

2022

## Telecommuting Adaptation of a Nonprofit Organization due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Walter Lynn Washington  
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# Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Telecommuting Adaptation of a Nonprofit Organization due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

by

Walter L. Washington

MAA, Barry University, 2015

MPA, Barry University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

PPA - Nonprofit Management and Leadership

Walden University

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## Abstract

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted lives around the globe, organizations have transitioned to telecommuting. Further research is required to address gaps in the literature regarding the perspectives of employees and organization leaders of these telecommuting policies. This study examined how leaders and employees of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceived implementation of and adaptation to telecommuting policies in response to COVID-19. The study specifically assessed behavioral and utilitarian variables associated with social exchange theory, such as individual engagement and social settings and effects in the workplace, which related to social distancing and telecommuting policies. The data were collected through interviews with 12 employees using purposive sampling techniques, who worked for at least 6 months in a nonprofit organization and exploration of peer-reviewed articles from the past 5 years. The recommendations for organizations based on the findings in this research included to establish new policies and strategies to foster a safe environment that prevents isolation and disconnectedness and meets community goals when adopting telecommuting. In addition, organizations should implement health checks and associated benefits to reduce operational expenses, promote flexibility, and fulfill work and personal responsibilities. Telecommuting has implications for positive social change in that it expands productivity and increases satisfaction within organizations.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

In 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic led to a widespread need to adopt telecommuting in the workplace (Wang et al., 2020). Prior to COVID-19, telecommuting policies were less common. Telecommuting policies became necessary because social distancing – in addition to proper hygiene and masking – is an effective measure to decrease the spread of the virus. Telecommuting allows for social distancing while enabling workers to continue earning an income (Wang et al., 2020). Telecommuting is also central for ensuring that organizations can continue to achieve financial success and productivity despite the need to maintain social distancing (Lee et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

The proliferation of telecommuting during COVID-19 was ideal for addressing social distancing needs (Wang et al., 2020). However, little is known about the specific processes that increase efficiency in telecommuting (Lee et al., 2020). Employees who work remotely may face distractions, in addition to other environmental challenges and technological barriers (e.g., lack of computer skills or adequate internet access and bandwidth). In addition, researchers have noted that the requirement of social distancing has led to increased loneliness and reduced productivity among employees (Lee et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Together, organizational leaders must consider how telecommunication impacts employees. This study therefore aims to examine perceptions among organization leaders and employees of telecommuting policies during COVID-19.

## **Problem Statement**

During COVID-19, many employees began to telecommute due to the need to obey social distancing measures (Lee et al., 2020). Research on telecommuting practices before the pandemic identified issues surrounding poor work-life balance and distraction (Moeckel, 2017; Narayanan et al., 2017). Furthermore, research from Lembrechts et al. (2016) illustrated that supervisors perceive telecommuting as disadvantageous for team cohesion and the productivity of employees (Caillier, 2016). More recent research has also found that employees faced several barriers as a result of telecommuting, including loneliness, distraction, and decreased productivity (Irawanto, 2020). In addition, Wang et al. (2020) found that telecommuting increases social isolation and psychological functioning. However, studies have also identified benefits from the practice, such as reduced organizational costs, lack of infrastructure costs, and the ability to reduce pollution and implement sustainable practices (Kuyucu, 2019; Moeckel, 2017; Narayanan et al., 2017). In short, there are mixed findings regarding challenges and opportunities from telecommuting. In addition, there is a lack of extensive research on how leaders use telecommuting policies to effectively adapt to changes in the workplace (Aguilera et al., 2016; Boell et al., 2016; Lembrechts et al., 2016).

Previous studies largely employed quantitative assessments regarding employee and client perceptions of telecommuting (Raghuram et al., 2019). However, this approach fails to illustrate how leaders consider the impacts of telecommuting practices on the productivity of employees. Schinoff et al. (2019) argued that there is a need to explore

how leaders perceive telecommuting to improve organizational behavior and productivity.

Around the world, leaders have implemented differing policies regarding telecommuting in various industries. Nonprofit organizations could generally shift to telecommuting more quickly than other organizations during the pandemic due to the ability of employees to work online while still accomplishing needed day-to-day tasks (Hudecheck et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Conversely, for-profit organizations often required their workers to socially distance in the workplace during the pandemic due to the need to continue to provide services and products (Hudecheck et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations in southeast Florida perceive implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The data derive from 12 semi-structured interviews, six with organization leaders and six with employees. The interview responses are transcribed and thematically analyzed following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2019).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guide the qualitative examination in this study:

RQ1: How do leaders of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive the implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

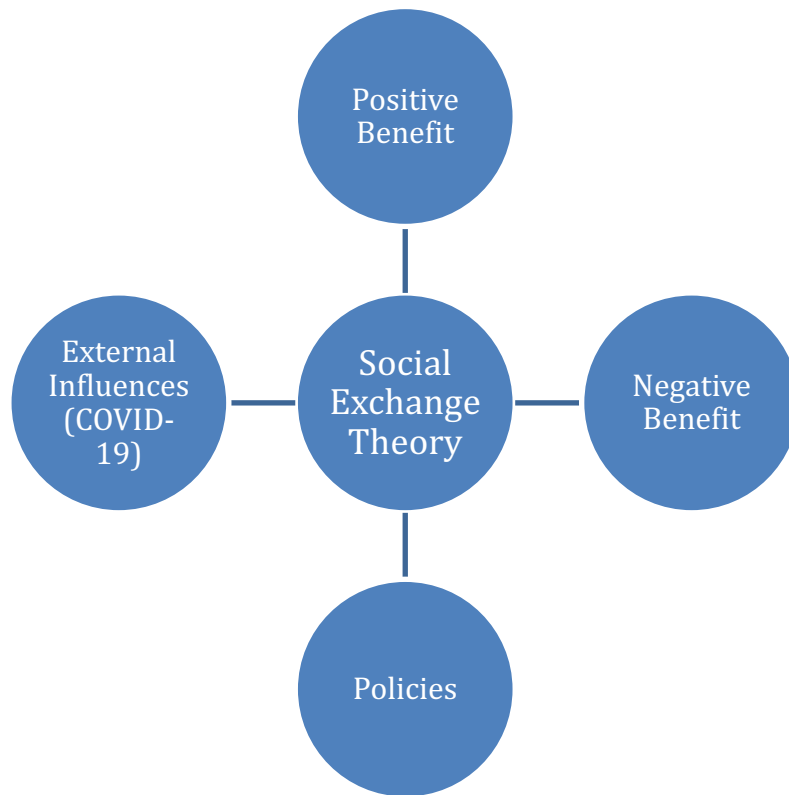
RQ2: How do employees of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive the implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Theoretical Framework**

For this study, the guiding theoretical framework is social exchange theory. Social exchange theory (Figure 1) was developed in the psychological literature through the work of Blau (1964) and Homans (1961). The theory is a critical philosophical and psychological approach for assessing how individuals, such as employees and leaders, view both behaviorism and utilitarianism (Redmond, 2015). Behaviorism refers to the process through which an individual engages within a social setting, such as the workplace (Redmond, 2015). Meanwhile, utilitarianism refers to how these variables are used in terms of work and social effect (Redmond, 2015). Social distancing practices and policies can be considered utilitarian practices.

#### **Figure 1**

*Social Exchange Theory Application to Current Study*



*Note.* Adapted from Redmond (2015).

Social exchange theory can be used to consider various factors, such as the interaction of social phenomena and utilitarian practices. For example, the social circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered the need for improved policies regarding telecommuting (Lee et al., 2020). Figure 1 demonstrates the application of this theory in the current study. In this illustration, social exchange theory is surrounded by key issues regarding (a) telecommuting policies, (b) benefits, (c) negative effects, and (d) external influences (i.e., the pandemic). Recent explorations of social exchange theory indicate that the relationship between an individual and the workplace is critical to the individual's productivity and satisfaction. However, in telecommuting settings, the connection between the workplace and the employee is diffuse, which may impact

productivity (Wang et al., 2020). Lee and Hong (2011) emphasized a need to examine how leadership practices influence positive and productive behaviors in the context of telecommuting. For this study, the use of social exchange theory explores how leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations perceive the implementation of telecommuting policies to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Social exchange theory is ideal for assessing how policies and motivational behaviors increase the performance of employees.

### **Nature of the Study**

Quantitative research is designed to assess measurable and testable phenomena (Tracy, 2019). Conversely, a qualitative research methodology is used to explore perceptions regarding a specific phenomenon (Tracy, 2019). For this study, the chosen qualitative approach is ideal for describing the policies instituted during COVID-19 and understanding perceptions of the policies among employees and leaders. I gathered data through semi-structured interviews, which provide rich and exploratory data regarding how employees and leaders perceive the adaption of telecommuting policies. Furthermore, the descriptive approach is ideal for detailing the perceptions of employees and leaders as a means of providing a qualitative discussion of the impacts of policies.

In this study, the purposive sampling technique was used to comprise 12 leaders and employees in southeast Florida. I conducted semi-structured interviews with six leaders and six employees who have worked for a nonprofit organization for 6 months or more during the pandemic. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to ensure that the participants were eligible for this study: (a) must be



employed in the southeast Florida area and (b) must be currently employed within a nonprofit organization. First, I developed an interview guide, which was then reviewed by an expert panel. The interview questions address perceptions of planning, implementation, and adaptation of telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To analyze the data, I applied Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis guidelines, which detail the process of inductive coding to identify emergent themes related to the purpose of the study.

### **Definitions**

*Employee productivity:* Employee productivity refers to employees' achievement of daily goals and objectives without interference and distraction (Lee et al., 2020). Employee productivity is central to organizational goals and objectives. Multiple variables may impact the employee productivity of an individual (Lee et al., 2020).

*Social exchange theory:* Social exchange theory is a model for exploring how groups or organizations direct change through positive and negative exchanges (Redmond, 2015). Social exchange theory is employed in various fields across empirical literature. Nevertheless, it is largely used to examine how internal and external forces guide social outcomes in a social setting.

*Telecommuting:* Telecommuting refers to the process of remotely engaging in work behaviors and activities (Kuyucu, 2019). In general, telecommuting is conducted through an internet application or online conferencing program (Kuyucu, 2019). The specific programs and hardware vary, but employees are generally expected to log on to a

specific program or complete a task by a given deadline without being in a physical setting with other employees (Kuyucu, 2019; Moeckel, 2017; Narayanan et al., 2017).

### **Assumptions**

This study first assumed that the participants were able to provide relevant data to the topic of interest. This assumption was appropriate, as the participants were assessed to ensure for their alignment with the inclusion criteria. The second assumption was that the findings address the purpose of this study and research questions. The alignment of the research questions, problem statement, and study purpose ensured that the findings of this study address these aims (Tracy, 2019). Finally, it was assumed that the participants were honest in the interviews. It was not possible to verify the sincerity or truth of the responses. However, I endeavored to make the participants comfortable and ensured that they were aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The study scope is limited to leaders and employees of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida. The study scope is also limited to perceptions of adaption to telecommuting policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. This scope fulfills the recommendations in previous research regarding examination of the impact of telecommuting policies on employee productivity during COVID-19 (Lee et al., 2020).

Study delimitations ensure that the participants and research design are aligned with the scope of the study (Tracy, 2019). The delimitations of this study are the geographic location of southeast Florida. The participants are also delimited to employees and leaders within a nonprofit organization.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study is that the findings may not be generalizable outside of Florida. In addition, given the small sample size, the findings have limited generalizability within Florida. To mitigate this limitation, the study proposes recommendations for future research in Chapter 5.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations in southeast Florida perceive the planning, implementation, and adaptation of telecommuting policies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter outlined the research justification, the research approach, the background to the problem, key definitions, and the study assumptions, scope, and limitations. For this study, data were collected through 12 semi-structured interviews. The following chapter reviews the related literature and identifies the gap in the existing literature.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This study focuses on perceptions of telecommuting policies during the COVID-19 pandemic among nonprofit leaders and employees. Before the pandemic, perceptions of telecommuting were divisive. The recognized benefits of remote work included improved work-life balance, reductions in organizational costs, and lower traffic and pollution burdens (Kuyucu, 2019; Moeckel, 2017; Narayanan et al., 2017). Conversely, the recognized disadvantages included negative impacts on teamwork due to longer response times and the lack of interaction, worsened relationships with supervisors, and decreased productivity (Aguilera et al., 2016; Boell et al., 2016; Lembrechts et al., 2016).

