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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Thomas Law

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Effective Strategies for Using Telecommuting by Owners of Small Businesses

by

Thomas Law

MA, University of Texas at Dallas, 2001

BBS, Hardin-Simmons University, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

January 2023

Abstract

Small business owners who lack effective strategies to incorporate telecommuting may be unable to retain teleworking employees, create a flexible working environment, or improve workforce morale, negatively impacting company productivity and profitability. Grounded in transformational leadership theory and sociotechnical systems theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners use to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees. Data were collected from five small business owners in Texas with at least 1 year of management experience and created and maintained remote working strategies. Data collection included semistructured interviews and company documents. Three themes emerged from coding analysis: connection between employee engagement and actors, employee engagement and tasks, and individual consideration and tasks. A key recommendation is for small business owners to provide team-building events for managers and employees. The implications for positive social change include the opportunity to recruit employees from a larger pool of applicants, reduce company expenses, and hire employees who cannot leave their homes because of disabilities or other physical concerns. Additionally, employees may experience improved work–life balance, which may allow them more time to volunteer in their local community, manage personal life concerns, and continue their education.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife and the love of my life, Kimberly, and my three children whom I love beyond words: Ethan, Bethany, and Olivia. My goal has always been to be a husband and father you are proud of and with whom you enjoy life. Each of you gives me the joy to be better, the encouragement to press on, and the inspiration to challenge what I know. You sacrificed time and resources so that I could pursue this dream, and it would not have been possible without each of you. Finally, I dedicate this to my heavenly Father, whose love is everlasting, all-consuming, and unconditional.

Acknowledgments

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

A pandemic hit the world in the early months of 2020 with a ferocity and intensity that few had seen (Kohli, 2020). One of the many effects of this pandemic was the shutting down of businesses and the implementation of social distancing measures (Kohli, 2020). Social distancing includes employees working from home, a practice known by many names, including teleworking, telecommuting, working remote, flexible working arrangements, and working from home (Georgiana, 2016). As organizations made the abrupt transition from working in the office to working from home, they had little time to incorporate strategies that help manage and control their remote workforce (Hicks, 2020).

Although teleworking is a newer phenomenon, its popularity increased a hundredfold in the first few months of 2020 (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garces, 2020). Of particular concern for the current study was the use of teleworking by small businesses. I studied how small businesses incorporate telecommuting strategies that create productive working environments for the employees and their managers.

Background of the Problem

Telecommuting has progressed from a trend to a phenomenon to a fact of business, with 25.8% of employees working from home in some form in 2010 (Thulin et al., 2019) to almost 40% 6 years later (Nakrosiene et al., 2018). More and more organizations allow their employees to work from home, work remotely, telecommute, or telework, creating a more flexible environment and retaining the employee (Georgiana, 2016). Telecommuting provides benefits to the organization and the employee, including,

better work–life balance, enhanced engagement, greater productivity (Tredup, 2016), higher job satisfaction (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018), reduced absenteeism, improved performance (Bosco et al., 2014), and lower costs (Patterson et al., 2014; Shabanpour et al., 2018). However, telecommuting has some drawbacks including employee disconnection, less accountability (Patterson et al., 2014), possible lack of productivity, and lack of managerial oversight (Patterson et al., 2014; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018). Researchers looked at the various effects of telecommuting on the employee, the organization, cost (Bathini & Kandathil, 2015), corporate morale (Bharadwaj, 2015), productivity (Dutcher, 2012), energy consumption (Hampton, 2017, employee health (Henke et al., 2015), travel (Jin & Wu, 2011; Kim, 2017), and transportation (Moeckel, 2016). Successful telecommuting strategies, especially for small businesses, require strong leadership and a keen understanding of technology and its impact on the employee and the organization. In the current study, I used transformational leadership and sociotechnical systems theories to explore effective strategies for managing teleworking employees.

Problem and Purpose Statement

The specific business problem was that some small business owners lack effective strategies to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies small business owners use to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees. The study population consisted of five small business owners who had effectively used telecommuting in Texas.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of five small business owners who had effectively used telecommuting in Texas. Moser and Korstjens (2018) indicated that qualitative researchers do not randomly select participants for their sample, but instead purposely choose their participants. After I received approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board, I proceeded with seeking access to participants through my personal network to conduct my qualitative interviews. The purposeful selection of five small business owners for my sample would be based on their knowledge and experience on the topic of study. To meet the eligibility requirements for this study, participants had to have at least 1 year of experience and had to have implemented strategies to successfully retain teleworking employees in their workforce. The data sources for this study consisted of my interview data from the participants, data extracted from their public websites, my journal notes, and newspaper articles on participants' success in dealing with their retention problems.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I used the qualitative method. By using a qualitative approach, the researcher can gain a greater understanding of an issue under review and identify and understand solutions to issue (van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). I studied the strategies that small business owners use to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees. Quantitative research is a statistical method to analyze variables' characteristics or the relationship among variables through testing of hypotheses (Yin, 2018). A quantitative method was not appropriate for the current study because the objective of the research

was not to examine and characterize variables or their relationships. Another option is a mixed-methods study, which includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. The mixed-methods approach requires the researcher to gather quantitative data in the study and also to collect qualitative data through discussions with participants involved in the topic of study (Amalki, 2016). The two advantages of mixed methods are that the researcher can use a quantitative method to analyze data or numbers in the study and qualitative data from interviews or questionnaires (Saunders et al., 2015). Using mixed methods, the researcher can investigate a topic in greater detail from a variety of angles (Amalki, 2016). However, mixed methods could also provide too much information and complicate or dilute the study (Saunders et al., 2015). Because my study did not require quantitative data, I did not use a mixed-methods approach.

Qualitative researchers tend to use ethnographic, phenomenological, or case study designs (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I chose a multiple case study design for the current study. Using a case study design allowed me to better understand the experiences of the participants related to telecommuting. Case study research is an extensive review of a particular event or person over a period of time (Yin, 2018). A case study involves studying a real-life situation using a variety of resources in the evaluation (Saunders et al., 2015). Case study researchers seek to answer “what,” “why,” or “how” questions for a situation, which is popular for exploratory or explanatory research (Saunders et al., 2015). There are two variations in the case study methodological framework: single and multiple case (Yin, 2018). I used the multiple case method by researching multiple small businesses. Although the multiple case study may require more resources and time to

conduct the study, it is also considered more compelling and thorough in its findings (Yin, 2018). Additionally, it is critical that the researcher follow a replication design rather than a sampling design, and the cases must be selected judiciously (Yin, 2018). A phenomenological study is one that explores the personal meanings of participants experiencing a phenomenon as lived experience by evaluating the patterns and determining the meaning of the experience from the participants' point of view (Groenewald, 2018). I did not use the phenomenological method because I was studying telecommuting strategies, which was not a single event or experience of one person. Telecommuting is a common experience and practice around the world. Finally, ethnographic studies involve longer analysis of participants and events, which was not necessary for my study (see Saunders et al., 2015).

Research Question

The research question for this case study was the following: What leadership and technology strategies do small business owners use to retain teleworking employees?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used in retaining teleworking employees in your business?
2. What key challenges did you face in using these strategies?
3. How did you overcome the key barriers to implementing these strategies?
4. How did you measure the success of these strategies?
5. What key lessons have you learned from developing and using these strategies to retain teleworking employees?

6. What else can you share with me about your organization's experiences in developing and using these strategies to retain teleworking employees?

Conceptual Framework

The objective of this study was to evaluate successful telecommuting strategies that small businesses are using to retain teleworking employees. To identify a proper conceptual framework, I combine sociotechnical systems (STS) theory and Burns's (1979) transformational leadership theory. Trist and Bamforth (1951) established STS theory in their study of new technology that profoundly affected the coal mining industry. The findings of Trist and Bamforth's study pointed to possible issues that might arise between the new technology and the social structure of the employee groups. STS theory addresses the connection between the social or human element within an organization and the technical or technological element (Chaudhari & Jayaram, 2018). Using STS allowed me to study the social and technological connections that exist in a complex work system (see Chaudhari & Jayaram, 2018) and helped me understand teleworking strategies and why they are successful.

Not only was it important to understand successful strategies of teleworking, but it was also important to understand how to manage teleworking employees. For this purpose, I used transformational leadership theory. Burns (1979) argued that a transformational leadership style can create a positive effect on the employee's motivation. Bass (1985) developed three dimensions for transformational leadership: inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Bass found that each of these dimensions created a stronger connection between leader and

follower and ultimately greater results. The first dimension, inspirational motivation, is the concept that the leader must possess and exude charisma and inspiration that causes the subordinate to follow (Bass, 1985). With intellectual stimulation, the leader creates an environment that encourages the subordinate to grow in knowledge and experience (Bass, 1985). Finally, with individual consideration, the leader focuses on each subordinate and their abilities and needs. For telecommuting to be an effective work environment, the manager must look to these dimensions and engage the workforce on each level. I chose the composite conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory and STS theory to understand strategies small business owners use to retain teleworking employees.

Operational Definitions

Flexible work arrangement: Flexible work arrangement involves providing employees with freedom and autonomy to choose when, where, and how to accomplish work assignments (Azar, 2017; Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Stirpe et al., 2018)

Job satisfaction: Job satisfaction is an employee's reaction to their job based on comparing their desired outcome with the actual outcome (Azar et al., 2018).

Telecommuting: Telecommuting is the use of telecommunication technology as a substitute for commuting to the primary work location (Narayanan et al., 2017).

Telework: Telework is an arrangement that allows an employee to work in a location separate from the primary employer location through information and communication technology (ICT; Groen et al., 2018). Many terms are used

interchangeably for work done outside the office, including telecommute, remote work, work from home, distributed work, and flexible work arrangement.

Virtual team: Virtual team is a work team that is geographically distanced and uses ICT to communicate and carry out work assignments (Nakrosiene et al., 2018).

Workplace flexibility: Workplace flexibility consists of a work arrangement in which employers allow the employee freedom in choosing where and when to work (Coenen & Kok, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are significant research concepts that assist the reader in understanding the scope of study, decisions made by the researcher, and aspects considered by the researcher. Explanation of these concepts allows the reader to appreciate the context regarding the study.

Assumptions

Assumptions are claims in the study including designs, data collection, data analysis, and participants that researchers believe to be accurate (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2014). Researchers have little control over assumptions (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2014). There were several assumptions in the current study. First, having worked from home for more than 8 years allowed me to assume I could gather and analyze relevant data for this study. Second, I assumed managers with at least one telecommuting employee had the requisite experience and knowledge to inform this study. Third, I assumed these managers had successfully managed a team with teleworkers. Fourth, I assumed participants would answer interview questions factually and honestly without sharing

biased individual opinions. The fifth assumption was that participants would articulate strategies they used to manage teleworking employees. Research processes and results may be influenced by these assumptions.

Limitations

Limitations are factors that restrict the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Limitations create possible weaknesses and impede actions in the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The current study involved interviewing five participants from multiple organizations in Texas. Although these participants manage telecommuting employees, a sample of five people in a town in Texas is not representative of the United States. A larger geographic area with a larger sample size might have yielded different results. The abbreviated period in conducting this study was another limitation. Also, there was possible researcher bias due to my previous experience with the topic under study (see Yin, 2017). My experience working from home for more than 8 years did not lead to researcher bias because I relied solely on open-ended interview questions during the data collection process. I used member checking and bracketing to mitigate my biases.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries and scope of a study. Participants in the current study were managers who oversee teleworking employees. Texas was the geographical location of this study. The study's sample size was five managers in organizations with teleworking employees. The focus of this study was on managers with teleworking employees in which the managers led employees using ICT. Data collection was through

face-to-face interviews and the review of company documents. By restricting the scope of this study in terms of organization type, sample size, and geographical location, I limited the generalizability of findings.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Telework is a common practice in business in the United States (Nakrosiene et al., 2018). Additionally, small business owners struggle to retain top talent (Hamshaw & Voter, 2017). Many researchers have noted the positive aspects of teleworking (Narayanan et al., 2017), but few have focused on the use of teleworking from a retention standpoint. The findings of the current study could provide business owners with a better understanding of the strategies needed to effectively use teleworking to retain teleworking employees. Business owners could use the findings of this study to implement procedures that help future or current employees succeed through different teleworking models for improving employees' effectiveness and organizations' performance.

Implications for Social Change

Teleworking provides implications for social change. Organizations that use teleworking can decrease the need for office space, alleviate traffic issues, reduce vehicle emissions, and improve employee retention (Castillo-Frick, 2017). Teleworking improves the work–life balance (Tredup, 2016). Studies showed that employees who telework are happier with their jobs (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018) and are less likely to leave the

organization (Bosco et al., 2014). Employees who are more content with their jobs are more productive and are better members of society (Tripathy & Sahoo, 2018).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies small business owners use to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees. I explored how managers successfully implemented and supervised employees who telecommuted. The goal of this study was to conduct a thorough evaluation of the successful management of telecommuting employees. The findings of this study could help others better understand how corporate policies enhance work–life balance, job satisfaction, and employee retention.

In this literature review, I reviewed recent and older literature related to STS theory (Trist & Bamforth, 1951) and transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978). Both theories are critical in understanding the connection between employee, manager, and business and were relevant to understanding a teleworking program's success. STS addresses how employees interact with their work environment, the technology they use, and the organization itself (Chaudhuri & Jayaram, 2019). The correlation between STS and telecommuting lies in understanding how technology impacts social behavior (Green et al., 2017). When designing new work processes such as telecommuting policies, businesses should use STS in this process (Green et al., 2017).

In addition to STS, understanding the role and impact of leadership is critical for the success of new business policies (Anning-Dorson, 2021). After careful review, I concluded that transformational leadership theory was a relevant and pertinent concept in

evaluating remote leadership. One salient aspect of transformational leadership is mutual trust between employees and management (Bass, 1985). The relationship between employee and manager is a critical component for an effective telecommuting policy (Lembrechts et al., 2019).

The articles and scholarly journals that compose this literature review came from ProQuest, EBSCO, SAGE Premier, and other Walden University Library databases. Keywords used to retrieve information included *telecommuting*, *telecommute*, *teleworking*, *telework*, *working from home*, *remote working*, *commuting*, *socio-technical systems*, *transformational leadership*, *effective leadership*, *teleworking strategies*, *employee engagement strategies*, *employee retention strategies*, *work-life balance*, *job satisfaction*, and *business policies*. The total number of references used in this study was 165. The literature review included a total of 87 sources including journal articles, books, and seminal literature. Of these 87 sources, 75 (86%) were published within 5 years of this study. Additionally, 155 (94%) of the references were peer reviewed.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used to support this study included Burns's (1979) transformational leadership theory and Trist and Bamforth's (1951) STS. Through the study of the behavior of political leaders, Burns developed the concept of transformational leadership. According to Burns, transformational leadership is more than requiring compliance from the follower. Transformational leadership involves a change in followers' beliefs, values, and goals (Buil et al., 2019). Burns defined *leadership* as actions that mobilize followers in such a way to arouse, engage, and satisfy

the followers. A leader does this to realize goals that are mutual to both the leader and the follower. Two essential aspects of leadership are motive and purpose. The leader must find a way to motivate and usually does this toward a higher goal (Burns, 1979). Leadership is a relational engagement between the leader and the follower, and it must take into account the followers' needs and goals (Burns, 1979). Transformational leaders move past the basic needs and wants of the employee to engage their interests and inspire the employee to be successful (Le & Lei, 2019).

Burns (1979) explained the two different forms of leadership: transactional and transformational. Transactional leadership involves a give and take or exchange of valued things. This exchange could be service, money, time, and so on. In contrast, transformational leadership involves both parties working to raise each other to higher motivation or morality (Burns, 1979). Burns cited Gandhi as an example of transformational leadership in his appeal to the Indian people and their struggle with the British empire. In transformational leadership, the leader works hard for the needs of the followers. The followers, in turn through their work, raise the organization. Transformational leadership has a significant impact on organizations, management, and employees (Hussein & Yesiltas, 2020; Peng et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2021).

Transformational leadership theory has evolved and been used to develop other theories (Brown et al., 2020; Legutko, 2020; Murari & Mukherjee, 2021; Thomas & Cangemi, 2021; Ucar et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Leader-member exchange theory had its origin in transactional and transformational leadership theory (Thomas & Cangemi, 2021). Wong and Berntzen (2019) examined the relationship between

dependence on electronics and task interdependence and their connection to transformational leadership and leader-member exchange. The results showed that transformational leadership positively connects to leader-member exchange quality. Additionally, the study showed that transformational leadership was more related to leader-member exchange quality when the dependence on electronics was low rather than high. Finally, the study showed that transformational leadership did not help build strong leader-member exchange relationships with high task interdependence and high electronic dependence.

