximize participant protection. Random participant

codes represented each study participant. Utilization of this code preserved the identity of each of the interviewees. The code was helpful in organizing and classifying the data after the interviews were complete. A professional transcriptionist entered the interview data from my recording to a Word document. I analyzed and summarized the study results based on the (a) coded transcripts, (b) detailed notes, (c) flip chart data, and (d) company documentation.

Coding and categorization allowed classification, sorting, and arrangement of the information in the most efficient, uniform manner (Basurto & Speer, 2012). Once sorted properly, I assessed the information to seek themes that support the findings of common themes or trends (Bishop & Lexchin, 2013). Based on emerging themes, an assessment of potential spillover from work to family or family to work occurred. This assessment determined how spillover theory explains flexible work schedules, and virtual work programs, and how flexible work schedule and virtual workplace policies can affect employee productivity.

Delineation was another crucial step in the explication process of data analysis. During the delineation stage, I focused on the statements that were the most clarifying in relation to the study topic. Extraction of the relative statements occurred followed by clustering. It was important to maintain substantial personal discretion and judgment; the researcher must bracket his or her own presuppositions to achieve maximum results (Groenewald, 2004). Clusters of themes emerged as evaluation of the statements occurred, revealing similar units of meaning. The researcher may notice and should expect to see an overlap in clusters (Groenewald, 2004).

During this time, I also noted important topics, also referred to as units of significance (Groenewald, 2004). Groenewald (2004) indicated that central themes make themselves present after a thorough analysis of the data and clusters. Clustering and analyzing the collected data assisted in developing themes across flexible work schedules and virtual work programs and the subsequent effect on employee productivity. Once the data was coded, categorized, and clustered, triangulation occurred, incorporating three data sources, followed by the assertion of common themes.

Triangulation refers to crosschecking data from multiple sources. Triangulation is the process of aligning multiple perspectives and leads to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using methodological triangulation, I identified themes across multiple data sources, that aided in the assessment, interpretation, and conclusion of the information collected. Triangulation can occur through the use of multiple data sources, multiple methods of data collection (individuals, focus groups), multiple data collectors (a minimum of two interviewers), multiple data collection points (same participant interviewed several times over a defined time period), or multiple theories (utilizing theories from various disciplines) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The four types and definitions of triangulation include (a) data: time, space, and persons; (b) investigator: multiple researchers; (c) theoretical: using more than one theoretical theme to interpret the phenomenon; and (d) methodological: more than one method to gather data such as interviews, observations, and documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I conducted methodological triangulation in this study via three data collection sources, including three in-depth interviews, a focus group of employee

perspectives, and company documentation reviews.

Member checking also served as a tool to increase the accuracy and credibility of the data. Throughout the analysis phase, careful consideration for design, approach, and processes helped to ensure the study results were reliable and valid. Based on the emerging data trends, I focused on key themes and compared the key themes with the literature (inclusive of newly published studies), as well as the spillover theory. Hill et al. (2013) suggested that what supports (either negatively or positively) the conditions in the work microsystem will spill over into the family microsystem and vice versa. Hill et al. added that time, energy, organization, and behavior can be strong determinants of work–life balance. Hill et al. posited that if work-family dynamics leave little room for flexibility, then negative spillover in terms of time, energy, and behavior results. Post data and literature analysis indicated potential spillover from work to family, or family to work, can influence the desire for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research requires an imaginative, expressive, and inventive approach to assessing quality (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). In qualitative research, a rich description of interview content can support the ability to draw accurate and valid outcomes based on patterns of behaviors. The design and data of the study must support the ability to make accurate conclusions (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Qualitative researchers have presented varying perspectives on the meaning and applicability of assuring and assessing studies' reliability and validity. Moustakas (1994) stated that reliability is a direct result of data collection that allows for study replication in an

alternative setting. Patton (2002) noted that qualitative researchers should carefully consider reliability and validity while planning a study design, analyzing data results, and assessing the overall quality of the study. If the goal of conducting research is to evoke reliable and valid information, then the most critical aspect of a qualitative study is the quality of the information retrieved. The selection of the appropriate method and instrument ensures the assembly of accurate data and enables the formation of accurate conclusions (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

Reliability

An interview protocol (see Appendix E) served as the secondary instrument throughout the interviews with all participants. Using the same guide with the same questions in consecutive order helped me to establish and ensure the reliability of the semistructured interviews. Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed the notion of *dependability* as an alternative criterion for judging the reliability and trustworthiness of qualitative research. Dependability requires the researcher to consider the constant changes within the context of which the research occurs (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Dependability is not measureable and needs to be established using other qualitative means, such as member checking and triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Marshall and Rossman (2011) defined member checking as a process whereby the researcher provides selected representatives with the opportunity to review the interpretation of the participants' personal responses in support of data completeness and interpretation accuracy. I included member checking in this study to provide the interviewees with the opportunity to clarify the interpretation and possibly furnish

supplemental perspectives on the study (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines served as the foundation throughout conducting this study. Following the IRB guidelines maximized the protection of human subjects, as well as increased the reliability of the study processes and avoided potential data corruption. Introducing bias, whether intentional or not, could negatively affect the validity of the data.

Validity

Validity threats include flawed processes and personal bias. As with study reliability, Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed the construct of qualitative *credibility* as an alternative criterion for judging the internal validity in qualitative research. The concept of credibility emphasizes that because qualitative research describes a phenomenon from a participant's perspective, the study participants are the only sources who can accurately assess and validate the truth of the data and the credibility of the conclusions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Methodological triangulation also further supports and enhances credibility.

Guba and Lincoln also proposed the notion of *transferability* as an alternative criterion for judging the external validity of qualitative research. Transferability refers to the degree to which the researcher can generalize or transfer qualitative research results to other settings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Marshall and Rossman (2011) discussed that transferability should be left to the researcher planning the next study.

Methodological triangulation is a combination of information sources, such as individuals or data types, used in analyzing data as a premise that enhances credibility

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Methodological triangulation also mitigates the chances for introducing bias that can sometimes occur when the researcher uses only one data source or method. During the course of the interviews, the researcher must remain unbiased to the subject matter. Moustakas (1994) noted that *epoché* is the first step of the reduction process. Personal views and judgments must be set aside to avoid compromising the integrity of the data. To achieve *epoché*, researchers must be cognizant of avoiding predeterminations and rely solely on the study data provided (Moustakas, 1994). Similar to bracketing, it was important for me to maintain substantial personal discretion and judgment, and *bracket* presuppositions to achieve valid results (Groenewald, 2004).