For instance, Wang et al. (2020) found that telecommuting employees within nonprofits reported experiencing social isolation that negatively affected their psychological functioning. Lembrechts et al. (2016) also found that supervisors are likely to have a negative view of employees' telecommuting when the job's nature is interdependent, perceiving that this working arrangement as a barrier for team cohesion. These negative experiences explain why telecommuting remains underused in many organizations (Caillier, 2016).

Because of the mass adoption of telecommuting in various industries worldwide, and the possibility that telecommuting will continue in the future, there is a need to reevaluate telecommuting policies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Savić, 2020). More research is also needed to determine the perceptions of telecommuting among leaders and employees as a means of providing insights regarding how policies

are implemented, facilitators for change, and barriers to effectiveness. Previous studies have primarily relied on controlled laboratory studies with limited exploration of telecommuters' perceptions (Raghuram et al., 2019). Furthermore, limited research is available on existing telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Irawanto, 2020). The exploration of how leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations perceive implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies can provide valuable insights regarding whether policies are effective or ineffective for improving productivity during COVID-19 (Schinoff et al., 2019). The insights gained by this study can support the design and adoption of future telecommuting policies.

This chapter first describes the literature search strategy. It then discusses the theoretical framework of Lee and Hong's (2011) contemporary social exchange theory, emphasizing how leaders perceive telecommuting in nonprofit organizations. The literature reviewed throughout this chapter considers policies, planning, and adaption among organizations that adopted telecommuting during COVID-19.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The researcher relied on the Walden Library, Department of Defense publications, EBSCOhost, Google Scholars, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, and Taylor and Francis to search for relevant studies in the existing literature. The key search terms were *social exchange, quality of work-life balance, telecommuting, telework, home-based telework, commuting, barriers, social expectations, telework paradoxes, nature of work, family-friendly benefits, turnover, work disruption theory, dependency theory, supervisor's attitude, task interdependence, integrated land use/transport modeling,*

*alternative work arrangements, a global workforce, 21st century workplace, conservation of resources, recovery, work exhaustion, well-being, flexible working, human resources, technology, work, family, boundary management, digital cultural capital, social inequality, virtual team, virtual group, organizational commitment, employee isolation, Covid-19, outbreak, pandemic, quarantine acute, Coronavirus, digital transformation, attitude, satisfaction, productivity, the office of personnel management, and the Telework Report to the United States Congress.* The search focused on journals published between 2015 and 2020; however, literature was included outside of the search window to support the theoretical framework and background.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Heath and Heath (1976), the early work of social exchange theory was focused on how individuals exchange power and social benefits. Today, social exchange theory is focused on how such exchanges are a behavioral need that is driven by motivators, such as working together to meet a deadline and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Recent studies on social exchange theory have focused on the relationships between theories on emotion, affection, trust, solidarity, coalition formation, fairness, social networks, and influence (Cropanzano et al., 2017). According to Blau (1964), the main focus of social exchange theory is on structural relationships that are either larger than or similar to the dyad. In this study, social exchange theory is ideal for considering the social and utilitarian practices that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social exchange theory is useful for exploring how leaders and employees of nonprofit

organizations perceive the implementation of telecommuting policies to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Background on Telework**

Telecommuting is an alternative work arrangement that allows employees to perform work tasks outside of the primary or central workplace for at least some portion of their work schedule. In this arrangement, employees use technology to interact with others both inside and outside of the organization in the performance of their work tasks (Allen et al., 2015). Telecommuting locations include the home, telework centers, or remote offices (Gajendran et al., 2007). According to Allen et al. (2015), individuals who telecommute most frequently work from a home office. While telecommuting can be a full-time practice, it is often practiced part-time in conjunction with a more conventional work arrangement (Allen et al., 2015). The use of telecommuting by organizations has continued to grow with the development of new technology and growing use of personal computers, laptops, and cell phones.

In 2014, the Society for Human Resource Management conducted a survey of randomly selected human resource professionals from a database of approximately 275,000 professionals employed by various sized organizations. The findings indicated that 59% of U.S. employers allowed some form of telecommuting at the time, with 29% of telecommuters as part-time employees and 20% employed full-time (Society for Human Resource Management, 2014). Previous research has investigated telecommuting work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and identification, stress, performance, withdrawal behaviors, and firm-level metrics (Allen et

al., 2015). According to this research, in addition to fostering favorable job attitudes, telecommuting significantly lowers work-role stress and work exhaustion (Allen et al., 2015). Worker performance and productivity, turnover, absenteeism, and overall organizational performance are also positively impacted by telecommuting (Allen et al., 2015). Furthermore, in one study, supervisor-rated task and contextual performance were rated higher for telecommuters than that for non-telecommuters (Gajendran et al., 2015). Moreover, employees given the option to telecommute have reported better job performance, higher levels of job satisfaction, and increased productivity (Anderson et al., 2015).

Because employees do not travel to a central location, telework minimizes the commuting burden, which can reduce costs associated with office maintenance, such as electricity and heating and air-conditioning. The American labor force identifies 43% of the current labor force as eligible for telework in some capacity. Recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) data also indicate that 24% of workers are currently engaging in some form of telecommuting. A survey of telecommuters conducted by Adame et al. (2016) found that people may work from home due to domestic responsibilities, childcare issues, or for the joy of working alone. For organizations, telework can create savings of 30% annually. According to recent data, telework can save organizations 17% in transit costs and 13% in office space funding (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

Windeler et al. (2017) concluded that remote work is more acceptable than in the past due to the increased reliability and accountability of employees in completing their work without constant supervision. However, organizations still hold different



perceptions of telecommuters. Some supervisors perceive that telecommuters add no benefit to the organization and do not always decrease costs. Aguilera et al. (2016) referenced correspondence reflective of these beliefs when Yahoo banned its workers from telework and required them to return to the office in 2012. Some managers feel that having the workers nearby assures them that the workers are productive. According to a study by Holland et al. (2016), employers believe that some workers waste time or work on their own business when they should be working.

Supervisors who do not understand telework can be biased and show favoritism towards the employees who they see every day and believe to be better workers. Moeckel (2017) described that the traditional worker commutes to work daily, collaborates in the workplace, and interacts with his or her supervisor and coworkers. Thus, while telecommuting can be key to satisfaction among employees, it can also be a source of conflict with leadership.

Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2019) wrote that, further compounding the lack of understanding of telecommuting work arrangements, it is not known how employees perceive synchronous and asynchronous technological platforms for telecommuting. Technological advancements have led to the availability of various options for telecommuting, such as asynchronous (e.g., email) and synchronous platforms (e.g., video conferencing; (Kwon & Jeon, 2017; Rymkevich, 2018). Raghuram et al. (2019) concluded that more research is needed to determine employees' perceptions about synchronous and asynchronous platforms for telecommuting, as previous studies have primarily relied on controlled laboratory studies with limited depth. Exploring

employees' perceptions about synchronous and asynchronous platforms for telecommuting is necessary because the increased use of technology in the workplace has changed employee interactions with each other (Schinoff et al., 2019).

### **Telecommuting Relevance**

Holland et al. (2016) suggested that further research needs to be conducted to examine employees' perceptions of telecommuting and how telework facilitates work practices. Aguilera et al. (2016) also proposed a study on telecommuters and how to improve-working relationships with coworkers who are not fans of the telecommuting benefit extended to others. Technological advancements will help supervisors and employers to determine how valuable this type of worker is to the rest of the labor force. Organizations weigh the pros and cons of increasing or decreasing telework programs to aid in cost-cutting initiatives. Organizations consider both the negative and positive aspects of telecommuting when considering the best options for employees and the organization.

Narayanan et al. (2017) noted that working with organizations that have telecommuters is essential to examine how management can best deal with the perceptions faced by telecommuters. The author recognized that telecommuters are viewed by some workers and management as low performers who do not pull their weight in the organization. The findings in the current study can help employers make policy changes that will benefit all groups in the organization, not just telecommuters.

### **Telecommuting Characteristics**

Savić (2020) identified four essential elements of telecommuting: employee of the company, performing a specific task for the company, working away from the company premises, and telecommuting for the employer (p. 101). Furthermore, this study demonstrated managerial improvements that could be implemented, such as new communication tools for organizational systems and devices to evaluate individual teleworkers. The researcher also noted that it is important for leadership to create additional training to clarify how telecommuter work is being remotely supervised.

Raghuram et al. (2019) offered several contributions to organizations that adopt telecommuting. First, this research helps organizations with employees who work from home to develop strategies to reducing the stigma and misconceptions surrounding telecommuting. Second, the analysis supports managers and employees to determine tasks and expectations that meet the needs of an organization and increase employee satisfaction. Third, the literature provides essential insights on how technological advancements have changed how employees address work-life balance issues. Finally, Raghuram et al. (2019) described how managers and supervisors, along with human resource departments, can use this information to improve the perceptions of those with flexible work schedules. The study recommendations serve to support employee retention and encourage more workers to telecommute and take care of their families.

Ollier-Malaterre et al.'s (2019) research showed an understanding of telecommuters' plight to coworkers, and if they will know what to do if they are put in situations where there is a need to pursue this type of work. The study also explored if

telecommuters become productive team members once organizations use NetMeeting, Facebook, and other platforms for delivering tasks and meeting work requirements.

Some managers think that having workers nearby ensures that the workers are productive. Holland et al. (2016) found that employers often believe that some workers waste time or work on their own business when working remotely. Managers therefore use whatever communication tools available to monitor their employees. However, there is no consensus on how employers should monitor workers. Advances in information and communication technologies are used to monitor telework (Rymkevich, 2018). Such advances enable widespread access to the organizational system through laptops and smartphones. In Moeckel's (2017) research, the traditional worker commutes to work daily and interacts with their supervisor and coworkers. The literature also provides insights into the negative perceptions of employees who are not present in the workplace. The Rymkevich (2018) study provided data on whether technology advancements have changed perceptions regarding the benefits of telecommuting.

### **Leadership and Telecommuting**

Hines-McCoy (2016) examined different styles of leadership – relational-oriented and task-oriented – and their impact on alleviating the absence of personal communication between teleworkers. The researcher conducted an electronic survey among 300 telecommuters from different workplaces to analyze the various leadership styles that the supervisors exerted. The findings revealed that age and gender did not have strong impacts on leadership style. Therefore, the result did not support the Herseley Blanchard leadership theory (Hines-McCoy, 2016).

Madlock (2018) examined the perception of telecommuters working in insurance companies on the leadership styles employed by their supervisors. The study specifically explored how perceived leadership styles influence the telecommuters' satisfaction with the communication with their supervisors, job satisfaction, perceived communication competence of their supervisors, and perceived supervisory commitment. This applied contingency theory as its framework. According to the results, leaders must be effective in communicating information on task-related matters more than relational-oriented information to be perceived by workers as effective supervisors (Madlock, 2018).

Moore (2020) conducted a qualitative study that explored the factors that support or prohibit the decisions of operational and non-operational healthcare leaders in the southwest region in the United States in implementing a telecommuting project. The data were collected through a focus group and one-on-one interviews with 11 participants. The researcher also made use of Saldana's coding and theming method for the data analysis. Four essential themes were identified: career advancement, driving factors in decision making, perceived limitation to implementation, and values for work-life balance. Four subthemes were also identified: access to quality candidates, organizational culture, the organization's perspective on telecommuting, and technology concerns. The results indicated that if the telecommuting project was supported by their work team and if there was sufficient technology available in organization, the healthcare leaders would support the telecommuting project (Moore, 2020). In addition, the results identified work-life balance of employees and space constraints as the driving factors that influence the essential themes identified above.