Although transformational leadership theory has many benefits, it also has weaknesses. One weakness is that although transformational leadership may increase employees' performance through motivation that achieves company goals, words may not be enough for an effective leadership strategy (Buil et al., 2019). Motivation is critical to achieving results through the employee's engagement without restricting how to establish that engagement. Additionally, transformational leadership could be more effective when combined with another leadership strategy (Brown et al., 2020). The most effective transformational leadership strategy aligns with the organization's vision and mission (Buil et al., 2019).

In 1985, Bass expanded the work done by Burns on transformational leadership. Using the example of health care professionals, Bass (1985, as cited in Buil et al., 2019) proposed that transformational leadership is different from other leadership strategies because it encourages the leader to exceed expectations. In Bass's (1985) description, transformational leaders were goal setters and motivators who cared for employees. One

of Bass's key contributions was the development of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire used to study transformational leadership behaviors and skills (Batista-Foguet et al., 2021). Bass believed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire could be used to identify leaders with the traits necessary to change an organization with their strategies (Batista-Foguet et al., 2021).

Bass (1985, as cited in Liang & Chi, 2013) identified four dimensions used by leaders to relate their strategies: (a) taking a personal interest in employees, (b) promoting and fostering creativity and problem solving, (c) motivating employees through inspirational communication, and (d) charismatic influence that provides a clear vision. Fair, creative, open-minded, courageous, and resilient leaders use transformational leadership strategies (Bass, 1985). Thompson et al. (2021) relied on transformational leadership theory to explore the concept of leaders inspiring employees to alter perceptions, expectations, and motivations to achieve a common goal. Transformational leadership theory allowed me to identify behaviors and strategies small business owners need to retain teleworking employees (see Peng et al., 2020).

Transformational leadership increases employee professional engagement and meeting job expectations (Gerards et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2021). Employees demonstrate greater engagement and fulfillment through a positive commitment to their job and the organization (Hussein & Yesiltas, 2020). Career engagement relates to transformational leadership strategies and job satisfaction because transformational leaders provide their employees with an understanding of direction and purpose (Duyan & Yildiz, 2020; Farahnak et al., 2020; Kayaalp et al., 2021; Liang & Chi, 2013).

Thompson et al. (2021) supported these findings by stating that transformational leadership creates trust and commitment because transformational leaders develop a clear understanding between the larger organizational vision and the daily assignments.

In contrast, Silva et al. (2019) studied transformational leadership and found that some strategies harmed employees. Turnover and job stress are examples of adverse effects experienced from transformational leaders due to the leader's acceptance of risk to achieve innovation (Silva et al., 2019). If turnover becomes an issue within an organization, it can lead to a loss of profits and credibility, decreased customer satisfaction, and other negative impacts (Silva et al., 2019).

I explored the strategies for managing telecommuting employees who are considered dispersed or not located in the primary office location. Some studies showed that transformational leadership is not as effective on a dispersed group of employees compared to when the employees work in the office location (Eisenberg et al., 2019). Eisenberg et al. (2019) noted that as the team becomes more and more dispersed, the effectiveness of transformational leadership decreases. A dispersed team means less communication, which is a critical component of transformational leadership (Eisenberg et al., 2019). Less contact also hurts performance. If the teams cannot communicate, this can impact daily operations, affecting their overall performance (Eisenberg et al., 2019). Transformational leadership requires a solid relational connection between the leader and the followers this is not present in dispersed teams (Aropah et al., 2020; Eisenberg et al., 2019).

Although the negative impacts of transformational leadership theory may appear to present a reason not to use this leadership style when managing telecommuting employees, there are many reasons this type is more beneficial than other leadership styles (Sinclair et al., 2021). When organizations use transformational leadership, the teleworking employees feel connected and cared for (Sinclair et al., 2021). Through virtual meetings and other strategic initiatives outlined in transformational leadership theory, the organization can increase the employee's connection with the managers and colleagues (Sinclair et al., 2021).

Transformational leadership provides employees with motivation and inspiration to achieve goals. An interesting correlation exists between leadership styles, knowledge sharing, and innovation (Lei et al., 2021; Sarıköse & Türkmen, 2020; Ugwu et al., 2020). Transformational leadership has a positive impact on knowledge sharing and significantly enhances an organization's innovation capabilities (Le & Lei, 2019). Le and Lei (2019) found that transformational leadership provides a welcoming climate to innovation and creates a path for product and process innovation. Additionally, as an essential component of the organization, knowledge sharing is a mediator between transformational leadership and innovation capability (Le & Lei, 2019). Transformational leadership encourages employees to share their knowledge, thereby inspiring innovation (Le & Lei, 2019).

Le and Lei (2019) further discussed the practical applications of the findings, including using this information to foster knowledge-sharing activities, improve innovation capabilities, and practice organizational support. Additionally, using

transformational leadership stimulates knowledge sharing, which increases an organization's ability to respond more quickly and decisively to changes in the market (Le & Lei, 2019). Managers should consider ways to increase the flow of knowledge within their organizations, ultimately increasing innovation (Le & Lei, 2019).

STS Theory

STS theory is used to explore the connection between technical and social systems within an organization to achieve organizational goals. The concept of STS is used to explore how employees interact with their work environment, technology, and organization (Green et al., 2017). Following World War II, there were significant changes in the method used to acquire coal. The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations commissioned studies to analyze the changes from manual to the new mechanized process (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). The management of the mines introduced the longwall method, which increased the size of the work crews and changed the dependency of a task, positions, and technology. The new method sometimes required grouping smaller groups into larger groups to complete tasks. The new technology and processes significantly disrupted the mining company's employees. Trist and Bamforth (1951) found that the disruption caused absenteeism, isolation, and blame, but not the expected benefits. Trist and Bamforth also noted that STS could not be seen in isolation, but rather the performance and job satisfaction of the organization depended on a good relationship between the two systems. Trist and Bamforth developed the STS theory more than 70 years ago, and researchers and industries have tested it over the decades.

STS is a theoretical framework that helps users envision and develop new technologies that incorporate human factors, end users, and institutions (Kyriakidis et al., 2018). Organizations use STS theory to design new work procedures, roles, and processes. Under STS theory, organizations are open work systems that convert inputs into outputs (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). Joint optimization is the objective with STS theory, the seamless combination of technical and social components within an open environment to achieve a positive outcome (Kyriakidis, 2018). Each side of the STS paradigm includes substructures. The social subsystem includes organizational personnel and structure. The technical subsystem includes technology and task-related factors (Chaudhuri & Jayaram, 2019). The social subsystem in the STS theory refers to the human component that brings emotions, attitudes, and motivation to the organization (Belanger et al., 2012). Additionally, the organizational structure refers to the hierarchy within the organization, corporate culture, processes, and procedures (Chaudhuri & Jayaram, 2019). The technical subsystem encompasses all areas of technology and task assignments (Chaudhuri & Jayaram, 2019).

Many studies exist on STS and its implications in the workplace (Geels, 2018; Kahsar, 2019; Malatji et al., 2019; Mariani, 2019; Ryan et al., 2021; Zoto et al., 2019). Ghaffari et al. (2019) explored the development of the Internet of Things through the lens of the STS. Ghaffari et al. concluded four interconnected elements of STS theory: technology, tasks, structure, and actors. The elements must be considered in concert and not separately. The study showed that functions and structural components are institutional and should be regarded as institutional elements. Each element influences the

other parts. For example, the actor–structure relationship focuses on the overall management provided, in this case by the Iranian government and its authority over the regulatory and legal issues. The task-technology relationship connects the technological elements and the educational program. The Internet of Things, through a strong relationship between the key stakeholders in a system (organization, industry, employees), combine institutional (or social) and technological (or technical) issues. Using the STS framework, Ghaffari et al. found the development of an ecosystem of each of the components (social and technical). This ecosystem requires strong coordination for developing the Internet of Things and by deduction any other ecosystem or organization (Ghaffari et al., 2019).

Managers should use the STS system to examine the social aspects of software development (Ghaffari et al., 2019). Software developers should consult end-users about workplace social subsystems to ensure greater effectiveness of the software application. This consideration is significant when considering the usability and accessibility features of the software. Additionally, software developers should note the different types of social interactions when using the software. Depending on the employee's work tasks, the software's features should match the needs of the employee. For example, an employee who experiences many interruptions by other coworkers or customers might need the capability to quickly save work completed.

In its simplest form, every organization relies on the combination of technology and employees (Cooper & Foster, 1971). The interaction between the workforce and technology can change each entity (Kyriakidis et al., 2018). Developers, researchers, and

managers used STS theory when evaluating a working system and its connection to the human element (Kyriakidis et al., 2018). In one study, the researchers explained that STS assisted organizations in developing systems for communication and information technology in order to connect remote teams (Mariani, 2019). The study indicated that STS enabled management to understand how to create social networks within the organization using social media (Mariani, 2019).

Researchers have used STS theory as a theoretical framework for telecommuting in the past. In a 2012 study, researchers analyzed how various factors affect outcomes and employee motivations to telework over time (Belanger et al., 2012). The study also noted that telework involves the effects of the group or organization and the employee. Another study explored how organizational support for telecommuters influences employee wellbeing (Bentley et al., 2016). This study found that telework was most effective when the subsystems of STS worked in a concerted manner. Bentley et al. focused the study on the well-being of telecommuting employees. The researchers found that many telecommuting employees experienced isolation due to changes in other areas of the STS subsystem. This study showed the strong connection between the STS subsystems and telework.

Chai and Kim (2012) utilized STS theory to study the social factors that affect online social networking sites. The researchers hypothesized the role that technology and socializing on social networking sites exert on community and interest in contributing to users. Chai and Kim (2012) sent surveys to students and employees of a university in the United States who used popular social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and

Twitter. The researchers found a direct correlation between users's feelings of connection to a social community and their ethical culture (Chai & Kim, 2012).

The research shows that socio-technical systems theory is an appropriate technical framework to employ in telework research. STS has moved from its original context in the industrial age to the current era of information. Belanger et al. (2012) suggested using STS as the theoretical framework to study telecommuting. However, many researchers' findings regarding telecommuting conflict with one another. One of the problems for these conflicting findings could be the lack of a clear theoretical framework. Other issues that may contribute to the conflicts include the multiple levels of employees who telecommute and the various environments in which telecommuters work (Belanger et al., 2012). Research that used STS as a conceptual framework studied how social behaviors coupled with technology affect work outcomes. Much research is still needed to review the areas mentioned above that affect workplace social construct (Chaudhuri & Jayaram, 2019).

Introduction to Telecommuting

Over the last 20 years, telecommuting has gained prominence as a corporate option for employees (Narayanan et al., 2017). Telecommuting has increased by over 115 percent in the last ten years. The idea of a workplace is evolving from work done in one central location to work done from anywhere, at any time, in any place (Varty et al., 2017). In the United States, 37 percent of the workforce teleworks in some form or fashion (Brumm, 2016). There is strong evidence for the idea that teleworking is not a

trend but rather the workplace's natural evolution. Employees prefer work flexibility over promotion and pay (Brumm, 2016).

While there is no universal definition for telework, one standard description is work or service done in a remote location, not in the primary office, through a computer and other online technology (Narayanan et al., 2017). The International Labour Organization defines telework as the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as laptops, smartphones, tablets, and home desktop computers, to perform work outside the organization's offices (Eurofound & International Labour Organization, 2017). Even though several authors note that telework only means working from home, telework involves working outside of the organization's offices through the support of ICTs and, therefore, can take place in a wide variety of locations (Narayanan et al., 2017).

Various factors contribute to teleworking growth, advances in managers' trust level, increased number of remote jobs, and changing tasks within the corporate workplace (Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016). These factors increase pressure on members of society to adjust their understanding of work. Organizations and organizational culture are slowly becoming more and more comfortable with the employees' idea of teleworking (Georgiana, 2016). The reasons for teleworking growth include social pressure, growing communication tools, and changing work mentally, allowing for greater trust (Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016).

The global pandemic of 2020 added to the growing interest and reliance on teleworking for business continuity (Belzunegui-Eraso et al., 2020). Before,

organizations that rejected the idea of allowing employees to work remotely hastily created teleworking options to maintain business function. From public school teachers to office managers, organizations desperately and quickly, were forced to switch their delivery models to include teleworking. These changes allowed organizations to stay in business (Belzunegui-Eraso et al., 2020). However, management should review to provide the most effective long-term viability strategies (Li et al., 2020).

Even though telework has become extremely common, managing employees who work from home is still tricky complicated. (Groen et al., 2018). According to research studies, a successful teleworking situation requires that the employee be open and ready for the experience. Managers need to be available to this new teleworking arrangement and possess the technology and infrastructure to handle teleworking (Kim & Hollensbe, 2018). While teleworking is growing in popularity, there are many barriers to allowing employees to telecommute. Some of these barriers include a current corporate culture that requires employees to be present in the office, lack of understanding of the cost advantages of teleworking, specific regulatory issues related to liability of workers, understanding work/life balance, and work schedule flexibility (Avikshit, 2021)

History of Telecommuting

The origins of the terms telecommuting and teleworking, used to describe a remote work environment, are credited to Jack Nilles, a researcher from the University of Southern California (Winter, 2014). Jack Nilles worked with several employees remotely to develop a communication system for the United States Air Force and NASA. In his description of how the team worked on the project from various locations, he used the

term “teleworking” (Chiru, 2017). Nilles worked during the 1970s, a period in the United States history where an oil embargo had increased gasoline prices. These increased prices resulted in higher commuter costs for the workforce (Winter, 2014). Teleworking became an attractive alternative to the higher commuter costs and an interest in decreasing traffic congestion and air pollution (Winter, 2014). Telecommuting gave employees a solution while providing work-life balance and work flexibility (Narayanan et al., 2017).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, organizations attempted to incorporate teleworking into standard business practice, but it was not until the 1990s that teleworking became more common. This was primarily due to the advent of internet connections (Winter, 2014). Global Workplace Analytics conducted a study from 2005 to 2016 to explore the telecommuting workforce in the United States. The authors of the study found that the telecommuting population had increased by more than 140% (Winter, 2014). Additionally, the report noted that more than 4.3 million employees were working from home at least half the time (Winter, 2014) and more than 80% of the workforce in the U.S. would like to telecommute at least part-time (Winter, 2014).

Teleworking is more popular with employees who work in analytical jobs because these employees tend to be more autonomous and use digital mediums to work and communicate (Thulin et al., 2019). One study noted that the vast majority of these workers regularly telework which supports earlier findings that telework is the rule rather than the exception (Thulin et al., 2019). However, other job categories considered office positions due to their routine nature or a solid connection to the primary office location are now allowed to be done from home (Thulin et al., 2019).

Technology plays a pivotal role in the creation of effective telecommuting programs. The internet allows employees to work closely with colleagues in the office, and communication can carry through a wide variety of mediums. Wired and wireless technology in addition to countless software applications allows instantaneous and visual communication. The primary concern in telecommuting communication is the system's connection speed (Chiru, 2017). Additionally, software applications such as instant messenger, email, internal chats, and electronic workflows allow remote workers to communicate seamlessly with colleagues in their organization.

Before telecommuting became a viable option, a flexible work schedule meant allowing employees to adjust their daily work schedule by arriving early in order to depart early or working through the lunch hour. Today's workforce demands a more robust, flexible working arrangement that lets employees choose where and when they will work. (Dima et al., 2019). Teleworking provides the employee with a better work-life balance, saves money on commuting expenses, and has the potential to increase job satisfaction (Delanoeijie et al., 2019). Properly designed and managed, a telecommuting program can be both beneficial to the employee and the organization.

There are various benefits to an effective telecommuting program which include decreased carbon footprint, increased productivity, lower facility expenses, and employee retention (Gallardo & Whitacre, 2018; deAbreu e Silva & Melo, 2018). Organizations with telecommuters use less office space and have decreased expenses in managing and maintaining a facility (Castillo-Frick, 2017). Incorporating a telecommuting program allows managers to recruit highly qualified candidates who do not want to relocate and

enables the new employee to be productive regardless of location. For these and many other reasons, a well-developed and managed telecommuting program can benefit the organization and its employees.

Telecommuting Productivity and Job Performance

Telecommuting is not a new trend; there is evidence that in 1877, a bank president had a telephone wire run from his office to his house enabling him to work from home (Langhoff, 2000). Over the next 140 years, the use of teleworking as a business solution has grown. Many organizations and managers have a concern about how telework affects an employee's productivity and job performance. Several researchers explored the issues of teleworking, productivity, and job performance (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018; Uchenna et al., 2018; Bhattacharya & Mittal, 2020).