Data saturation occurs when no new data add to current findings or themes (Bowen, 2008). Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that additional interviews might be required until the researcher achieves data saturation. Utilizing 60 in-depth interviews, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) used data saturation as a qualitative research technique to ensure exhaustion of new data information or themes. Additional interviews may be required until the researcher achieves data saturation. Bowen (2008) stated data saturation has occurred when (a) no new data emerge, (b) no new themes emerge, (c) no new coding is needed, and (d) one can replicate the study to achieve the same results. Data saturation requires that the target population be narrow enough to produce a clear outcome based on the qualitative data obtained throughout the interviews, and ensure flexibility. Therefore, I assured data saturation existed prior to completing my exploration of the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. Follow-up interviews and member checking sessions supported information-rich cases and data

saturation. Utilizing this approach strengthened the assurance of validity of the data.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included an in-depth view into the study design by reiterating the focus of the project and the associated details of the study plan. Providing further detailed information regarding the (a) research method, (b) study design, (c) population sample, and (d) data collection techniques, served as a strategy to enhance reliability and validity. Section 3 includes interview data, focus group findings, and company documents with my interpretations, analysis, and presentation of key themes. I relate my findings to the conceptual framework and current literature to provide the (a) study conclusions, (b) application to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, and (d) personal recommendations.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Sections 1 and 2 provided an explanation of why this study is important to business leaders, as well as detailed information on the study design and implementation procedures. This final section includes (a) the interview data, (b) focus group findings, (c) company documents along with my interpretations, (d) results analysis, and (e) presentation of key themes. I relate my findings to the study's conceptual framework, as well as to other relevant theories and the existing body of relevant literature to provide (a) study conclusions, (b) application to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, and (d) personal recommendations.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this qualitative, explorative single case study was to ascertain the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. Through qualitative research, one can develop an understanding of the participants' views and experiences (Montero-Marín et al., 2013). The format of qualitative interviews allowed for open-ended questions that represented the basis for the in-depth exploration of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), and addressing the research question. The conceptual framework for this study stemmed from the spillover theory.

Prior to the 1970s, members of society traditionally considered work and family domains separate entities; however, the concept of considering work and family separate domain entities has since evolved into shared, inter-connected platforms (Pleck, 1977). Spillover theory dictates that spillover can be either positive or negative (Hill et al.,

2013). This explanation includes a multidimensional model, whereby work-family spillover can flow in variation as follows: (a) work-to-family positive spillover, (b) family-to-work negative spillover, (c) family-to-work positive spillover, and (d) work-to-family negative spillover.

I explored the following central research question: What strategies do business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs? Based on predefined criteria, three midlevel managers participated in three separate series of individual interviews. Each of the managerial study participants responded to a series of the same 10 open-ended questions. Probing questions aided in receiving detailed level of responses. The use of probing questions elicits in-depth responses resulting in an abundance of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I also facilitated a focus group session of six company employees who provided their collective input on flexible work schedules and virtual work for employees as opposed to managers to provide a well-rounded, comprehensive view from cross-segments of the respective organization.

After professional transcription of the data, methodological triangulation assisted in the definition and verification of derivative themes across multiple data sources, that aided in the assessment, interpretation, and conclusion of the information collected. The focus group participants and I synthesized the data at the time of the focus group session. Company documentation served as the tertiary data source. After signing a waiver, the human resources department provided me with three company policy documents including: (a) Telecommuting Policy, (b) Flexible/Alternative Work Schedule Policy, and (c) Flexible Working Regulation-Bothwell.

Presentation of the Findings

This section contains an introduction to the various themes that emerged from exploring the study's data. Based on the central research question, data analysis of participant responses subsequently identified a total of five core themes that pertained to the various strategies that business leaders use for developing, implementing, and maintaining flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. The findings related to managerial strategies regarding (a) employee productivity, (b) working hours, (c) communication, (d) virtual office setups, (e) job satisfaction, and (f) quality of life. This presentation of findings intentionally excluded redundant information and extraneous data.

Theme 1: Standard Set of Virtual Working Hours

Promote a standard set of core working hours (minimal required) based on geographical demands and time-zone variations enabling consistent coverage for designated time-blocks, while offering employee schedule flexibility to start early or end late.

The *standard set of virtual working hours* finding was new to the best of my knowledge as I did not uncover this specific strategy when reviewing the historical or newly published body of literature. The concept of the standard set of virtual working hours theme is to maintain a level of accountability for a predetermined set of working hours and encourage built-in flexibility to satisfy work–life balance, while ensuring seamless global coverage. This theme directly relates to the conceptual framework (spillover model) for this study. Konrad and Yang (2012) stated that the availability and

usage of work–life benefits allow employees to perform effectively in both their work and family roles. Based on this finding, Konrad and Yang concluded that equal balance or harmony in fulfilling both roles produces positive and productive outcomes. There was a clear theme across respondents from both the managerial interviews and focus group session.

For example, M02 noted the following:

We would allow flexible work schedules but we would still need a set of kind of defined core hours that everyone needed to be together. It would be maybe approximately a 6-hour block. We do a lot of collaborative work and if everyone's active working different hours it's kind of hard to do that collaboration. We will set these core hours whether it's between 10:00 and 4:00 or something like that, and then people could start as early as they want, because you always have the people who like to work early as they have commitments later on... or if they like to work late, we would just allow that to be whatever they needed. But as long as you were kind of there during that time, we knew we could schedule meetings and we could count on everyone to be there at that time.

Respondent M01 provided similar input and noted that flexible shifts in work schedules are often required considering globalization and the accommodation of various time-zones, with shifts ending earlier or later than defined core working hours. Similarly, FG01 noted that, "It's a positive for my productivity because I work with a Hungarian team, so I can work on their time zone and have that flexibility and then end my day early basically." The document entitled *Flexible/Alternative Work Schedule Policy* also

contained the same theme, identifying “Core hours as 9:00 -3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday (may vary by company site).” This document also corroborated the aforementioned evidence and supported flex–time as “A block of time at the start and end of traditional work days during which employees may report and complete their required hours of work. These hours are 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. (may vary by site).” Furthermore, this policy document also indicated that employees are expected to work an 8 hour shift, exclusive of lunch, including core hours (from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.) “including applicable break periods and Flexible work hours in which the employee may start work between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m. and stop work between 3:30 and 5:30 p.m.”