Ruth (2018) analyzed telecommuting and the supervisory implications for properly engaging telecommuting employees. Some industries are meticulous and anxious about the employees to hire within a workforce of telecommuters. Such industries tend to look at the negative impacts of telecommuting and choose to believe the biases presented by the media. Furthermore, although there are several case studies on the workforce of telecommuters and the impacts on telecommuting employees, a review of the literature on leadership implications regarding a telecommuting workforce is still missing (Ruth, 2018).

Hudson (2018) explored the areas of managing, recruiting, and retaining telecommuters. The study was guided by a framework for understanding how individuals employ knowledge for their own benefit. The data were gathered from two groups of telecommuters and the supervisors of telecommuters using surveys. Surveys were collected from 80 telecommuters and 33 supervisors. Hudson (2018) found that the structural policies on telecommuting were thought to be effective by telecommuters and telecommuter supervisors (Hudson, 2018). On the one hand, both the telecommuters and telecommuter supervisors agreed that flexible work schedules were the main reason that telecommuters accepted and maintained their job. On the other hand, the main barriers were the boundaries that the telecommuters had to set between their home and their work. The study also found that job satisfaction and productivity increased, and supervisor knowledge broadened due to the shift to telecommuting. The author proposed that relevant trainings on management strategies for setting boundaries between home and work may support the telecommuting workforce.

### **Telecommuting and Travel**

Shabanpour et al. (2018) applied an integrated framework with three steps to assess empirical evidence of the impacts of telecommuting on air quality, network congestion, and travel behavior in Chicago. First, the researchers outlined a telecommuting adaption model. Through statistical analysis, the researchers assessed possible factors that are linked with the telecommuting adaption capacities of workers. Second, the researchers introduced an estimated model in the activity-based framework called POLARIS for the simulation of patterns of travel activities of workers and congestion in networks. Third, the authors made use of simulators, namely MOVES mobile, that simulate source emission and autonomies that simulate vehicle energy to evaluate possible changes in usage of fuel and emissions from vehicles in the network. The researchers also explored various policy adoption outlines in the presented integrated platform. The authors determined that, when 50% of workers have flexible working time, telecommuting is capable of reducing total daily vehicle miles traveled (VMT) up to 0.69% and vehicle hours traveled (VHT) up to 2.09% in comparison with the baseline situation in which 12% workers have flexible working time arrangements. Furthermore, greenhouse gas and particulate matter emissions can be reduced by 0.71% and 1.14% with the help of this policy (Shabanpour et al., 2018). Overall, the findings suggest that telecommuting policies can be utilized to reduce vehicular emissions and network congestion, especially during rush hours.

In order to understand the impacts of telecommuting on the patterns of activity-travel on a daily basis, Asgari et al. (2016) studied the impacts of telecommuting

arrangements on time management for non-compulsory activities. The authors considered escort, discretionary, in-home shopping, maintenance, and shopping as five significant categories of telecommuting arrangements. They hypothesized that telecommuting balances the time and space restrictions related to work activities in a normal workplace and that telecommuters can wisely budget their time to voluntary activities. The researchers utilized a systemic equations model approach to recognize the impacts of telecommuting on non-compulsory activities. The results showed that telecommuters scheduled for full-day work report a longer duration spent on discretionary activities than those scheduled for a part-day work have taken a higher duration of maintaining errands outside of home. In addition, the total daily trips for all telecommuters including their household members increased because of telecommuting (Asgari et al., 2016).

Previous studies have explored telecommuting as a strategy in travel demand management in the U.S., including an extensive investigation of the underlying conditions through which telecommuting can lessen vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and ease traffic congestion in peak periods. Chakrabarti (2018) explored the possible ways in which telecommuting can be associated with normal travel behavior using data from the U.S. National Household Travel Survey conducted in 2009. The author also compared the physical activity and travel behavior of telecommuters in telecommuting and no-telecommuting scenarios on an ordinary workday. However, the impact of telecommuting on non-motorized travel, physical activity, and public transit use was not addressed. The results indicate that telecommuting more than four times a month is linked with an average of 15% walking trips on a weekly basis, while the higher odds of more than once



transit trip per month, 44% of more than 30 minutes of daily physical activity, and 27% of driving approximately 20,000 miles annually, compared to scenarios without telecommuting. In relation, telecommuting workers are linked with 41% of walking or bicycling activities of not more than a mile, an estimated 71% of more than 30 minutes of physical activity, lower odds of riding transit with an average of 71%, and a greater of 3.58 times of driving not more than 10 miles. Furthermore, the results suggest that physical activity and non-motorized travel are increased as a result of telecommuting, especially in the presence of a need for an active lifestyle (Chakrabarti, 2018). Planning and policy implementation were not discussed in the survey and transit reduction increase and VMT reduction were shown not to be automatic.

Kim et al. (2015) evaluated the impact of a telecommuter household head's attempt to balance household travel and control the interdependence within their home and outside of home travel purposes. A censored regression model was applied to the 2006 Household Travel Survey data from the Seoul Metropolitan area. Considering the vehicle kilometers traveled, the study showed that non-work trips and non-commute trips of telecommuters, including their household members' non-commute and non-work trips, tended to be more frequent than those of the non-telecommuters and household members. Thus, it was evident that commuting trips can be reduced by telecommuting. The variation between household members was only notable in households with less than one or no vehicles for every employed household member. In such households that have insufficient vehicles, the vehicle used for significant travel, such as the non-commute travel of the household head, could either be used for the purposes of non-commute trips

or by other members of the household if the head of the household was not using it for commuting (Kim et al., 2015). The significant implication is that when a household only has a limited budget for vehicle travel, the compensation the household makes for travel mechanism can make optimum usage of such limited vehicle resources and at the same time offset the telecommuting travel-substituting effect. The possible associated effects upon household members should also be considered in order to estimate the impacts of telecommuting promotion policies.

### **Telecommuting, the Organization, and the Employees**

Co-working practices can potentially overcome several problems related to telecommuting from both the individual and organizational point of view. Raffaele and Connell (2016) reviewed existing literature on telecommuting and its impacts on the flexibility of individual and supervisors. Over the past several years, there has been a gradual increase in telecommuting, though rates differ by country (Raffaele & Connell, 2016). For instance, there were approximately 16 million home-based U.S. workers for at least 1 day per month, or about 10% of all employees, which makes the US one of the countries with the highest rates of telecommuting adoption. In Australia, there were about 5.6 million Australian digital workers in 2013. The advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting that affect employees and organizations vary according to the opportunities provided for telecommuters (Raffaele & Connell, 2016).

Through a longitudinal analysis, Henke et al. (2016) investigated the impact of an intense telecommuting environment on the health of employees. The researchers analyzed demographic data, medical claims, health risk assessment data, and remote

connectivity hours in a sample of active employees 18–64 years old from 2010 to 2011. The measures of interest were telecommuting status and intensity and eight indicators of health risk status: alcohol abuse, depression, physical inactivity, obesity, poor nutrition, stress, tobacco use, and overall health, and age, sex, race, job grade, work status, and work location were included as control variables. Furthermore, the health risks related to telecommuting varied depending on the intensity of telecommuting. Employees who telecommuted for no more than 8 hours on a monthly basis faced a lower risk of depression, and there were no identified connections between telecommuting and stress (Henke et al., 2016)

Using a sample of 405 employees connected and corporate data on salary growth and promotion, Golden and Eddleston (2020) compared success measures for telecommuters and non-telecommuter. The study focused on the relationship between telecommuting and career success and the moderating effects of contextual factors. The results indicated that there was no difference in the number of promotions between telecommuters and non-telecommuters. However, it was notable that the telecommuters were more likely to experience decreased salary growth. In addition, it was evident that the extent of telecommuting was related to promotions and salary growth, which indicates that the extent of telecommuting affects workers' career success. The context of work was also highly influential. Telecommuters who worked in a workplace where telecommuting was highly regulated and where they could engage in more visible work received more promotions and enjoyed more communication and face-to-face contact with their supervisors than other telecommuters (Golden & Eddleston, 2020). These

findings help to understand how to achieve telecommuting benefits and challenge prior research that portrays telecommuting as harmful to workers' careers.

In order to determine if telecommuting obstructs critical dimensions of employee effectiveness, Gajendran et al. (2015) developed a theoretical framework connecting telecommuting to duties and circumstantial performance using two set of mechanisms: ideals and job resources. The researchers proposed that the social context that surrounds telecommuting helps determine the outcomes from these trajectories. The sample was comprising of 323 employees and 143 supervisors in different industries. The researchers predicted that telecommuting is connected with duties and circumstantial performance. The results revealed that regulated and normative appropriateness between employees and supervisors and the leader-member relationship were factors in the beneficial effects of telecommuting in a social context (Gajendran et al., 2015).

Ansong and Boateng (2018) investigated the environmental, organizational, and technological factors that affect the adoption of telecommuting in Ghana and West Africa. The authors specifically examined the possible benefits of telecommuting in Ericsson Ghana's operations. The finding demonstrated that the adoption of telecommuting was beneficial for both the employees and the company as a whole (Ansong & Boateng, 2018).

Asgari and Jin (2015) presented a broad and systematic framework to analyze telecommuter behavior and its impacts, particularly the impacts of telecommuting on traffic outcomes. There are a number of other relevant studies on telecommuting; however, such studies do not recognize the various telecommuting forms that may have

different impacts on daily activity patterns. In addition, these studies focused on supporting the decision to telecommute or not and comparing the frequency of telecommuting on a weekly or monthly basis (Asgari & Jin, 2015). Asgari and Jim's comprehensive framework was designed to fill gaps in the existing research. First, the authors introduced an algorithm to identify telecommuting activities that play a major role in telecommuter behavior. Second, the authors incorporated choice and frequency as preferences and established a daily framework of telecommuter activities. Third, an appropriate modeling composition was proposed, which was capable of controlling different forms of engagements and associations with other telecommuter activities. The estimation of the connections between telecommuting engagements and other daily telecommuter activities was enabled by these study features, enabling an impact analysis on congestion reduction and VMT (Asgari & Jin, 2015).

Lyttelton et al. (2020) addressed the impact of telecommuting on telecommuters' work-family conflicts and flexibility. The authors utilized data from the American Time Use Survey from 2003–2018 (N = 19,179) and the COVID Impact Survey from April and May 2020 (N= 784). The study identified differences in assimilated time on childcare, housework, subjective telecommuting experiences, and leisure through comparing mothers and fathers who are working in the workplace, working exclusively at home, and working partially at home. The results demonstrated that housework gaps among the genders among telecommuters and on telecommuting days were all equally larger for females compared to males. As such, the gender gap in childcare can be lessened by the telecommuting of parents who are both full-time earners (Lyttelton et al., 2020). In

addition, according to a survey conducted during the COVID–19 lockdown, stay-at-home orders resulted in more frequent feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety among mothers.

In exploring telecommuting, factors such as technology, management, the policy-making process and government policies, and customer service quality should be considered. Blount (2015) presented a monograph that scrutinizes most of the prior research on telecommuting’s key effects. As an effect, the proposed advantages and benefits of “anywhere working” while alleviating its limitations can be achieved with commitment from the organization. Furthermore, this monograph analyzed the related literature on a sustainable telecommuting environment to identify how the adoption of telecommuting can provide benefits to society, organizations, and individuals (Blount, 2015). This study also delved into the tensions and contentions of telecommuting for employees. According to telecommuting proponents, technological advances may inevitably lead to telecommuting becoming normal operating procedure. Meanwhile telecommuter detractors argue that there are barriers to full-scale adoption of telecommuting, including resulting professional and social isolation. In conclusion, the monograph proposed a prolonged research agenda that can help in the development of a sustainable telecommuting framework.