Productivity means meeting or exceeding the expectations of the role or position one holds within an organization and is usually measured quantitatively through the work completed. In a traditional workplace environment, management has direct oversight in evaluating and visually monitoring employees' productivity. In a remote or telecommuting situation, the visual and proximity options for evaluation are not present. Therefore, alternative methods of monitoring productivity are necessary to ensure that the employee is performing the position's requirements. These methods may include virtual web-based programs (Teams, Zoom, Facetime), electronic workflows, or outcome-driven projects with deadlines. Each provides management with mechanisms to monitor work progress (López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020).

As newer generations join the workforce and become a larger share of that group, managers must realize the workplace expectations that younger generations possess. Additionally, managers need to create work environments that promote and monitor productivity for their employees, especially the teleworkers. Benefits packages that contain telecommuting alternatives will enhance the recruitment efforts and increase job satisfaction. If management incorporates these telecommuting options, they must also revise and update their evaluation of the employees. Traditional management methods of evaluating productivity and performance will not be effective in this new workplace model. Incorporating different leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, may motivate employees through common inspirational goals and an enhanced sense of community (Peng et al., 2021). Transformational leadership leads by example and develops a feeling of group identity which inspires and attracts younger workers (Le & Lei, 2019). Through transformational leadership, managers go beyond the needs of the employees to engage their interests and motivate employees to create and develop new ideas to help the organization succeed (Le & Lei, 2019).

Globalization and the advancements in technology have created unique opportunities for a global workforce including telecommuting positions that never existed before. Employees today are more likely to change careers multiple times and do not expect to remain with the same organization for the duration of their careers (Jayathilake et al., 2021). The current technology allows employees to perform their work in any location with internet access and gives management the ability to monitor productivity (Rysavy & Michalak, 2020).

With the increased demand for flexible work arrangements from the younger workforce, there is a greater need to develop telecommuting programs that provide oversight and necessary benefits to make them successful. Studies showed that telecommuting positively affects productivity, recruitment and retention, and employee emotional intelligence (Kazekami, 2019). Other benefits of telecommuting include reducing commuting and facility expenses as well as positively impacting corporate culture (Kazekami, 2019). Managers who understand transformational leadership theory and use it effectively in their organizations will recruit and retain productive teleworkers. Superior leaders use this knowledge to develop leadership training programs for future managers of remote teams to enhance the manager's ability to promote higher productivity levels from their employees.

Many studies explore productivity within the telecommuting context. Allowing an employee to telecommute is a critical decision within an organization, and productivity is a pivotal component in that decision (Kazekami, 2019). One study reported that the initial difficulty in analyzing productivity is identifying the appropriate measures to quantify and separate environmental factors from others (Dutcher, 2012). The researcher used a novel study design and surveys to troubleshoot these issues (Dutcher, 2012). The study results showed that telecommuting has a negative effect on certain people groups when working on specific job assignments but can positively impact workers when the projects are creative (Dutcher, 2012).

In his study, Dutcher's (2012) first hypothesis was that the participants would be less productive outside the lab. The second hypothesis was that females would be more

effective than males outside the lab. The third hypothesis was that procrastinators would be less productive outside the lab, and non-procrastinators would not be affected by the environment. Through a series of activities, the researcher gathered data to conclude two distinct tasks: dull and creative. The results showed that tedious activities reduced productivity, while creative activities increased productivity. Data entry or similar monotonous activities might not be conducive to a remote environment; highly creative work would be more appropriate (Dutcher, 2012).

Another study by Rupietta and Beckmann (2018) investigated how working from home or teleworking affects employees' effort. Due to the freedom and autonomy of working from home, teleworking has a positive impact on an employee's effort, and it increases their intrinsic motivation. The authors discussed a variety of theories that could or should affect the telework situation including, principle-agent theory, job characteristics model, and self-determination theory. Each of these theories suggests that a high degree of autonomy should increase an employee's intrinsic motivation and thus greater productivity (Rupietta & Beckman, 2018). The conclusions of this study showed a correlation between working from home, the effort of the employee, and intrinsic motivation (Rupietta & Beckman, 2018). A fascinating side note is how much or how often an employee works from home is significant. Employees who work more hours from home have a higher level of effort than those who work fewer hours (Rupietta & Beckman, 2018).

Another interesting finding by Rupietta and Beckman (2018) is that regardless of wage level, all employees show a higher level of effort when working from home than

working in the office. Additionally, across all industries and occupations, the researchers found higher levels of action when working from home. Rupietta and Beckmann connect the higher levels of effort with intrinsic motivation; they found that these two components complement each other. The researchers conclude with three suggestions for telework programs: they should be voluntary, companies should work against the isolation of employees, and the employees should receive regular feedback to strengthen intrinsic motivation (Rupietta & Beckman, 2018).

Telework is a global trend, and although there are countless papers and research initiatives focused on telework, the findings are polarized (Kazekami, 2019). Many studies note that telework increases employee productivity; however, this was only the case if the employee worked the appropriate hours. If the employee worked more than the reasonable hours, productivity increased. Similarly, telework increases life satisfaction, but it also can increase the stress to balance work and life. This stress can lead to a lower life satisfaction which ultimately can affect productivity (Kazekami, 2019).

Job performance is a crucial indicator of employee success, and it is essential to understand how it relates to those who telecommute. Sanchez et al. (2008) investigated the connection between workplace flexibility, telecommuting, and organizational performance. The study found that organizational performance positively connects to telecommuting and flexible work arrangements (Sanchez et al., 2008). Additionally, the authors noted that organizational performance also related positively to job design and planning, used various compensation models, and was results-driven (Sanchez et al., 2008).

Ongaki (2019) explored the relationship between flexible work arrangements, work-family conflict, organizational commitment, and job performance. The study results showed a significant relationship between the use of flexible work arrangements (telecommuting and flexible schedules), organizational commitment outcome variable, and using family-work conflict as a covariate. Another finding from the study showed that when the researcher used flexible work schedules or telecommuting independently, this had no value to employees when holding work-family conflict as a covariate and job performance and organizational commitment as dependent variables. Ongaki (2019) noted that when the employee had available resources such as controlling their schedule or teleworking, this had a significant impact on family-role conflicts. The author advised that management should use flexible working arrangements to help increase organizational commitment among its employees. The findings indicated that approximately half of the employees might be working long hours by transferring non-work time. There was also difficulty in determining the differences between work and family roles. Finally, some employees used flexible working arrangements regularly, so they may view this as a standard benefit (Ongaki, 2019).

Telework Supervision

Effective management and leadership are critical in any work environment, regardless of whether the employees are in the exact location as the manager or working remotely. Studies have been conducted into the challenges of training and developing managers of virtual teams. The research shows that traditional leadership skills and techniques focused on controlling the employees were not successful in leading a remote

or virtual team (Griffith et al., 2018). Additional research explored organizational succession plans to prepare for the impending Baby Boomer retirement crisis (Reester, 2008). The study noted that organizations should focus on retaining and internally developing leaders (Reester, 2008). This study pertains to telecommuting studies. The study predicted future career trends and employment needs in the workplace and how the development of telecommuting programs could provide necessary opportunities for managers to fill open positions.

As the workplace and workforce evolve, managers need to understand that the growing interest in work-life balance. Employees seek opportunities that match their interests and hobbies, flexible working arrangements, and options in workplace environments (Guy & Pentz, 2017). Organizations must develop effective leadership teams that are competent and able to manage virtual and remote teams. Researchers of global leadership strategies found seven critical elements of influential leaders that help understand the current manager-to-employee paradigm. All of the elements are soft skills and include cultural awareness, developing and maintaining relationships, communication, attitude, knowledge, learning from experience, and a global perspective.

Being culturally aware applies to understanding employees from around the world and employees from different generations. Managers should connect with their employees and develop a good working relationship through effective communication. Training, mentoring, and coaching programs are critical in all work environments but particularly important when the manager operates a virtual team with members from different generations. A positive attitude combined with superior knowledge and skills

for the job gives the manager the necessary credibility to manage the complexities of a virtual team. Additionally, managers should be life-long learners gathering from personal and professional experiences then sharing those lessons with their employees. Finally, a global perspective provides the manager with the ability to understand and relate to employees worldwide.

While telework has become extremely common, managing employees who work from home is still a difficult decision. Many managers use output controls as a mechanism to help them monitor the work of employees who telework. This method is called control theory and revolves around the concept that when a manager cannot oversee an employee's work, that manager will incorporate other mechanisms to monitor the work (Groen et al., 2018). However, researchers found that employees who telework experience fewer control outputs than those who work in the office. Additionally, employees who are allowed to work remotely but choose to work in the office also experience fewer controls than those not given the same privileges. These findings contradict previous assertions from the control theory (Groen et al., 2018).

There are several possible reasons for this contradiction. First, the data comes from employees and their perceptions of the output controls, not the management (Groen et al., 2018). The weakness in this approach is that its perception comes from the employee and not actual controls from the managers. Another issue is that employees allowed to work remotely might have been chosen because they do not need the output controls like their fellow employees. The study only used one specific organization and, therefore, might contain inherent bias. Finally, the study did not evaluate the type of

training that these employees received, which might skew the findings (Groen et al., 2018).

Teleworker Engagement

Work engagement is the connection that employees have with their team, management, and organization. This connection involves the employee feeling a part of the team and playing a pivotal role in the organization's success. Traditional workplace engagement requires face-to-face interaction with colleagues and managers. Through these interactions, employees are fully connected and engaged in the goals and objectives of the organization. Engagement for teleworkers, while an essential component for a successful teleworking program, is more difficult to attain, and therefore alternative engagement methods are necessary.

When studying employee engagement related to telework, it is essential to be aware of the different generations represented in the current workforce and what motivates the individuals from each generation to engage with the organization. Managers must understand the defining characteristics of each generation before they can expect to maximize engagement. A generation is defined as people born within a specific range of years and shares a common set of cultural experiences and historical events that impact their values, interests, beliefs, and attitudes (Jayathilake et al., 2021). There are five primary generations in today's workforce: the Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millenials), and Generation Z (Moss, 2017).

The Veterans are people born before 1946. This generation of people represents the smallest group in the workplace, with less than 1% currently employed; they prefer

leadership that focuses on command and control. The Veterans like face-to-face direction (Moss, 2017); they place a lot of emphasis on rules and regulations and are typically less skilled with technology.

The Baby Boomers are people born between 1946 and 1964. Workers of this generation make up approximately 29% of the employees in the United States and is quickly reaching retirement age. As the oldest group in the workforce, many Baby Boomers are in positions of authority or leadership due to long careers. Baby Boomers have a high commitment to their employers, are career-focused, and possess strong work ethics. Motivating Baby Boomers involves personal gratification, status, positions of authority, and recognition for their contributions (Clark, 2017). Teleworking may require extensive training since many employees from this generation lack the knowledge or experience with technology to operate remotely.

Generation X are people born between 1965 and 1980. This generation comprises 34% of the employees in today's workforce and was raised primarily by the Baby Boomer workaholic generation. Due to this upbringing, many Generation X members have rejected the workaholic mindset and seek a better work-life balance. Work flexibility and limiting long work hours are primary concerns for Generation X members. This generation understands and expects change and is technologically capable of handling teleworking requirements (Clark, 2017). Due to their mindset and comfort with technology, Generation Xers require less training for the teleworking environment, but they embrace the opportunity.

Millennials or Generation Y were born between 1981 and 2000 (Jayathilake et al., 2021). Approximately 34% of the workforce are Millennials. Millennials grew up in the ever-changing age of technology with personal electronics and the Internet. Many of the Millennials are highly capable with technology and fully integrated with the Internet. While this generation is interested in a better work-life balance like their parents, they are more community-minded and socially responsible. This generation is greatly motivated by purpose and needs to belong to social communities and groups. Additionally, this generation expects superior feedback, supervision, and structure. Millennials expect work environments with a global perspective and technology. (Clark, 2017). Finally, employees of this generation i are very comfortable with a virtual work environment and require very little training.

Generation Z employees were born after 2000 and are 2% of the workforce. Similar to older siblings, they prefer the use of technology when communicating. Many Generation Zers possess a significant number of friends on electronic networks. Currently, this generation is a small part of the workforce; however, their share will grow exponentially in the coming years as they join the workforce. This generation relies on technology and adapts quickly to changes in the virtual environment. Generation Zers not only accept a changing work environment, but they also expect and embrace it, making teleworking opportunities a realistic option. However, their comfort with change may create retention problems for organizations, as teleworking offers employment changes without relocating.

Work expectations between the Millennial workforce and Baby Boomers create the most significant challenge for organizations. The Millennial generation seeks opportunities to work remotely and is very comfortable with the technology necessary to telecommute. This focus on teleworking is a significant shift, especially for the Baby Boomer generation that leads many organizations. Millennials appreciate engagement and inspiration and emotionally connect to their work (Hadiyat et al., 2020); this is a change from past generations, and organizations need to acknowledge and strategize for this shift. Organizations need to understand this shift and each generation's different motivational factors and expectations.

Telecommuting and Organizational Support

Miglioretti et al. (2021) studied the effects of telework on employees and found that while there were many positive impacts from telework, telecommuters noted flaws such as less organizational resources, a lack of support from managers and peers, and difficulty with work-life balance. Miglioretti et al. (2021) also found that organizations need to change their management style to develop better communication, responsiveness, and employee expectations. The success of a telework program depends on the people and their response to the program. Technology brings impressive communication tools; however, management must foster the relationship with telecommuters and support them appropriately (Choi, 2018).

There are a variety of areas where organizations can support their telecommuting employees. Baker et al. (2006) explored the connection between different forms of organizational support and the employee's reactions to remote work technology.

Organizations need to provide IT support and the necessary technology for telecommuters to perform their jobs. Additionally, training for employees that telecommute and their colleagues that work in the office is pivotal (Baker et al., 2006). While telecommuting provides an attractive alternative for both the organization and the employees, challenges can affect management's attitude toward telecommuting. As a result, managers are hesitant to allow employees to telecommute. Another study found that one of the primary difficulties in establishing a teleworking policy is managers' resistance (Silva et al., 2019). Silva et al. (2019) noted that managers' hesitancy related to their ability to articulate and manage performance and the organization's overall culture (Silva et al., 2019).

Organizational support for teleworking revolves around trust, particularly the manager's confidence in the teleworker (Nakrosiene et al., 2018). Managers need to establish this trust with their employees, allowing the manager to work on the employee's satisfaction with their job (Nakrosiene et al., 2018). Transformational leadership provides an excellent framework for establishing the support needed from teleworking employees (Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021).

Telework and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is an essential component in the effectiveness of an employee. Organizations that do not offer rewarding work conditions, lack necessary resources, fail to support employees, and impose heavy workloads produce dissatisfied employees (Tripathy & Sahoo, 2018). In contrast, most of the studies done on telecommuting and job satisfaction found that telecommuting had a positive effect on an employee's job

satisfaction (Smith et al., 2018). Several studies explored the positive impact of telecommuting on job satisfaction (Kazekami, 2019; Smith et al., 2018). One study explored the influence a flexible workplace had on the work-life balance issue for employees from multiple countries and found a positive effect (Zhang et al., 2020). Another study tested and found a positive correlation between increased employees' job satisfaction and a decrease in work-related stress among teleworkers compared to their colleagues in a traditional workplace (Topino et al., 2021). Teleworking benefits such as flexible work arrangements that allow employees greater freedom closely connect with lower employee attrition and higher job satisfaction (Smith et al., 2018).

An essential step in improving teleworkers' job satisfaction is creating a formal teleworking policy. In a study by Troup and Rose (2012), the researchers explored the effect of formal and informal teleworking policies on men and women. They found that teleworking has a significant impact on job satisfaction. The study found that when a company did not have a formal teleworking policy, there was no effect on job satisfaction between men and women. However, when a standard policy existed, women had higher job satisfaction levels than men (Troup & Rose, 2012).

An interesting note to the study by Troup and Rose (2012) is the relationship between parenting, childcare, work-family balance, and teleworking. Informal teleworking policies tend to pressure women to manage family issues. Formal procedures tend to favor men and work-life balance, while the converse is true for women. An informal policy tends to allow women the freedom to handle many of the home responsibilities that historically fall to them. However, work-life balance is not the same

as job satisfaction. As it relates to job satisfaction, a formal teleworking policy seems to lead to greater job satisfaction for women because they have greater control over their career responsibilities (Troup & Rose, 2012).

Research is scarce that explores correlations between the age of employees, job satisfaction, and teleworking. Several studies research age and job satisfaction (Topino et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2018) with conflicting findings regarding an employee's age and their satisfaction with their job. McNall et al. (2010) conducted a study that explored the relationship between job satisfaction and employee age and between teleworking and job satisfaction. However, the study did not examine the correlation between all three. A study by Martin and MacDonnell (2012) found a connection between organizational commitment and telework. As the age of the participant increased, their level of commitment to telework decreased. The deduction from the authors was that the younger participants had a more significant commitment to telework alternatives, therefore, they had higher job satisfaction (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). Telecommuting is an extrinsic factor that can impact job satisfaction, but it is important to mention that other intrinsic and extrinsic factors can also have an effect (Murari & Mukherjee, 2021).