Theme 2: Increased Virtual Communication

In support of implementing or maintaining flexible work schedules and virtual work programs, require and frequently enforce increased use of communication tools to demand employee availability and proactively prevent non-responsiveness, including but not limited to Instant Messenger, Skype, and Webex.

The *increased virtual communication* theme aligned to the historical and new supportive body of literature and relates to the adaptive structuration theory. The adaptive structuration theory focuses on the formation of group structures and their influence on communication and decision making (Ghiyoung, 2014). Adaptive structuration theory pertains to the evolution and development of teams and organizations. The adaptive structuration theory addresses the interactions of groups via information technology (Ghiyoung, 2014). Employees utilizing information technology for their daily tasks

dynamically establish discernments about the role and utility of the technology (Ghiyoung, 2014).

In this case study, as the employees shifted to a completely remote workforce and continued formation of their new working model, the structuration process called for increased communication (via instant messenger and Skype). As the groups evolved, team members became more engaged and reliant on information technology due to the variance in distance and location across the organization. The supervisory perception was that increased communication (via information technology) was paramount to achieve and maintain maximum employee accessibility and accountability.

Greer and Payne (2014) explored outcomes of telework challenges and successful teleworker strategies. Supervisors conveyed that the most frequently mentioned telework challenge was communication (Greer & Payne, 2014). Greer and Payne also noted that both managers and employees believed that *being accessible* was key to showing availability, strengthening relationships, and maintaining communications across the team. The study results indicated that the use of (a) advanced technology, (b) communicating, (c) task planning, and (d) striving for heightened productivity all contributed to virtual success (Greer & Payne, 2014).

In a subsequent and similar study, Lockwood (2015) utilized (a) surveys, (b) interviews, (c) document reviews, and (d) meeting observations to gain an increased understanding of virtual work teams. Lockwood determined that virtual workplace communication is becoming increasingly prevalent for business meetings. Business leaders are demanding increased communication when functioning in alternative

workplace models (Lockwood, 2015). Similarly, Olariu and Aldea (2014) concurred with both Lockwood (2015) and Greer and Payne (2014), and noted that virtual work models require increased levels of communication from all team members. Effective communication plays the most important role in achieving virtual teams' success (Olariu & Aldea, 2014).

Maximizing communication can compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction when working remotely. Respondent M03 noted that "waiting for answers" was a significant challenge when the company shifted from a traditional office setup to a virtual workforce and that it was difficult to figure out how to communicate with others at times. As a result, all employees were required to be available via Instant Messenger and Skype. The outcome of this strategy resulted in maximized communication, accountability, and increased cross-team collaboration.

Participant M01 responded similarly concurring that virtual work programs require employees to be "extra communicative, setup with WebEx and other collaboration tools so that they're continually involved," and that "IM technology has made flexible work schedules and virtual work schedules a lot better." Study findings indicated that there is a heightened level of accountability required for virtual workers. Respondent M02 also communicated that employees "need to just be available on those things (office communicator, instant messenger) kind of 24/7." The document entitled *Telecommuting Policy* indicated that the employee and manager will agree on "the manner and frequency of communication." The telecommuting policy document also contained similar themes regarding communication strategies indicating that the

employee will agree “to be accessible by phone or on-line during the agreed upon work schedule.”

Theme 3: Establish Remote Office Setup

When instituting a virtual work program, provide and compensate employees for all related technical equipment in support of establishing a successful virtual working environment, including a laptop, printer, cell phone, and Internet.

The historical body of supporting literature included limited references regarding the establishment of remote office setups. Establishing remote office setups appeared to have no direct relationship to the spillover model; however, establishment of remote office setups relates to Herzberg’s motivator-hygiene theory. Under this theory, situational job characteristics have the potential to influence employee job satisfaction (Hauff, Richter, & Tressin, 2015). High rates of employee job satisfaction are associated with high commitment levels and high productivity (Rama Devi & Nagini, 2013). Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) indicated that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction act independently of each other. According to Herzberg’s motivator-hygiene theory, job satisfaction antecedents are classified into *motivational factors*- such as work, recognition, responsibility, and growth, as well as *hygiene factors*- such as company policy, pay, supervisory practices, and co-worker relationships (Herzberg et al., 1959). According to Herzberg et al. (1959), hygiene factors are the main contributors to employee dissatisfaction in the workplace. Herzberg et al. considered the following hygiene factors ranked highest of importance to lowest: (a) company policy, (b) supervision, (c) employee-boss relationship, (d) work conditions, (e), salary, and (f) peer

relationships. In this case study, the evidence clearly indicated that the company's telecommuting policy in support of the establishment of remote office setups positively influenced employee job satisfaction.

Rodriguez (2013) noted that operative and effective technology is a primary enabler in the design and execution of a successful remote workforce program that benefits both employees and businesses. In a more recent study, Greer and Payne (2014) concluded that communication coupled with the use of advanced technology contributed to virtual success. While fundamental, this notion was an important and common theme across both the managers as well as among the focus group participants.

Supporting the existing body of literature, respondent M02 noted that a laptop enables the remote worker to "move around and work from wherever," that the company would "pay for your phone or give you a cell phone and would also pay for your Internet if you were working from home." Respondent M03 also stated that the company will, "provide them (the employees) all of their equipment" including "laptop, desktop, printer, and cell phone, as well as pay for their (the employee's) Internet." The interviews and company documentation revealed that the extent to which these items are granted has the potential to slightly vary depending on an employee's remote needs.

The document entitled *Telecommuting Policy* further corroborated this theme indicating that the corporation "will determine, with information supplied by the employee and supervisor, the appropriate equipment needs (including hardware, software, modems, internet connectivity, phone and data lines, facsimile equipment or software, photocopiers, etc.) for each telecommuting arrangement on a case-by-case

basis.” The telecommuting policy document also identified similar themes regarding virtual office setup inclusive of the organization reimbursing the employee “for all business-related expenses such as phone calls, shipping costs, etc., that are reasonably incurred in accordance with job responsibilities.”

Theme 4: Program Assessment and Monitoring

Flexible work schedules and virtual work programs increase employee job satisfaction and employee productivity; however, these programs require careful monitoring. It is critical that they are a good fit for both the individual employee and the particular job at hand.