He and Hu (2015) examined the impact of telecommuters’ conduct on their non-telecommuting activities and out-of-home activities. The study specifically investigated the differences in activities between low-income and high-income earner telecommuters using a sample of 7,500 telecommuters from the 2007 Chicago Regional Household

Travel Inventory. It was notable that during the survey days, high-income workers were more likely to telecommute than low-income workers. Similarly, telecommuters performed a higher total number of trips, maintenance trips, and pick-up and drop-off trips than the workers with high income. Telecommuting status was strongly linked with the number of trips even on the days when the telecommuters went to their actual workplace. The disparity between telecommuters and non-telecommuters on days that both take commuting trips stems from the unnoticed disparities between the two groups of employees and not from the commute time that can be saved from telecommuting (He & Hu, 2015).

### **Organizational Impact**

Researchers have emphasized the need for further investigation regarding technology usage to evaluate the perceptions of workers in relation to advancements in technology used to monitor workers from their homes. Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2019) noted that technological advancements in telecommuting have changed employee perceptions. Kuyucu (2019) concluded that there are still gaps in the study of telecommuting and evolving workplace dynamics. Melo and Silva (2017) research the assumptions that everyone is okay with flexible work schedules throughout the organization that discloses a problem that needs greater awareness from an educated and professional context. Besides, this research addresses the realization and delivers more awareness of perceptions when an employee has a different work-life balance.

Holland et al. (2016) also argued that government and scholarly studies and decisions over the past decade have not addressed perceptions of workers towards their

telecommuting colleagues. In addition, organizations have glossed over issues regarding negative work-life balance in telework schedules. New advancements in technology have caused management and workers to consider new approaches to address work-related problems and concerns put forth by employees (Weible & Heikkila, 2017). Policy changes and improvements in telecommuting will be better understood if managers understand the negative perceptions of telework in their organizations. Researchers can develop policies and practices that benefit more than one group (Weible & Sabatier, 2017).

### **Methodology**

Quantitative research was not appropriate for this study as the aim was not to gather quantifiable data, but instead to understand experiences and perceptions. A qualitative research design was chosen for this study as a means of gaining rich and exploratory data from participants (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is the appropriate design when researchers aim to uncover the meaning ascribed by individuals to a particular issue (Merriam, 2009). Hence, this research design was suitable given that the current study focuses on describing how leaders and employees of a nonprofit organization perceive telecommuting policies.

### **Justification**

The use of social exchange theory is ideal for this study as it provides a grounded framework for exploring perceptions among leaders and employees of a nonprofit organization regarding the implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies. The research approach seeks to understand the lived experience of teleworkers and how



other members of the organization have accepted the practice. Previous studies in the past decade have not addressed perceptions among workers of their telecommuting colleagues. This literature review helped to identify the recognized impacts of the marked increase in telecommuting due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented a comprehensive literature review that exposes the misconceptions about telecommuters' roles in organizations and outlines strategies to improve productivity. Individuals who telecommute do not always have a voice in organizations. However, research demonstrates that particular tasks are better suited to individuals who are not working at a central office, such as administrative duties that can be performed at home.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how leaders and employees of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Telecommuting policies in the workplace have changed significantly to manage the growing online workforce (Lee et al., 2020). Telecommunication is ideal for observing social distancing while also maintaining a productive workforce (Lee et al., 2020). Yet, online workers face several challenges, such as social loneliness, decreased productivity, and negative perceptions by leadership (Wang et al., 2020). A lack of understanding about the perceptions of telecommuting policies adds to the underuse of telecommuting work arrangements (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019).

In this chapter, I present the research design and methodology. I present the instrumentation, procedures for participant recruitment, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. Finally, I discuss the trustworthiness of the research and ethical considerations.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The following research questions guide the research design for this study.

RQ1: How do leaders of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive the implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: How do employees of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive the implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

To address the research questions, a qualitative methodology was chosen. Qualitative research examines phenomena that are not measurable or testable (Tracy, 2019). Qualitative research is used to gather participant perceptions, lived experiences, or opinions about a specific phenomenon (Tracy, 2019). Conversely, quantitative approaches are used for the purpose of exploring relationships between two or more variables (Goertzen, 2017). A quantitative approach involves collecting data to test hypotheses (Goertzen, 2017). The data collected in a quantitative approach are typically measurable and quantified through descriptive or inferential statistics (Goertzen, 2017).

A qualitative design is effective for understanding or describing a phenomenon and how it is addressed or perceived by participants (Tracy, 2019). A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study given its focus on the perceptions of leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations regarding telecommuting policies. A qualitative design allows for gathering rich and exploratory information through semi-structured interviews.

### **Role of the Researcher**

This study was conducted by a primary data collector and analyst. I recruited the participants and collected and analyzed the data. I had no personal connections with the recruited participants. However, researcher bias is still important to consider. Researcher bias refers to the possibility that personal perceptions or opinions will impact the data collection and analysis (Tracy, 2019). In this study, I employed bracketing, which is a form of reflexive journaling, for the aim of documenting and mitigating personal bias.

### **Methodology**

The target population for this study is nonprofit leaders and employees in southeast Florida. The sample is comprised of leaders and employees in a single nonprofit organization. The unit of analysis is perceptions of telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were delineated for the purpose of ensuring that participants were eligible for this study. Firstly, the participants had to be employed in the southeast Florida area by the nonprofit organization. This requirement was established to ensure that the participants could effectively respond to the interview questions. Second, the participants had to have worked in a telecommunication capacity for a minimum of 6 months during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to be able to reflect on the adaptation of telecommuting policies. Third, the participants had to be comfortable discussing how they perceive planning, implementation, and adaptation of telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the participants had to be willing to be interviewed for 10–15 minutes

and audio recorded. The rationale for this requirement was to select participants who were aware of the obligations of participation if they chose to participate voluntarily.

Candidates who met these criteria were included in the study. Those who did not were thanked for their time and excluded from the study. All of the participants were recruited from a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida. The selected site was a nonprofit organization identified through the Great Nonprofits databases, which lists all of the nonprofit organizations within Florida. Prior to recruitment, site authorization was requested to conduct the research. After authorization, a recruitment email with my contact information was sent to all employees in the nonprofit organization. For the purposes of privacy, the recruitment flyer was distributed through the organization's email account such that I did not access the email list of employees. Interested participants contacted me directly for inclusion in the study.

This study's sampling method was purposive sampling (Lavrakas, 2008). Purposive sampling selects participants by using a non-random sampling technique to ensure alignment with the sample criteria (Lavrakas, 2008). Purposive sampling targets only individuals with related backgrounds and experience regarding the given phenomenon (Lavrakas, 2008; Tracy, 2019). Purposive sampling was ideal for this study because it allowed for selecting individuals with the relevant experience to address the interview questions. A sample of 10 participants was the target for this study. In qualitative research, sample saturation refers to the process of gathering information until no new themes are revealed (Tracy, 2019). For this study, the saturation point was estimated to be 10 participants based on previous qualitative studies. No new themes

emerged, but if new themes had continued to emerge, the data collection process would have continued in order to achieve data saturation (Tracy, 2019).

### **Instrumentation**

The primary source of data in this study was semi-structured interviews, for which I prepared an interview guide. The purpose of the interview guide was to align the questions with the research questions and purpose. The semi-structured interview process was useful, as it offered structure for each participant but also provided the opportunity to use probing questions in response to participant reflections (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The use of semi-structured interviews therefore allowed for gathering rich and exploratory data that are unique to each participant (Tracy, 2019). The guide listed a total of eight questions regarding how leaders and employees perceive telecommuting policies in response to COVID-19 and potential probing questions to encourage to describe of their experiences in detail.

An expert panel reviewed and validated the interview guide. The expert panel was composed of three professionals in the field of study who hold terminal degrees (Table 1). I selected the experts from within his university. I contacted selected individuals through university email and provided them with a description of the request. The three reviewers were provided the interview guide and had 5–10 days to provide feedback, which was incorporated into the final guide. The goal was to ensure that the interview guide is credible, addresses the research question, and flows logically with the study's purpose (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

**Table 1***Semi-Structured Interview Guide Expert Panel*

Reviewer name	Education/experience	Feedback
X	X	X
X	X	X
X	X	X

**Participant Recruitment**

This section discusses the recruitment procedures, which were implemented in two phases. First, site authorization was requested to conduct the proposed study. I sent a formal letter via email to the selected nonprofit organization in southeast Florida. The letter contained the purpose of the study and the participant criteria. The letter was reviewed by representatives of the organization and approval was obtained. Walden University regulations (10-18-21-0668222) were strictly adhered to in the recruitment process.

After the site authorization process, I distributed a recruitment email (Appendix A) through across the nonprofit organization that detailed the study's purpose and significance. I also provided my contact information in the form of email and phone numbers. The electronic distribution by the organization reduced social contact per IRB regulations and also ensured that the employee email list was protected. Interested participants contacted me to be included in the study.

I assessed each interested participant according to the inclusion criteria to ensure that they were eligible for the study. Participants who were eligible were included in the study. If more than 10–15 participants had contacted me, I was prepared to develop a waitlist, which would be ready to draw on if participants withdrew from the study. Prior to participation, the participants received an informed consent form. Through the purposive sampling technique, I had a minimum of 12 participants readily available and representative of the population. The participants voluntarily signed the informed consent form and returned it via email to me. Each participant was provided with a signed and dated copy of the informed consent form. I subsequently scheduled the interviews. Each participants indicated if they were more comfortable with a Zoom setting or a physical meeting for the interview.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process commenced after the participants were screened for eligibility and signed the informed consent forms. After this process, the participants and I set times for the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted online. I began each interview with an emphasis on the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time. I then followed the predeveloped interview guide. The interviews lasted approximately 10–15 minutes and were audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and data analysis. Pseudonyms – such as E1 (Employee 1) and E2 (Employee 2) – were used to ensure confidentiality. The use of pseudonyms ensured that all personal names and identifiers were absent from the transcripts.



Rev.com was used to transcribe the completed interviews that were recorded on audio files. After transcription, individual summaries were provided to the participants for member checking. Member checking is key to ensuring that findings meet the dependability and credibility standards for trustworthiness. Participants had 5–10 days to review the summaries and provide feedback, if any, to me. After this period, I commenced data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The data in this study were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis guidelines. Braun and Clarke provided a clear methodology for analyzing transcribed data and rigorously presenting the findings. The key objective of thematic analysis is to use transcripts to identify themes derived from coding reoccurring phrases and words (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Throughout this process, I created a codebook that was used to demonstrate the relationship between each selected code, category, and theme that emerged. This process served to increase the credibility of the research through clearly demonstrating the relationship between the emergent themes and the initial coding procedures.

For this study, the thematic analysis results were themes related to participants' coded responses that addressed the research questions. First, the transcripts were uploaded into NVivo, an organizational software that allowed me to organize excerpts of the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2019). I then commenced with the six steps of thematic analysis.

In the first phase, I became familiar with the data through reading and re-reading the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In Phase 2, I formulated initial codes based on repeated patterns in the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The codes included “implementation of telecommunication strategies” and “adapting to telecommunication.” The overarching categories of codes included “leaders’ perceptions of policies,” “employees’ perceptions of policies,” “implementation of policies” and “adaption to policies.” These codes were entered into the NVivo software and linked to excerpts from specific participants to ensure the credibility of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In Phase 3 of the thematic analysis, I searched for themes among the codes developed in Phase 2 (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Similar codes were grouped into themes, which were reviewed in the following phase (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

In Phase 4, I reviewed the themes with the dissertation committee to ensure that they objectively represented the findings based on participants’ responses (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

In the final phase, triangulation was used to assess the convergence of findings from the semi-structured interviews (Tracy, 2019). The outcomes of the triangulation are discussed in detail in Chapter 4 along with the key findings, which are detailed by theme and discussed in terms of the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

This research was guided by adherence to trustworthiness principles (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The measures of trustworthiness include dependability, transferability, confirmability, and credibility (Connelly, 2016). The following subsections describe each

of these variables, potential threats to these criteria, and the approaches used to mitigate the threats.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is defined as the representation of findings in a valid and trustworthy manner (Connelly, 2016). Threats to credibility include misrepresenting data, researcher bias, an improper sampling strategy, and other distortions in data collection and analysis. In this study, researcher bias serves as a threat to credibility. To mitigate this bias, I employed bracketing (Tracy, 2019). Bracketing is a form of reflexive journaling used during data collection, analysis, and the presentation of findings (Tracy, 2019). The author used the reflexive process to mitigate bias and interpret findings in relation to previous empirical research.