Telework Challenges

Telework is a popular option for organizations and employees and provides many benefits, however; in order to fully grasp the concept, one must understand the challenges. Some challenges include a lack of face-to-face interaction, less manager control, distractions and home conflict, technological difficulties, and ineffective teamwork. When an employee works from home, they bring their daily work

requirements, tasks, and issues into the home (Golden, 2021). At the same time, the employee brings home conflicts into the workplace, and depending on how often the employee works from home can significantly impact the work-home conflict issue (Golden, 2021).

Research indicates that the more an employee works from home, the lower the work-home conflict (Golden, 2021). Work-home conflict may be due to the employee's ability to manage their schedule efficiently or create a routine that facilitates work at home without creating conflict. Other factors that help reduce friction when working from home include lower commute time, fewer coworker or management interruptions, and less emotional demand from colleagues. However, the more an employee teleworks, the greater the possibility for family interruptions with work (Bae et al., 2019; Golden, 2021). These interruptions are due to the proximity and access that family members have with the employee. Some of the issues that employees face regarding family include domestic demands, noise levels, childcare assistance, and other home interruptions (Golden, 2021).

Another challenge that teleworking brings to the workplace is the relationships between employees, specifically the telework employees and their colleagues in the office. When employees do not work in the primary workplace location, all their interaction with colleagues happens via technology, be it phone, email, messenger, Zoom, etc. (Miglioretti et al., 2021). Employees that work in the exact location together spend time in the breakroom, by the water cooler, talking over the cubicles, and develop relationships directly and informally. This level of relationship is extremely difficult to

cultivate while teleworking. A side issue associated with the lack of relationship-building opportunities is the feeling of isolation. which affects the employee's mental wellbeing (Miglioretti et al., 2021). Managers should be aware of these issues and address them with opportunities to enhance the connection between their teleworking employees and their in-office employees (Albano et al., 2019).

A study by Song and Gao (2020) explored how telework affects employees' happiness and their home life. The authors found that teleworking during the week brought less joy and more stress to the employee. However, the study revealed less happiness among parents that telework, especially fathers, during workdays but a higher level of satisfaction during the weekend or holidays. In contrast, non-parent teleworkers' enjoyment did not vary regardless of where they worked (Nedelcu, 2020; Song & Gao, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Happiness is vital in the work setting (Tripathy & Sahoo, 2018), especially in telework.

While teleworking provides the employee and the organization many benefits, one study investigated these benefits deeper to verify that telework delivers on the previous findings. Kwon and Jeon (2017) examined benefits including reducing employee turnover, increased flexibility and autonomy, and increased employee satisfaction and productivity, and found the results unclear. The authors's study found no significant improvement in employee turnover or retention when an organization implemented teleworking as an option. Teleworking is supposed to increase autonomy and flexibility, which will provide the organization with an increase in employee satisfaction and productivity. However, the study shows that employees have difficulty

separating their work and personal lives and feel isolated due to their lack of interaction with colleagues. Distraction from work due to personal issues or isolation can decrease productivity and job satisfaction (Kwon, & Jeon, 2017). The primary benefits that many claim telework provides may be creating deficits for the organization.

Fear is another challenge that organizations need to recognize and address before implementing a teleworking policy. Employees' expectations and fears about teleworking can significantly impact their productivity, and thus it is imperative that managers clearly understand these concerns. Employees' fears regarding telework are reduced visibility and connection within the organization and, therefore, the loss of promotion opportunities. Additionally, employees expect to have greater flexibility with their work that will allow them to manage home-life issues. Managers need to address these concerns and develop policies and strategies that mitigate problems and maximize benefits.

An organization must evaluate its expectations and management model for its teleworking workforce (Silva et al., 2019). The expense and commitment to teleworking create a considerable investment for an organization. The return on this investment may not be as high as expected or may take a long time to achieve (Silva et al., 2019). One recent study noted that telework is merely a fad and that organizations, rather than investment in telework, should consider multi-office systems that have smaller groups of employees working together. (Takahashi, 2021). This study found that telework is not a viable, long-term solution.

Telework, SMEs, and Retention of Employees

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) typically employ less than 250 employees (Jaroslav et al., 2019), and they are a significant portion of the economy of many countries (Grigorescu & Mocanu, 2020). For many SMEs, retaining employees is one of the most challenging responsibilities for Human Resource management (Bilan et al., 2020). Due to this problem, managers evaluate various options to attract talent including telework (Jaroslav et al., 2019). Teleworking allows organizations to address three primary difficulties in filling open positions: job attractiveness due to constraints of pay and work arrangements, proper recruiting tools, and job satisfaction (Bilan et al., 2020). A telecommuting position is attractive to prospective employees and provides managers with needed leverage to entice top talent to their organizations.

Transition

In Section 1, I presented the Foundation of the Study, that includes the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the nature of the study, the research question, the interview questions, and the conceptual framework. It also includes the operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study, and the significance of the study, including the contributions to business practice and the implications for social change. Section 1 concluded with an in-depth review of the professional and academic literature, highlighting transformational leadership, socio-technical systems and the need for managers to understand the complexities of telecommuting to increase employee's well-being in the workplace, thus increasing employee productivity.

In Section 2, I restate the purpose of the study. I then present the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, the participants in the study, the research method and design of the study, the population and sampling, the ethical research, the data collection, the data organization, and the data analysis. Section 2 concludes with a discussion of how I ensure the reliability and validity of my research. In Section 3, I present the findings of my study. Further discussion in this section includes applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further research. I conclude Section 3 with a reflection and conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I review my role as the researcher, the participants' criteria for eligibility, and how I gathered information. I explain the use of the qualitative multiple case study design and justify the plan to reach data saturation. Additionally, I discuss the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical procedures, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies small business owners use to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees. The study population consisted of five small business owners who had effectively used telecommuting in Texas. The findings may be valuable to organizations wanting to evaluate the options for employees who desire to telecommute. The conclusions of this study may allow organizational leaders to promote positive social change by identifying and implementing initiatives, programs, and strategies that provide an enhanced work–life balance, job satisfaction, and employee retention for the organization. The growing social pressure to allow employees to telecommute due to pandemic and other natural disasters increases the need to develop and implement telecommuting strategies. Because of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, organizations implemented a wide range of telecommuting policies to increase social distancing. These policies were set in place for a large number of the world's working population (Li et al., 2020). The current study may

help organizations ensure that their policies are structured in a way that will benefit both the organization and the employees.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument in collecting data in qualitative studies because the researcher initiates and carries out the study (Yin, 2018). As the researcher, my role included gathering, recording, interpreting, and presenting the data that were collected (see Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Additionally, the researcher makes key determinations related to the research questions, structure of the research sample, and selection of the participants (Sutherland et al., 2014). For the last 9 years, I worked as a remote employee and felt confident in collecting the necessary and pertinent data for the current study.

Qualitative research lends itself to researcher bias because the researcher's background can affect the study's validity and reliability (Yin, 2018). Researchers must avoid bias and maintain an open mind related to the data and participants to obtain reliable findings (Yin, 2018). Bias in research involves the failure to eliminate personal emotions, feelings, or other attachments from the research process (Yin, 2018). I kept my personal opinions, emotions, feelings, and culture from the research process to mitigate bias. The research process involves choosing research participants, gathering data, recording data, evaluating and interpreting data, and presenting research findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Throughout this process, a researcher's prior experiences related to the topic could impact the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). My prior experience as a remote employee could have led to researcher bias. I mitigated this

bias through a technique called bracketing. Bracketing involves minimizing the researcher's experiences and encouraging the participants' experiences to surface without interference (Trepal et al., 2014). One way to achieve bracketing is using open-ended questions throughout the data gathering process (Trepal et al., 2014). While gathering data, I used six open-ended questions.

Another bias concern involves the researcher recruiting participants from their employer's company (Cairney & St. Denny, 2015). No participants were recruited from my place of employment or any organization with which I had a personal or professional relationship. A personal or professional relationship with the participants can affect the validity of the data collected (Cairney & St. Denny, 2015).

As the researcher, I was respectful and fair to all participants. Understanding and applying ethical principles of respecting participants, generalizing beneficence, and ensuring justice are critical when conducting research (Artal & Rubenfeld, 2017). I followed the guidelines established by the Belmont Report of 1979. The Belmont Report is a set of ethical guidelines that are intended to protect research participants against misuse, unfair treatment, and coercion to participate in studies while maintaining their confidentiality (Leyva-Moral & Feijoo-Cid, 2017). I sought to reduce or eliminate any discomfort the participants might have experienced during the interview. I also included an informed consent form that helped the participants understand the study's purpose, any possible risks, and the expected benefits (see Yin, 2018). The participants read and signed the informed consent form before the start of the interview.

Participants

Selecting participants is a critical step in acquiring knowledge because the participants are the primary source of information and provide a variety of perspectives related to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I selected the participants from businesses in the Texas area that allow employees to work from home. Participants were knowledgeable about strategies for effectively managing teleworkers. Members of the target population should meet the criteria necessary to participate in the study (Watts et al., 2017). The requirements for inclusion in the current study included business owners (a) working for small businesses, (b) with at least 1 year of work experience in the target company, and (c) with employees who work remotely. With clearly defined eligibility criteria, the researcher can compare research data with those from other studies (Watts et al., 2017).

For a researcher to gain access to a participant, the researcher must search for potential candidates, contact the candidates, and interview the candidates to collect data (Peticca-Harris et al., 2016). A researcher can gain access to the candidates either directly or indirectly. To gain access indirectly, the researcher can contact managers of organizations and personal acquaintances (Peticca-Harris et al., 2016). In the current study, business contacts in the Texas area were the means to access the target organizations and managers participating in the study. I used the eligibility criteria to consolidate my search of candidate organizations. My initial investigation involved identifying many small businesses in the Texas area from the local chamber of commerce. The chamber of commerce business listing included physical addresses, email

addresses, telephone numbers, and key company personnel. I use the information gathered to contact and gain access to the target companies. Using the information gathered, I contacted the companies and sought permission from the owners to conduct my study. When an owner showed willingness to participate in the study, I sent them the informed consent form.

Once access to the participants is secured, the researcher should maintain access by establishing a relationship with the participants (Grant, 2017). Researchers gather quality data through trust, authenticity, openness, and respect (Kowal et al., 2017). Establishing a connection with participants is vital; this connection allows for fewer research issues for all people involved (Yin, 2018). I contacted prospective participants through email and telephone. I provided information on my background and experience to create a connection of trust with the selected companies. While I conducted the interviews, I was respectful and observant of the participants' demeanor to evaluate any issues affecting the study. Honesty and sincerity with the participants promote a positive relationship with the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Additionally, a virtual interview allowed me to observe the participants' behavior and nonverbal messages within each response. I carefully recorded these behaviors or expressions to prevent bias from the influencing the findings.

Research Method and Design

The research method and design are critical components of a study because the design impacts the gathering and analysis of the study's data (Goerres et al., 2019). The proper alignment in a study requires consistency between the research method and design

and the study's intent (Goerres et al., 2019). The qualitative research method, which includes multiple case studies, was appropriate for the current study because the study involved several owners' and executives' effective practices for remote work. This method was appropriate because it allowed for a more profound exploration of the phenomenon to answer the research question.

Research Method

When conducting research, a researcher has three methods to choose from: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Yin, 2018). My qualitative multiple case study focused on gathering data regarding effective strategies used by owners for telecommuting. Qualitative research provides an understanding of a phenomenon through the analysis of various sources of data (Yin, 2018). Additionally, the qualitative method can be used to understand an existing process (Frempong et al., 2018). Furthermore, when the researcher's goal is to gather data that can increase the understanding of a phenomenon, the qualitative method is preferred (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Studies requiring participants' perspectives typically require qualitative tools such as interview questions (Staniskiene et al., 2018). Interview questions allow the researcher to collect information not previously explored and reduce any influence from the researcher's framework (Weller et al., 2018).

Researchers looking to test hypotheses focused on existing relationships tend to use quantitative methodology (Goerres et al., 2019). The quantitative method allows the researcher to examine the relationship between variables and quantify that relationship through objective measurements (Staniskiene et al., 2018). When a researcher seeks to

confirm causation and generalize findings, quantitative methodology is appropriate (Crane et al., 2017). For the current study, quantitative methodology was not appropriate because I did not need to gather numerical data or examine relationships between variables.

The third research method is the mixed-methods approach, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Researchers use the mixed-methods approach when they requires qualitative and quantitative data to answer the research questions. Researchers also use the mixed-methods approach when they want to both define and solve the problem (Yin, 2018). Additionally, many researchers use the mixed-methods approach when gathering quantitative data and analyzing the information through qualitative discussions with participants (Amalki, 2016). Finally, the mixed-methods approach assists researchers in theory development and testing theories in a single study (Turner et al., 2017). I did not use the mixed-methods approach because my study did not include a quantitative component or numerical data collection.

Research Design

A qualitative study design will involve one of several designs, including ethnographic, phenomenological, and case study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). For the current study, I used the multiple case study design. Multiple case studies are appropriate when interviewing participants through semistructured discussions to understand their experiences within a bounded system (Alase, 2017). Participants' answers to research questions provide the researcher with in-depth information regarding the phenomenon (Bock et al., 2018). The multiple case study design may require more sources and time to

conduct the study; however, it is also considered more thorough in its conclusions (Yin, 2018).

Ethnographic research requires the researcher to be in the study setting to combine the interviews with observations of the participants (Wutich & Brewis, 2019). I did not use the ethnographic approach because there was no need to incorporate myself into the participants' workplace, and I did not need to conduct a more extended analysis of the participants (see Saunders et al., 2015). Additionally, researchers tend to use the ethnographic design to involve several components in the study and explore the relationship between the data and the environment (Gherardi, 2019). My study did not require exploration of this interaction; therefore, the ethnographic design was not appropriate.

In a phenomenological study, the focus is on the experiences of the participants regarding the same phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Furthermore, the phenomenological researcher seeks to identify the personal meanings and understand the phenomenon's patterns from the participants' lived experiences (Groenewald, 2018). Effective telecommuting strategies did not constitute a single event or experience; therefore, I did not choose the phenomenological design.

Case study research involves interviews, observations, and analysis of documents (Yin, 2018). A case study involves exploring a real-life event (Saunders et al., 2015). The case study method is used to answer "why", "what," and "how" questions regarding an event or situation and is the preferred method for explanatory or exploratory research (Saunders et al., 2015).

There are two variations of the case study method (single and multiple cases), and I used the multiple case method. In a multiple case study, the researcher interviews various participants (Yin, 2018). The multiple case study method may require more time and resources than a single case study; however, it is also considered more thorough and compelling (Yin, 2018).

Population and Sampling

This study's population included owners of small businesses with experience in incorporating telecommuting policies by allowing at least a portion of their employees to telecommute. The participants were owners of companies in Texas. The sample included five participants. I conducted interviews at a mutually agreed upon location with each participant. The sites were comfortable and quiet to ensure an environment conducive to an effective interview. Interview sites included coffee houses, libraries, and conference rooms.

I used purposive sampling to recruit participants who manage employees who telecommute. By targeting this population, I sought to incorporate a representation of small businesses in Texas. Purposive sampling is a technique researchers use to study events that are not random (Elo et al., 2014). Researchers who need participants with knowledge or information will use purposive sampling (Elo et al., 2014). For the current study, the specific event was owners of small businesses whose employees telecommute.

The sample size in a study should include enough participants to achieve reliability and validity but does not extend beyond data saturation (Roberts et al., 2019). Data saturation is the point at which the researcher is not uncovering new information

(Roberts et al., 2019) or at which the researcher is experiencing diminishing returns (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In purposive samples, data saturation can occur in theoretical saturation where the researcher has grounds for drawing generalizations (Yin, 2018). I interviewed five owners of small businesses in Texas who had effectively used telecommuting.

Ethical Research

This qualitative study aimed to explore strategies that small business owners use to implement and oversee teleworking policies. There is no physical risk for participants since they will merely answer interview questions posed to them. That said, ethical research requires the researcher to obtain informed consent forms from each participant before conducting the interview (Yin, 2018). The participants in this study received a written consent form via email asking them to read and consent by replying before starting their interview. The consent form is included in Appendix A. The written consent form provides information that participation in the study is confidential. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, and the procedure for withdrawal is explained in the consent form. Participants may also refuse to answer any or all questions.

This study does not offer any incentives to the participants. However, participants may benefit from new strategies or policies related to the business problem. Before gathering any data, I informed the participants that the study contains no risks regarding participation and their employment status will not be affected. I also ensured that the participants understood their rights regarding any questions they might have during the interview process.