The body of literature primarily supported this theme. In a new study recently published in 2015, on working outside of a traditional office, Kojo and Nenonen concluded that working from home is not a widely practical solution in *all* cases. Virtual work programs may not be a good fit, such as when family distractions are present (Kojo & Nenonen, 2015). Managers must ensure that the respective employee and job task are best suited for this type of alternative work arrangement.

A number of factors pertaining to work–life benefit programs may affect employee job involvement and sense of competence, which lead to job satisfaction and performance (Pawar, 2013). Stout et al. (2013) found that work–life benefit programs could be a positive, beneficial option for both the employer and employee, as long as the worker is a responsible worker. In contrast, if the employee is irresponsible, work–life benefit programs could be to blame. Mohammadi and Shahrabi (2013) found that various working components, including quality of work life and working conditions, influenced

employee job satisfaction. Mohammadi and Shahrabi indicated that positive spillover from a high degree of satisfaction in one's quality of personal life, crosses over into their professional working domain and vice versa, further supporting the spillover-crossover conceptual model (Hill et al., 2013).

The spillover model also supports this theme. Hill et al. (2013) suggested that what supports or hinders the work microsystem will spill over into the family microsystem and vice versa. Hill et al. added that time, energy, organization, and behavior can be strong determinants of work–life balance. Hill et al. posited that if work–family dynamics leave little room for flexibility, then negative spillover in terms of time, energy, and behavior results.

The majority of the managers and focus group employees were in agreement that flexible work schedules and virtual work programs provide a high degree of value from both a satisfaction and productivity standpoint. However, it should be noted that there was one focus group participant who thought and voiced differently at times. From a company perspective, M01 noted that these work arrangements also “get them (employees) working longer hours which is important when you're looking at things like globalization.” M01 also noted that he/she is a big proponent of flexible work schedules and that flexible work schedules can be “taken overboard,” but that the “concept is a good one.” M01 further stated that virtual work programs are a “dramatic way to improve employee satisfaction; however the company has to be supportive of it and if the company does not support the employee and there is not a good policy in place it is a dissatisfactor.” M02 noted that “it (flexible work) increases their productivity if they're

(employees) working the hours they want to work.” M02 followed up with “If you’re not a morning person but you’re set to work at 6:00 in the morning, well you’re going to take a few hours to get going and you’re not going to be as productive in those first couple of hours.”

M02 concluded that “for most people, it increases productivity being at home because I think you don’t have as many distractions.” However, respondent M03 noted that the “first thing that somebody should decide when they implement the flexible work schedule is what tasks are they doing, and what is their role on the team.” M03 also stated that “when you provide somebody with flexibility, I do think job satisfaction goes up to balance work and home,” however, M03 also noted that some people are better suited for working at home than others and that self-discipline plays a big role in determining which employees are better suited for telework.

FG01 stated that “You gain almost 2 hours back of your day not commuting.” This is added value not only to the employee, but the company as well. Respondent M01 stated that virtual work is good for the employee that is “capable” and “mature.” M01 followed up and stated that it’s “good for the company as well” however, “you have to recognize the communication challenges... and do everything you can to increase your communications.” M02 indicated that it “takes the right person” and a “certain mindset.” M03 concurred and stated that “it’s not for some people,” that there “needs to be consideration of the work that needs to get done” and “if it’s a good fit it (virtual work) increases job satisfaction.” M03 also noted that some work, such as new product development is not a good fit for telework as it requires significant collaboration, and

concluded by saying this type of work “needs to be managed closely so it doesn’t affect productivity.”

The company policy document entitled *Telecommuting Policy* corroborated this evidence and considers “telecommuting to be a viable alternative work arrangement in certain cases where individual, job, and supervisor characteristics are best suited to such an arrangement, without jeopardizing our commitment to our customers and balancing obligations to other key stakeholders.” The same company policy document also indicated that telecommuting “may be appropriate for some employees and some jobs.”

Another key point for consideration where there was alignment across the data sources, is that the majority of respondents felt that some form of a social gathering is beneficial on a regular basis. This social gathering may include, but was not limited to, team building events, monthly luncheons, or casual get togethers. The consensus was that social interaction replaces the typical water cooler conversations. M02 noted in their member checking session that “getting people together on a regular basis for a lunch or team building event increases team morale and benefits productivity.” Similarly, and further supporting M02’s proposition, M03 noted that “When they closed down the office and everyone went remote, we had a monthly lunch that we kept going for a couple of years, actually. We’d meet monthly and we’d see each other face-to-face.” M03 also expressed that the company’s managers strive to incorporate an element of personal conversation into their one-on-one meetings with employees. The overall consensus was that virtual workers require an increased level of social interaction due to the nature of their isolated work. M02 indicated that social interaction and that personal conversation

help to build trust. Trust is an important factor that influences team collaboration and group productivity (C.-Y. Jang, 2013).

It was clear from this study's interview and focus group data that virtual work programs affect every employee differently depending on the individual and personal circumstances outside of work. The majority of study participants indicated that virtual work programs have the potential to generate blurred boundaries between personal and professional responsibilities. Flexible time-space workplace policies often result in blurred boundaries between work and home life (Valoura, 2013). Technological advances are providing workers with increased location flexibility; however, it is important to discuss potential drawbacks and work-life conflict issues (Adkins & Premeaux, 2014). Virtual work programs may foster a greater sense of work-life balance and increased productivity in the workplace; however, remote workplace policies can cause negative spillover into the home domain (Adkins & Premeaux, 2014). Employees may feel an obligation to check e-mail and work all hours of the day into the evening, on the weekends, and while on vacation (Adkins & Premeaux, 2014). Changing work environments, coupled with increasing access to technology, can result in *gray lines* between life and work (Burg-Brown, 2013). Problematically, home-based work often blurs the separation of these two spheres (Ojala, Natti, & Anttila, 2014).

Spillover is a process by which one person's experience in one domain affects his or her experiences in another domain (Naithani, 2010). Spillover theory dictates that spillover can be both positive and negative. The spillover theory includes a multidimensional model, whereby work-family spillover can flow in variation as follows:

(a) work-to-family positive spillover, (b) family-to-work negative spillover, (c) family-to-work positive spillover, and (d) work-to-family negative spillover (Hill et al., 2013).

Supporting the spillover model, if a remote employee has difficulty detaching from their work at home, there is the potential that work may cause spillover into the employee's personal life, causing a negative or potentially positive result (depending on the individual).