Sampling design is also a threat to credibility (Connelly, 2016). However, the purposive sampling strategy applied in this study is ideal for gathering information from participants that have relevant experience and insights. I also screened each participant according to the developed inclusion criteria before including them in the study.

A further threat to credibility is the research design. In this case, the qualitative approach was ideal for gathering data on the perceptions of participants (Tracy, 2019). To further extend the credibility of the findings, the results were contextualized within the existing literature.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the consistency of finding with the raw data (Connelly, 2016). A threat to dependability in this study is the inaccurate representation of participant's

reflections through data analysis. This threat was mitigated through the expert panel review of the interview guide. Future researchers can use this guide for similar research explorations. An audit trail was also used to clearly demonstrate how the codes and themes were developed and to discuss the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. The use of the audit trail ensured context and transparency of the results to validate the study's rigor (Tracy, 2019). The study protocol is presented in detail for future replication in Chapter 3. In Chapter 5, the findings are discussed in relation to the previous empirical literature.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the applicability of findings to different situations or populations (Connelly, 2016). Transferability is limited in qualitative studies due to the narrow focus on specific samples and geographic places (Connelly, 2016). However, there are methods that can be used to extend the transferability of a study (Connelly, 2016). For this study, I enhanced transferability by discussing the findings in relation to the previous empirical literature. Transferability was also enhanced through the description in Chapter 4. Thick description involved the discussion of findings with reference to direct quotes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the degree to which findings can be replicated by future researchers (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability is based on the presentation of a clear study protocol (Connelly, 2016), which is presented in detail in Chapter 3. Any changes to the protocol are clarified with detailed justifications in Chapter 4.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative research should strictly adhere to the ethical considerations delineated by the IRB and guided by the Belmont Report. The Belmont Report explains that all participants must be treated ethically and protected from risk to harm. The three principles of the Belmont Report are respect to persons, beneficence, and justice (Adashi et al., 2018; Sanjari et al., 2014). The ethical treatment of participants was guided in this study by the site authorization and IRB approval. Only after these approvals did the data collection and analysis commence. Participants were also provided informed consent forms that detailed their participation and risk of harm, which was minimal. Furthermore, participants were made aware that they could withdraw at any time without consequences (Sanjari et al., 2014). Participants were additionally protected in this study through the use of pseudonyms to ensure that personal identifiers and names were not present in the data collection, analysis, or final report (Richards & Schwartz, 2002).

The final copy of this dissertation is available to all participants. Participants may access the results via the university database or contact me for a copy. The data for this study have been secured to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The data are stored on a password-protected USB drive. I only access the information on a private password-protected computer. Per IRB regulations, after 3 years, the data and the USB will be permanently destroyed.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how leaders and employees of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive planning, implementation, and

adaptation of telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter provided the justification for the qualitative research design and detailed the recruitment procedures. The data were collected through 12 semi-structured interviews. The process for data collection and analysis was also presented at length in this chapter. The following chapter includes a detailed discussion of the findings, the identified themes, and the associated codes.

## Chapter 4: Results

The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in 2020 has caused over 800,000 deaths in the United States and has disrupted daily lives around the world. Since the start of the pandemic, organizations have adjusted their work policies to allow more personnel to work from home, acknowledging the risk of contracting the virus. Organizations around the country have consequently experienced changed perceptions of telecommuting for their employees and of the need to work in a closed office environment. Therefore, it is imperative to explore and better understand the effects of telecommuting on organizations.

There are gaps in knowledge about the perceptions of telecommuting. Given that many organizations now allow for telework, exploring the phenomenon is valuable to both literature and practice. The problem that prompted this study is that there is a lack of understanding regarding how leadership considers existing telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Irawanto, 2020). Telecommuting has been found in some instances to be associated with decreased productivity among employees, despite policies regarding how employees should work during their shifts (Lee et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it is unknown how leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations perceive telecommuting policies' effectiveness regarding productivity (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019).

### **Research Design and Rationale**

At the moment, there is no known research underway to evaluate and compare nonprofit organizations' telecommuting policies during the pandemic. For this qualitative

study, I collected and analyzed primary data from 12 research participants. Online interviews were conducted with the employees of a nonprofit organization. The data collection process commenced after the participants were screened for their eligibility and signed and submitted the informed consent forms. After this point, the participants and I scheduled semi-structured interviews based on the availability and convenience of the participants. The interviews lasted between 15–30 minutes and were audio-recorded for the purposes of transcription and data analysis. Rev.com was used to transcribe the interview recordings. I then performed a thematic analysis with regard to the participants' perceptions of the implementation and adaption of telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The analysis led to the discovery of thematic categories, major and minor themes, and subthemes. The major themes are those with the most associated codes and represent the most significant findings of the study. Meanwhile, minor themes are important themes with fewer associated codes than the major themes. Finally, the subthemes represent examples, details, or explanations of the major and minor themes.

### **Findings of the Interviews**

The thematic analysis revealed that the interviewed leaders of nonprofit organizations believe that telecommuting policies in response to the pandemic led to the development of feelings of isolation and disconnectedness, leading to the inability to accomplish their tasks and duties. The leaders reported that the shift to telecommuting was the organization's response to comply with the safety guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Finally, they believe that the change reduced the



organization's operational expenses and the stakeholders enjoyed flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities. As for the employees, they believe that the shift to telecommuting lacked preparedness, as there were no clear policies and regulations in place when it was implemented. At the same time, they found that the new policy reduced their organization's operational expenses. The following sections discuss the themes that appeared in at least 50% of the participants' responses. Those with limited references are displayed in Table 3. Further research may be necessary to affirm these themes given the limited number of references recorded.

**Table 2***Summary of Findings by Research Question*

Research questions	Thematic category	Themes	Number of participants	Number of references	
RQ1. How do leaders of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive the implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?	TC1. Challenges Faced by Nonprofit Organizations	Feelings of isolation and disconnectedness	6	9	
		<i>* Leading to the inability to accomplish their tasks and duties</i>			
		The inability to separate professional and personal boundaries	2	4	
			Lack of proper resources to telecommute, especially in terms of network and connection	2	3
			Financial constraints due to the acquisition of technological equipment	2	3
	TC2. Strategies Applied to Overcome Telecommuting Challenges	Compliance with the safety guidelines of the CDC	3	2	
		Provision of additional training opportunities and programs	2	2	
		Provision of IT resources to enhance the telecommuting experience of employees	2	2	
	TC3. Benefits and Future of Telecommuting	Reduction in organization's operational expenses	3	2	
Flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities		3	2		

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RQ2. How do employees of a nonprofit organization perceive the implementation and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?	TC1. Challenges Faced by Nonprofit Organizations	Lack of preparedness; no policies and regulations in place	4	6
		Feelings of isolation and disconnectedness	3	6
	TC2. Strategies Applied to Overcome Telecommuting Challenges	Provision of additional training opportunities and programs	2	2
	TC3. Benefits and Future of Telecommuting	Reduction in organization's operational expenses	3	3
		Boosted morale of employees	2	3
		Flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities	1	3
		Reduced travel time, increased work efficiency <i>*Saving resources with less traveling</i>	1	2

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**Research Question 1: How do leaders of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive the implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The participants' responses could be categorized into three thematic categories: the challenges faced with the implementation and adaption, strategies applied to overcome telecommuting challenges, and the benefits and future of telecommuting. The interview responses indicate that the leaders found the transition to telecommuting to be difficult due to the development of feelings of isolation and disconnectedness. They also shared that such feelings lead to the inability to accomplish their tasks and duties. As for the strategies applied to manage the issues of telecommuting, the leaders believe that it was important to demonstrate the importance of strictly complying with the safety guidelines of the CDC to protect their stakeholders' health and wellness. Finally, the leaders also highlighted advantages of the transition, attesting to the reduction in operational expenses and flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities. Table 4 presents the key findings in relation to the first research question.

**Table 3***Summary of the Findings Addressing Research Question 1*

Research questions	Thematic category	Themes	Number of participants	Number of references
RQ1. How do leaders of a nonprofit organization perceive the implementation and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?	TC1. Challenges Faced by Nonprofit Organizations	Feelings of isolation and disconnectedness <i>* Leading to the inability to accomplish their tasks and duties</i>	6	9
		Inability to separate professional and personal boundaries	2	4
		Lack of proper resources to telecommute, especially in terms of network and connection	2	3
		Financial constraints due to the acquisition of technological equipment	2	3
	TC2. Strategies Applied to Overcome Telecommuting Challenges	Compliance with the safety guidelines of the CDC	3	2
		Provision of additional training opportunities and programs	2	2
		Provision of IT resources to enhance the telecommuting experience of employees	2	2
	TC3. Benefits and Future of Telecommuting	Reduction in organization's operational expenses	3	2

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Flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities	3	2
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### ***Thematic Category 1: Challenges Faced by Nonprofit Organizations***

When asked about the challenges faced by their respective organizations, the interviewed leaders revealed that there was development of feelings of isolation and disconnectedness among members. According to five of the six leaders, the lack of personal and physical interaction among the staff members and other stakeholders contributed to feelings of loneliness. For some, such feelings led to the inability to properly accomplish their responsibilities from home. Three other themes emerged under this category, each noted by two interviewees: (1) the inability to separate professional and personal boundaries; (2) the lack of proper resources to telecommute, especially in terms of network and connection; and (3) financial constraints due to the acquisition of technological equipment. These themes are found in the table above but are not discussed in detail as they need further research to solidify their trustworthiness.

**Major Theme 1: Feelings of Isolation and Disconnectedness.** The first major theme of the study is the development of feelings of isolation and disconnectedness. According to the participants, although working from home has been practical and convenient, over time, employees came to feel lonely without personal communication and interaction with co-workers. As one manager described, employees were initially happy when they worked from home at the start of the pandemic. However, as they continued to work from 8–12 hours without physical interaction, employees came to feel “disconnected.” The manager added how telecommuting was challenging for their own mental health and suggested that organizations should consider assisting all employees with regard to this aspect. Manager 1 shared:

Yes, they wanted to work from home. Everyone was happy to work from home. But the social implications changed because working from home is very isolating. You are not connected with your peers. There is a lot to be learned when you are around other people. If you are in an office and you overhear something that is useful. That's gone. You are alone for 8–10 or 12 hours without anybody else from work around. From people that I have talked to, that wasn't what they expected. They did not expect to feel that disconnected. They thought that working from home would be easier. In fact, it wasn't mentally easier.

I think if the organization were to acknowledge the mental health aspect as to what is going on they might do a little bit better. But to keep things the same as usual before the pandemic has caused in my perception a negative impact. There are some positive things, rules and processes are a little bit stricter and are detailed, but the connection piece is lacking. So, I think negatively people working from home try and the organization is not trying to find ways to connect them has had a negative impact overall.

Based on experience, Manager 2 also noted that he has seen signs of depression from people in general.

Moreover, with the demands from work and the need to complete them outside of the usual office space, employees recalled the value of office experience and interaction.

One participant stated:



My perception that I kind of see the most is that so many people are walking around like zombies trying to deal with this stuff. Trying to get through the next day. I have seen a lot of depression in people.

I got to go with negative on that, because as easily as we have adapted to telecommuting during the covid pandemic, it has been difficult because people like the interaction of the office experience. I have seen where it has led to feelings of isolation and not accomplishing that much. Even though they are, it can tough to adjust to a not worksite specific job. It can be tough to adapt to that, but most people have adapted to it very well.