Protecting the participants' anonymity and confidentiality is a primary concern during this study (Ross et al., 2018). I used codes to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Neither the names of the participants nor their businesses' names will appear in any journal or published research, only the identifying code. To maintain the participants' rights, I will secure the data received on a password-protected flash drive in a locked location for 5 years. After 5 years, I will destroy all the gathered data by shredding the flash drive and papers.

Data Collection Instruments

In a qualitative study, the primary instrument of data collection is the researcher (Yin, 2018). As the primary instrument, the researcher gains information through observing, interpreting, and recording the data gathered during the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). There are four standard methods of data collection available to the researcher, interviews, observations, artifacts, and archived documents (Yin, 2018). Of these four methods, interviews are the most popular method because they allow the researcher to gain greater insight into the participants' perception and knowledge of the event (Yin, 2018). I used semi-structured interviews because they allow greater flexibility with the participant, focusing on specific, pertinent information in the interview (Miller, 2017). In addition, my questions are open-ended, allowing for opportunities for rich dialogue and information gathering (Saunders et al., 2018). For this study, my interviews used the series of questions found in Appendix B.

When the researcher conducts semi-structured interviews, it is critical to adhere to a comprehensive process. The extensive interview process consists of procedures and

steps used by the researcher (Dikko, 2016). that ensure the reliability of the research study (Dikko, 2016). I used a specific set of questions for each interview conducted. (See Appendix A.). Interviews should be held in an environment free of distractions, comfortable for the participant, and with little or low background noise to facilitate the recording process (Hamilton et al., 2017). Another concern when planning the interviews is the time of the interview. The researcher should ensure that the interview is held at a convenient time for the participant which does not interfere with the participant's daily schedule (Friesen et al., 2017). A variety of methods increase the reliability and validity of interviews. Recording the interview is one proven method to ensure reliability and validity. The recorded interview allows the researcher to constantly review the recording for accuracy (Al-Yateem, 2012). I used my iPhone 11 cell phone to record each interview and backed up the interview on iCloud storage to ensure the data is safe and secure.

To build rapport with the participants, I began each interview by introducing myself and my research study. I also had a short conversation with the participant to ease and answer any general questions they might have. The initial interview was no more than 60 minutes in length. Each participant received the informed consent form before the interview. At the beginning of the interview, I reviewed the informed consent form (included in Appendix D) and the complete nature and relevance of the study. Once the participants read the consent form, I provided the option to withdraw from the study at any time (Friesen et al., 2017).

Additionally, I shared that the participants' identities will be kept confidential, and each participant was assigned a random number at the time of the interview. Each

interview included the questions written in the interview process, and all participants were asked the same set of questions (See Appendix A.). Finally, after each interview, I thanked the participants for their time and participation and shared that follow-up communication would come via email. The follow-up email will take the participant less than 30 minutes to complete.

Documentation review is another data collection instrument in this research study. In qualitative research studies, documents provide valuable evidence (Dabic & Stojanov, 2014). The documents received from participants complement and support data obtained in the interview (Yin, 2018). The documents used in this research study include employee handbooks, code of conduct, and employee diversity policies. Data gathered from documents allows the researcher to triangulate interview information and increase participants' interviews' validity and reliability (Yin, 2018). Triangulation of data by comparing data from multiple sources helps the researcher achieve data saturation (Graue, 2015).

Researchers should carefully review information received in the interview process through member checking and follow-up questions. Those questions help researchers elicit information from participants and generate more significant thinking from participants (Yin, 2018). The researcher will ask follow-up questions until no new information is available (Yin, 2018). I asked each participant follow-up questions for clarification. Member checking allows the participants to confirm the researcher's interpretation of the interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Following the summary of the interviews, participants received electronic copies of my synthesis of the interview

with a request to review and validate the information. The member checking of interviews comes after the interview transcription but prior to the data analysis. I included comments provided by participants in a revised version of the interviews.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection instruments used in this qualitative multiple case study include in-depth, semi-structured interviews and the review of the interviews. Researchers increase the accuracy of their research by collecting data through several techniques, various sources of information, and using different methods to analyze the data (Abdalla et al., 2018). Techniques available to researchers include interviews, archival records, observations of participants, document reviews, site visits, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2018). Validity in a research study increases by using multiple data collection techniques (Yin, 2018) recommends using at least two data collection techniques.

For this study, the data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews and a review of documents. The interview process provides protocols for the researcher to engage the participants in open-ended discussions in the interview session (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). In my study, the primary data collection technique will be a face-to-face interview. Zoom or Skype interviews will be an alternative for participants concerned with COVID protocols. Semi-structured interviews allow participants the time to answer open-ended questions as well as provide the researcher opportunities to include follow-up questions for clarification (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Given the nature of the research topic, telecommuting strategies, and the possible geographic location of managers,

allowing Zoom or Skype interviews could be more convenient and comfortable (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). When a face-to-face interview is too difficult or impossible, an alternative method is recommended, such as an e-interview (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Although a telephone interview is convenient, it does not allow the researcher to observe non-verbal communication such as a facial expressions or body language. Zoom or Skye provides the researcher with a visual observation of the participant (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014).

Before starting each interview, I asked the participant for permission to record the interview. Recording the interview allows the researcher to capture and include each participant's response in the data analysis. Recording the interview also assists the researcher in identifying common themes in the collected data (Yin, 2018). As I conducted interviews, I kept a journal with notes on each participant's responses. In the journal, I recorded any vocal reactions, tone changes, and relevant ideas or concepts during the interviews. The notes taken in an interview can enhance the overall data collected and assist data analysis (Yin, 2018). Notes in a journal are a critical part of the study because they allow the researcher to review responses to follow-up questions, correct interview transcripts, and provide fresh ideas during the member checking process.

Researchers use a secondary data collection technique to ensure validity and reliability (Graue, 2015). In this study, the review of company documents is the second data collection technique for data triangulation. The review of documents assists and complements interviews in the research process (Yin, 2018). Any data collected in the

documentation review can support interview data to increase the study's validity and reliability (Yin, 2018). The documents I reviewed for this study include the employee handbook, code of conduct, employee diversity policy, and telecommuting policy. Company documents contain helpful information on specific events or references for the researcher to review and ensure data triangulation (Yin, 2018). I requested company documentation from the research participants following the interview sessions.

Data Organization Technique

The organization of data during a research study is a critical component of the entire process (Yin, 2018). There are many techniques for tracking research data, including research logs, reflective journals, and cataloging the data. The primary purpose of the research logs is to keep track of the research process (Bloom & Deyrup, 2015). The data retained in research logs provides the researcher with the ability to describe and review the research process (Bloom & Deyrup, 2015). Research logs also provide rich information for analyzing the data (Bloom & Deyrup, 2015). For this study, the research logs will be kept electronically (Bloom & Deyrup, 2015), and they will help me document and reflect on the data collection process.

Reflective journals are a second data organization technique for qualitative research. Researchers garner valuable data regarding the participants' beliefs and thoughts from the reflective journals (Bruno & Dell'Aversan, 2017). Reflective journals, in case studies, allow the researcher to record and track all reflections from the participants as they relate to experiences and interactions during the research process (Bruno & Dell'Aversan, 2017). The researcher must maintain objectivity to create

influential reflective journals (Cowan, 2014). Information gathered in journals can lead to new understandings or insights that can benefit the research study (Cowan, 2014).

The final data organizing technique for this study is cataloging. The practice of cataloging includes labeling the research data. The proper formatting, labeling, and categorizing the data collected in the interviews with participants is critical for data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The transcripts from participant interviews are divided into individual files on my computer. Each interview was assigned a random number specific only to that participant. The random number ensures that the participants' names and personal information remain private and confidential. Storing the information separately and categorizing the data using specific random identifiers provides differentiation between participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

All data is stored on my password-protected personal computer and kept on an encrypted flash drive securely stored in a locked cabinet. I am the only person who has access to the computer and the flash drive. I will delete all audio records, files, and flash drives after 5 years.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data involves thoroughly examining and categorizing the data to deliver evidence-based findings (Yin, 2018). Data analysis aims to identify answers to the primary research question, which explains the need to align the research question, data collection, data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques. In qualitative research studies, data analysis includes collecting, filtering, and organizing data (Graue, 2015). Next, the researcher will conclude the data attained (Graue, 2015).

The two data analysis techniques employed in this current study are content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis helps identify and categorize themes that emerge during the research study (Graue, 2015). I used content analysis to explore and identify themes related to effective strategies for telecommuting in small businesses. Due to the multiple steps in the data analysis process, content analysis is the logical approach (Graue, 2015). When using content analysis, the researcher will prepare the data, develop codes and categories, assess the codes, and make conclusions on the coded data (Graue, 2015). The preparation of data involves transcribing the recorded interviews (Graue, 2015) and obtaining any relevant information from the team documents.

Researchers use themes to code research data to prioritize relevant components for the data analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify and analyze patterns and themes in the data gathered (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Therefore, it is appropriate to use thematic analysis to examine semi-structured interviews recorded and transcribed (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Using thematic analysis, I objectively examined effective telecommuting strategies used by small business owners.

I began the data analysis process by reviewing the raw data from the interviews (Yin, 2018). The analysis involved listening to the participants' interviews, reading the transcripts of the interview and the company documents, and converting the information into codes, categories, and themes. I used Atlas.ti software to assist in coding the raw data and organizing it into themes. Atlas.ti provides a more rapid connection between themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The participants' views formed the basis for the

categories that were stated in the interview, and these categories generate the development of the themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

Reliability and Validity

As the primary instrument in collecting, analyzing, categorizing, and interpreting the data in qualitative research, the researcher must maintain rigor for the entire study (Cypress, 2017). It is imperative to understand rigor in the research process. allows the researcher to ensure the study is objective, accurate, and precise (Cypress, 2017). Qualitative studies must be reviewed with great rigor due to the potential for subjectivity (Cypress, 2017). To incorporate rigor into the qualitative research, the researcher must adhere to the criteria of validity and reliability (Dikko, 2016) which are two vital components of all research studies. Subjectivity can impact qualitative research due to the researcher's bias (Cypress, 2017). This bias can influence the interpretations and results acquired in the study (Cypress, 2017). A variety of strategies can help improve the validity and reliability of a research study, including triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity (Abdalla et al., 2018; Caretta & Perez, 2019; Madill & Sullivan, 2018).

Reliability

The researcher's primary goal in a qualitative study, when it comes to reliability, is consistency (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). Reliability means consistency in similarities in results drawn from the research that provide greater explanation of the phenomena (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). Additionally, the reliability of the research study is significantly tied to adequacy of the data and how it supports the research process and procedures (Spiers et al., 2018).

Two other terms critical to reliability of the research study are dependability and confirmability (Yilmaz, 2013). The researcher may attain dependability and confirmability in the research study through identifying and justifying the research practices and procedures (Yilmaz, 2013). Describing the research provides the audience with the tools to trace the research (Yilmaz, 2013). For this study, dependability and confirmability were assured through a clear and detailed description of the research question, the conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, data collection, and data analysis.

Member checking is a method used to increase dependability in the research, and a crucial method to ensure reliability (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). Member checking requires the researcher to ensure understanding of the information in the interview through a process of checking with the participant. This process consists of returning to the participant the information gathered in the interview for confirmation on the accuracy and interpretation of the material (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). Some researchers consider member checking a follow-up interview that allows the participant an opportunity to debrief before the study is concluded (Madill & Sullivan, 2018).

By checking with the participants, the researcher can clarify any ideas or thoughts expressed in the interview (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). Once an interview was concluded, I contacted each participant for member checking. During the member checking process, I provided a transcript of the interview to each participant along with my synthesis of the information and asked if I had understood their ideas and comments correctly. (Cretta & Perez, 2019). I gave each participant the opportunity to make any necessary corrections.

The collection and analysis of the data are vital in achieving reliable results in a qualitative study. I used the thematic analysis method to analyze data collected. Thematic analysis allowed me to identify patterns in the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). However, the use of codes and themes was possibly influenced by my unconscious bias. To reduce bias, I used the process of reflexivity. Reflexivity is a method where the researcher constantly self-evaluates or self-reflects one's actions, perceptions, and emotions (Darawsheh, 2014). By using reflexivity, I was able to identify any influence I had on the research process.

Validity

Qualitative research depends on truthfulness or credibility to be valid (Spiers et al., 2018). Validity is being relevant, well-founded, and justifiable (Cypress, 2017). Providing results that reflect the data precisely and with integrity is validity in research (Spiers et al., 2018). Spiers et al. (2018) further explained that validity in qualitative research is connected to data relevance, where the experiences of the participants are shared in a real and accurate manner. Accurately explaining the experiences of participants through interview and observation techniques is a critical component of qualitative studies (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). Validity in this study is ensured by accurately presenting the data collected. Each interview was recorded, which allowed me to improve validity by continuously reviewing the recordings for accuracy as I developed the transcripts (Al-Yateem, 2012).

Methodological triangulation is another technique that increases the validity of a research study. Methodological triangulation improves the rigor of the study by

evaluating the data from different sources throughout the process (Abdalla et al., 2018). The additional sources of data used for triangulation were the employee handbook, the code of conduct and ethics, and employee diversity policy from each business participating in the study.

Transferability

Transferability occurs when the results from a study can be replicated by another researcher in a different setting under similar circumstances (Yilmaz, 2013; Yin, 2018). Researchers can increase the opportunity for transferability by future researchers through meticulous documentation of each step in the process, maintaining strict research protocols, and attaining data saturation (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). An additional method in improving the transferability of a research study is through complete and exhaustive data collection (Yilmaz, 2013). Transferability is a component that defines a research study that is trustworthy (Yilmaz, 2013). I documented my research process, closely adhered to the interview protocol, engaged in member checking, ensured the highest levels of ethical standards, and achieved data saturation to provide future studies the opportunity to reach credible and dependable findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability of another researcher to corroborate and replicate the findings of a research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Evaluating the research data rigorously for validity and accuracy achieves confirmability (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used member checking with all participants to ensure accuracy of the findings and satisfy confirmability (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Additionally, confirmability is

ensured through a detailed description of the steps used in the research process to eliminate bias (Morse, 2015; Yin, 2018). I included a detailed description of all steps used in the research study. Finally, a researcher can reach confirmability when the outcomes become consistent. I reach confirmability by evaluating and comparing the participants' responses and analyzing for consistency.

Data Saturation

A research study that contains a saturated sample achieves credibility. Data saturation is attained when including additional participants does not add new information to the study (Yin, 2018). Triangulation of the data by comparing information from multiple sources will help me achieve data saturation (Graue, 2015). For this study, I used the code of conduct and ethics, employee handbook, and employee diversity policy as supporting documentation to achieve data saturation. Member checking is another method to ensure data saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Member checking allows the researcher and the participants to review, analyze, and validate the interviews and the researcher's interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). If the researcher does not reach data saturation the study is incomplete (Yin, 2018).

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies small business owners use to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees. In Section 2, I explained the purpose of the study, role of the researcher, participants, research method, and design selection. In Section 2, I explored the study's methodology, the justification for choosing a qualitative multiple case study design, the study

population, the sampling process, semi-structured interviews and company documents as data collection instruments, the interview technique employed, and the discussion on reliability and validity. In Section 3, I included a discussion of the findings of the study, applications to professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for action and future research, reflections on the process, and a conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies small business owners use to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees. I used transformational leadership and STS theory as the conceptual framework for exploring the connection between leadership, technology, and remote work. I conducted semistructured interviews with five owners of small businesses in Texas. These participants supervised employees who worked remotely. I identified participants with a number assigned to each, from 001 to 005. By using member checking, I validated the information received from the participants. Additionally, I used Atlas.ti to code the data. From the analysis, three themes emerged.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this study was the following: What leadership and technology strategies do small business owners use to retain teleworking employees? I conducted semistructured interviews with a saturated sample of participants. There were three conditions for participation. First, the participant had to be a business owner. Second, the participant had to possess at least 1 year of work experience with the target company. Third, the participant's target company must have employees who work remotely. After using purposeful sampling to recruit participants, I began collecting data by conducting semistructured interviews. I achieved data saturation following the fifth interview when no new information was obtained. I conducted no further interviews. Following the interviews, I verified the collected data by reviewing relevant documents such as employee handbooks, telework company policies, and nonconfidential emails.

The three themes that emerged from the data were the connection between employee engagement and actors, employee engagement and tasks, and individual consideration and tasks.

I analyzed the data using Atlas.ti software, which allowed me to create codes related to the conceptual framework principles, identify quotes in the interviews with the codes, organize codes in groups, and develop co-occurrence tables to visualize the conceptual framework and the research question. Table 1 shows the summary of the codes, the three themes that emerged from the interviews, and the strategies used by the participants to effectively incorporate teleworking strategies for teleworking employees.