Respondent M01 indicated that they personally “struggle with that (blurred boundaries)” and also noted that employees struggle with blurred boundaries as well, consistently “feeling a need to respond” during non-working hours, creating negative spillover from work-to-family. However, a consistent trend in the data showed that having the opportunity to work additional hours (a remote setup) increases employee productivity. M02 responded with the following:

If you're going to the office you typically keep your equipment here, so when you get home, while you do have that nice shut off of I'm unplugged now... maybe I've got my phone and I can check some e-mails and things. Whereas you're at home, you don't really have that, so I think again it increases productivity, because now people go eat dinner or I gotta take my son to the game and I can still spend 2 hours being very productive because I have my whole set up at home. I have all my files, I have my computer, I've got my 3 monitors, whatever it is. I can do that at night.

In this particular instance, there is a positive spillover from work to family. However, the data were indicative that virtual work programs affect each individual differently. FG01

indicated:

When I'm working from home I work more hours. I lose track of time, so I just keep going and then because I leave my computer on during the week, when I go by it, if I kept wondering if I've got a response from e-call, I'll go back in and I'll start doing some things or checking e-mails, following up on...

Other FG participants noted that there are often issues with work to family and family to work spillover regarding their children and their availability as a parent in the house. Working (being) at home does not equate to always being available despite what their family members may think. Another FG participant noted that with several children at home things are "extremely blurred." Whereas another FG participant explained that there were no blurred boundaries "I have my own room. I have my set of rules. When I'm working nobody bothers me, no matter what, just like I'm in the office basically." While virtual work programs affect every employee differently depending on the individual and their personal circumstances, the consensus was that all FG participants felt more of a responsibility to work after hours considering they all have remote office setups, which in turn can be an infringement on their family time, although increasing the remote employees' productivity.

Theme 5: Promote Quality of Life

Managers and employees both place extraordinary value on the option of flexible work schedules and virtual work programs as these practices promote better quality of life and cohesive management of personal and professional commitments.

The body of literature primarily supported this theme. Armache (2013) noted that

managers who implement work–life balance practices enable their employees by reducing stress levels and increasing motivation, dedication, and commitment, which in turn increase productivity. Research also suggested that flexible timing in work schedules results in improved job satisfaction and overall balance of work and family commitments (Tuttle & Garr, 2012). Martin and MacDonnell (2012) noted that employees who have more control over their work schedule and location generally experience less work–life conflict, greater job satisfaction, and increased productivity. Overall, telecommuters report less work–family conflict (Goodman, 2013).

Galea, Houkes, and De Rijk (2014) conducted a qualitative, exploratory case study to gain a better understanding of how employees experience the influence of flexible work schedules on their personal work–life balance. Fifteen employees across five international organizations participated in semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour each (Galea, Houkes, & De Rijk, 2014). Galea, Houkes, and De Rijk utilized data driven thematic analysis to assist in assessment and identification of common trends and corresponding themes across the data. The principal finding was that working a flexible schedule is greatly beneficial for individuals as they try to balance both personal and professional obligations (Galea, Houkes, & De Rijk, 2014). However, management must be supportive of the flexible work schedule philosophy (Galea, Houkes, & De Rijk, 2014). Galea, Houkes, and De Rijk determined that business leaders must be strategically aligned across the organization and committed to empowering employee work–life balance.

As seen in the body of literature, the spillover theory also supports the promote

quality of life theme. Konrad and Yang (2012) stated that the availability and usage of work–life benefits allows employees to perform effectively in both their work and family roles. Based on this finding, Konrad and Yang concluded that equal balance or harmony in fulfilling both roles produces positive and productive outcomes.

The majority of the study participants, including both managers as well as the focus group participants, were in agreement that flexible work schedules and virtual work programs add overall immense value to employees. Respondent M01 indicated that they are a “big believer” in flexible and virtual work programs and that these programs “drive employee satisfaction.” M01 also stated that it allows good employees to “get a payback so they don’t feel bad about doing some things they need to do during the day.” Interestingly, respondent M01 indicated they were *surprised* at how positive his responses actually were after seeing them documented on paper. During member checking procedures, when asked if they wished to alter any of the information presented or add to their responses, the participant explained that they did not have anything further to add. M01 also indicated that the reflections captured within the member checking document were an accurate interpretation and representation of their interview responses.

Respondent M03 concurred with M01 and indicated that “giving people the flexibility that they need to manage their personal life, the job satisfaction goes up.” Respondent M03 had nothing further to add during the member checking session. Respondent M02 made a reference to a popular saying, “Is life getting in the way of your work?” M02 subsequently noted that “having a flexible work schedule allows those things to come and go a bit easier.”

FG01 noted that flexible work schedules “make me like my job so much more, so much more” and that flexible work scheduling “reduces so much stress out of my mind and that it will make me put up with a lot more crap in my job that would otherwise make me walk.” FG01 also conveyed that flexible work schedules and virtual work programs were absolute motivators and primary drivers for job criteria. At one point in their career FG01 was planning on leaving the company; however, the company then offered flexibility and the option to work remotely so they stayed. FG01 also noted that a shift in the working paradigm to come back into a traditional work environment is “demotivating and it brings back a lot of negative feelings.” FG01 also stated that “If things continue and it goes back to 100% needing to be in the office everyone will be less happy.”

The consensus of the focus group participants was that having the option to partake in a flexible work schedule and virtual work program provides a better “quality of life.” The company document entitled *Flexible/Alternative Work Schedule Policy* further corroborated this theme and noted:

Wherever practical, the company will provide flexibility to employees as a means to promote work–life balance and position us a progressive employer for which to work. Subject to approvals, ... alternative scheduling may be available to employees in meeting their personal work performance goals and family needs.

Applications to Professional Practice

This study’s findings were significant to professional business practices in several ways. The findings of this study revealed leaders’ and employees’ views within one company about the strategies that business leaders use for alternative work programs.

Business leaders who are currently employing, or who wish to consider or implement flexible work schedule or virtual work programs, require current information on how flexible work schedules and virtual work program policies affect their corporations.

Providing employees with the option to customize where and when they work can create positive opportunities for balance, both inside and outside of the workplace; however, business leaders must understand how flexible work models affect productivity within their organizations (Pawar, 2013). Business leaders seek information about how their current policies may or may not affect employee productivity as flexible work schedules and virtual work policies may affect overall productivity and companies' earnings (Pawar, 2013). Publishing the results of this study might provide business leaders information about the potential effects that flexible work schedules and virtual work programs have on employee productivity.