Manager 4 similarly shared that the dissatisfaction with telecommuting stems from the lack of personal and light moments among co-workers and employees. This participant also echoed the call of Manager 1 with regard to the need to give attention to the professional and mental health of employees. The participant commented:

On the downside to that, some general dissatisfaction comes from a lack or inability to have some of those watercooler type moments that, regardless of the technology, you don't get when you are around other people in an office environment. Sometimes at least initially, using communication platforms could have been a challenge because getting responses from individuals and not being able to walk down to office space was one of the major initial challenges for members to get tasks completed. However, overall, telecommuting is a positive experience.

... I think if left unsolved, it can hurt a worker's professional health. In the since, their ability to execute on the job they are trying to perform. Suppose they are spending more time trying to figure out how to manage the expectations of their manager. So, it comes back to communication.

### ***Thematic Category 2: Strategies Applied to Overcome Telecommuting Challenges***

The second thematic category concerns the strategies applied to overcome and adjust to the telecommuting challenges identified in the first thematic category. Three of the six leaders expressed that the transition was fast and the situation convinced all stakeholders that there was a need to strictly comply with the safety guidelines of the CDC in order to protect the health and wellness of the organization's stakeholders. Two other minor themes also emerged: provision of additional training opportunities and programs and provision of IT resources to enhance the telecommuting experience of employees. Again, these two themes may need further research given the limited number of references.

**Major Theme 2: Compliance with the safety guidelines of the CDC.** The second major theme of the study refers to the need for organizations to abide by the safety guidelines of the CDC, despite the lack of initial knowledge and policies on telecommuting. For three of the leaders, the organization's quick decision to transition to telecommuting reflected the need to follow the government's rules and protect all stakeholders. Manager 1 shared that "I am satisfied the organization followed the government rules. They quickly closed things down. They followed the policies that were set by the CDC." Meanwhile, Manager 5 noted the unprecedented impact of the

pandemic across sectors, businesses, societies, and countries around the world. Manager 5 indicated that their organization needed to swiftly decide to transition to ensure the safety of their employees. The participant provided a breakdown of the organization's actions and practices:

The drastic spread of COVID-19 has disrupted a lot of lives and livelihood and business. We have had to put new policies, procedures and strategies in place that can help meet the needs of the organization and community goals. We want to address employee safety, their expectations, and the need to increase flexibility. So, we want our employees to respect the workplace and ensure a safe environment. Ensuring the health checks are being made. We are working on arming our teams the way we can by providing them with the information and resources they need to do their job. Also, we are not just doing it for our employees, we are doing it for our community as well. Because the pandemic has caused a big impact psychologically and mentally on their wellbeing. So, we are just trying to put policies and procedures in place to overcome the issues that have been caused by the pandemic and see what we can do.

### ***Thematic Category 3: Benefits and Future of Telecommuting***

The third thematic category regards the benefits and future of telecommuting in nonprofit organizations. Two major themes were established under this category: reduction in operational expenses and flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities. Three of the leaders noted that telecommuting may continue to be implemented given the reduced costs and expenses of not maintaining a physical office.

Three other leaders explained that managers and employees enjoy the flexibility of being able to fulfil both their personal and professional tasks from home.

**Major Theme 3: Reducing organization's operational expenses.** The third major theme that emerged from the analysis was reduced operational expenses as a result of telecommuting. Three of the leaders indicated that telecommuting is here to stay. They explained that although COVID-19 cases and infections have slowed down, their organization has maintained their telecommuting policy. Manager 1 reported that most organizations have realized that they can work and be productive with the current setting without needing to spend on office spaces, rent, and power. This manager also noted that their organization is not planning on changing their policy anytime soon. The participant explained:

I think it is just going to be mainstream. I don't think it is going to change anytime soon. I think that now after last year and this year. Even though the pandemic has shown the number of infections has slowed down, organizations have figured out how to do it and maybe even save money and cut back with additional office spaces and rents and people have been able to effectively learn to work from home. I don't foresee it changing in my organization anytime soon.

Manager 4 similarly commented, "I think that, at present, my organization will stay 100% remote. It is pretty much built for that, and it is a net positive." In addition, Manager 6 shared that their organization has already announced and committed to transitioning their work protocol to telecommuting, even after the pandemic. The

participant highlighted that their management recognizes that the set-up has permitted them to save money and increase productivity:

My senior management has already come online and stated, even after the pandemic, if the pandemic ever ends, this is going to be a permanent thing for us. Because the organization is saving money by not having everyone come into an office and sit in a desk. That is going to save on electricity bills, people on the road traveling. Less people trying to drive to access the organization during the day. Again, you are going to have those older nay-sayers who are never going to like teleworking. But it has been a huge paradigm shift where a lot of senior leaders who never thought we can do this have come to realize how productive we can be telecommuting.

**Major Theme 4: Flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities.**

The fourth major theme of the study is the ability of managers and employees to multi-task, completing both their professional and personal duties at their convenience and from the comfort of their homes. According to Manager 5, working from home is more relaxing and stress and burnout are not as plausible. Manager 5 described that telecommuters can take a break at any time and breathe when faced with difficult tasks, pressure, and issues:

The positive, is that the management and spending more time at home. At home you can take a couple of breaks and unable to take them at work. You don't get as burned out as you do at home. You can get some other personal tasks done at home while working from home. Maybe, take a break and clean around the house

and have dinner already ready. Healthy eating habits from working from home. Less frequency to visit fast food restaurants.

Meanwhile, Manager 6 described his work under telecommuting as “positive.”

This participant believed that he is more productive and efficient working from home:

My personal work has been positive since I have been telecommuting. I think that I am more productive and have less distractions. When I am working from home, I don't have people walking in and out of my office and I get to take my dog to work with me every day. Which is a huge plus for me.

**Research Question 2: How do employees of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive the implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The thematic analysis explored the firsthand perceptions and experiences of employees with telecommuting in their organization. Four of the six employees reported that telecommuting was initially a challenge because their organizations lacked preparedness and there were no policies and regulations in place. One minor theme was established, as two participants noted that the provision of additional training opportunities and programs assisted in the smooth and successful transition to telecommuting. The key advantage of telecommuting identified under this theme was the reduction of operational expenses. Similar to the previous thematic category, themes with limited references are found in the tables, but not extensively explored. Table 5 presents the themes under the second thematic category.

**Table 4***Breakdown of the Findings Addressing Research Question Two*

Research Questions	Thematic Category	Themes	Number of Participants	Number of References
RQ2. How do employees of a nonprofit organization perceive the implementation and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?	TC1. Challenges Faced by Non-Profit Organizations	Lack of preparedness, no policies and regulations in place	4	6
		Feelings of isolation and disconnectedness	3	6
	TC2. Strategies Applied to Overcome Telecommuting Challenges	Provision of additional training opportunities and programs	2	2
	TC3. Benefits and Future of Telecommuting	Reduction in organization's operational expenses	3	3
		Boosted morale of employees	2	3
		Flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities	1	3
	Reduced travel time, increased work efficiency <i>*Saving resources with less traveling</i>	1	2	

***Thematic Category 1: Challenges Faced by Non-Profit Organizations***

Under the first thematic category, the majority of the employees believed that the primary issue was the lack of preparedness for telecommuting, as there were no policies and regulations in place.

**Major Theme 5: Lack of preparedness; no policies and regulations in place.**

The fifth major theme was employees' belief that their organization lacked preparedness for the transition to telecommuting as there were no clear policies and regulations in place. Several participants described that telecommuting was initially difficult as the majority of the employees were unaware of the processes and practices of working from home. Employee 2 expressed that at the beginning, employees were unsure of their respective roles and responsibilities. Employee 2 also stated that progress was also slow and unsatisfactory at first given that the organization failed to provide clear and proper guidelines to employees. The participant described:

Perception during COVID-19 pandemic and organizational command acceptance is basically that the leadership who are not familiar with telecommuting were hesitant to execute effective measures nor was the leadership prepared to emplace effective policies and procedures to organizational emergency plans for use.

Therefore, at the beginning of the pandemic, work productivity yielded unsatisfactory results, creating cynicism among many personnel and affected leadership roles and responsibilities.

Initially, the rate of progress was unsatisfactory, mainly based on who is required to telecommute and who wasn't. There was no clear guidance initially and the organizational leadership struggled to implement policies and procedures to yield effective work performance measures. Those who were allowed or approved to telecommute was hard to reach on occasion in case of an emergency or responses to critical tasks were delayed. Specifically in critical areas this effective moral



overall due to poor implementation of effective policies and programs with minimal oversight.

Employee 4 noted that there were many concerns during the transition to telecommuting. This participant believed that many leaders of organizations in general do not have adequate knowledge and experience about telecommuting. The participant therefore contended that the government should lead with formal and well-structured plans for organizations to follow.

Perception of working during the COVID-19 pandemic is many organizational leaders had limited guidance on how to remain in business during a pandemic, which is concerning since the training has been around for over a decade. The concern for us as an organization is that local leaders are more focused on their profits and investors than finding ways to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on their employees. This is a reason why the government should be instrumental in providing continuity of operation plans.

Lastly, Employee 6 acknowledged that the majority of organizations and their stakeholders were not prepared to transition. This lack of preparedness pertained to the lack of formal strategies and back-up plans to support stakeholders during a crucial period:

I don't think any of us were prepared. We did not have a strategic plan for something like this to happen. What it has taught us is to have a back-up plan. We have to have another way of doing business. What we failed to do is have a back-up plan. So, it has taught us to think ahead and think that anything can happen.

You know being in America this is something that has never happened before. We kind of always thought that everything was just a given. We thought we would never just shut down. However, we did shut down. We have to be cognitive of things like that and be able to adjust and be flexible. Like they say, “flexibility is the key to airpower.”

***Minor Theme 1: Feelings of isolation and disconnectedness.*** The first minor theme that emerged from the employee interviews was the development of feelings of isolation and loneliness, which was a major theme shared by the managers. According to three of the six employees, many workers wanted to return to the traditional work environment, as they wanted to personally communicate and interact with their co-workers. Employee 1 reflected that human touch is a crucial factor in order for one to successfully perform his or her responsibilities:

Employees wanted to come back to work because they missed the camaraderie between their work family and themselves. Some coworkers can go either way with being happy to work from home or the office. They feel they will be just as productive in the office or working from home. If they work from home, there will still need to be a way to have contact with coworkers who are in the office.

Some need the human touch of being around others to feel comfortable working.

Employee 3 similarly found the day-to-day stories and interactions were missing as the organization transitioned to the new work platform. Employee 3 admitted that it has become more difficult to stay motivated while working from home. The participant shared several examples:

You know that it really comes down to that there is no day-to-day conversations with other people. So, you are by yourself and miss those daily interactions with different people. Some days it is like groundhogs' day. I get up at a certain time and walk into another room with my coffee and start working. There is no real, I don't know, it is more difficult to be motivated. I guess it depends on what type of work that you do, but for me it has been kind of ups and downs where I am busy, and I am motivated in the mornings. Other times it's not. Whereas going to work I am making the drive and going to see people maybe I like. I get to talk with them or whatever, and different daily interactions. I think health wise you must be a motivated person, workout and be healthy to work from home.

Employee 6 explained that the background of their organization and the work that they do make the transition particularly difficult. Although working from home was enjoyable for some employees, the participant shared that they missed the personal interactions with co-workers. The participant highlighted the following perceptions and experiences:

Some of the problems that we ran into during the COVID-19 pandemic was we did a lot of outreaches in the community and that was cut out. We were unable to get out to the community and pass out the things that we normally do. So, it was a very difficult and all assistance pretty much stopped during the pandemic because there was no way to get the items to the children during the pandemic. So, we had to stop doing what we were doing because of that exact situation. There were so many stipulations and people were so afraid of being around people. You didn't

want to touch items. You didn't want to give them to the children because we really didn't know the premise of how COVID-19 was spread. We didn't want to be spreaders of the actual virus. So, we stopped what we were doing and did not pass out any items during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What I have heard from a lot of people is that they really enjoy being able to work from home. For the most part. You know you do miss the personal interaction with people. You miss that part, but you get a lot more work done working at home.