Table 1

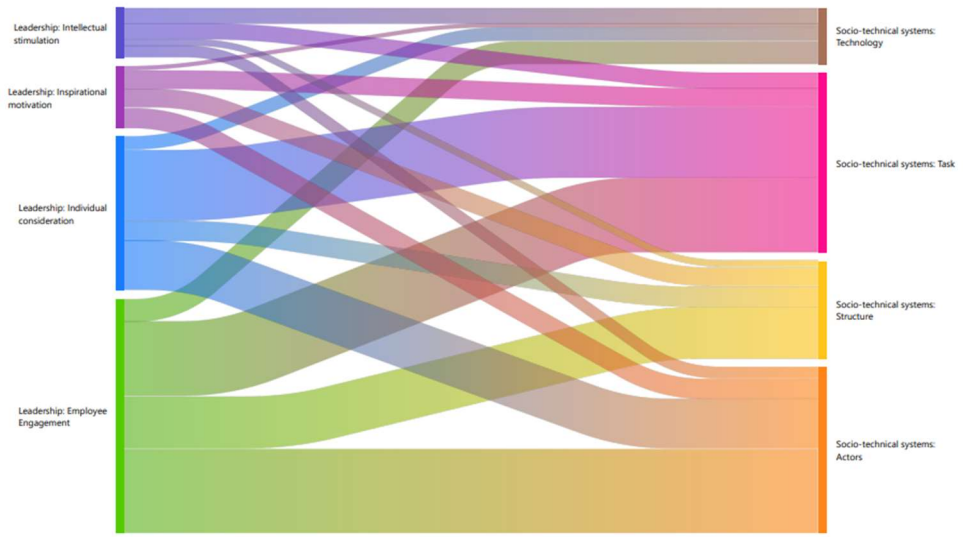
Summary of Themes, Strategies, and Coding

Theme	Strategy	Reference coded for theme
Connection between employee engagement and actors	Create team-building experiences and events Incorporate consistent and clear communication between all levels of the company Develop and maintain strong connections between managers and employees	37
Connection between employee engagement and task	Provide training and educational programs for newer employees Develop mentorship opportunities between more seasoned employees and newer employees Incorporate high levels of measurable accountability for teleworking employees	33
Connection between individual consideration and task	Provide flexible working arrangements for employees Managers must know their employees	31

The Atlas.ti software enable me to create a Sankey diagram using the data collected in the interviews. Sankey diagrams date back to 1898 and are typically used in physics and engineering to explain the flow of energy (Otto et al., 2022). These diagrams are also used in business and economics to visualize complex, multifaceted processes (Otto et al., 2022). For the current study, I use Sankey diagrams to analyze the correlations between the two theories in the conceptual framework relating to the research question. As shown in Figure 1, the components of each theory are outlined on either side of the Sankey diagram. The diagram displays lines between the components. The thickness of the line corresponds to the level of occurrence of each component within the interviews. As the diagram shows, three lines emerge as thicker or show more significant occurrences between the components. These lines represent the three themes or the connection between employee engagement and actors, employee engagement and tasks, and individual consideration and tasks.

Figure 1

Sankey Diagram: All Connections Between Transformational Leadership and STS

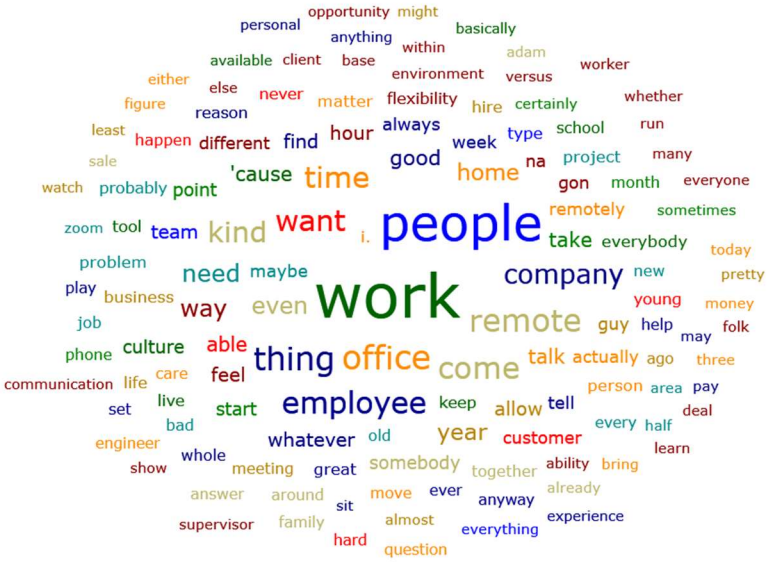


Word Cloud

In addition to the Sankey diagram, I used a word cloud from Atlas.ti to visualize the data collected and support the findings. Word clouds provide the viewer with a visual representation of the more common words used in the interviews. The larger the size of the word, the more frequently it was used in the interview. As shown in Figure 2, employee, work, people, remote, time, talk, meeting, flexibility, communication, and talk were the participants' most frequently used words in the interviews.

Figure 2

Word Cloud of Most Frequently Used Words by Participants



Theme 1: Employee Engagement and Actors

The first theme that emerged during the data analysis was the connection between employee engagement and actors in the STS theory. I was able to relate this theme to my research question as owners who understand the connection between employee engagement and actors can successfully implement effective strategies to retain teleworking employees. Employee engagement is the level to which the employee experiences an emotional connection to the company, cares deeply about the work, and is willing to put extra effort into the job (Swaroop & Swarma, 2022). Employee engagement is critical in managing a rapidly evolving workforce (Swaroop & Swarma, 2022). The growing number of employees who are working remotely has increased the pressure on managers to connect with and retain these employees through higher levels of

engagement (Swaroop & Swarma, 2022). Although there is ample research to explain the connection between job satisfaction, productivity, and employee engagement, much of this research focused on the office environment and engagement therein (Swaroop & Swarma, 2022).

All five participants in the current study mentioned the importance of the connection between employee engagement and actors, highlighting the necessity for an increase in intentional connection. Organizations use various means to accomplish this connection, including daily/weekly one-on-one meetings between managers and employees, group or team meetings, company events, formal and informal company parties, and teleconferencing software to allow for instant, visual, and direct communication. With the physical and psychological distance that remote work creates, it is pivotal that actors within an organization communicate clearly, directly, and consistently to maintain employee engagement (Wang et al., 2020). This engagement relates to the first theme of identifying effective strategies to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees, per the transformational leadership and STS theories. Participant 001 noted "teleworking allows an employee the ability to go to their kid's program in school or game. Afterward, they can log back on at home and knock out whatever project they're working on for a deadline." Participant 002 shared "we like to share screens. We have what we call bluebeam live sessions, where we're looking at drawings that are being marked up live. And so, it's this very interactive collaborative way of doing engineering. Participant 003 mentioned

> the fact of the matter is that most people want to work when they want to work, how they want to work, where they want to work. If you don't embrace that, especially in our industry, the software industry. If you don't embrace remote employee work, I think you are really cutting off your nose. We can actually be a better culture if we're intentional about doing more to foster connection. So, we get together twice a year for company events. One is our Christmas party and then we hold a user conference. We have hundreds of our customers come in, usually about 400 and people attend. We think these two events really foster that culture. We encourage our managers to do things with their employees. So, like the software development team, the sales team go out and dine together. But then we also pay for them to go play laser tag, go bowling. We want these events to be for the family too. We cover all the expenses for these events. One team took their families to the zoo. Great team building event.

Participant 004 mentioned

> you know the thing that we try to do is stay in touch with our remote employees and keep them involved in every way possible. Having zoom meetings, team meetings or whatever. Keep them feeling as part of the company and part of their department. That's been critical to figure out ways to keep them plugged in and have a sense of loyalty, a sense of community, a sense of being part of a team versus being a Lone Ranger. We try to create great experiences and bring remote employees to the Home Office, twice a year. Then we have the big group meetings twice a year via zoom and those have worked out fantastic. Of course,

> we require all our supervisors to have one-on-one meetings once a week with all employees, remote and in the office.

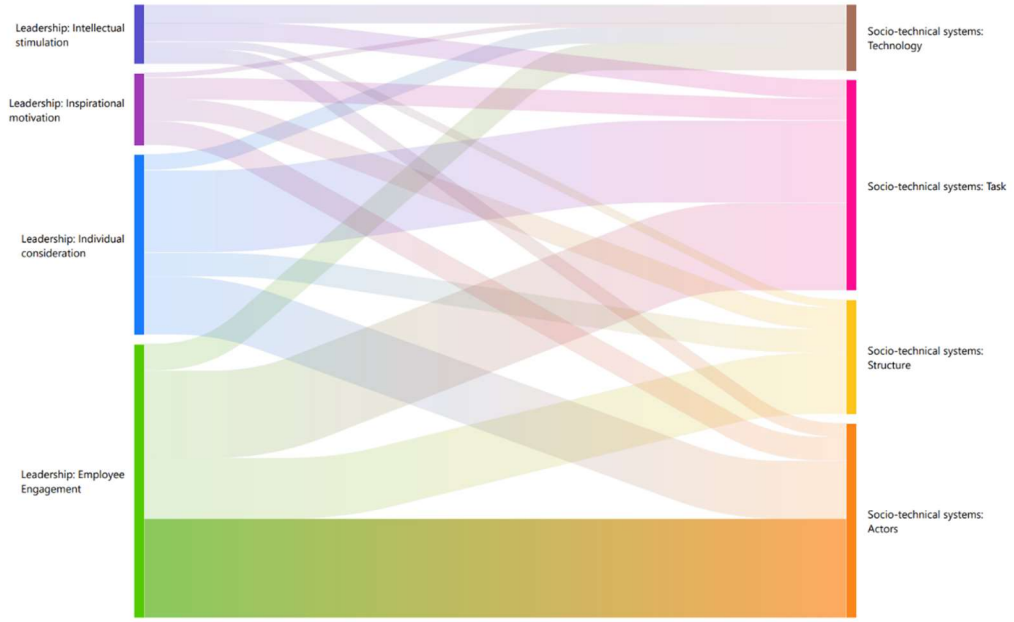
Participant 005 explained

> I have these conversations with employees. You've got sick kids home today? Well, I'm not necessarily saying you've got to take a whole day. I think you can be home and take care of things at home. You can work from home and don't take a sick day or a personal day. I leave it up to them like give them. Here are some other options besides just taking the day off. Instead of just being able to text your supervisor that you will be out of the office you have to physically call your supervisor. Even if you can't get him or her, you go up the chain until you reach someone.

Related to the first theme of connections, the Sankey Diagram in Figure 2 from ATLAS.ti shows the highest occurrence between employee engagement and actors. Based on the coding in Atlas.ti, there were 37 occurrences between these two components.

Figure 3

Sankey Diagram: Connection Between Employee Engagement and Actors



Three primary strategies provided a comprehensive overview of the techniques used by the participants in the first theme of connections. To address the connection between employee engagement and actors, managers should use strategies to promote these connections. There is a wide variety of methods to develop employee engagement with remote working employees, including virtual meetings, web-based seminars, online sessions related to well-being and health, and prerecorded training sessions (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020). Additionally, Kumar and Kapoor (2020) proposed five steps to achieve a greater return on the investment a company makes in employee engagement: connect personally, carefully listen to the employee, provide health options, incorporate digital

platforms, and engage in the overall well-being of the employees. The strategies identified in the current study increase the connection between managers and employees.

Create Team-Building Experiences and Events

During the interviews, all five participants identified team building as a primary objective for their organizations. Each participant had varying opinions on how team building should occur, how often, and who should participate. Four of the five participants bring remote employees to their home office at least once a year to meet with team members and connect with coworkers. These same participants also promote company parties and events for home office and remote working employees throughout the year. Participant 002 described providing as many team-building events as possible throughout the year. Events for Participant 002's company included picnics, game nights, and holiday parties. Some of these events were for employees only, others had spouses or partners, and a few were for the entire family. The objective of the events varied from developing a culture of corporate unity to creating community among the employees. Participant 002 commented that these events were a part of their corporate culture and he encouraged remote workers to come and participate. He felt that when remote workers could not attend company events, they missed out on the culture. Participant 005 shared something similar regarding employees who did not participate in the home office events or come into the office regularly; he said that these employees did not have as much camaraderie or connection with their coworkers as those who came in more frequently.

Participant 004 said that their company attempted to include remote workers in every event held at the home office. His company pays for travel expenses for the events.

If employees cannot attend in person, the company sets up a Zoom call for them to attend virtually. Participant 004 shared that his company learned how important it was to ensure their remote workers were “plugged in” to the organization and the organizational community. It was imperative that they be a part of the culture and not a “lone ranger” out on their own with little connection to the company, its people, and its culture.

Participant 003 hosts three different office parties in the home office every year. During the holiday season, the company hosts several days of parties and events for various teams in the company. The week concludes with a Christmas party for employees and spouses. The company covers all travel expenses to Abilene and the cost of the different events. A second event is held in the summer with the various teams and their customers. Participant 003 noted that over 400 people attended the summer event which included several seminars and meetings between the teams and their customers. This time spent face-to-face with team members and customers is invaluable for learning, bonding, and strategy. Finally, the company requires each manager to hold a team-specific event with only their team involved throughout the year. This event focuses solely on team connection and objectives. By taking his company almost entirely remote, Participant 003 is saving a substantial amount of cost on office space. It is using those cost savings to fund the various events mentioned above.

Not all the participants shared the same views regarding team building and corporate events. Participant 001 explained that most team meetings were for sharing company information. Even though the company had an annual Christmas party, remote workers were not required to attend. His preference is to have employees in the office,

and his policies are focused in that direction. Participant 006 holds one annual company event, but the primary purpose is to review company policies and share corporate expectations for the following year. All the participants use team meetings to share information and connect with their employees. Table 4 represents the statements provided by the participants.

Strategy 1: Incorporate Consistent and Clear Communication Between All Levels of the Company

From the data analysis it was evident that communication with remote employees is a critical component of successful management. Participants 001 and 002 explained that they constantly communicate with their employees, especially their direct reports. This communication comes in various forms, including text messages, emails, instant messenger chats, and video conferences. They each explained that this communication helped gauge the employee's progress with projects, their needs, or their problem issues. Participant 002 noted that he required this level of communication between all managers and their subordinates. He also expected constant and open communication. Participant 003 said that a text or email was a preferred method of communication because it was quicker and documented. His managers appreciated reviewing past discussions and tracking progress over time. Participant 002 asserted that remote work allowed greater flexibility but required accountability. Participant 002 thought that responding randomly to emails and not answering the phone was evidence of the employee not being accountable. Participant 004 required a visual meeting between his managers and their subordinates. These meetings could happen via video conferencing, but the manager must

see the employee weekly. Participant 005 shared that if an employee was going to be out of the office or working from home, they must speak directly with their supervisor because using email or text was not sufficient. He explained that there were several reasons for this expectation. A verbal conversation between manager and employee reduced confusion, allowed for the context of the situation, and created accountability for both manager and employee.

Additionally, Participant 005 noted that communication minimized downtime, specifically if an employee was sick or unable to work. Participant 003 believes that communication has improved through the technology tools. He also mentioned that using technology required the employees to be more focused on the information they shared and eliminate unnecessary comments or details.

Strategy 2: Develop and Maintain Strong Connections Between Managers and Employees

All five participants identified the importance of connection between managers and employees to manage remote working employees successfully. Each participant provided examples of ways to promote, develop and maintain a relationship between managers and employees. Participant 001 spends time mentoring newer employees and focusing on their situations within the company. Participant 001 shared that he encourages his managers to do the same with their employees. Participant 002 expects his managers to engage with their employees daily regardless of whether the employee is in the office or working remotely. In his opinion, connection strengthens the organization and minimizes issues derailing progress. Participant 003 noted that his company is

primarily remote, therefore, managers heavily rely on technology to connect daily with employees. His company's culture was vital to him, and a significant component of that culture was the bonds between managers and employees. Participants 004 and 005 each shared the effort they gave to engage with their direct reports in order to model what they expect from the managers. Several examples they provided included checking on specific job-related issues, offering advice on how to manage these issues, providing encouragement when the manager was struggling, and focusing on the person rather than just the work assignment. Anand and Acharya (2021) note that engaging with employees significantly contributes to the workforce's morale through strong connection and consistent support for the overall wellbeing of each person within the company.

Strategy 3: Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework (Transformational Leadership)

The findings from the interviews align with the transformational leadership conceptual framework. Managers using a transformational leadership framework relate emotionally with their employees to establish a connection (Eisenberg et al., 2019); this connection is employee engagement. Due to the geographic distance that remote work creates, establishing this connection is more complicated and requires a tremendous effort on the part of the manager. Additionally, transformational leadership with a remote-working employee requires the managers to be proactive and precise in their communication and work to integrate the remote employee into team processes and activities (Eisenberg et al., 2019). As transformational leadership suggests, communication is critical to effectively managing a remote workforce (Eisenberg et al.,

2019). Eisenberg et al. (2019) observed that transformational leadership decreases in effectiveness the more dispersed a work group becomes, which enforces the importance of daily and constant communication. Participants of this study regularly use videoconferencing software to speak with remote workers and encourage supervisors to do the same.

Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework (STS)

The findings from this study align with the socio-technical systems conceptual framework. In many cases, socio-technical systems theory is used to develop new task procedures, processes, and roles. In 2020, when the COVID pandemic hit these small businesses in Texas, the participants interviewed for this study had to re-evaluate their processes and procedures as they related to their technical capabilities and social system (employees). Socio-technical system emphasizes the importance of each of the four elements of STS, actors, structure, technology, and tasks (Ghaffari et al., 2019). The participants noted their close attention to each area, but each carefully mentioned the clear priority placed on the actors. Mariani (2019) explored using technology to increase communication and information between remote working employees and the office. Participants of this study used technology daily to communicate with their remote working employees, to the point that technology is a standard tool for business. A lack of technological tools would significantly impact the actors' ability to communicate and be productive (Green et al., 2017).

Findings Related to the Literature Review

The team-building finding of this study aligned with Bentley et al. (2016), who noted that company support and connection significantly reduce employee isolation. Most participants provide regular group meetings and periodically bring the entire company together to promote camaraderie. Additionally, Bentley et al. (2016) explained that coworkers should be offered stable connections in a face-to-face manner to mitigate the isolation that the employees experience through remote work; the finding of my doctoral study aligns with this explanation. My doctoral study aligns with Sinclair et al. (2021), who explained that providing consistent virtual meetings and other points of connection by the ownership results in remote workers who feel engaged with their fellow workers and supervisors. This finding also aligned with Wojcak et al. (2016), who shared that remote workers who are not part of the daily office activities begin losing connection with the company reality and become more isolated from the company. Several participants in my study noted the importance of avoiding a situation where an employee felt disconnected from the rest of the company.

Theme 2: Employee Engagement/Tasks

The second theme that emerged during the interviews was the connection between employee engagement and tasks in the socio-technical systems theory. I was able to relate this theme to my research as owners who understand the connection between employee engagement and tasks can successfully implement effective strategies to retain teleworking employees. Employee engagement is pivotal in productivity and performance (Swaroop and Sharma, 2022). Employees who feel a strong positive connection with their place of employment and their management tend to work harder

and better for the company (Hurtienne et al., 2021). This effort generates greater productivity which ultimately benefits the company. Employees who work remotely require an even higher level of engagement particularly regarding task assignments (Anand & Acharya, 2022). The lack of direct visual and physical oversight from management in the company office necessitates strategies that strengthen the connection between employee engagement and tasks.

All five participants noted the importance of the connection between employee engagement and tasks, emphasizing the need for training, mentorship, and accountability. Companies used different mechanisms and resources to train new employees properly, fostered mentorship between more experienced employees and recent hires, and incorporated a clear understanding of the task expectations to manage employee engagement effectively. This engagement relates to the second theme of identifying effective strategies to integrate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees as per the transformational and socio-technical systems theories. Participant 001 noted

> right now, the dilemma is some people could work remote and do it really well. And some, either by their own work ethic or by the nature of their position, remote work is not a good option. So, it's a bit important for our employees to be in the office or in the field with other team members in order to be fully qualified at their job. I've encountered a number of people right out of school who aren't prepared to work remote. You know, we shut down like everybody during COVID, and all our employees went home and worked. We had IP-based phones, and we just let employees take those home. They had access to their remote

> desktops from wherever and we didn't miss a beat. I guess this is also a retention strategy. It has allowed us to be more humane and have a personal approach. Be more flexible supporting their goals.

Participant 002 mentioned

> we have a situation right now where there's somebody who is probably taking a little bit too much advantage of remote work, and that's coming home to roost for him. In his annual review that is coming next week he will be told that he is taking advantage of the system and not getting enough work done. We will outline the metrics.

Participant 003 explained "allowing good employees to go remote is really how we got into the remote employee business. Retention is what started the process for us."

Participant 004 shared

> we encourage our people if they aren't feeling well or whatever and desire to work from home, and they're allowed to do that if their job allows them to work at home. Well, we've had a lot of flexibility, and that's worked best for us. We've been very flexible with people who desire to work remote, but we're not hiring people to work too remote to begin with. They come in here get our culture.

Participant 005 noted

> we have the ability to set up new employees remotely and teach them the job. However, it's a lot better if they can shadow somebody when they're first here. I think they get to know the people in the office too. I think it helps seeing the person, how they work, and who they go to for support.

Related to the second theme of connections, the Sankey Diagram in Figure 3, from ATLAS.ti, shows the second highest occurrence between employee engagement and tasks. Based on the coding in Atlas.ti there were 33 occurrences between these two components.

Figure 4

Sankey Diagram: Connection Between Employee Engagement and Task

The following three primary strategies provide a comprehensive overview of the strategy used by the participants in the second theme of connections in the doctoral study. To address the connection between employee engagement and tasks, managers should use strategies to promote these connections. There are myriad of options and methods to develop the connection between employee engagement and tasks, but this current study focuses on training, mentorship, and accountability. Hurtienne et al. (2022) recently conducted a study regarding employee engagement, specifically looking at the

generational component. Hurtienne et al. (2022) found that younger generations are more likely to engage with work if there is strong leadership and mentorship between themselves and older employees, increased opportunities for education and training, and a clear understanding of the work expectations. The strategies outlined in this my study regarding the second theme focus on the Hurtienne et al. findings.

Strategy 1: Provide Training and Educational Programs for Newer Employees

Four of the five participants shared that working remotely under normal conditions was more of a privilege than a right. In their opinion, handling the work remotely required both prior work experience and training. There was a significant concern among the participants, allowing new or younger employees to work away from the office. Participant 001 shared that younger employees were not a great fit for remote work due to a lack of experience, knowledge of corporate culture, and a track record of reliability. He further explained that for an employee to consistently work remotely the employee would be required to have several years with the company with a high level of job performance. Several employees had proven themselves repeatedly throughout many years of employment, and he felt comfortable allowing them to work remotely. Participant 001 shared that working remotely was an earned benefit based on experience and training. He enables supervisors to allow employees to work remotely because the supervisors know their employees' work habits and can hold them individually accountable. Participant 002 echoed this sentiment focusing specifically on their young engineers who require constant supervision and feedback, both of which are difficult in a

remote environment. He noted that during COVID-19 these engineers struggled the most with productivity and connection.

Participant 005 requires new employees to spend a minimum of six months in the home office before they are allowed any remote work. This time acclimates the new employee to the company's culture and work expectations and provides time to complete required training. Corporate culture is a significant concern for these participants, and working remote makes it difficult to embrace the culture. Participant 003 noted that one of the reasons they hesitated to convert to a remote organization was the fear of losing corporate culture. Participant 004 shared that he only allows employees with a track record that connects to the corporate culture to work remotely. Working autonomously is a metric that Participant 004 considers imperative to allowing his employees to work remotely. Participant 005 emphasized that employees must understand how the company works, who they are, and what they do to be effective remote workers.

Strategy 2: Develop Mentorship Opportunities Between More Seasoned Employees and Newer Employees

Four of the five participants indicated that providing mentorship opportunities between more recent hires and more seasoned employees was a successful strategy within their companies. These participants also shared that this mentorship was more effective in person. Participant 005 related a story about a young employee he mentored with whom he worked closely. He felt that if this employee were not in the office, he would not have the opportunity to connect in a meaningful way with this employee. Participant 005 identified this employee as a future leader because he spoke with him daily and watched

him work. He further elaborated that video conference calls, texts, and emails were not as effective mechanisms for him to know his employees very well. Participant 004 does not allow his senior leadership to work remotely unless necessary. He expects to see these leaders, interact with them, and collaborate on projects daily. He also expects these leaders to engage directly with their employees. Participant 002 explained that knowing if an employee was a leader if they were never in the office was challenging. While remote work provides invaluable options for an organization, there are a variety of intangibles that are difficult to measure and develop virtually. Participant 001 prefers his direct reports and any employee pursuing advancement to be in the office as much as possible.

Participant 003, however, shared that his company focuses on the tangible attributes of its employees when mentoring. He emphasizes task performance, communication, and overall productivity. He believes in the connection between the different levels in the organization but primarily as a tool to accomplish projects.

Strategy 3: Incorporate High Levels of Measurable Accountability for Teleworking Employees

Another essential aspect of the management of remote workers is a clear understanding of work expectations and accountability to those expectations. Accountability is vital for employees who work in the office, but it is critical when an employee is not physically in the exact location as their supervisor (Sinclair et al., 2021). Every one of the participants emphasized this point. Participant 001 noted that he spent a reasonable amount of time with his remote employees before allowing them to work

remotely, outlining their job expectations, performance evaluation, and ways to be successful.

An interesting fact from every participant was that none of them used any software or ICT to track or monitor employees' minute-by-minute work. Additionally, three participants mentioned the importance of not micro-managing their employees. They were clear about to the importance of allowing their employees to do their jobs and be responsible for their work. Monitoring keystrokes, minutes on a webpage, or time spent on the phone was not helpful information for their programs. However, Participants 002 and 004 explained that successful management of employees, particularly remote employees, should include some trackability. The manager must have tools to measure job performance.

Each participant outlined various mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the job performance of their teleworking employees. Participants 001, 002, 004, and 005 used projects and billable hours as a quantifiable method to assess employee task progress. The business of these organizations provides customers with extensive quotes based either on billable hours or total project costs. The work completed by remote workers ties directly to these projects and requires weekly updates of hours billed or project components that have been completed. The participants discussed that an experienced manager could quickly match the information submitted by the employee and the work completed to evaluate the employee's performance. It is essential to mention that Participants 001 and 002 were also concerned about protecting customers from the possible lack of corporate oversight and incorrect billing of hours. To that end, these

participants provided examples of mechanisms they used to control and manage their customers' exposure. Each participant requires their managers to be familiar with the employees' work.

Another standard method to monitor and evaluate job performance is deadlines or milestones for work assignments. Participants 001, 002, and 004 use assignment milestones for each project. These milestones incentivize the employee to ensure they are progressing correctly through the job. For the manager, the milestones build in the ability to spend time periodically discussing the project's progress, the work's quality, and any issues that have arisen throughout the previous weeks.

Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework (Transformational Leadership)

The findings aligned with Buil (2019), who explained that managers should adopt transformational leadership practices that include expressing and supporting the organization's mission, vision, and goals, providing an atmosphere of support, and increasing communication levels. Lembrechts et al. (2019) provided further evidence that trust between employees and management is crucial in developing telecommuting policies, and transformational leadership provides an ideal framework for this trust. The participants in my doctoral study embrace the importance of trust, communication, and supporting their employees through constant contact, employee autonomy, and provision of necessary resources. Additionally, the findings align with Le and Lei (2019). They noted that transformational leadership plays a significant role in developing innovation by engendering a positive environment that promotes employees' skills and expertise to create innovation. Each participant in my doctoral study shared examples of working

closely with their teams to develop solutions when confronted with obstacles to productivity and communication.

Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework (STS)

The findings from this study align with the socio-technical systems conceptual framework. All the participants noted the ability to continue with work-related tasks even during a global pandemic or a weather disaster. These findings align with Green et al. (2017), who explored the use of telework by several companies during a natural disaster in New Zealand. The Green et al. (2017) study used the STS framework to understand the rapid transition from an office environment to remote work. Green (2017) found that telework allowed these companies to maintain high levels of productivity; the participants of this study all shared the same experience with their transitions to telework in 2020. Through STS, the researcher can accurately assess the entire organization, all four elements (Siawsh et al., 2021). The findings of this study align with Siawsh et al. (2021) and found a very clear picture of the companies represented. These companies focused significantly on two of the four elements, actors and tasks.

Findings Related to the Literature Review

The findings of this study aligned with Thompson et al. (2021), in which communication between leaders and employees plays a pivotal role in improving workplace productivity. The participants outlined specific steps taken over the last few years to promote and increase communication between remote-working employees and management. Many participants felt strongly that only employees with years of experience and connections were good candidates for remote positions. This finding

aligned with Wang et al. (2020), noting that more tenured employees can maintain work connections and responsibility when working remotely because of their years of experience. The finding also aligned with Wojcak et al. (2016). They found that younger employees, including recent college graduates, are not good candidates for remote work because they lack the experience and connections for successful remote work. The participants provided various examples, including recent engineering graduates who needed time with more experienced coworkers before they could perform their jobs remotely.

Theme 3: Individual Consideration and Tasks

The third theme that emerged during the interviews was the connection between individual consideration and tasks in the socio-technical systems theory. I related this to my research questions as owners who understand the connection between individual consideration and tasks can successfully implement effective strategies to retain teleworking employees. Individual consideration involves careful notice by the employee's manager to increase motivation (Khalili, 2017). When managers take the time to consider their employees as individuals, there are many benefits for the company including civic responsibility, care for the company, and selfless concern (Budur & Demir, 2022). Researchers also found that employees' feelings of connection and successful task performance increase with individual consideration (Li et al., 2019). Budur and Demir (2022) also found this accurate; when managers extend individual consideration to their employees, there are direct correlations with positive employee performance. Participant 001 mentioned

> supervisors know what their employee's obligations are, their deadlines, and which team members they can give some flexibility. So, we've allowed employees to, you know, continue their career in a remote work scenario. We had a guy who relocated to San Antonio area for his wife and her job. So, we opened an office down there for him. I mean, he worked remote. He's now moved him into a small storefront office. Summer schedule brings some changes. I've got some working moms that have kids home in the afternoons during the summer. We allow for them to have flexibility when and where they work, especially during summer. Some people work to live, some live to work. Remote work has allowed our people to work so that they can live. Our supervisors can gauge our employee's ability to hit deadlines. They know if they can let an employee off. You know, to go to a doctor's appointment or a basketball game, or something. We know if they are going to get back and get their work done or do it at home. In the old days, we had PTO that was reserved for these types of situations.

Participant 003 noted "a highly sought recent candidate who was graduating soon asked if we would consider letting him work remote. We agreed, and he chose to come work for us and is working remote." Participant 004 mentioned "our managers know the performance of our people, and we give them the freedom to allow remote work."

Participant 005 noted

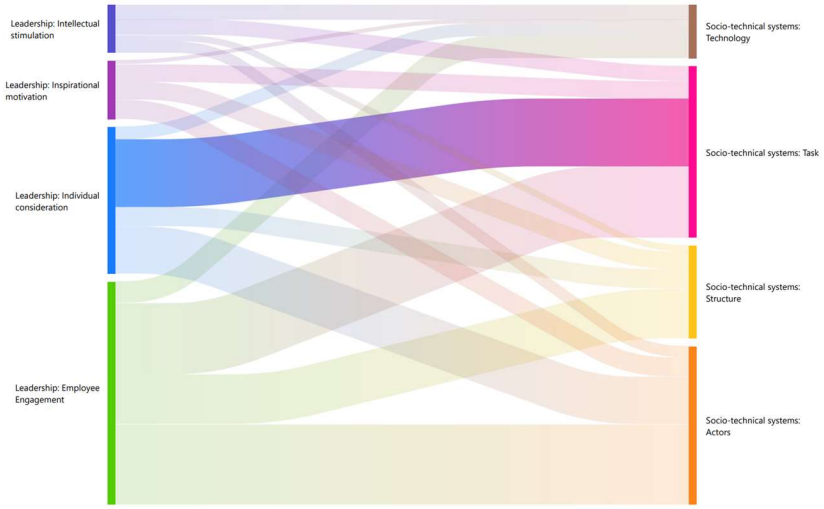
> if somebody hasn't been in the actual office for a time period before they go and work remotely, our success with retaining or even just them integrating into the culture or even longevity of staying if they've never come in just doesn't work as

> well for us. Typically, somebody needs to at least start out here for a few months, six months, or a year and then move out. Then if they're that type of person that works well, you know, a self-starter type person who is motivated. It is those people that it works well. We've had some people in the past where we've hired him, and they never worked in the corporate office. They worked remotely from the start, and it just usually doesn't work out that well. Either they end up going somewhere else, or they don't perform to our expectations. I ask my employees; do you have a runny nose? You don't want to be around people but work from your home. I think one of the things that we've been trying to do more and more is to give people the opportunity to have flexibility. Especially when it comes to quality of life. You know, they've got things that come up. Kids are sick, or whatever. Maybe that day, they need to be home for something, and so we let them telecommute. I think what we've looked at more specifically is the employee. I can say that we can see the success in remote working, especially when it comes to things like people being out sick people.