Armache (2013) noted that managers who implement work–life balance practices enable their employees by reducing stress levels and increasing motivation, dedication, and commitment, which in turn increase productivity. Goodman (2013) agreed with Armache and argued that telecommuters report less work-family conflict. Findings from this study also demonstrated how work–life benefit programs affect employee productivity. Chief executive officers seek to understand and consider the effects of productivity and financial performance on their businesses (Giberson & Miklos, 2013). Data from this study provided business leaders with the foundational knowledge to assess whether their current workplace policies maximize productivity within their organization. Findings and conclusions from this study may assist in preparing organizational leaders

to assess their current work–life benefit policies.

Based on the conclusions and recommendations in this study, leaders may gain relevant work–life benefit policy knowledge, enabling them to (a) review their internal policies, (b) identify strategies to improve business policies or job requirement approaches, and (c) potentially influence industry policy standards. Businesses' leaders may be sacrificing gains due to unsatisfied, stagnant employees who struggle with managing their professional and personal commitments. Businesses leaders may also be unintentionally curtailing productivity and financial growth by not optimizing workplace policies.

Moreover, the research findings revealed five major themes, one of which identified as a new finding, not previously identified in the literature. Based on the research outcomes, the study results provided the basis for recommendations for strategic action as well as further studies. Therefore, stakeholders may find the recommendations useful in their quest to understand the strategies for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs.

Implications for Social Change

Work–life balance is a concern for both corporate leaders and members of society (Kumar & Charkraborty, 2013). Findings from this research add to the existing body of knowledge by providing information on the relationship between flexible work schedules and virtual work programs and employee productivity, as well as recommendations in support of this relationship. This study's findings and recommendations may serve as a basis for positive social change. Study data supported the conclusion that when

effectively implemented and managed, flexible work schedules and virtual work programs may be beneficial in promoting work–life balance for employees. This research may raise awareness in support of developing and implementing related policies.

This study may be of value to society as its findings may better position organizations' leaders for success while positioning individuals to attain optimum balance between their personal and professional relationships. Data analysis indicated there is a fluid relationship between work and home, and business leaders should be aware of how work–life policies affect employees as well as their businesses. As the spillover theory indicates, working individuals generate spillover from work to home and home to work. Spillover can occur in both positive and negative forms.

Business policy improvements may foster a greater sense of quality of life for employees. This sense of a better quality of life has the potential to translate balance into individual's homes, personal relationships, promoting an increased sense of health and well-being. As seen in the presentation of findings, the majority of the study's participants, including both managers as well as the focus group participants, were in agreement that flexible work schedules and virtual work programs overall add value to employees. Furthermore, this study constituted an addition to the body of knowledge about the strategies business leaders use for developing, implementing, and maintaining flexible work schedules and virtual work programs.

Recommendations for Action

As the researcher, I am personally committed to inform relevant business leaders of these study findings as they relate to organizational practices. Business leaders have an

important role to play in helping to assess and enact where appropriate, work–life business policies that maximize productivity, while addressing employee quality of life. Business leaders are encouraged to be mindful of the results of this study and to educate themselves on the strategies for implementing and maintaining flexible work schedules and virtual work programs.

As the findings revealed, flexible work schedules and virtual work programs can increase employee job satisfaction and employee productivity; however, these programs require careful monitoring. Leaders should ensure that the respective employee and job task are best suited for this type of alternative work arrangement. Work–life benefit programs affect employee job involvement, which can lead to job satisfaction and the overall performance of the organization (Pawar, 2013). Work–life balance and work–life satisfaction may have an impact on productivity in the workplace (Mušura, Korican, & Krajnovic, 2013). Organizations’ leaders continue to adopt nontraditional workplace policies, including virtual work programs, in response to the financial savings realized and the unique flexibility these programs can offer (Purvanova, 2014).

In general, this study might be beneficial to key community stakeholders, including business leaders and corporate employees. The following community parties will receive a high-level summary of the study results via e-mail: research participants, immediate family, and the research site. My goal is to publish the results of this study for the broader audience. Wherever possible, I intend to publicize the research results using effective and appropriate platforms such as lectures and seminars. Essentially, the results of this study indicate that there is a need for active business leader engagement and other

key stakeholders to ensure that the proposed recommendations be shared, reviewed, and implemented.

Recommendations for Further Study

The focus of this study was on business leaders and employees who possess pertinent experience on flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. The study was specific to employees within one global blood management solutions firm. The population consisted of three lower- to middle-level business executives and six employees. I selected both managerial and employee participants as they represent a holistic sample to provide various perspectives on flexible work schedules and virtual work programs strategies. I noted several study limitations and key areas for further research around work–life benefit policies.

Limitations are potential shortcomings of the study that are typically out of the researcher’s control (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Study limitations are as follows: (a) small sample size, (b) hour maximum interview time limit, (c) time constraints to conduct the study, and (d) limited researcher expertise. One potential limitation of this study was that it solely focused on one corporation and therefore may only be applicable to that organization as opposed to the entire business field (Downes & Koekemoer, 2012). One recommendation for further research is to include more than one firm for potentially increasing the study’s domain of external validity. The sample population is also limited given that the source of participants is a single business area located in the midwestern United States. This limitation is common of qualitative research. Another recommendation for further study is to include a larger sample size. As a result of the

small sample size, researchers may not be inclined to accept these study results and conclusions as widely applicable to the workforce based on the limited number of companies (one) that participated in the study. Another limitation is the amount of time permitted for this study due to the inherent nature of the Walden University Doctorate of Business Administration program.

As discussed in the presentation of findings, one major theme that manifests across the managers, focus group, and company documentation involves program assessment and monitoring in an effort to identify those employees and job tasks recommended for virtual work. The study findings indicate that flexible work schedules and virtual work programs overall increase employee job satisfaction and employee productivity; however, these programs require careful monitoring. It is critical that flexible work schedules and virtual work programs are a good fit for both the individual employee and the particular job at hand. A further recommendation for future study is the exploration of employee characteristics and particular jobs that may or may not be suitable for virtual work. Findings from future studies pertaining to flexible work schedules, virtual work programs, and employee productivity may improve organizational practices by further exploring business leaders' strategies on alternative work programs.