### ***Thematic Category 2: Strategies Applied to Overcome Telecommuting Challenges***

The second thematic category concerns the strategies adopted by the organization and management to address the telecommuting challenges. The interviewed employees did not extensively discuss this category. The analysis led to only one theme: additional training opportunities and programs to support the transition to telecommuting. Employee 5 shared that the following practices helped them adjust to the new work setting:

Well first and foremost, a lot of training with online video programs. Secondly, we started doing awareness training of what we did as an organization to make us more effective. And the perception of others as we did our meetings and our conferences online. One of the biggest takeaways was learning how to do this online. How we did it was that we started associating with people that are really respected by others in our area of expertise with this nonprofit.

### ***Thematic Category 3: Benefits and Future of Telecommuting***

The third thematic category refers to the benefits and future of telecommuting. The majority of employees observed that telecommuting reduced their organizations' overall operational expenses. Meanwhile, themes with limited references in this category were boosting the morale of employees; flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities; and reduced travel time and increased work efficiency.

**Major Theme 6: Reduction in organization's operational expenses.** The sixth and final major theme of the study is the reduction in operational expenses of non-profit organizations. This major theme was elaborated upon by three of the six interviewed employees. According to Employee 3, "I do believe with the changes we have been able to get rid of some of the buildings we were leasing and save funds and have more flexibility. So, coming back a couple days a week is beneficial." Employee 5 shared that telecommuting has made their work and life easier due to the ability to work anywhere. They were also able to save on expenses, allowing them to become more resourceful and use their extra funds to support other projects. The participant explained:

Well, I see more conferences online and more meetings online at home. It helped us because we truly don't have to worry about getting that building now. We were looking for brick and mortar. So, I think we will be able to save a little more extra funding and put it towards the veterans. Not having to rent or purchase a brick-and-mortar building. We also noticed that during this pandemic we have actually saved on our travel and lodging budget. It is looking for a lot better than it has in the past years. For most of us working from home has been a little more

comfortable and we are all pushing trying to take the lead on different team projects that come up. I think there are truly some pluses working from home.

Finally, Employee 6 expressed that telecommuting has created many benefits for the organization and its stakeholders and described several examples:

I think it has been more positive than anything because it has shown us that we can do things from home rather than going to sit in someone's office. It takes out that travel or commute time. If you are sitting home, you don't have to worry about the power in the building. You don't have to worry about people being late because they are stuck in traffic or any of these things. They can just jump on their laptops, their phones, or whatever. They can communicate that way because it gives you a lot more flexibility. I think it has been a positive because it has actually shown from the nonprofit world all the way up through the government sector that you can work from home. You don't have to be in a specific location to get work done.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the key findings from the interviews with the six managers and six employees of a nonprofit organization. The researcher performed a thematic analysis of the 12 interviews, which generated thematic categories and major and minor themes. The next chapter discusses these findings in relation to the existing literature.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how leaders and employees of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To do so, I conducted and analyzed semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, six leaders and six employees.

The global COVID-19 pandemic led to an increased need for telecommuting in the workplace. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, telecommuting processes were generally less common. Telecommuting is a means for organizations to maintain productivity while restraining from working in physical association with other workers. The proliferation of telecommuting during COVID-19 was therefore ideal for addressing social distancing needs. Nevertheless, employees who work remotely can face distractions, challenges surrounding resources and technological barriers, and difficulties with work-life balance. According to studies, the requirement of social distancing led to increased loneliness and reduced productivity among employees. Organizational leaders have thus been forced to consider how telecommuting impacts employees. The present study suggests that telecommuting during the pandemic had negative impacts on social isolation and psychological functioning. Some organizations perceive telecommuting as a hindrance for team cohesion and the productivity of employees. However, benefits associated with telecommuting include reduced organizational and infrastructure costs and the ability to reduce pollution and implement better sustainable practices.

Leaders have implemented differing policies regarding telecommuting in various industries. Nonprofit organizations were more likely to adopt telecommuting during the pandemic compared to other organizations because of the ability of employees to work online while accomplishing day-to-day tasks. In contrast, for-profit organizations largely required their workers to socially distance within the workplace due to the need to continue to provide services and products.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The results of the thematic analysis presented in Chapter 4 reveal three thematic categories under each of the two research questions. The first thematic category for Research Question 1 was “Challenges Faced by Nonprofit Organizations,” comprised of three themes. The first theme is feelings of isolation and disconnectedness. Such feelings can result in the inability of leaders of nonprofit organizations to accomplish their different tasks and duties (Wang et al., 2020). According to Wang et al. (2020), telecommuting is associated with negative impacts on psychological functioning and social isolation. Many supervisors consider telecommunicating as a hindrance to team cohesion (Lembrechts et al., 2016). The results in the present study indicate that telecommuting was challenging for the mental health of the employees. Depression can result from overwhelming work demands and the need to complete them outside of one’s usual office space or work environment. Some interviewed employees recalled the value of office experience and interaction. Furthermore, the interviews suggest that dissatisfaction with telecommuting stems in part from the lack of personal and light moments among co-workers and employees. Organizations therefore need to devote



attention to the professional and mental health of employees. The transition to telecommuting during the pandemic was fast and organizations were forced to strictly comply with different safety guidelines to protect the health and wellness of stakeholders.

The second theme that emerged was the inability to separate professional and personal boundaries. A main barrier associated with telecommuting is the boundaries that telecommuters have to set between their home and their work (Hudson, 2018). Relevant training on management strategies to set such boundaries is crucial in helping the telecommuting workforce. According to Holland et al. (2016), many employers believe that some workers waste time or work on personal business when they should be working. Holland et al. found that some workers do waste time or work on their own business when they should be working. To eliminate this issue, managers have been forced to use different communication tools to monitor their employees.

The third theme that emerged was the lack of proper resources to telecommute. In telecommuting settings, the connection between the workplace and the employee is remote, which has a significant effect on productivity. Employees who are working remotely may face distractions, as well as issues surrounding resources and technological barriers, including a lack of computer skills, adequate internet access, or sufficient bandwidth (Lee et al., 2020). Without these resources, organizations experience telecommuting inefficiency.

The final theme associated with the first thematic category for Research Question 1 was financial constraints due to the acquisition of technological equipment. Most employees lack the proper resources to telecommute and experience financial constraints

when they want to acquire technological equipment. As the use of telecommuting by organizations continues to spread, many employees confront difficulties in acquiring the necessary resources for financial reasons (Lee et al., 2020). Financial constraint is therefore one of the most significant barriers to telecommuting efficiency.

The second thematic category for Research Question 1 was “Strategies Applied to Overcome Telecommuting Challenges,” and this thematic category comprised three themes. The first theme was compliance with the safety guidelines of the CDC. It is important for nonprofit organizations to strictly comply with the safety guidelines of the CDC to protect their stakeholders’ health and wellness (Savić, 2020). The decision to transition to telecommuting requires organizations to follow the government’s rules and protect all of their stakeholders accordingly.

The second theme that emerged under this category was provision of additional training opportunities and programs. It is important for the leadership of nonprofit organizations to offer training and programs to clarify how employees can telecommute and how telecommuter work can be supervised remotely (Savić, 2020). Furthermore, as previously noted, relevant training on management strategies for setting boundaries between home and work may help the telecommuting workforce.

The third theme that emerged under this category was provision of information technology (IT) resources to enhance the telecommuting experience of employees. To ensure telecommuting efficiency, it is important for the leaders to provide different IT resources to employees (Savić, 2020). With the right IT resources, employees can easily telecommunicate and be productive.

The third thematic category for Research Question 1 was “Benefits and Future of Telecommuting,” and this thematic category comprised two themes. The first theme was reduction in operational expenses. The findings indicate that telecommuting helps organizations to reduce their operational expenses, allows employees to enjoy flexibility in fulfilling personal and work responsibilities, boosts employees' morale, increases work efficiency, and reduces travel time.

The second theme was flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities. Telecommuting has helped most organizations to realize that they can work and be productive without needing to spend on office spaces, rent, and power. Furthermore, telecommuting has promoted the ability of managers and employees to multi-task, completing both their professional and personal duties at their convenience and from the comfort of their homes (Adame et al., 2016). From the findings, it is evident that leaders of nonprofit organizations have divisive opinions about the implementation of and adaption to telecommuting policies, influenced by various factors such as perceptions of hindering teamwork and lack of interaction, perceptions of poor relationships with supervisors, and decreased productivity. Research also indicates that supervisors are more likely to have a negative view of telecommuting when the job's nature is interdependent, perceiving this working arrangement as a barrier for team cohesion. Therefore, most leaders of nonprofit organizations tend to underuse telecommuting in their organizations.

The second research question, regarding how employees of nonprofit organizations perceive telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic produced three thematic categories. The first thematic category for Research Question 2

was “Challenges Faced by Non-Profit Organizations.” The first theme under this category was lack of preparedness. Employees noted that there were no policies and regulations in place for the transition to telecommuting and that the provision of additional training opportunities and programs would assist in a smooth and successful transition.

Telecommuting was considered difficult because most of the employees were not aware of the associated processes and practices of working from home. Most employees were not sure of their respective roles and responsibilities. The progress of adapting to telecommuting can be slow and unsatisfactory at first if organizations fail to provide clear and proper guidelines to their employees. Moreover, lack of preparedness results in feelings of isolation and disconnectedness (Wang et al., 2020).

The second theme was feelings of isolation and disconnectedness. During the adoption of telecommuting, managers and employees should respect the workplace and ensure a safe environment that does not lead to the development of feelings of isolation and disconnectedness (Wang et al., 2020). Such feelings lead to the inability of employees to accomplish their tasks and duties. To adopt telecommuting, nonprofit organizations should work on arming their teams with the information and resources they need (Gajendran et al., 2015).

The second thematic category for Research Question 2 was “Strategies Applied to Overcome Telecommuting Challenges.” The only theme under this category was provision of additional training opportunities and programs. Employees task leadership with the responsibility to offer additional training and programs to clarify how employees can telecommute and how telecommuter work can be supervised remotely (Savić, 2020).

To realize telecommuting efficiency and ensure productivity, it is important for leaders to provide employees with the right programs and training.

The third thematic category for Research Question 2 was “Benefits and Future of Telecommuting.” The first theme under this category was reduction in operational expenses. According to Kuyucu (2019) and Narayanan et al. (2017), some of the benefits associated with telecommuting include reduced organizational costs, lack of building costs, and the ability to reduce pollution and implement better sustainable practices.

The second theme was boosted morale of employees. Telecommuting helps to boost the morale of employees by allowing them to enjoy flexibility in fulfilling personal and work responsibilities, increasing work efficiency, and reducing travel time (Kim et al., 2015). When employees’ morale is boosted, they tend to be productive.

The third theme was flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities. Working from home is perceived to be more relaxing because stress and burnout are not as plausible. Employees can take breaks and breathe when faced with difficult tasks, pressure, and issues. Telecommuting allows some employees to work from home because of domestic responsibilities, childcare issues, or for the joy of working alone (Adame et al., 2016).

The last theme under this category was reduced travel time and increased work efficiency. Reducing (or eliminating) travel time helps to save resources. According to Shabanpour et al. (2018), telecommuting from home helps to improve air quality and reduce network congestion. Employees can save on travel costs and vehicle congestion is reduced.