Related to the third theme of connections, the Sankey Diagram in Figure 4, from ATLAS.ti, shows the third highest level of occurrence between individual consideration and tasks. Based on the coding in Atlas.ti there were 31 occurrences between these two components.

Figure 5

Sankey Diagram: Connection Between Individual Consideration and Task



The following two primary strategies provide a comprehensive overview of the strategy used by participants in the third theme of connections in the doctoral study. Managers should use the strategies mentioned below to address the connection between individual consideration and tasks. Zeinab et al. (2019) found that managers demonstrate individual consideration when they care for their employees' needs. In a work environment, there are many ways to show care and concern for employees' needs. The two I suggested as strategies include flexibility and genuinely knowing the employee.

Strategy 1: Provide Flexible Working Arrangements for Employees

All five participants detailed the use of flexible working arrangements to address individual needs among their employees. The definitions and parameters of flexible working arrangements (FWA) varied considerably between organizations. Participant 001 outlined several FWAs that his company uses for different groups within the

organization. Participant 01 has several working mothers who need a modified schedule when their children are home from school in the summer. He allows these employees greater freedom to complete work from home and come into the office at scheduled intervals. Through various iterations, Participant 002 arrived at a concept he refers to as "core hours," where most of his employees are required to be in the office. These "core hours" are Tuesday through Thursday from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm. Outside of these hours, he provides a fair amount of flexibility for his employees. During the "non-core" hours, he encourages his employees to schedule doctor appointments, handle personal business, or do whatever else they need to do. During these hours, Participant 002 allows his employees to work from home; however, in the "core hours," Participant 002 schedules team meetings and other office events.

Of the five companies interviewed, only one has moved from a primarily "in the office" organization to a remote organization. This company required all employees to work remotely during the global pandemic two years ago. As the pandemic ended, the company brought every employee back to the office for a short time. The company decided to go remote after many senior management meetings, a companywide employee survey, and time spent with a consultant. Participant 003 discussed the process and psychology that brought about this change. In his opinion, organizations today must consider remote work for their employees especially in the software development industry. He noted that most people want to work "when, and where, how they want," and the market allows it. He believes that organizations that do not provide flexible

working arrangements in some form are significantly hurting their ability to attract and retain top talent.

Participants 004 and 005 allow flexible working arrangements individually. Most of Participant 004's salesforce works remotely because they have sales territories throughout the United States. Participant 004 also has several employees whose job requires a heavy amount of travel, allowing them to work remotely when they are not traveling. Participant 005 has employees embedded within customer organizations and considers these remote employees. He has a few employees who can work remotely due to health conditions or other personal situations. Participants felt that although these policies were company mandated, they were fully supported by the employees because most preferred to be in the office. The implication is that offering flexible working arrangements to all employees would be a waste of time because it was unnecessary.

Strategy 2: Managers Must Know Their Employees

All the participants expressed the importance of knowing their employees and encouraging their managers to do the same. Each of the companies represented is a small business in Texas. Small businesses, by nature, involve a closer connection between managers and employees. The participants in this study showed repeatedly how aware they are of their employee's situations. Participant 001 discussed the difference between the school year and summertime schedules with several of his employees. Participant 002 related stories about sick employees or employees who needed to move to a new location for personal reasons. All the participants observed that they had and would allow remote work or flexible working arrangements for valued employees who needed to relocate for

personal reasons. Participant 003's company is now a completely remote organization because he was aware of the changing social climate in his industry, particularly the younger software designers, and he proactively embraced telework. Participant 004 discussed the value of talking with his direct reports daily and encouraging them to do the same with their employees. These conversations were not only task-focused but also allowed the manager to know the employee on a personal level. Finally, Participant 005 believes very strongly in mentorship. He shared that developing a mentorship relationship takes time, patience, and a caring attitude.

Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework (Transformational Leadership)

The findings from the interviews alignwith the transformational leadership conceptual framework. Managers who use the transformational leadership framework take particular care in knowing the needs and goals of their employees (Thompson et al., 2021). Transformational leadership requires the leader to work hard for the needs of the employees, who, in turn, find value and purpose in the relationship. Additionally, transformational leaders are open to innovation and creativity (Le & Lei, 2019). Companies that use transformational leadership typically have employees who feel cared for and connected (Sinclair et al., 2021). Focusing on addressing employee needs through flexibility and genuinely knowing each employee aligns directly with transformational leadership theory elements.

Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework (STS)

Socio-technical system's conceptual framework is designed to observe the relationship between technical and social systems primarily focusing on the relationship

between employees and their work environment (Green et al., 2017). Socio-technical systems are used to develop mechanisms that maximize productivity and identify areas of weakness or concern in the system. Even though companies and their employees are determined to complete work tasks, many reasons might impede this productivity. All the participants in this study explained many options to circumvent these barriers to productivity through flexible working arrangements. These arrangements expand the socio-technical system beyond the designated physical office to include homes, coffee houses, and other locations (Bentley et al., 2016).

Findings Related to the Literature Review

The flexible working arrangements (FWA) findings aligned with Meshur (2015), who observed that companies that allow employees to work remotely experienced several benefits. Some of these benefits included increased productivity and job satisfaction. Most study participants provided their employees with flexible working arrangements and have experienced these benefits. FWAs also generate goodwill between the employee and ownership (Chen & Fulmer, 2018), in which the employee acknowledges the company care for their circumstances. The participants in this study shared examples of working with employees to develop FWAs to assist employees with personal situations.

Applications to Professional Practice

This doctoral study examined small business owners' strategies to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees; the findings could also apply to medium-sized companies with remote working employees. Many companies allow their employees to work remotely, creating a more flexible environment and retaining

employees (Georgiana, 2016). The owners interviewed for this study shared strategies small business owners could use to develop or improve their remote working programs. Avikshit (2021) explained that there could be a variety of barriers to allowing employees to telecommute. This doctoral study may provide hesitant owners with a strategic plan to implement remote work as an option to overcome these barriers.

Groen et al. (2018) showed that flexible work arrangements present many challenges for managers of remote-working employees. Additionally, Avikshit (2021) listed several barriers to remote work including company culture that requires employees to be in the office, incomplete understanding of the benefits of telework, or the need for work-life balance. It is incumbent upon companies to strategically analyze remote work as a benefit for their employees, company, and society (Groen et al., 2018). The strategies provided in this study could encourage small business owners to develop a more strategic view when evaluating remote work implementation.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change are numerous because remote work provides many benefits for both companies and employees. These benefits include reduced absenteeism, improved performance (Bosco et al., 2014), greater productivity, increased employee engagement, enhanced work-life balance (Tredup, 2016), and lower company expenses (Patterson et al., 2014; Shabanpour et al., 2018). Meshur (2015) noted that remote work also offers greater potential for companies to hire employees with disabilities for whom the prospect of going into an office daily is more complicated.

The implications for positive social change include benefits for both employers and employees. The positive social changes for employers may include the opportunity to identify and hire employees from a larger pool of applicants (Perry et al., 2018). Additionally, allowing employees to work from home can reduce company expenses such as utilities and office equipment., This cost savings enables the company to financially support other socially responsible initiatives. Flexible working arrangements allows the company to hire employees who cannot leave their homes due to disabilities or other physical concerns (Wittmer & Lin, 2017). The positive social changes for employees include an excellent work-life balance (Groen et al., 2018), which gives employees more time to volunteer in their local community, manage personal life concerns, and continue their education (Chen & Fulmer, 2018).

Recommendations for Action

The participants interviewed for this study were aware of the difficulties in retaining employees for small businesses. Each of these participants devised strategies to mitigate the challenges encountered. Structure and definition of tasks are critical components necessary to keep teleworkers committed and engaged, according to Sinclair et al. (2021) and Silva et al. (2019). Owners and managers of small businesses could implement the following strategies to implement teleworking policies successfully.

Owners should provide team-building events for managers and employees. During the interviews, participants noted the importance of the connection between managers and employees. Team building events allow employees to connect and engage with management and coworkers. Although managers can face difficulties involving

employees in team-building activities, providing as many opportunities as possible to involve these team members is essential. Several participants noted their attempts to offer these types of events for their employees, including work parties, company retreats, and holiday events. Team building can be both formal or informal, and scheduled or spontaneous.

Managers could specify days for telework to ensure that employees maximize time in the office for socialization and connection. Identifying specific days for telework helps managers ensure that employees are in the office on the same days, thus minimizing isolation. As noted in the literature review, many teleworkers experience reduced organizational commitment and increased isolation levels (Miglioretti et al., 2021). Flexibility is a primary benefit of telework, therefore, several participants provided examples where they scheduled days and times when they allowed telework. These time slots ensured that the companies had employees in the office when needed and provided employees with the flexibility to schedule personal events or work from home.

Managers should increase organizational communication between all employees, particularly teleworking employees. Various options to improve corporate communication include videoconferencing, instant messengers, chats, and group meetings. All the participants interviewed for this study used these strategies to connect teleworking and non-teleworking employees. Several participants enhanced their communication using screen-sharing software to collaborate in real time.

Managers could implement teleworking as a management tool to reward employees for high-performance levels or years of tenure. Telework is a tool to utilize at the management's discretion, but not a right that belongs to employees (Lembrechts et al., 2019). Managers oversee all aspects of the work environment, including the option to work remotely. Managers need to maintain control over this tool and offer it in situations that benefit the company and the employee. All the participants provided example cases in their companies and each used the telework tool for tenured and loyal employees.

Teleworking employees should receive special training to maximize the positive outcomes in their performance. Training could include communication, task planning, and performance management (Meshur, 2015). Furthermore, training should not only apply to employees but also to managers. It takes specific managerial skills to oversee teleworking employees, yet not all managers possess these skills (Eisenberg et al., 2019). Providing this training would help create a more supportive and efficient work environment.

I recommend that before allowing employees to telework managers should provide a telework agreement between themselves and teleworking employees. A telework agreement provides a clear understanding of expectations, essential tools for telework, overall communication strategy, and conflict resolution parameters. The telework agreement, though not necessarily an official contract, is a valuable tool that provides a benchmark for the working relationship.

I recommend that managers explore several different supervision techniques for teleworking employees due to the lack of face-to-face time with each employee (Cowan,

2014). Managers must leverage ICT to develop direct and constant communication with employees (Cowan, 2014). Additionally, managers should ensure that the teleworking employees clearly understand and receive their communication. Finally, I recommend that managers use both relationship and task-orientation leadership styles when managing teleworking employees. Structure and a clear understanding of work expectations provide a needed working framework for teleworking employees (Dahlstrom, 2013). At the same time, building trust through relationship-oriented measures is critical for success (Dahlstrom, 2013). Each participant in my study had years of experience with many of their teleworking employees which provided trust between the two parties. The participants were careful to emphasize performance expectations.

The strategies shared in this study could benefit small business owners and managers who have teleworking employees or wish to implement teleworking policies. Successful telework programs require managers with strong leadership skills (Eisenberg et al., 2019). The themes outlined in this study could raise the management leadership skills when working with their teleworking employees.

Recommendations for Further Research

I offer four recommendations for further research based on the results of this study. First, this research was conducted with a smaller number of participants in Abilene, Texas; further research should include a wider geographic region with a more significant number of participants or larger organizations. A different sampling of participants might provide other insights relevant to the research. Expanding from the industries included in the current research would also provide a broader range of perspectives. Second, this was

a qualitative research study approach to gain in-depth information and experiences from the participants. Further research should be done using a quantitative or mixed method approach measuring the benefits of each strategy or the impact of the policies on work-life balance. The objective of that research would be to outline specific plans for a diverse workforce. Third, future research could examine corporate culture and the impact of remote work on the culture. Understanding whether remote work alters corporate culture is critical to many small business owners who participated in this study. Finally, there might be value in a quantitative study of the benefits for a small business shifting to a completely virtual environment examining cost, job satisfaction, productivity, culture, and work-life balance.

Reflections

The journey to complete a Doctorate of Business Administration was far more challenging than I expected. As someone who had not written scholarly papers for many years before beginning my doctorate, I vastly underestimated the time and effort required to succeed. I am thankful for the opportunity and genuinely appreciate the rigor and expectations set forth by the faculty of Walden University. There is no question that I have a greater understanding of the educational process and consider myself a better scholar for this experience. The skills and expertise I have acquired, particularly in the doctoral study, are already reaping benefits in my teaching of undergraduate students.

My research topic allowed me to engage with participants whose opinions and experiences I value. The insights shared by the participants expanded my understanding of leadership, employee/manager engagement, corporate culture, and business strategy.

The pressure and expectation placed on a business owner are tremendous, and the honesty from the participants was refreshing, illuminating, and challenging. The care and concern they make so many decisions provide an excellent example of transformational leadership.

Conclusion

Remote work is no longer a trend but is now a fact of life and a key component of strategic management planning for businesses (Nakrosiene et al., 2018). The current business climate expects companies to include remote work as an option and provide the resources necessary for employees to work successfully (reference). Additionally, leading a dispersed workforce requires an expanded skillset from the typical office environment. Transformational leadership provides many tools needed to lead a remote workforce (Lembrechts et al., 2019). Furthermore, the ever-changing and developing technologies offer solutions and barriers to effective leadership. Socio-technical systems theory provides a framework better to understand the interaction between human actors and ICT to develop a thriving work environment, in the office and virtually. This study used these two conceptual frameworks to create a complete picture of managers' landscape in today's business climate. With so many changes and complexities in the current employee/management relationship, it is incumbent upon business owners to possess effective strategies for remote work that allow them to retain critically essential employees.

Five small business owners in Texas, participated in semi-structured interviews. Their answers, comments, and insight provided the primary data collected and analyzed

in this research study. My research identified three themes that business owners and managers could use in their efforts to lead their dispersed workforce. The themes were the connections between employee engagement and actors, employee engagement and tasks, and individual consideration and tasks. These themes were aligned and supported by previous research on these topics.

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The research question is: What strategies do small business owners use to incorporate telecommuting to retain teleworking employees? This qualitative multiple case study will consist of six open-ended interview questions to explore strategies and gain knowledge from business leaders that have been successful in incorporating telecommuting to retain teleworking employees.

Protocol Steps	**Protocol Actions**
Select participants and provide an informed consent form	I will contact potential participants by e-mail or other online measures deemed appropriate by Walden's guidelines. I will attach the informed consent form to each e-mail
Set time and place for interviews	Interviews will occur in person at the participant's office or public space, or virtually via Zoom at an agreed-upon time.
Introduce the interview and obtain verbal consent	I will reiterate the purpose of the research study, obtain verbal consent from each participant.
Record the interview and maintain a time limit	I will advise the participant that the interview will be audio recorded for accuracy and follow-up. The interview will begin with the participant's background information, including (a) educational background, (b) title/position, and (c) years of experience. There will be a time limit of 45 minutes for each interview.
• Conduct the semi-structured interview by asking seven questions • Observe non-verbal cues	1. What strategies have you used in retaining teleworking employees in your business? 2. What key challenges did you face in using these strategies? 3. How did you overcome the key barriers to implementing these strategies?

• Paraphrase when necessary • Ask follow-up questions to achieve in-depth responses and ensure accuracy	4. How did you measure the success of these strategies? 5. What key lessons have you learned from developing and using these strategies to retain teleworking employees? 6. What else can you share with me about your organization's experiences in developing and using these strategies to retain teleworking employees?
Thank the participant and set a follow-up time for member checking	I will thank the participant for their time and involvement in the research study, provide them with a thank you card, and set up a follow-up time for when participants will receive the researcher's interpretations of their interview responses.
Conduct member checking	After the interview, the participant will receive a copy of the researcher's interpretation of the data collected. The researcher will ask each participant to review and confirm the accuracy and validity of the researcher's interpretations of their interview responses. The researcher will ask or answer any follow-up questions at this time.

Many small businesses have difficulty recruiting and retaining employees due to their size (Bilan et al., 2020). In the last 10 years, technology has revolutionized the workplace. In 2015, more than 37% of the US workforce did some level of telecommuting for their job while saving costs for their employers, increasing productivity, and finding more excellent work/life balance (Nakrosiene et al., 2018). The general business problem is that small businesses struggle to retain teleworking employees. The findings may be valuable to organizations wanting to evaluate the options for employees who desire to telecommute. The conclusions of this study may

allow organizational leaders to promote a positive social change by the identification and implementation of initiatives, programs, and strategies that provide an enhanced work-life balance, job satisfaction, and employee retention for the organization. Among the social benefits possible from this study, the growing social pressure to allow employees to telecommute due to pandemic spread of viruses and other natural disasters increases the need to develop and implement telecommuting strategies. Due to the COVID 19 outbreak in 2020, organizations implemented a wide range of telecommuting policies to increase social distancing. These policies were rapidly set in place for a large number of the world's working population (Li et al., 2020). A study such as this one will help organizations ensure that their policies are structured in a way that will be beneficial to both the organization and the employee.