Reflections

Given that more than a quarter of employed Americans comprise the virtual workforce (Noonan & Glass, 2012), the current research became crucial at a time when leaders are seeking alternative, non-traditional work programs (Purvanova, 2014). It is

critical that business leaders are sufficiently knowledgeable to identify appropriate strategies for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs to best position their organizations for success. Prior to conducting this research, as well as throughout the research process, I had no preconceived ideas regarding the study topic. As the researcher, I did my personal best to approach the process with an unbiased approach and solely rely on the data to address the answer to the research question.

To my surprise, the managerial study participants were extremely forthcoming in sharing their personal perceptions and lived experiences of flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. The focus group panel was equally as engaged, voicing their beliefs and individual experiences. Although we utilized the full two-hour timeslot, it was apparent that we could have continued for an extended duration thereafter. Throughout my data collection process, I was mindful to remain neutral and focus on the task of the interviewer, while doing my best to make the participants feel comfortable and at ease. During data analysis, I carefully examined the data to identify core emergent themes while being mindful to bracket possible personal bias.

The research findings derived from the data represented the essence of the responses that led to a better understanding of the research question. I felt enlightened by the results of the study and learned new knowledge from the findings. The majority of the research participants indicated that alternative work models were a timely topic for the study participants; therefore, this topic generated a plethora of data. I found it inspiring to listen to the study participants recount their personal experiences. Moreover, it was personally fulfilling to add new insights to the body of literature on this topic.

Summary and Study Conclusions

In a workplace of increasing professional demands and competing personal commitments, many corporate leaders are considering alternative work models. However, many business leaders and managers are reluctant to promote family-friendly work practice initiatives (Stout, Awad, & Guzmán, 2013). Some business leaders require an increased understanding of the strategies that other business leaders use for designing, implementing, and managing flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. The data collection process included a series of semistructured interviews, followed by a focus group, and the assessment of company documentation. I used methodological triangulation to validate themes across multiple data sources.

Given the in-depth inquiry of study participants and the cross-assessment of multiple data sources, findings from this study serve as an additional source of information about the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. However, this study's findings are most likely not widely applicable due to the time constraints of this study (DBA program) and the associated scale (small single case study). This study's findings and conclusions also resulted in recommendations for action and further research. The study findings may also contribute to social change as they have the potential to inspire business leaders to learn about flexible work schedule and virtual work program strategies, better position organizations for success, while simultaneously positioning individuals to attain an optimum balance between life and work responsibilities.

Post data analysis, five major themes emerged. Building on the spillover model

(conceptual framework), the research findings reveal that both managers and employees clearly place significant value on quality of life programs. The exploration of participants' responses revealed that despite some challenges, when appropriately implemented and monitored, flexible work schedules and virtual work programs can positively influence job satisfaction and employee productivity. The research findings highlight several strategies that business leaders use for developing and deploying policies and practices for implementing and maintaining flexible work schedule and virtual work programs, (a) business leaders should consider promoting a standard set of core working hours, (b) allowing flexible start and end times, (c) establishing remote office setups, (d) maximizing virtual communications, and (e) promoting quality of life.

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Appendix A: Certificate of Ethical Compliance



Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in Research Forms

In-Depth Interviews- Invitation to Participate in Business Research

Greetings Mr. or Mrs. **XXX**,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University pursuing a Doctorate of Business Administration degree. You are invited to voluntarily take part in a research study that focuses on exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of lower- to middle-level managers regarding flexible work schedules, virtual work programs, and employee productivity. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. The study conduct procedures include a series of interviews with low to midlevel managers. Your name or any other information that could personally identify you will not be included in any reports of the study.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please refer to the attached ‘informed consent’ form. This document provides detailed information to help you understand the study conduct procedures and better assist you in your own personal decision whether to participate. Walden University’s approval number for this study is **11-24-14-0167383** and it expires on **November 23, 2015**. After reviewing the attached consent form, if you are agreeable to participate in this research, please reply to this e-mail with the words “I consent.” By doing so, you are agreeing to voluntarily participate in the study. Please feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions or would like additional information. Please respond at your earliest convenience indicating your decision. I sincerely appreciate your time!

Respectfully,

Kelley

Kelley M. Campbell

Doctorate of Business Administration Candidate

Focus Group- Invitation to Participate in Business Research

Greetings Mr. or Mrs. XXX,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University pursuing a Doctorate of Business Administration degree. You are invited to voluntarily take part in a research study that focuses on exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of company employees regarding flexible work schedules, virtual work programs, and employee productivity. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. You are being invited to participate in a focus group session of 6-8 employees, to voice your present and past experiences pertaining to flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. A focus group is a form of research in which a group of people are asked questions about their personal perceptions, opinions or beliefs about a particular topic in an interactive group setting. Your name or any other information that could personally identify you will not be included in any reports of the study.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please refer to the attached 'informed consent' form. This document provides detailed information to help you understand the study conduct procedures and better assist you in your own personal decision whether to participate. Walden University's approval number for this study is **11-24-14-0167383** and it expires on **November 23, 2015**. After reviewing the attached consent form, if you are agreeable to participate in this research, please reply to this e-mail with the words "I consent." By doing so, you are agreeing to voluntarily participate in the study. Please feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions or would like

additional information. Please respond at your earliest convenience indicating your decision. I sincerely appreciate your time!

Respectfully,

Kelley

Kelley M. Campbell

Doctorate of Business Administration Candidate

Appendix C: Consent Forms

In-Depth Interviews- Research Informed Consent Document

You are invited to take part in a research study that focuses on exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of lower- to middle-level managers regarding flexible work schedules, virtual work programs, and employee productivity. You were chosen for this study because you are a lower- to middle-level manager, employed at a company that offers relevant work–life benefit programs and possess the required experience. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to participate. The study is being conducted by Kelley M. Campbell, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to is to ascertain the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs.

Procedures

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a series of (3) audio recorded, face-to-face interviews, each lasting no more than 1 hour in duration
 - Interview #1 will include a series of 10 open-ended questions
 - Interview #2 will be a ‘follow-up’ opportunity for you to provide any additional information you may have thought of after interview #1
 - Interview #3 will provide you with the opportunity to review final study reports for interpretation accuracy and feedback (this occurs after my

analysis and interpretation of the data you have provided)

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision whether or not you choose to participate in the study. No one will penalize you if you decide not to participate in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you are at liberty to opt out if you change your mind at any point throughout the duration of the study. You may choose to stop at any time if you feel stressed during the study, and you may respectfully decline any question(s) that you are not comfortable answering.