From the findings of this study, it is evident that telecommuting helps to reduce organizations' operational expenses and foster enjoyment in terms of flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities. However, while working from home is practical and convenient, over time, employees may feel lonely without personal communication and interaction with their co-workers. At the start of the pandemic, employees were happy working from home. As they settled in and regularly worked 8–12 hours without being with anyone physically, many employees came to feel disconnected. The findings of this study demonstrate that some of the ways of eliminating problems associated with telecommuting in nonprofit organizations include providing additional training opportunities and programs and providing IT resources to enhance the telecommuting experience of employees. Organizations also need to follow different safety guidelines. Organizations' quick decision to transition to telecommuting during the COVID-19 pandemic revolved around the need to follow the government's rules and protect all of their stakeholders accordingly. In relation to the research question of how employees of nonprofit organizations perceive telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was evident that employees have different opinions. According to previous research, some employees who are not telecommuters are more vulnerable to alcohol abuse, obesity, physical abuse, and tobacco use. Yet, telecommuters are more likely to experience decreased salary growth. Regulated and normative appropriateness between employees and supervisors and the leader-member relationship were factors that proved beneficial when it came to adopting telecommuting in a social context.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The main limitation of the study was the lack of generalizability of the results. Although the small sample size was fundamental to the research's mode of inquiry and selected by virtue of its capacity to provide significant information, the study's results cannot be generalized as a result. The participants only included nonprofit employees and leaders within southeast Florida. Data were gathered from interviews with a small group of participants; therefore, the views cannot be generalized for all nonprofit organizations. The sample therefore fails to represent the full spectrum of nonprofit organizations, though the obtained data represent an opportunity to generate different hypotheses that can be tested in future work. While the themes obtained from the interviews appeared to be replicable, more themes would have helped to provide deeper explanations. Given the small and narrow sample, it is unlikely that all key themes have been explored and identified. However, despite the lack of generalizability and the small sample size, the study managed to identify valuable themes that were sufficient for investigation.

### **Recommendations**

Organizations should establish new policies, procedures, and strategies that can help meet their needs and community goals when adopting telecommuting (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019). These procedures and strategies will help to address employee safety, expectations, and the need to increase flexibility. During the adoption of telecommuting, managers and employees should respect the workplace and ensure a safe environment that does not lead to the development of feelings of isolation and disconnectedness (Wang et al., 2020). Such feelings lead to the inability of employees to

accomplish their tasks and duties. It is therefore important for organizations to carry out health checks when adopting telecommuting. Furthermore, nonprofit organizations should arm their teams with the information and resources they need (Gajendran et al., 2015). Different policies and procedures should also be adopted by nonprofit organizations to help overcome any issues that may arise because of adopting telecommuting. It is important for nonprofit organizations to effectively adopt telecommuting to realize the associated benefits, including reduced operational expenses and flexibility in fulfilling work and personal responsibilities.

Future research should further examine the nature of telecommuting to provide a better understanding of its effectiveness. It would also be valuable to distinguish the extent and frequency of telecommuting to help isolate telecommuting effects. He and Hu (2015), for example, examined telecommuters' non-telecommuting activities and out-of-home activities. Future research should provide information on temporal flexibility, which will improve understanding of positive work-related outcomes associated with telecommuting.

Because of the mass adoption of telecommuting in various industries worldwide and the possibility that telecommuting will continue in the future, there is a need to reevaluate telecommuting policies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. More research is required to determine the perceptions among both leaders and employees of telecommuting regarding how these policies are implemented, facilitators for change, and barriers to effectiveness. Since previous studies have primarily relied on controlled laboratory studies with limited depth into telecommuters' perceptions, there is need for



more research on how real telecommuting policies are perceived. Kuyucu (2019) noted that there are still gaps in the study of telecommuting and changing workplace dynamics. According to Aguilera et al. (2016), Boell et al. (2016), and Lembrechts et al. (2016), there is also a lack of research that considers how leaders use telecommuting policies to adapt effectively to changes in the workplace. It is important for future research to investigate how leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations will perceive future telecommuting policies to address COVID-19. The exploration of how leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations perceive telecommuting policies remains necessary because it will provide insights regarding why different policies are effective or ineffective for improving productivity. Holland et al. (2016) concluded that previous government and scholarly studies and decisions in the past decade have failed to address workers' perceptions towards their telecommuting colleagues. There is limited research about issues regarding negative work-life balance in telework schedules. According to Savić (2020), there is need to examine how telecommuting policies have been revised during the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research on these different areas will help to provide useful data that will support future telecommuting policies and help organizations that will continue to telecommute after the end of the pandemic.

If this study was replicated, several changes should be made. It would be important to extend the scope for a longer period to help capture involvement from initial design through to dissemination. The research should also include more participants. Furthermore, future research should not limit the scope of the study to leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations. A broader scope will help to effectively address

the gap in the literature and provide different insights regarding the perspectives of employees and leadership in terms of telecommuting policies during COVID-19.

Moreover, future research should not limit the geographic scope to southeast Florida to allow the transferability of the study's findings to a large geographic location.

### **Implications**

Positive social change facilitates the betterment of society by improving social and human conditions. Such changes occur at different levels. According to social exchange theory, the relationship between an individual and the workplace is critical to their productivity and satisfaction (Redmond, 2015). In telecommuting settings, the connection between the workplace and the employee is remote, which has a significant effect on productivity. Leadership practices strongly influence positive and productive behaviors. Policies and motivational behaviors help to increase the performance of employees. The growing desire for flexibility and new ways of working underscore the need to understand telecommuting's impact. The multifaceted and complex literature concerning telecommuting cuts across different study areas, resulting in different implications for stakeholders. This study provides an impressive array of evidence about the extent to which telecommuting makes a difference when it comes to determining organization productivity outcomes. Telecommuting can be beneficial when it comes to organizational, individual, and societal outcomes when practiced to a moderate degree and guided by different policies.

Individuals, organizations, and society have been forced to weigh the different advantages and disadvantages of individuals working more flexibly compared to face-to-

face communication when it comes to innovation and sharing of knowledge. At an individual level, telecommuting can increase the productivity of individual employees. At an organizational level, telecommuting reduces operational and building costs (Kuyucu, 2019). At the societal level, telecommuting helps to reduce pollution, contain the spread of COVID-19, reduce automobile emissions, and promote sustainable practices. Furthermore, telecommuting helps to promote employees' self-regulation skills, support from supervisors, and task independence (Wang et al., 2020). Training and support help to facilitate the adjustment of telecommuting work arrangements. Employees should therefore be provided with quality technology to telecommute.

Public policy plays a significant role in telecommuting. For example, public policy on telecommuting can be used to create different employment and work opportunities for people with disabilities. Telecommuting can also be a key source of support for employees who have children with different special needs (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019). Telecommuting helps to minimize stigmatization by providing people with flexible work options. Normalization of telecommuting thereby provides an opportunity to reduce stigmas.

Social exchange theory is a critical philosophical and psychological approach for assessing how individuals, such as employees and leaders, view behaviorism and utilitarianism. In this study, social exchange theory was insightful in considering different factors, such as the interaction of social phenomena and utilitarian practices. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the social circumstances of the crisis enabled telecommuting and produced the need for improved policies regarding telecommuting. Recent explorations

of social exchange theory indicate that the relationship between an individual and the workplace is critical to their productivity and satisfaction. The use of social exchange theory in this study helped in the exploration of how leaders and employees of nonprofit organizations perceive the implementation of telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social exchange theory was ideal for assessing how telecommuting policies and motivational behaviors increase the performance of employees. This study utilized a small sample of 12 participants to gain significant insights. The findings of the study are aligned with social exchange theory. The main implication of this qualitative study is that social exchange theory can serve as a useful framework to obtain insights about different research questions. The theoretical framework helped to increase the reliability of the findings.

Thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible and easily accessible interpretative approach to the analysis of qualitative data (Byrne, 2021). Braun and Clarke's procedure facilitated the identification and analysis of themes and patterns in the collected data set. Compared to other approaches, Braun and Clarke's procedure is a highly flexible procedure that can be modified to meet different study needs, thereby providing a detailed and rich account of data (Byrne, 2021). The procedure also offers a more accessible form of analysis compared to other procedures. Braun and Clarke's approach is useful because it helps to examine the different perspectives of the research participants by highlighting differences and similarities. The procedure is therefore useful

in summarizing different features of large data sets, providing a well-structured approach to handling the data (Byrne, 2021).

### **Conclusion**

Telecommuting is a topic that has received significant attention from the public and researchers due to its potential for widespread benefits at the societal, organizational, and individual levels. However, telecommuting is also associated with various drawbacks. This qualitative study provides an understanding of how leaders and employees of a nonprofit organization in southeast Florida perceive planning, implementation, and adaptation of telecommuting policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Telecommuting supports the notion that work is what people do and is not a place, representing a new way of working. The expansion of telecommuting during COVID-19 was ideal for addressing social distancing needs. Given its new prevalence, organizational leaders should consider how telecommunication impacts employees and how leadership and employees perceive telecommuting policies. Telecommuting practices before the pandemic resulted in different issues surrounding poor work-life balance and distraction. However, some of the benefits associated with telecommunicating include reduced organizational and building costs, increased flexibility, and the ability to reduce pollution and implement sustainable practices. Nonprofit organizations are more likely to adopt telecommuting compared to other organizations due to the ability of employees to work online while still accomplishing the needed day-to-day tasks. Telecommuting has helped many organizations to realize that they can work and be productive without needing to spend on office spaces, rent, and

power. The process has helped nonprofit organizations to save money and become more productive. Furthermore, telecommuting has promoted the ability of managers and employees to multi-task, completing both their professional and personal duties at their convenience and from the comfort of their homes. Most employees perceive working from home to be more relaxing because stress and burnout are not as plausible.

Comprehensive and multidisciplinary understanding of the drawbacks and benefits of telecommuting is useful to inform and shape public policy and organizational practices.

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## Appendix A: Research Participation Invitation Letter/Email

Dear Nonprofit Member,

My name is Walter Washington, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. As a nonprofit organization in Southeast, Florida, you have valuable insight on telecommuting to share on the institution of remote work since the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, I am inviting you to voluntarily participate in a research study that seeks to understand the perception of telecommuting in your organization. The practice will include completing an Informed Consent statement (I will e-mail this to you); and allowing me to interview you at a location and time of your choosing. The whole process should take no more than 1 hour of your time. Please let me know if you would like to participate. The research has deadlines, so we will need to begin the process by (mm/dd/yyyy) and finish the interview by (mm/dd/yyyy). You can contact me by the provided phone number or by e-mail at [walter.washington@waldenu.edu](mailto:walter.washington@waldenu.edu) if you have any questions. I appreciate your assistance and look forward to your participation and interview.

Very respectfully,

Walter Washington

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

Good morning!

First, let me thank you again for agreeing to be part of this research study. My name is Walter Washington, and I am currently conducting a doctoral research study for my dissertation at Walden University. The requirement is to collect data as part of this study. The research is to understand better the perceptions of nonprofit leaders and employees on future telecommuting policies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interview will be conducted in one hour, but I have allocated an additional 30 minutes to the time to cover any follow-up questions or concerns you may have on the research subject. The interview will consist of 8 questions. At any time during the interview, we can pause if we are confused by a question being asked or need to take a break.

You are participating as part of a group of telecommuters who are currently working in the nonprofit community and have agreed to participate in the research study. Are there any questions before we begin the interview?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What is the current perception of you doing remote by your manager or colleagues?
2. Describe your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current perception of telecommuting?
3. What kind of difficulties might or have, influenced the perception?
4. What efforts have been made to overcome these perceptions?

5. Are you aware of any variations among telecommuters regarding their telecommuting perceptions with your manager or colleagues?
6. Share your thoughts as to whether or not these differences might have affected your career positively or negatively.
7. How do you see your role in supporting telecommuting with your management and colleagues?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to mention?

### **Closing**

This interview has covered questions that have come up in the past year since the global pandemic outbreak, and more personnel are required to work from home, changing the perceptions in the organization. I appreciate your efforts in this research study. After all the interviews are done, I will transcribe your interview and send you a copy of it for your records. Once received, please verify the interview for accuracy, and if you would like to make changes, we can reschedule some time to do a follow-up. No other person other than myself and the researchers who are assisting knows you have given an interview. The information you provide is kept confidential and according to the rules set out by the Walden University research process. Thanks again for participating in this study.