Risk and Benefits of Study Participation

Given the nature of the study, the possibility of participants experiencing any harm is extremely minimal as the study focuses only on examining the lived experiences and perceptions of participants, and no confidential information or trade secrets will be sought. The potential benefit of being in the study is your contribution to an enlightened view of the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs.

Compensation

No compensation will be given to participants in the study.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not

use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. The researcher will not include your name or any other information that could personally identify you in any reports of the study. However, if any illegal activities are disclosed, I will need to report those to the proper authorities.

Contacts and Questions

You may contact the researcher via e-mail at **Kelley.campbell@waldenu.edu** or via telephone at xxx.xxx.xxxx if you have any questions pertaining to this study. If you wish to privately discuss your rights as a research participant, you may call the Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at **+X-XXX-XXX-XXXX ext. XX from within the United States** or e-mail **XXX@XXXX**. Walden University's approval number for this study is **11-24-14-0167383** and it expires on **November 23, 2015**. The researcher, Kelley M. Campbell, will provide you a copy of this form to retain for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read and sufficiently understood the above information, my role as a research participant, and the purpose of the study to make an informed decision about my participation. By replying to this e-mail with the words "I consent," I am agreeing to participate in the study.

Focus Group- Research Informed Consent Document

You are invited to take part in a research study that focuses on exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of employees regarding flexible work schedules, virtual work programs, and employee productivity. You were chosen for this study because you are employed at a company that offers relevant work–life benefit programs and possess the required experience. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before personally deciding whether to participate. The study is being conducted by Kelley M. Campbell, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. You are being invited to participate in a focus group of 6-8 employees, to voice your present and past experiences pertaining to flexible work schedules and virtual work programs. A focus group is a form of research in which a group of people are asked questions about their personal perceptions, opinions or beliefs about a particular topic, in an interactive group setting. The rationale for a focus group is the group dynamic that it brings stimulating conversations, which leads to exploration, discovery, depth, and direction.

Procedures

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in one audio recorded, face-to-face focus group session lasting no more than 2 hours in duration

- Collectively, the group will be asked a series of 10 open-ended questions
- Data and mediator notes will be captured on a flip chart
- The group participants will spend the last portion of the interview reviewing the information documented on the flip chart, as well as synthesizing any common themes that emerge as they relate to the interview questions

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision whether or not you choose to participate in the study. No one will penalize you if you decide not to participate in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you are at liberty to opt out if you change your mind at any point throughout the duration of the study. You may choose to stop at any time if you feel stressed during the study, and you may respectfully decline any question(s) that you are not comfortable answering.

Risk and Benefits of Study Participation

Given the nature of the study, the possibility of participants experiencing any harm is extremely minimal as the study focuses only on examining the lived experiences and perceptions of participants, and no confidential information or trade secrets will be sought. The potential benefit of being in the study is your contribution to an enlightened view of the strategies that business leaders use for flexible work schedules and virtual work programs.

Compensation

No compensation will be given to participants in the study.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. The researcher will not include your name or any other information that could personally identify you in any reports of the study. However, if any illegal activities are disclosed, I will need to report those to the proper authorities.

Contacts and Questions

You may contact the researcher via e-mail at Kelley.campbell@waldenu.edu or via telephone xxx.xxx.xxxx if you have any questions pertaining to this study. If you wish to privately discuss your rights as a research participant, you may call the Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at **+X-XXX-XXX-XXXX ext. XX from within the United States** or e-mail **XXX@XXXX**. Walden University's approval number for this study is **11-24-14-0167383** and it expires on **November 23, 2015**. The researcher, Kelley M. Campbell, will provide you a copy of this form to retain for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read and sufficiently understood the above information, my role as a research participant, and the purpose of the study to make an informed decision about my participation. By replying to this e-mail with the words "I consent," I am agreeing to participate in the study.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Title: Exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of low-mid level managers and associate employees regarding flexible work schedules, virtual work programs, and employee productivity

1. The interview session will commence with greetings and introductions.
2. The study participants will have previously read the informed consent form and provided their consent via e-mail, agreeing to participate in the research. I will thank the participant for their agreement to participate in the research study. I will also provide information regarding the member checking process that will follow the transcription and interpretation of the data. Following transcript interpretation, I will schedule time with the interview participants for member checking procedures to assist with ensuring the reliability and validity of the data.
3. The participant will be given a hard copy print out of the informed consent letter for their records.
4. I will turn on the audio recorder and I will note the date, time, and location.
5. I will indicate the coded sequential representation of the participant's name e.g., 'respondent R01' on the audio recording, documented on my copy of the consent form and the interview will begin.
6. Each participant will be given the required time to fully answer each pre-determined interview question in detail (including any additional follow-up/probing questions).
7. At the close of the interview, I will thank each research participant for their time

and participation in the study.

Appendix E: Interview Questions

In-Depth Interview Questions (for Managers)

1. What strategies have you used for implementing flexible work schedules?
2. What strategies have you used for implementing virtual work program policies?
3. What productivity challenges occurred when your employees began working flexible work schedules?
4. What productivity challenges occurred when your employees began working in a virtual environment?
5. What suggestions do you have for improving virtual work productivity?
6. What are your experiences on how flexible work schedule programs affect job satisfaction?
7. What are your experiences on how virtual work programs affect job satisfaction?
8. What are your experiences on flexible time–space workplace policies and blurred boundaries between work and home life?
9. What additional information would you like to add about flexible work schedules?
10. What additional information would you like to add about working virtually?

Focus Group Questions (for Employee Focus Group)

1. How has participating in a flexible work schedule negatively affected your productivity?
2. How has participating in a flexible work schedule positively affected your productivity?
3. How has participating in a virtual work program negatively affected your productivity?
4. How has participating in a virtual work program positively affected your productivity?
5. What have you experienced regarding flexible time–space workplace policies and blurred boundaries between work and home life?
6. What tools enable your productivity the least when working virtually?
7. What technical issues have you experienced while working virtually?
8. How have these technical issues affected your virtual work?
9. What additional information would you like to add about flexible work schedules?
10. What information would you like to add about working virtually?

Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer: XXX

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: “Flexible Work Schedules, Virtual Work Programs, and Employee Productivity” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I’m officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized

individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature:

Date:
