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Telecommuting Strategies in the Human Capital Management Industry

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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

Abstract

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MS, University of Phoenix, 2016

BS, University of Kansas, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Telecommuting became more entrenched in many corporations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rise in the number of telecommuting employees has presented new challenges to traditional employee management; some business leaders lack strategies to manage telecommuting employees while maintaining expected productivity levels. Grounded in the resource-based view conceptual framework, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to maintain productivity in employees who telecommute. The participants were four managers in the human capital management industry with a minimum of 2 years in their managerial role and telecommuting direct reports. Data were collected by conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing public company documents. Use of Yin's five-step data analysis process yielded five themes: (a) resource engagement, (b) effective communication, (c) technology management, (d) people management, and (e) work–life balance. A key recommendation is for business leaders to ensure resource engagement by improving onboarding processes for telecommuting employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to identify strategies that, if implemented, can potentially improve the work–life balance of employees.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my children, Kahleigh and Bennett. I am thankful for your

patience as I worked through long nights of research and writing.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank God for granting me the patience and perseverance to complete the doctoral journey. A special thank you for the guidance and dedication from my committee chair, Dr. Jill Murray, who enabled a clear path forward and frequently revisited next steps to help me remain on track. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Yvette S. Ghormley, Dr. Ronald Black, and Dr. Roger Mayer, whose guidance and feedback helped to improve my study. I would like to thank Dr. Susan Davis, director of the Doctor of Business Administration program, who led my first residency, helped me narrow my topic during the residency discussion sessions, and provided feedback to help me develop a strong problem statement to present to my committee.

I would like to thank my spouse, Nick, for giving me your unconditional love and support during this journey. I am grateful for all the days and nights you committed to feeding and entertaining our children so I could complete reading, research, and writing. I would like to thank my daughter, Kahleigh, for cheering me on and understanding when I had to do homework. I would like to thank my son, Bennett, for being calm when I brought out my laptop to attempt writing. I would like to thank my parents, Pat and Connie, for instilling in me the desire to pursue more and go further. I would like to thank my in-laws, Terry and Katy, for hanging out with Kahleigh and Bennett during extra-curricular activities so I could bring my laptop along.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The rise in telecommuting is changing the nature of work for many employees and employers. Millions of employees across the globe began telecommuting with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rofcanin & Anand, 2020). Advances in technology have improved the ability for organizations to communicate with telecommuting employees (Fossum et al., 2019). However, some managers have struggled to maintain productivity among employees who work via telecommunication (Dixit et al., 2020). Based on the challenges that managers faced in maintaining productivity from telecommuting employees, additional research on effective telecommuting strategies was necessary to aid managers in effectively tracking and managing productivity rates in employees who telecommute.

Background of the Problem

Organizational success requires productive employees. However, little attention has been paid to strategies that maintain the productivity of telecommuting employees (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2019). Although the rise in globalization had expanded telecommuting into various industries, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the need for more employees to telecommute within a very short period (Tsukamoto, 2021). As employees and managers continue to navigate the telecommuting environment, organizational leaders need to identify strategies to maintain employee productivity. Knowledge of how successful telecommuting organizations maintain productivity without face-to-face employment interactions may offer new strategies that can be used at other organizations offering telecommuting.

There was a need to explore telecommuting employees considering the increased prevalence of telecommuting during COVID-19 and the continuation in this practice as organizations explore a virtual world climate. Telecommuting employees experience productivity issues at both the personal and organizational levels, so it is essential for organizations to develop strategies to maintain productivity (Chang et al., 2021). In conducting this study, I wanted to inform leaders of successful telecommuting strategies that they may use to thrive during uncertainty.

Problem and Purpose

Misperceptions abound about the productivity of employees who telecommute. Many managers, for instance, avoided authorizing telecommuting arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic despite increased telecommuting employment policies due to misperceptions about employee productivity (Prager et al., 2022, p. 241). Due to the global pandemic, COVID-19, the number of employees working from home at the beginning of 2020 increased by 25% with maintained employee productivity levels (Beck et al., 2020, p. 7). The general business problem was that some business leaders have misperceptions regarding telecommuting employee productivity levels. The specific business problem was that some business leaders in human capital management organizations lack the strategies to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore successful strategies that business leaders in human capital management organizations used to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute. The target population was

comprised of four business leaders from three human capital management organizations whose teams were located within the United States and had successfully implemented strategies to maintain telecommuting employee productivity. The implications for positive social change include increased awareness of the need for strategies to promote employee work–life balance. Reduced commuting time and increased employment opportunities in rural communities are potential implications associated with increases in telecommuting.

Nature of the Study

The three research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Saunders et al., 2023). Quantitative researchers focus on numeric data and examine and describe variable relationships through statistical analysis (Connaway et al., 2022). The quantitative method was not appropriate because the process for analyzing data in this study was not statistical analysis. Mixed-method researchers use both the qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a broader understanding of the subject phenomenon (Timans et al., 2019). The mixed-methods approach was not appropriate because the study's purpose did not necessitate statistical analysis (i.e., the use of quantitative methods). Qualitative researchers focus on nonnumeric data to explore concepts, opinions, or experiences (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Saunders et al., 2023). The qualitative method was the most appropriate because exploring experiences and associated descriptive characterizations was required to understand business leaders' telecommuting strategies.

The four qualitative research designs are ethnographic, phenomenological, narrative, and case study. Ethnography refers to when researchers collect information on a group whose members share a common culture (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Ethnography was inappropriate because culture was not relevant to the study's purpose. Researchers conducting a phenomenological study explore personal meanings in participants' shared experiences within a social or cultural context (Amatullah et al., 2020). The phenomenological design was inappropriate because I did not investigate the personal meanings behind participants' shared experiences. Using grounded theory design enables researchers to develop a theory for explaining phenomena through data collection and analysis (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2020). Grounded theory was inappropriate because the study's purpose was not to develop a new theory. In a narrative study, participants share stories regarding their personal-life experiences that a researcher then analyzes (Gholami et al., 2020). The narrative design was inappropriate because analysis of personal life experiences was not consistent with the study's purpose.

In a case study, the researcher collects information on a single or multiple case (individuals, programs, events, or organizations) through observation, interviews, or documentation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Yin, 2018). The case study researcher conducts their observation change over time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Yin, 2018). The multiple-case study was the appropriate research design for this study because the goal was to understand the experiences of individuals from multiple organizations in the human capital management industry regarding strategies to maintain productivity from telecommuting employees.

Research Question

What strategies do business leaders in human capital management organizations use to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to manage productivity in a telecommuting workforce?

2. What are the key components of your telecommuting strategy?

3. How do you measure productivity in telecommuting?

4. How has your organization assessed the effectiveness of the strategies for managing telecommuters?

5. What strategies are most effective in managing telecommuting productivity?

6. What key challenges arise when implementing the strategies for managing telecommuting productivity?

7. How did you address these key challenges?

8. What suggestions have you received from fellow leaders within your organization that influenced your strategies for maintaining telecommuting productivity?

9. What additional information can you provide regarding telecommuting strategies within your organization?

Appendix A also contains the interview questions. Appendix B includes the interview protocol that I followed.

Conceptual Framework

Barney (1991) developed the resource-based view conceptual framework. Barney used the resource-based framework to explain how firms sustained the competitive

advantage by implementing strategies that exploited their resources and capabilities. According to Barney, the following key constructs underpin the resource-based conceptual framework: (a) firm resources, (b) competitive advantage, and (c) sustained competitive advantage. A firm controls the resources that enable the firm to improve efficiency and effectiveness (Hamdoun, 2020). Examples of firm resources examples include employees, technology, information, and knowledge. Competitive advantage occurs when a firm's leaders implement a strategy that is not currently implemented and that is difficult to duplicate by the competition (Shan et al., 2018). Sustained competitive advantage occurs when the leaders of other firms cannot duplicate a firm's competitive advantage. Barney's resource-based view aligned with this study's purpose because the focus was on the employees and they technology they access from their organization to maintain productivity.

Operational Definitions

Global virtual teams: Teams that are comprised of geographically dispersed and culturally diverse employee groups (Presbitero, 2019).

Productivity: A measurement of the quantity and quality of employee work (Azmy, 2020).

Telecommuting: A phenomenon that occurs when an employee spent part of their work hours away from their central work location, typically at their home, using technology to interact with coworkers (Golden & Eddleston, 2020).

Telework: Work that occurs when employees performed tasks outside a central workplace (Lembrechts et al., 2018).

Trust in project teams: Teams that are defined by the willingness of a project team member to be vulnerable while relying on another party to perform a specific action (Breuer et al., 2019).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

As with any study, this study has assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Assumptions

Assumptions refer to interpretations that a researcher makes and applies to ideas, concepts, and conclusions based on experience but that are not backed up with data (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Assumptions could lead to bias when interpreting results. The first assumption in this study was that participants were involved in developing and implementing strategies for telecommuting employees to remain productive. The second assumption in this study was that participants would openly and honestly answer the interview questions (see Appendix A). The third assumption was that the study's results would provide information to business leaders regarding strategies to maintain productivity from telecommuting employees.

Limitations

Limitations are elements in a study that a researcher cannot control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Limitations in this study included time, the sample size, and potential participant bias. Time was a limitation because I had a set time frame to complete the study. Participant bias was a potential limitation to this study because participants could have feared revealing issues with their strategies or might not have fully remembered or understood the strategies within their organization.

Delimitations

Delimitations are restrictions that a researcher applies to a study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). I included only business leaders within the human capital management industry. Limiting the study to one industry reduces the ability to transfer the knowledge, though comparing the study findings with those of similar studies in other industries could help correlate the results. Limiting the study to business leaders may have negated the ability to obtain for a comprehensive understanding of telecommuting employee strategies.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study is relevant because telecommuting continues to increase across the globe and organizations with telecommuting employees need to understand successful strategies from other business leaders. The goal for this study was to increase awareness regarding the successful strategies some business leaders used to manage telecommuting employees. I described telecommuting contributions to business practice and their implications for effecting beneficial social change.

Contribution to Business Practice

According to a study by Kelly (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed the workspace for knowledge workers by significantly increasing the telecommuting employee numbers at the beginning of 2020. As restrictions relaxed, and some workers returned to the office, following social distancing and facial covering guidelines, employees began questioning the need to report to the office. This study is potentially significant to business practice because its findings may provide awareness of

the need for an increased applicant pool to create a more diverse and broader workforce for businesses.

Implications for Social Change

The study's social change implications include the potential for business leaders to promote employee work–life balance and childcare flexibility. Flexible work practices such as telecommuting may offer employment opportunities for parents with childcare needs (Dickson, 2019). Childcare has specific start and end times during the day, and childcare facilities are closed at various times throughout the year, which limits parents' availability for work. The increased flexibility in telecommuting also may reduce the need for workers to drive to and from the office, reducing associated negative environmental impacts.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The following literature review includes peer-reviewed research regarding telecommuting strategies used in knowledge-based industries and the resource-based view conceptual framework. I searched two research databases, ProQuest and EBSCOhost, which I accessed from Walden University Library. I also used Walden's Thoreau multidatabase search tool. The keywords and phrases used in the searches were *telecommuting*, *virtual employment*, *remote worker*, *employee productivity*, *project leadership*, *resource-based view*, *virtual world*, *global virtual teams*, *work from home*, *organizational productivity*, *human capital management*, *work–life balance*, *productivity strategies*, *telework*, *virtual teams*, *global project teams*, *virtual team effectiveness*, *working from home during COVID-19*, *flexible work arrangements*, *employee*

engagement in a virtual environment, *successful strategies in virtual employment*, and *telecommuting productivity*. Most (85%) of the sources in the literature review were peer reviewed and published within 5 years of my anticipated completion date.

Resource-Based View Framework

The foundation of the resource-based view framework was a 1991 article by Jay Barney. Barney addressed methods for firms to obtain a competitive advantage within their industry. Barney stated using the time's mindset a firm's opportunities and threats are essential to strategic advantage. The resource-based view assumes that the firm consists of a diverse group of resources. It also assumes that the resources are not easily transferred from firm to firm. The firm obtains and sustains competitive advantage over time by holding on to resources and utilizing resources in a manner that is not easily duplicated.

When evaluating the firm externally, the findings were only accurate if each firm possesses the same internal resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). Competitive advantage often focuses on a firm's strategies (Barney, 1986). The resource-based view emphasizes that competitive advantage is not solely reliant on a firm's strategies but also the cost to implement those strategies. This perspective shifts the focus of business leaders to resources and the value that resources plus strategies have for a firm's competitive advantage (Barney, 1986).

In a previous article, Barney (1986) also discussed strategic factors. Strategic factors include resource acquisition, exploiting imperfections, and controlling the firm's skills and capabilities, Barney noted. The strategic factor markets goals focuses on

identifying how firm leaders could better implement successful strategies. One strategy that the leaders of a firm could follow is to analyze the firm's competitive environment; another is to analyze existing skills and capabilities. Identifying strategic factors is the basis for the resource-based view.

The main argument of the resource-based view framework is that firm leaders should exploit their current resources and capabilities (Sajuyigbe et al., 2021). This can be done by implementing strategies that involve the firm's current assets and increase the firm's advantage through areas of imbalance. Although not all resources generate additional financial gain, the proper combination of resources and strategies may increase the firm's status within the relevant market.

A firm's resources are either tangible or intangible (Wang et al., 2018). Tangible resources include physical items such as (a) an office building, (b) equipment, and (c) land. Intangible resources include items that the firm owns but that cannot be touched, such as (a) brand, (b) intellectual property, (c) patents, and (d) trademarks. Interestingly, although human resources include physical items, because employee productivity cannot be bought and sold or easily imitated, human resources are categorized as an intangible resource (Feng & Gerhart, 2021). Firm leaders' use of the resource-based view to sustain competitive advantage creates value that is difficult for the competition to replicate (Gueler & Schneider, 2021). Firm capital s considered an intangible resource and could be used to sustain competitive advantage by managing talent and aligning strategic goals (Miles & Van Clieaf, 2017). Competitive advantage factors that could help a firm build capital include (a) employee productivity, (b) the establishment of performance metrics

for evaluating productivity, (c) effective organizational strategy alignment, and (d) validation of the alignment between organizational design and organizational strategy.

Telecommuting employees perform their work outside the physical office but also qualify as intangible resources. The leaders of firms manage the technology available to their employees to sustain a competitive advantage (Kukyte & Jasinskas, 2022). Telecommuting employers need the most advanced technology available in the industry to ensure that they help their companies excel over the competition. The resource-based view is used by firm leaders to develop strategies to remain competitive with telecommuting employees in the telecommuting environment.

Telecommuting Employees

The literature on telecommuting employees includes the terminology (a) *global virtual teams*, (b) *virtual employee*, (c) *remote employees*, (d) *remote worker*, (e) *flexible work arrangements*, (f) *telecommuter*, (g) *teleworker*, and (h) *telecommuting employee*. All these terms have the same basic meaning: an employee who uses technology to communicate with team members (Krumm et al., 2016). Telecommuting employees spend all or a portion of their workday outside the physical office. The exact arrangement varies from firm to firm as well as industry to industry.

Traditionally, telecommuting was categorized into three groups: (a) street work, (b) satellite center, and (c) home office (Grigorescu & Mocanu, 2020). Street work referred to work performed while traveling. Examples included sales professionals, politicians, and traveling consultants. A street worker worked outside a physical office building but not from the same location every day. Contrary to a street worker, a satellite

worker could have worked from the same location every day. A satellite center referred to work performed in a location determined by the employer. Examples included technicians, some teachers, and construction workers. For example, when building a home, a construction worker reports to that build site for a certain number of days until they complete their section of the build. The employer tells a construction worker where to work each day. Home offices refer to work performed from an employee's home or other location not specified by the employer; examples include technical consultants, those in administrative support roles, and writers. Home office workers choose their work location so long as they do not violate any employment agreements. Most employers do not support hosting a confidential call from a coffee shop but consider writing a book from a coffee shop to be fine.

Telecommuting Technology

Advancements in technology have made it possible for both workers and managers to better communicate (Fossum et al., 2019). Communication methods included email, instant messaging, project collaboration tools, and social media. Managers can successfully use the technologies available when they invest time in understanding their telecommuting workers and establish methods for communication that are appropriate for that worker. Understanding the worker includes carefully selecting team members based on skill, experience, knowledge, and cultural and linguistic differences. Written communication could be difficult due to the potential interpretation of emotion. Because telecommuting has expanded to workers in other

countries and across the globe, workers need to understand fellow team members, cultural differences, and emotional intelligence.

Four main approaches to telecommuting teams are (a) dichotomy, (b) dimensional, (c) multiple facets, and (d) discontinuity (Schulze & Krumm, 2017). The dichotomy approach is comprised of team member interactions that are not face-to-face; team members could be working from inside the office, but not in the same room (Schulze & Krumm, 2017). For example, when an employee schedules a call with a client and both the employee and their manager joined the call from separate offices they represent a dichotomous telecommuting team. Because the meeting occurred over the phone, other employees from the same firm can join the call from different offices or conference rooms. The dimensional approach includes non-face-to-face team interactions as well with some resources working from outside the office (Schulze & Krumm, 2017). Using the same example, this could occur if a salesperson in the field and their manager in the office both join a call with a client from their respective locations.

The multiple facets approach refers to separating the non-face-to-face interactions from the telecommuting interactions when discussing communication (Schulze & Krumm, 2017). In the multiple facets approach, the employee's location and the manager's location do not make a difference. Participants on the call, outside the conference room, are considered telecommuting, whether they are in the office next door or at home. This approach works best when used by organizations that are unconcerned about the physical location of the employee being constant so long as the employee's job duties are performed. The discontinuity approach focuses on the employee's experience

while working with a telecommuting team (Schulze & Krumm, 2017). The discontinuity approach ensures that telecommuting employees feel like part of the team. The emphasis is on inclusion.

Telecommuting Globalization

Four million North American expatriates from the United States and Canada work abroad (Coughlan et al., 2019). As part of their positions, they combine knowledge from their home country and host country. However, cultural differences and separation from family negatively affect success rates for expatriates working abroad. Utilizing available technology helps to mitigate some employment stressors. Communication modes such as videoconferencing tools, phone calls, emails, and texts increase the virtual proximity between workers and their global organizations, research shows. Knowledge sharing between countries is the foundation for global virtual teamwork and resources.

Successful global teams develop based on three dimensions: (a) location, (b) distance, and (c) time (Jimenez et al., 2017). The ability for telecommuting teams to spread resources across the globe means that work can continue during the day across time zones. Organizations with global teams are not limited to the working hours within their corporate office. While workers in the Western hemisphere are clocking out, workers in the Eastern hemisphere are clocking in. Whether they work from a home office or a satellite office, telecommuting employees use technology to communicate with one another across the globe. For example, an employee in Sydney, Australia could clock in at 8:00 am on Tuesday while an employee in New York clocked out at 4:00 pm on Monday. The New York employee could pass along knowledge regarding the issue

they were working on to the Sydney employee, which allows the work to continue after hours in New York. By managing work around the clock, the leaders of global organizations can use effective knowledge sharing and technology.

However, cultural differences can create some boundaries between global virtual team members. Team members transcend cultural boundaries and bridge differences amongst the team by effectively knowledge sharing (Eisenberg & Matterelli, 2017). Knowledge sharing includes information provided to the organization as well as information provided within teams and subgroups. Subgroups include information technology offshore teams, geographically based on-site offices, team member nationality groups, and groups based on experience level. Team leads, or more advanced team members, sometimes need information that the rest of the team cannot access or do not understand. Team members typically understand what knowledge to share and with which groups. Telecommuting workers also may need to share location-specific information with a subgroup during a localized outage or leaders need to share information with those in a specific country regarding backup support during a national holiday. Telecommuting team members in an organization exist within a localized region, nationally, and globally.

Online businesses and organizations with telecommuting workers illustrate the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful. Successful telecommuting employees exhibit the following capabilities: They (a) lead and make decisions, (b) support the team and are cooperative, (c) are interactive and present findings, (d) analyze and interpret information, (e) create and conceptualize ideas, (f) organize and execute information, (g)

adapt to and cope with new surroundings and changes, and (h) show initiative and perform at the necessary level (Krumm et al., 2016). Telecommuting workers are able to perform the necessary work with minimal supervision. Whether the employee telecommutes in a traveling role, a satellite role, or a home office role, the team members and manager are not in the same physical location. Employees are knowledgeable and have the capabilities necessary to complete the work.

Transitioning into a telecommuting business allows organizations to reach beyond traditional borders (Bejleri & Fishta, 2017). Businesses with telecommuting employees or retailers with solely online sales are not paying for a physical store or office building or all the additional costs that came with renting or owning business property. Successful online businesses maintain positive supplier relationships and customer relationships.

Telecommuting Strategies

Telecommuting employees who remain successful, especially those who work from a home office environment, without a manager monitoring their daily activities, develop traits that promote productivity, research shows. Chang et al. (2021) identified two key worker traits that affect employee productivity: (a) proactive coping and (b) future time orientation. Proactive coping refers to the ability for workers to manage stressors toward improved personal growth. For example, an employee with short deadlines sets goals and checkpoints along the way to minimize the impact once the deadline approaches. Telecommuting employees use proactive coping as a self-management tool to remain on track without a manager's physical presence.

Future time orientation refers to a worker's ability to adjust their present actions in preparation for their needs in the future (Chang et al., 2021). For example, an employee delays participating in a celebration today, due to the possible consequences of procrastinating on a project due in the future. This strategy helps employees to minimize risks of procrastination. The employee realizes that a task due in the future takes time to complete. Instead of putting off pieces of the task until later because of the future deadline, the employee began working on the task sooner.

Organizational productivity and organizational financial success are also important corporate strategies. Two primary strategies exist regarding managing organizational productivity: (a) the cost leadership strategy and (b) the differentiation strategy (Subanidja et al., 2020). The cost leadership strategy involves managing costs during production to allow the company to sell goods at a lower price and attract more customers. Reduced manufacturing costs create a larger gap between the production cost and retail price. A firm gain competitive advantage in the market by lowering the retail price to increase sales. The differentiation strategy refers to when a company's uniqueness attracts customers (Subanidja et al., 2020). Instead of drawing customers by lowering costs, the firm attracts customers by creating something other firms do not provide. An example of a differentiation strategy is Apple in 2007. Apple presented the iPhone with capabilities unseen at that time, such as a touchscreen, a camera, and an internet browser (Park et al., 2021). Apple obtained the competitive advantage by presenting customers with a unique device. It sustained the competitive advantage by

making its products unduplicatable. Although both strategies affected organizational finances, only the cost leadership strategy affected productivity.

Sochat (2021) researched additional strategies for telecommuting best practices. In the identified strategies (a) employees worked on something they cared about, (b) organizational leaders identified clear employee goals, (c) managers defined productivity to clarify expectations, (d) employees created a daily routine and environment conducive to work, (e) employees took responsibility for their own work, (f) workers met a certain level of human connection, (g) workers were empathetic in their internal and external communication, (h) workers were mindful of their own daily accomplishments, (i) workers understood when to say no to prevent burnout, and (j) workers understood and used the most appropriate communication methods for each task. It was difficult for some managers to implement the strategies. Most managers strove to promoting employee and team motivation. However, most of the strategies Sochat outlined are at the discretion of the employee. This aspect makes it difficult for leaders of an organization to implement all the strategies.

When the opportunity arose to telecommute, some workers chose not to. Researchers identified potential work–life conflicts, mental health impacts, and negative career consequences as reasons for not telecommuting (Lott & Abendroth, 2020). This provided a different perspective to the work–life balance argument of telecommuting. Some employees who were offered telecommuting opportunities chose not to telecommute due to management expectations and the types of tasks the employee performed. Some employees believed their manager expected them to be physically

present in the workplace and they found reasons not to allow the employee to telecommute. Some employees also believed the tasks they performed were more difficult to perform from home.

Telecommuting Work–Life Balance

Organizations with global virtual team members could conduct business around the clock, and studies showed telecommuting employees were likely to work more overtime and perform highly due to the autonomy over their work schedule and work location (Cañibano, 2018). In some cases, telecommuting employees needed to participate in late night meetings with coworkers outside their time zone. In other cases, telecommuting employees took care of family obligations and personal needs during the workday. Autonomy over their own work schedule resulted in a telecommuting employee working in the morning, taking care of non-work tasks during the middle of the day, and then returning to working in the afternoon and evening. Employment contributions and employee incentives applied differently to telecommuting employees than to non-telecommuting employees. While the employee had more autonomy over their schedule, they also found themselves working more hours to meet organizational needs. Access to work technology and the ability to participate in meetings outside the office resulted in employees joining meetings outside their normal working hours, which added to the employee's overall working hours for the day or workweek.

Unclear boundaries in telework lead to overwork and task uncertainty, which negatively affected work–life balance (Avgoustaki, 2015). Avgoustaki identified work effort in respect to work–life balance, in two categories. Extensive work effort referred to

the number of hours an employee engaged in work activities. Work activities included times an employee participated in meetings, completed tasks, emailed, and documented processes. Intrinsic work effort comprised of the physical and mental effort an employee invested in their work (Avgoustaki, 2015). Intrinsic work effort included the process of thinking through a conversation or problem to determine which steps to take. The employee completed no task and engaged in no work activities during that time, but they spent time thinking about the work activity and determined how to complete their work activities. Working overtime exhausted a telecommuting employee's extensive work effort because more hours were worked in a day as well as their intrinsic work effort because the employee continued to exert mental efforts towards work tasks.

While telecommuting offered employees more opportunities to manage work–life balance, they also risked work-home spillover. Work-home spillover occurred when work experiences effected the individual's state while at home (Benlian, 2020). For telecommuting employees work-home spillover was promoted or inhibited by technology. Some telecommuting employees continued to answer emails or call team members after normal working hours, or during personal activities. The act of continuing to work, interrupted personal activities and allowed work to interfere. Technology constraints, task ambiguity, and resource obstacles were all stressors that impacted work-home spillover. Work-home spillover impacted the quality of work an employee provided while working during personal activities. Work-home spillover also impacted the employee's personal well-being, and the employee's family, and negatively impacted work–life balance.

Teleworkers who did not manage a healthy work–life balance experienced both personal and work-related consequences. Poor work–life balance in telecommuting employees lead to burnout and sleep problems (Hu et al., 2019). Burnout and overwork lead to physical and psychological health issues. Lack of sleep also lead to reduced productivity during working hours. Likewise, when life flowed over into working hours by employees who used technology for personal distractions such as social media or other unrelated work tasks contributed to poor productivity. Managers helped organizations engage telecommuting employees on the tasks at hand and provided strategies for managing work–life balance.

Personal distractions via technology were actions some telecommuting employees performed due to feelings of isolation. Telecommuting employees had a need-to-belong and connect with fellow workers (Wang et al., 2020). Telecommuting employees had a need for connection. While many telecommuting employees chose to telecommute for the work–life balance and physical isolation, some struggled with psychological isolation while telecommuting. Psychological isolation occurred when an employee felt disconnected from the rest of the organization. Managers were aware of possible psychological isolation and found ways to promote coworker bonding and job support. Ensuring employees were engaged and received the support they needed contributed to continued organizational productivity.

Knowledge Workers

A knowledge worker referred to someone who performed most of their work strategizing, planning, and thinking, and used their education, and training (Indeed

Editorial Team, 2021). An example of a knowledge worker included an information technology consultant. The consultant used their existing knowledge of cybersecurity, technology processes, existing hardware, and existing software to help the organization through improved efficiency or effectiveness of their information technology. The consultant discussed technology with the client, explained the available technology to the client, and discussed the client's intentions with the new technology. The consultant spent less time setting up or physically implementing the technology the client chose.

Knowledge workers telecommuted with less disruption to business practices due to the nature of their work. Advanced technology and communication enhanced the ability for knowledge workers to telecommute (Stiles & Smart, 2020). Knowledge workers spent a significant amount of time utilizing the internet, cloud computing, and electronic modes of communication. An employee worked from home, a local coffee shop, a neighbor's house, or the library and still accomplished their work. The knowledge worker telecommuted but depending on the nature of their work also worked from multiple locations. A benefit of knowledge workers telecommuting included the reduction in overall employee travel time. Employees and the organization were not disrupted by telecommuting constraints such as heavy traffic or simply running late (Dijst, 2004).

Collaboration tools were essential to both telecommuting and non-telecommuting knowledge workers. Videoconferencing offered face-to-face communication from different locations, information sharing, and improvements on business efficiency via an online collaboration tool (Kodama, 2020). Videoconferencing also assisted non-

telecommuting employees when face-to-face meetings were needed but the meeting participants were not able to be in the same room. For example, a business with one office in New York and one office in California saved money on travel and gained the benefit of seeing nonverbal communication and building familiarity and trust with videoconferencing. Videoconferencing was used in instances where a customer could not physically join the meeting. For example, telemedicine allowed a patient to videoconference with the doctor when unable or unwilling to go into the medical facility (Teladoc, n.d.). Videoconferencing also allowed telecommuting employees to establish trust and introduce those on the call (Kodama, 2020). When a telecommuting employee had no reason to visit the client's office, the videoconferencing tool was the only way for the client to have a face-to-face conversation.

Using tools such as videoconferencing and advanced technology allowed a knowledge worker to work from anywhere. However, knowledge workers tended to concentrate near economic hubs and big cities (Bjursell et al., 2021). This was due to the tendency for telecommuting employees to experience some flexibility but not telecommute every day of the week. Employees experienced knowledge transfer in various forms, including social in-person interactions within the office (Adamovic et al., 2022). The knowledge transfer that occurred during social interactions and the distractions social interactions created, conflicted with each other when it came to measuring employee productivity.

Employee Productivity

Employee productivity was influenced by job resources and demands. Organizations used productivity propensity to explain an employee's ability to achieve the quality requirements of the customer and the productivity objectives of the organization (Harris, 2020). Job demands included employee workload, while resources included supervisory support. Task ambiguity and team conflicts added to productivity factors because they were job stressors. Managerial support and the ability to keep employees engaged were key when measuring a telecommuting employee's ability to be successful and productive.

Employee communication style and employee traits influenced both the worker's productivity and impacted the organization. Many organizations measured productivity as the quantity and quality of employee work. Successful organizational productivity started with hiring the right people (Azmy, 2020). Employees, as well as the technology they used were productivity resources organizations worked toward keeping and improving. Organizational culture promoted productivity among its workers and managers. Organizational cultures also hindered productivity by employees who used the internet for non-work-related items during work hours, took long breaks, and utilized work tools for non-work tasks.

An employee productivity-deterrent included non-work-related internet usage. Managers boosted employee productivity through proper internet access controls (Alamawich & AlSoufi, 2019). Internet usage and technology throughout the workday was distracting to employee productivity regardless of whether the employee worked in

the office or from home. While on-site employee internet usage was blocked through network routers or specific IP addresses within the building, telecommuting employee internet access was more difficult to manage. It was also challenging for organizations to identify which content should be blocked. For many employees, social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn were not work-related, but for some employees, such as recruiters and sales professionals, these sites were essential to performing their work. Organizations promoted productivity by limiting internet usage but exercised caution when determining organization-wide access policies to ensure they did not limit social media access for those who used it in their daily work tasks.

Difficulties occurred when limiting internet access to telecommuting employees because employees used technology as the primary mode of communication. Due to reliance on technology, telecommuting teams experienced fewer natural interactions (Lauring & Jonasson, 2018). Telecommuting team members communicated with each other through email and messaging tools. As a written form of communication, email did not contain the verbal and non-verbal ques involved in face-to-face communication. Openness to language diversity and creating shared team goals improved communication and facilitated team cohesiveness. Audio tools such as the phone, or videoconferencing tools such as Zoom allowed team members to express verbal and non-verbal ques while telecommuting. Avoiding styles that required verbal and non-verbal communication over email, such as sarcasm, improved the team's communication. More efficient communication and collaboration among team members positively impacted performance (Tan et al., 2019).

Employee Performance

Employee performance was measured based on how closely the employee adhered to their schedule, adhered to their budget, resolved conflicts, and effectively and efficiently utilized the available technology (Lippert & Dulewicz, 2018). Employee performance and organizational performance differed significantly. For example, whether an employee showed up to the corporate office on time did not impact whether the delivered product met quality standards. Tying performance metrics to productivity metrics was difficult for organizations to measure. Likewise, some performance factors determined for on-site employees were difficult to measure with telecommuting employees or virtual project teams. To mitigate this, some organizations with telecommuting employees utilized tools for employees to self-evaluate their performance, which included variations on the traditional schedule adherence measurement scales. Employee availability and responsiveness tended to replace evaluations on an employee's adherence to set start and end times. Instead of measuring how frequently the telecommuting employee was tardy within a set calendar period, the organization measured how quickly the employee responded to requests or completed assigned tasks.

In some instances, employee trustworthiness represented a strong employee performance indicator and a critical factor in virtual team success (Hao et al., 2019). Virtual team performance relied on effectively sharing knowledge among team members. Teams assessed team member performance based on the tendency for members to share knowledge versus withholding knowledge from each other. Telecommuting employees who were more aware of their role, were more likely to share knowledge with others.

Teams with telecommuting employees who were more prone to knowledge sharing performed better than teams that did not share information.

In other cases, teams had trouble building trust, so instead, an employee's ability to remain task focused represented a key performance indicator (Lin et al., 2008). Short projects, or non-project team telecommuting employees did not have the opportunity to build trust within an employee group. In those scenarios, the telecommuting employee's ability to remain on task and avoid distractions impacted the employee's performance levels. Employees who were easily distracted, or struggled to remain on task, performed at a lower quality or with a lower quantity output than their peers. Distractions included any non-work activities during working hours.

Time banditry occurred when employees focused on non-work activities during work hours (Ding et al., 2018). Non-work activity distractions expanded past telecommuting employees, and frequently occurred within they workplace. Examples included when employees (a) personally used company technology, (b) took extra-long breaks, and (c) socialized too much with coworkers. Non-work activities were more distracting when working from one's own home. Temptations such as (a) doing laundry during working hours, (b) preparing dinner before the family came home, (c) performing as a caregiver for a child or adult during the day, and (d) watching television, distracted from an employee's tasks and negatively impacted performance. Time bandits also included individuals who found a way out of performing the work they were assigned. An example included an employee who received a task then passed it off to a coworker, or did not complete the task at all, and required the original assigner to complete the task

themselves. Time bandits could be employees who underperformed because they spent the day wishing they were somewhere else, employees who did not take responsibility but instead tried to get someone else to help them complete their work, and those who procrastinated (Ding et al., 2018). Organizations reduced time-banditry by implementing relevant policies.

Telecommuting During COVID-19

Jobs that could not be performed from home developed potential inequality when employees were required to telecommute during a pandemic. In impoverished communities, employees did not have the option to telecommute due to the work they were performing and were often penalized for missing work (Fisher et al., 2020). For example, an employee who worked in a retail store or manufacturing could not perform their work from home. When the store temporarily closed during a pandemic, or the manufacturing facility closed, the employees were unable to work and unable to earn money. When schools closed unexpectedly, parents found a way for their children to remain supervised during the day. Parents working occupations that could not be performed from home were required to either leave their children home alone or leave their jobs when schools closed at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Fisher et al., 2020). The inability for some employees to telecommute or report to their work place during a pandemic created a financial burden on the employee.

In some regions, the COVID-19 social distancing requirements resulted in a lack of childcare support during the onset of the pandemic, which some researchers identified as a contributor to the decreased productivity (Chang et al., 2021). Employees with the

appropriate resources, who were good at proactive coping and future time orientation were more successful telecommuting. Proactive coping occurred when employees faced challenges head on as opposed to reacting to challenges as they occurred.

Telecommuting became the new norm for some employees and some organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Rofcanin, & Anand, 2020). Employees who were unprepared to work from home had negative experiences because both the employee and the organization were unprepared for the shift in culture. Some employees experienced blurred work-family boundaries, lacked training or preparation for telecommuting which caused stress in some employees, and others struggled to maintain their motivation to complete their work. The new conflict to the employee's workday reduced the employee's contribution to the organization. Managers established strategies to effectively manage telecommuting employees and to help keep up productivity.

The pandemic impacted job demands and stressors on telecommuters. Opposing arguments included the positive impact on employee well-being due to greater flexibility and stress reduction versus the negative impacts of work intensification and conflicts in work–life balance (Bilotta et al., 2021). Employees new to telecommuting were able to experience work flexibility for the first time. Some employees experienced a reduction in work-related stress because they were able to continue working and manage their own daily activities. Others experienced increased work-related stress because they struggled to remain on task or effectively manage themselves.

COVID-19 Telecommuting Global Impact

During the COVID-19 pandemic, more employees began telecommuting. The ability for employees in different industries to telecommute depended on the type of work. According to the Australian Household Income and Labor Dynamics Survey, Australia experienced a 25% increase in the number of employees working from home between their 2001 and 2020 surveys (Beck et al., 2020, p. 7). Other nations experienced similar increases.

Gallacher and Hossain evaluated the ability of different occupations within Canada to telecommute (Gallacher, & Hossain, 2020). Approximately 40% of Canadian jobs could be performed by a telecommuting employee. Work that was performed outdoors, required driving a vehicle, managed or operated mechanical tools, and required physical activities, was more challenging to perform from home. Employees performing these roles needed a flexible work schedule that allowed for some time within the physical office. Work that could not be performed from home, caused both financial and personal costs when employees were required to social distance.

A study in Japan compared those who continued to work in the office, inexperienced telecommuters who started telecommuting because of COVID-19, and experienced telecommuters. Only 7% of workers were required to telecommute, and 34% stated the telecommuting option was more flexible (Tsukamoto, 2021). The researchers found that those with previous telecommuting experience provided more reasons for telecommuting than COVID-19 and had increased productivity. The lower percentage of telecommuters during COVID-19 was due to the nature of jobs performed within Japan.

A majority of the jobs that could not be performed from home required social distancing and in some cases resulted in temporarily closing the organization or business found ways for employees to continue reporting to work.

A study conducted in the United States found nearly 50% of all US workers were telecommuting during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Sako, 2021). Feedback from US workers fluctuated between pleasure in flexible schedules and loneliness or blurred work-home boundaries. Sako pointed out that while telecommuting was not a new concept, the pandemic helped accelerate acceptability across the globe. Successful telecommuting businesses broke down jobs into tasks to determine which tasks could be performed away from the office and which tasks required the employee to be on-site. This strategy proposed that future work included telecommuting flexibility based on task if the job could not be fully performed away from the office. The work tasks that could be performed away from the office allowed telecommuting, while work tasks that required the employee to be physically present could only be performed within the office building. Instead of requiring an all or nothing approach to telecommuting during a pandemic, organizations specified which tasks were performed within the office and allowed workers to complete everything else from home. The organization then staggered on-site schedules based on the specified tasks to ensure as few employees were in the building at the same time as possible.

In 2003, Romania developed the Labor Code to regulate telework (Teleoacă Vartolomei, 2020). The code stated an employee who worked from their home could establish their own schedule and the employer held responsibility and ensured the

employee had all the necessary tools to perform the work. The employer had the right to verify if the employee performed the agreed-upon work. In 2018, Romania added the additional detail that any employee could work away from the employer's place of work at least 1 day a month. The telecommuting workdays were agreed upon and agreements were not required to exceed 1 day a month, which limited the employee's ability to be effective while working from home. Limiting the employee's telecommuting experience to 1 day a month also limited the employee's ability to improve upon their skills and style to ensure they were being productive.

Telecommuting Challenges

Organizations and employees' experiences benefited from telecommuting work but there were also challenges. Data security presented a new corporate challenge when employees began telecommuting. During COVID-19, businesses that did not already have strategies in place put themselves at risk of security breaches. Security breaches that occurred with unprepared employees and organizations included rouge wi-fi broadcasts, faulty anti-malware software, smishing and phishing attacks, and privacy threats when employees used their residential technology (Ahuja et al., 2020). When employees used personal computers, personal cell phones, or tools that lacked a corporate VPN they added risk to both company and client data. Companies protected their data while employees telecommuted by implementing software that could be used from external locations, such as a remote VPN, or other geofencing technology. Companies also implemented telecommuting policies and prevented security breaches by way of eaves dropping. An employee was able to discuss general business concepts over the phone

from their local coffee shop. If they began to discuss topics containing someone else's personal information, corporate secrets, or some form of top-secret information from their local coffee shop, anyone in the coffee shop could overhear the conversation causing a potential security breach.

Every industry, including the defense industry, was impacted by the telecommuting trend during the onset of COVID-19. The defense industry experienced operational challenges related to day-to-day decisions and security briefings with telecommuting employees (Dixit et al., 2020). Most employees and tasks within the defense industry were performed independently. Supervisory involvement depended on the situation and provided a method for monitoring productivity. However, tasks that include classified information, manufacturing, or on-site information technology required both the employee and manager to be on-site. This was challenging during a pandemic when employees were ordered to work from home. During COVID-19 some strategic decisions were attempted within the defense industry using virtual conferencing tools, necessary dialogue and interactions were missing which impacted the ability to make decisions (Dixit et al., 2020). The necessary non-verbal ques and the level of trust involved in a face-to-face meeting were missing from the conversation and made it difficult to judge the situation.

During COVID-19, Ireland mandated all office-based knowledge workers to work from home (Kelly, 2020). Knowledge workers were identified as those who worked 80% or more from an office. Most knowledge workers stated the space they worked in affected their productivity. Moving employees from their productive environment to a

different environment had an impact on their overall productivity. The employees were not prepared ahead of time with previous telecommuting experience. They were required to set up their home workspace within a short period of time and with different office resources. Although the new office location was their own homes, it was out of their comfort zone because they were not used to working from their homes.

Some countries lacked the necessary infrastructure for telecommuting, which resulted in national productivity issues during the COVID-19 mandatory social distancing period (Gottipati et al., 2021). Third world countries with slower internet or cellular signals within the residential villages struggled to support nationwide telecommuting. Some employees were not comfortable with the idea of working from home. The initial telecommuting during COVID-19 caused some employees to experience challenges at home. As telecommuting continued, employees experienced challenges with morale (Gottipati et al., 2021). Those who were not used to, or comfortable with telecommuting felt uncomfortable when required to telecommute during instances of a pandemic.

Decreased social interactions also created a challenge for newly telecommuting employees. Employees new to telecommuting suffered on a personal level due to the decreased social interactions and suffered on a professional level due to work and home overlap (Das Swain et al., 2020). In person, employees self-assessed how closely they were meeting the expectations and responsibilities of their job. The employee received daily input from managers or coworkers regarding progress on tasks and sought clarification from others while performing the work. When telecommuting, the employer's expectations compared to what the employee actual did, was more drastic. It

was difficult for the employees to receive constant confirmation of their actions and performance. Employees were concerned about their job ambiguity.

Another challenge newly telecommuting employees faced included the ability to manage their own workday. Stressors occurred during COVID-19 due to the onset of telecommuting and disruption to daily work–life schedules (Ingusci et al., 2021). Workers struggled to manage their own workday, maintain their technology, and effectively separate their work time and family time. In these cases, employees needed to find strategies to help with managing the unexpected demands of telecommuting.

Telecommuting Project Work

Project Structure

Job demands on telecommuting employees in virtual project teams created negative psychological and organizational impacts (Adamovic, 2017). Negative job demands included heavy workload and team confrontation. Proper resources, such as career development, countered negative job demands and promoted employee well-being. Successful telecommuting organizations helped employees balance job demands with job resources. The project structure level known as resource cohesion helped to balance the resources within the telecommuting project team.

Organizations utilized online learning to help promote career development within virtual project teams (Park et al., 2018). Firms found that face-to-face training lasted approximately 120 hr, which took too long. Some organizations experienced turnover during their on-site training. Using virtual training with knowledge sharing saved time and allowed employees to learn at their own pace. Successful telecommuting

organizations found that online learning not only helped with project team training but also provided a library of online content available for retraining as needed.

The project team created a sense of community within the organization (Arnold et al., 2019). With telecommuting employees, employee engagement impacted employee performance. The employees' feelings of membership within the virtual project team enhanced their connection and influence as a team member. The virtual project team presented the telecommuting employee with several resources they could reach out to or lean on for confirmation. If the employee needed to validate a process or receive additional guidance on a task, the virtual project team provided a set of resources to engage. The telecommuting employee could also request a referral from their team members to other employees who experienced similar challenges.

Functional organizational structure included centralized decision making, unit levels, and employees' specialization (Angelova, 2019). A functional organizational structure occurred when employees reported up through a manager over a certain department. For example, an HR generalist, an HR manager, and an HR director all flowed up through the Human Resources department. Any questions the employee had or issues the employee experienced were handled through the HR department first. Functional organizations also included misunderstandings at the inter-unit level and low flexibility. Employees were limited to working within their own department. Project based organizational structure brought in employees from different business units to work together and combined different thought processes and work habits. For example, a consulting firm with an HR resource, a payroll resource, and a project manager worked

together toward an end goal or on an implementation. The project-based structure also caused conflict when the team members were combined from different hierarchies within the organization.

Identifying project issues impacted the virtual team's success. Rating project day-to-day performance data helped project managers better manage the project and found areas for improvement or additional focus (Bogdan & Marginean, 2020). Structure and clarity were important in accurately documenting project team behavior and issues.

Project Culture

Geographically dispersed organizations utilized telecommuting employees through virtual project teams and used the latest communication technology (Bhat et al., 2017). Virtual teams consisted of (a) a temporary nature, (b) culture diversity, (c) geographic diversity, and (d) electronic communications. Successful virtual teams with cultural differences relied on trust, communication, and information sharing.

Trust represented the willingness to be vulnerable and relied on another party to perform a specific action (Breuer et al., 2019). Virtual teams and face-to-face teams required trust for success. Virtual teams experienced additional challenges due to the lack of a delicate touch in the project interactions. Addressing conflicts openly significantly impacted the virtual project team's level of internal trust.

Telework, as defined by Lembrechts et al. (2018), referred to a work arrangement in which employees performed tasks outside the central workplace. Often, organizations underutilized telework and did not have the intended positive results. Supervisors found success through setting goals and providing and receiving feedback. Some managers

struggled to perform these tasks with telecommuting employees. Employees collaborated within the workplace when supervisors relied heavily on team member tasks.

A global virtual team referred to a geographically and culturally diverse work group that relied on virtual communication tools (Presbitero, 2019). Cultural dissimilarity impacted task performance in any organization. Effective communication tools and respect for social identity helped virtual teams with culturally diverse members.

To successfully manage projects and project portfolios, businesses valued national and organizational cultures (Korhonen et al., 2023). Project success relied on strategic fit and portfolio balance. Strategic fit measured the degree in which the project aligned to the corporate strategy. Portfolio balance referred to the mix of projects within the organization. Assertiveness within a virtual project team positively impacted both the strategic and portfolio alignment of the project.

Project Trust

Trust among project team members impacted project success. Trust included the willingness for a project team member to be vulnerable and relied on others to perform a specific action (Breuer et al., 2019). In a virtual project team, each team member held responsibility for a piece of the project. Team members trusted each other to complete their sections of the project to ensure the success of the full project. Trust at the individual level required a trustor and a trustee. A one-to-one relationship between the individual doing the trusting and the individual to be trusted. While trust at the project team level required multiple trustors and multiple trustees, everyone on the team trusted

their team members and were trusted by their team members. The overall experience with other team members influenced the trustworthiness within the virtual project team.

The level of trust within a project team impacted team cohesion and performance. Communication methods that included the full team, required effective team leadership, and pursued the same goal were necessary to foster team trust (Shah & Arinze., 2023). Team cohesion occurred when the willingness of the individuals equaled the goals of the team. Virtual project team members worked together to reach team cohesion. Successful virtual project teams also relied on team member trust.

Strong relationships, team trust, and organizational culture were attributes of a firm's competitive advantage (Barney, 1995). Firms had difficulty replicating team trust because trust was built within each team separately. One virtual project team developed trust differently from another within the same organization. Likewise, trust within project teams developed differently from one firm to the other. A leading factor in the resource-based view conceptual framework included the inability to duplicate attributes such as strong trust among virtual project teams.

Transition

This section included the background of the study, the business problem, the purpose of the study, and the question this study answered. I also identified the interview questions (see also Appendix A), defined key terms, and discussed the conceptual framework. The section concluded with the literature review which exhausted the available research on telecommuting and examined the resource-based view conceptual framework.

Section 2: The Project

I used a qualitative multiple-case study approach for the project. As I discussed in Section 1, the qualitative method with the case study design was the suitable approach for exploring telecommuting strategies that some business leaders in human capital management organizations used to maintain productivity. In Section 2, after restating the study purpose, I provide an overview of the study, focusing on the methodology I used. I discuss my role in the research process, the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research procedures, and the data collection and analysis procedures.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore successful strategies that business leaders in human capital management organizations used to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute. The target population was comprised of four business leaders from three human capital management organizations whose teams were located within the United States. The leaders had successfully implemented strategies to maintain productivity among telecommuting employees. The implication for positive social change include increasing business leaders' awareness of the need to promote work–life balance among employees who telecommute. These efforts may help to make these jobs more sustainable. Increasing the prevalence of telecommuting in workplaces may help to reduce individual commuting time and increase employment opportunities in rural communities.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role is to add knowledge to the available literature on the phenomenon in the study (Snyder, 2019). The role of the researcher also includes setting parameters, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting findings (Yin, 2018). The parameters of this study included that participants were from human capital management organizations who currently managed telecommuting employees. The researcher performs as the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative case study (Yin, 2018). As the researcher and primary data collection instrument, I collected data by conducting semistructured telephone interviews with participants and listening to their stories. My success was dependent on the participants' willingness to share their experiences. My main goal was to collect and interpret data until I reached data saturation.

Throughout data collection, I sought to remain unbiased and follow ethical protocols. Researcher bias exists in all research (Gupta & Kim, 2023). The issues with researcher bias occur when researchers unintentionally skew the results of the study due to their own bias (Fusch et al., 2015). To help minimize bias, I selected participants with whom I was not personally acquainted and who work for businesses in which I did not have a vested interest. I avoided cultural bias as well by following the guidelines set forth in the *Belmont Report* for research involving human subjects (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). I asked permission to record the interviews. These recordings helped to ensure that I did not misremember any data. I also double-checked my notes to make sure that I had recorded everything accurately. I compiled responses

into themes and organized the strategies participants used when working with telecommuting employees.

Ethical protocols outlined in the *Belmont Report* provide guidelines for the protection of human subjects who participate in research. As noted in the *Belmont Report*, researchers should show respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). Respect for persons require that participants maintain autonomy throughout the study; those with diminished autonomy should be protected. Beneficence requires that the research not harm the participants, and if a possibility of risk exists then the possible benefits should outweigh the possible harm. Justice requires that those who bear the burden of the research also benefit from the research. I accomplished beneficence by reminding the participants that they were volunteers and were not required to provide responses if they felt uncomfortable or in any way could not respond. I accomplished respect for persons by keeping participant the personal information of participants, including their identities, confidential. I accomplished the justice aspect outlined in the *Belmont Report* by interviewing business leaders who might benefit from the study by learning strategies to promote work–life balance.

Participants

The participant sample is a smaller group selected out of the target population (Saunders et al., 2023). Although the target population encompassed business leaders in the human capital management industry, the participant sample focused on managers. The selection criteria included managers in the human capital management industry, who

had a minimum of 2 years in their managerial role and currently had telecommuting direct reports. To gain access to these participants, I reached out to individuals via LinkedIn and email who held managerial titles within an organization in the human capital management industry. I also utilized past coworkers who worked for new organizations in the human capital management industry to help identify managers within their organization who had telecommuting direct reports.

I contacted potential participants through LinkedIn using an introductory letter (see Appendix C). Prior to conducting the interviews, I established rapport with the potential participants, built trust, and enhanced the feedback I received during the interview by increasing the participants' comfort level (see Antes et al., 2019). I used a business networking tool, such as LinkedIn, to contact potential participants and built rapport through the common tool. The introductory letter introduced the potential participants to the research study. During the interviews, I used active listening, summarization, and empathy to allow the conversation to flow naturally (see McCarthy & LaChenaye, 2017). To conduct the interviews, I used videoconferencing tools.

Research Method and Design

Three research methods are available when conducting a study: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Yin, 2018). The four research designs under the qualitative method include case study, ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Researchers who use the qualitative method focus mostly on experiences whereas those who use the quantitative method focus on numeric data. The goal of this study was to explore telecommuting strategies. Each employee and each

organization had their differences, so it would have been difficult, using the quantitative method, to determine why some organizations had successful telecommuting employees whereas other organizations did not. Collecting information on the strategies that organizational leaders used required a conversation and the ability for leaders to share their experiences in an open-ended format. The numeric nature of the quantitative method would have limited feedback into measurable predetermined responses. The semistructured interview format of a qualitative method allowed participants to share their experiences without limiting the responses to measurable numeric data. I used the qualitative method and the case study design.

Research Method

The qualitative method allows researchers to explore themes related to a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2023). The ability to identify themes among participants was essential to understanding the effective strategies for business leaders with telecommuting employees. The qualitative method focused on participant experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2017). Participants shared stories or experiences that researchers used to help describe the phenomenon. The participant's subjective view of their experience added socially constructed meanings to the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2023). Selecting the qualitative method allowed me to gather more information regarding the experiences and strategies managers used with their telecommuting employees. The qualitative method allowed the participants to provide more accurate and complete responses that were not limited by answers already identified within a survey.

Quantitative researchers focused on numeric data for examining and describing variable relationships through statistical analysis (Connaway, 2022). Numeric data required researchers to focus on the objective aspects of a phenomenon (De Saint Georges, 2018). Researchers used the quantitative method to collect measurable data to test a theory or hypothesis (Kay & Young, 2022). The quantitative method was not appropriate because the process for analyzing data in this study was not statistical analysis.

Mixed-method researchers used both the qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a broader understanding of the subject phenomenon (Timans et al., 2019). The mixed-method was not appropriate because the study's purpose was not to use both quantitative and qualitative methods or include a statistical analysis. Qualitative researchers focused on nonnumeric data to explore concepts, opinions, or experiences (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Saunders et al., 2023). The qualitative method was most appropriate for this study because exploring experiences and associated descriptive characterizations was required to understand business leaders telecommuting strategies.

I used the qualitative research method for this study to explore the strategies some business leaders in human capital management organizations used to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute. I conducted interviews with predetermined interview questions (see Appendix A) and ensured a consistent experience across participants by following an interview protocol (see Appendix B). Consistency across participants through identifying the specific research questions ahead of time, sticking to the identified list of questions, and using the same interview format with all

participants was essential to maintaining research integrity (Avgoustaki & Bessa, 2019). The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because I intended to gain in-depth insight into the participants' experiences with productivity in telecommuting employees.

Research Design

The research design provided the plan the researcher followed to collect and analyze data related to a phenomenon (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). Through the study's research method and research design I explored strategies business leaders used to manage telecommuting employees. I used a multiple-case study design to collect data from more than one organization. The case study represented one of four qualitative research designs aimed at exploring why a phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2018).

The four qualitative research designs were: case study, ethnography, phenomenological, and narrative research. Researchers conducting a case study used the interview technique to gather data (Crowe et al., 2011). An ethnographic study used the narrative approach (Saunders et al., 2023). A phenomenological study utilized the interview approach, conducted as the participants were living the experience. The narrative research design used the story telling approach to share the participant's individual piece of a phenomenon.

Ethnography occurred when researchers collected information on a group that shared a common culture (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The researcher collected an individual's actions within a social and cultural context (Strong et al., 2023). The ethnographic study was inappropriate because culture was not relevant to the study's purpose.

Researchers conducted a phenomenological study to understand personal meanings of participants' shared experiences within a social or cultural context (Amatullah et al., 2020). Phenomenological studies gathered information on the participant's understanding of an event, focused on the experience of the participant (Larkin et al., 2019). The phenomenological design was inappropriate because the study was not investigating the personal meanings of participants' shared experiences.

Grounded theory enabled researchers to develop a theory for explaining phenomena through data collection and analysis (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2020). Grounded theory was inappropriate because the study's purpose was not to develop a new theory. This research study used an existing conceptual framework as the lens by which to view the data collected but did not generate a new theory or conceptual framework from the data collected.

Narrative study participants shared stories regarding their personal-life experiences (Gholami et al., 2020). Researchers used the narrative approach to explore the deeper meaning behind the participant's experiences. The narrative recorded the participant's first-person account but included subjective interpretation in the telling of the experience. The narrative design was inappropriate because personal life experiences were not the study's purpose.

In a case study, the researcher collected information on a single or multiple individuals, programs, events, or organizations through observation, interviews, or documentation to observe a change over time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Yin, 2018). The multiple-case study was the appropriate research design for my study because the goal of

my study was to understand the participants' human capital management industry from multiple organizations regarding strategies to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute.

In the case study research design the researcher collected information from one or more individuals in an interview format (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Yin, 2018). The ability to ask participants open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) allowed me to collect new, potentially unknown, information regarding the telecommuting phenomenon. If I did not ask open-ended questions, then the responses were based on what information I already had and what has been published previously regarding managing telecommuting employees. The goal of the study was to find out from managers what their strategies were, not to find out what limited selection of strategies the participant might agree with or has tried in the past.

Data saturation when conducting a case study helped researchers ensure all feasible data points were addressed. Data saturation occurred when no new data or themes arose during an interview (Fusch et al., 2015). I ensured data saturation by asking probing questions during the interview to pull more information out of the participant. I also used confirming statements to prompt elaboration from the participant. Allowing the participant to respond to the initial question and then asking follow up questions exhausted the topic so no new themes arose. I made sure we had a complete response to each interview question before moving on. I also sent a summary of the interview to the participant with a copy of the interview transcript, to allow them to add any new items we may have missed, and to confirm all data points were addressed.

Population and Sampling

Defining the Population

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore successful strategies that business leaders in human capital management organizations used to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute. The multiple-case study population was comprised of four managers from three human capital management organizations, who worked at least 2 years within their role, and whose teams included telecommuting employees located within the United States. This study focused on telecommuting employees. Telecommuting employees could work using their own technology or company provided technology, communicate with team members using email and instant messaging tools, and participate in real time videoconferencing from any time zone (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Due to the nature of telecommuting, the geographic location of the population sample was less stringent. The sample was limited to managers working within the United States.

Sampling

I used the convenience sampling technique in this study. Convenience sampling referred to collecting data from any qualified individual, conveniently accessible, and willing to participate in the study (Scholtz, 2021). This sampling technique ensured I was able to find willing participants within the time and cost constraints of the study. Convenience sampling also ensured I had participants with the availability necessary for my chosen collection method.

The collection methods in a multiple-case study included face-to-face interactions, conversations over the telephone, email, instant messaging, and videoconferencing (Saunders et al., 2023). I used interviews over video-conferencing tools. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Saturation and Sampling

Data saturation occurred when no new data or themes surfaced during an interview regardless of sample size (Fusch et al., 2015). In this study the target sample size was four participants. According to Fusch et al. (2015), the sample size does not impact data saturation. Due to time and cost restraints, limiting the target sample size to four participants ensured enough participants were located for the study. The participants completed a semistructured interview. The ideal length for a semistructured multiple-case study interview to reach saturation occurred between 60 and 90 min (Almakayeel et al., 2023; Firestone et al., 2020). To ensure enough time was allocated to complete the interview and reach data saturation, participants received a 90-min meeting invitation based on their availability, which allowed for the recommended 60–90-min interview time.

<div align="center">

Ethical Research

</div>

I solicited participants based on their job title, place of employment and experience with telecommuting employees. I provided participants an outline of the study's scope. I asked participants to share their experiences in managing strategies to maintain productivity in telecommuting employees. Participants signed an informed consent document and agreed to participate in the study. An informed consent document

referred to the process of collecting consent from the participant after the participant learned of a study's purpose, procedures, benefits, and risks (Bhupathi & Ravi, 2017). The informed consent form included a summary of the study, the study's purpose, and the study's objectives, I identified participant qualifications and outlined the selection method, I also provided contact information so the participant could reach out with any questions or concerns regarding the study or research process.

Researchers followed established ethical procedures during a study (Shepherd et al., 2021). A consent form made participants aware of their rights during the study and identified the participation as voluntary (Raj et al., 2018). After identifying the participants, I reviewed the consent form with them to make sure they had a clear understanding of the objectives and their rights. The consent form included the (a) study's purpose, (b) voluntary participant, (c) participant's privacy and confidentiality, (d) process for withdrawing. Participants were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Kazembe et al., 2022).

In addition to identifying the voluntary nature of the study I informed the participants that their identity remained confidential. There was no monetary, personal, or professional gain offered to participants for participating in the study. The benefit of participating in the research study was to provide other managers with necessary insight to run an effective telecommuting workforce.

Protecting a participant's health and safety were also key factors in an academic study (Makhoul et al., 2018). This study was conducted via semistructured phone interviews, the participant's health and safety were not impacted by the nature of the

study. However, because the interviews were conducted over the phone, I verified with the participants that they were not driving or operating machinery before we began. The ethical procedures of the study were reviewed by the Walden University Institutional Review Board before data collection occurred.

I followed the Walden University Institutional Review Board requirements and ensured none of the data collected contained personal identifiers that revealed the identity of participants or their organizations. Personal identifying information included the participant's name, email address, address, and place of business. Using alphanumeric coding, such as P1 for participant 1, and P2 for participant 2 helped ensure the participants were clearly labeled during analysis but kept their information confidential. I also limited email communication to my Walden University email address to ensure all information remained within the Walden University security protocols. Participants who met all requirements received a consent form (and an invitation to participate.

Data Collection Instruments

As the researcher in the qualitative case study, I was the data collection instrument (Thompson et al., 2023). I used three data collection methods. Using more than one collection method allowed for data triangulation (Yin, 2018). In this study I used semistructured interviews as one data collection method, observations as another data collection method, and reviewed archival records as a third data collection method where available.

As the primary data collection method, I conducted the semistructured interviews over the phone. Recording each interview was important to make sure I captured all

responses and could refer to the recording to make sure I did not miss any themes. I used a transcription tool which ensured interviews were converted to text for documentation and used as a guide as I analyzed the data. The interviews featured the outlined interview questions (see Appendix A). I observed each participant's demeanor during the interview to determine if they needed clarification of any interview questions or if they needed additional probing questions to provide more accurate and complete responses. I reviewed and analyzed any available archival records relevant to telecommuting through available corporate databases or public records.

Data Collection Technique

The research question was, What strategies do business leaders in human capital management organizations use to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute? To answer this question, I conducted semistructured interviews using protocols appropriate for qualitative studies. Prior to locating my participants, I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (approval no. 09-15-22-1016721) to conduct the research. I located my participants through LinkedIn and references from past coworkers. I interviewed the participants using open ended questions and probing questions which allowed participants to draw more details from their experiences. All interviews were recorded and transcribed through a transcription tool. I observed participant behavior during the interview. I triangulated the interview data using public archived documentation from each company.

Semistructured interviews helped researchers collect direct knowledge from individuals who experienced the phenomenon (Alam, 2021). I used videoconferencing

interview techniques and observed pauses or audible cues not relevant in the participant's direct responses and could provide additional context to their responses (Buchnik & Frenkel, 2023). Due to the nature of the human capital management implementation industry, the location of primary human capital management hubs in the United States for non-telecommuting leadership, and the telecommuting research topic, the business leaders I interviewed were located across the United States. Therefore, I used videoconferencing tools to fulfill my interview technique. I identified the interview questions (see Appendix A) ahead of time, which helped answer the research question and guided the conversation which allowed participants to share their experiences. The questions were open ended, participants provided in-depth and illustrative information regarding their experiences (Wielenga, 2018).

Semistructured interviews were a great technique for asking open ended questions when participants provided details surrounding their experiences. As with all techniques, disadvantages were present as well. Semistructured interviews were at risk of the participant veering off topic by sharing information not relevant or helpful to the study. The open-ended nature of semistructured interview questions sometimes lead to misunderstanding or confusion by the participant which resulted in the participant either refusing to or being unable to provide a response. Time constraints on either the participant or the researcher limited the amount of data collected within an interview. Likewise, too many questions caused the participant to lose interest or struggle to follow along, which impacted the participant's responses (Willis et al., 2021). To ensure I did not miss anything during the interviews I utilized both the recording feature in the

videoconferencing tool and an audio transcription tool. In addition, background noise and environmental influences negatively impact semistructured interviews. To avoid these conflicts, I scheduled interviews during business hours after coordinating the best time and date for both the participant and the researcher which limited any possible background noise or external distractions.

Validity in qualitative research required dependability, consistency, and repeatability (Cypress, 2021). Member checking and dependability checking were strategies for ensuring complete data collection (Morse, 2018). Member checking allowed participants to review their own data collection results and ensured it accurately represented their experiences (Erb & Loppie, 2023). Once all data collection was complete, I reviewed the transcripts of each interview, validated member checking, provided participants a summary of their interview with a copy of the transcription and allowed them to review the data for accuracy. I asked participants to confirm accuracy or provide changes.

Data Organization Technique

Researchers maintained and securely managed data for future auditing requests for a period of at least 5 years (Yin, 2018). Recorded interviews, interview transcripts, and any archived documentation were stored together on a secured OneDrive. In case anything goes wrong with the OneDrive, physical copies were printed of the meeting transcripts and the archival data and stored securely in a safe. I identified each participant using a unique alphanumeric designator based on the sequence of interviews to ensure that each participant's data were accurately separated. Using a code to identify

participants ensured confidentiality when data were reviewed (Kirilova & Karcher, 2017). I used an audio recording to capture all verbal ques. I captured notes electronically during the interview, which I used while reviewing the data. Five years after the completion of the study, the data will be deleted from the OneDrive and shredded from the safe.

Data Analysis

The appropriate data analysis method depends on a study's research design. I used three data collection methods for this multiple-case study: (a) semistructured interviews, (b) observations, and (c) reviews of archival data. The use of two or more data collection methods allowed for methodological triangulation (see Yin, 2018). As Denzin and Lincoln (2023) noted, methodological triangulation is the most appropriate data analysis method for a qualitative case study.

The steps for analyzing data included (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding (Yin, 2018). To compile the data, I organized the collected data by participant and grouped the archival data and observation notes to the relevant interview. I created a separate digital folder for each participant and then combined all participant folders into a single folder. Individual folders for each participant ensured that the necessary preliminary data, such as consent forms, were collected before participant interviews occurred. Data categorized into similar groupings helps researchers quickly identify data groups while conducting data analysis (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

Disassembling required reading the interview transcripts and writing down topics the participant identified in their responses. I coded data collected from the interviews and documented where the coding occurred using the interview categorizations. Reassembling involved organizing the participant's topics and grouping similar topics into themes among interviews. I combined similar responses into larger themes. Participant responses organized into themes provided more insight into the studied phenomenon (see Guest et al., 2020). Interpreting the data consisted of developing a narrative from the themes and categorization. By analyzing data, I was able to locate patterns in the study and identify emergent themes.

The concluding step of the data analysis process required linking the key themes to recent studies outlined in the literature review. I used the resource-based view conceptual framework for this study. The resource-based view focused on a firm's strategic ability to obtain the competitive advantage within their industry (Barney, 1991). With this conceptual framework, I explored strategies business leaders used in the human capital management industry to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute. When analyzing data collected from interviews, I identified thematic support for strategies that assisted firms in obtaining the competitive advantage with telecommuting employees.

Reliability and Validity

The fundamental question of this study regarded the participant's experience while managing telecommuting employees. The purpose was to provide a description to others regarding how managers maintain productivity with telecommuting employees.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2017), a qualitative study that provided a description of the participants experience with the phenomenon, needed triangulation as the major validity criteria.

Reliability

Reliability referred to the study's dependability. A dependable study when duplicated produced similar results (Yin, 2018). To ensure the study could be duplicated, I provided the chosen methodology, the list of interview questions (see Appendix A), and the research question. I maintained consistency in data collection by following an interview protocol (see Appendix B) to minimize researcher bias. The duplication in a qualitative research study allowed researchers to recognize patterns (Lawrence, 2017). When participants shared similar information that could be coded to the same theme, researchers were able to ensure data saturation across participants.

Dependability

Dependability referred to the level of trust a researcher placed in the consistency of the collected data (Cont et al., 2023). I ensured dependability by utilizing the outlined interview questions and referred to those interview questions with every participant. I also ensured dependability by selecting participants who met the criteria. The ability to duplicate the research helped to validate the study's dependability. I maintained accurate notes, followed the data retention policies, and completed member checking which helped enable future researchers to duplicate the process and validate the dependability of the study.

Member Checking

Member checking established reliability in a qualitative study (Candela, 2019; Stahl & King, 2020). Member checking referred to when participants reviewed their own data collection results and ensured it accurately represented their experiences (Erb & Loppie, 2023). I engaged in member checking when I created transcripts of each interview, summarized my interpretations, and then sent the summaries to the participants. Sending the summary to the participant allowed the participant to verify whether I understood their responses fully and accurately. The participants confirmed the data's accuracy or provided updates to clarify any inaccuracies.

Validity

A qualitative study's validity referred to its credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Zheng & Yu, 2019). Transferability referred to external validity, while confirmability and credibility referred to internal validity (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The subsections below contained additional details regarding credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Validity referred to the trustworthiness of the study (Fusch et al., 2015). Trustworthiness referred to the ability of the findings from a sample size to represent the full population. Representation across the population was found using methodological triangulation.

Credibility

I ensured credibility by reviewing the participant transcripts and confirmed my notes were complete and I identified all themes. I also ensured credibility by utilizing methodological triangulation using multiple data collection methods. Methodological

triangulation required using all-encompassing data relevant to the participant's interview to achieve credibility (Raskind et al., 2018). The multiple data collecting methods included semistructured interviews with participants, observations, and reviewing archival data.

Confirmability

Confirmability occurred when other participants support the results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability also required the researcher to confirm that the data collected represented the interpretation of the participant, not the researcher's bias. Methodological triangulation and probing questions during the interview helped confirm participant responses. Utilizing archival data, and observation in addition to semistructured interviews helped to confirm the analysis so another researcher could confirm the results. Providing the participant a summary of the interview reduced researcher bias by confirming the interpretations were based on the participant's views.

Transferability

Transferability referred to the application of the results to other contexts. Using rich data, purposive sampling, and complete interviews provided content applicable to other researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Taking accurate notes and reviewing the transcripts ensured I provided all the information I collected and generated accurate themes. Methodological triangulation ensured the study provided supporting data beneficial to other researchers.

Data Saturation

Data saturation occurred in a qualitative study when participants began to describe the same phenomenon (Hennink & Kaiser, 2020). Data saturation supported fulfilling the study's validity and reliability. Researchers know they reached data saturation when no new information or themes arose from the data sources (Saunders, et al., 2023). I reached data saturation because my analysis generated no new information, and my coding process identified no new themes.

Transition and Summary

In Section 1 of this study, I provided the foundation and background of the business problem, In Section 2, I restated the purpose statement, expanded on topics such as the nature of the study, and provided an overview of the study. This section also included details on the semistructured interviews and methodological triangulation of sources. In Section 3, I provide details regarding the research and discuss the results in relation to the literature review and conceptual framework. The section includes a detailed analysis of the data collected, including interview responses, themes, and related documentation associated with the study. Section 3 also includes discussion of professional practice applications and recommendations for future research. The section ends with discussion of my experience conducting the study and an overall conclusion to the work.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore successful strategies that business leaders in human capital management organizations used to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute. I focused on the strategies used by managers. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with four managers with telecommuting direct reports. The findings include five themes for maintaining productivity in telecommuting employees: (a) effective communication, (b) people management, (c) resource engagement, (d) technology management, and (e) work–life balance. In Section 3, I present the findings of this research, detail potential applications to professional practice, consider the study's implications for positive social change, share recommendations for action and further research, summarize my reflections, and provide a conclusion.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for the study was, What strategies do business leaders in human capital management organizations use to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute? To answer the research question, I interviewed four managers from three human capital management organizations, with telecommuting direct reports, who were in their role at least 2 years. The participants shared their lived experiences on the techniques they used to implement effective telecommuting strategies. Through semistructured interviews and observations, five themes emerged: (a) effective

communication, (b) people management, (c) resource engagement, (d) technology management, and (e) work–life balance.

I assigned the participants and related companies alphanumeric codes of P1, P2, P3, and P4 for participants and C1, C2, and C3 for companies. The semistructured interviews were scheduled for 90 min each. Each interview lasted approximately 60 min. I realized data saturation when participants provided similar details in their responses to questions and no new data emerged. Also, after the fourth interview, no new themes or information emerged, so there was no need for more interviews. I recorded the interview audio and used audio transcription tools during the interviews via Microsoft Teams. Following the interviews, I summarized the transcribed data and then emailed the summary and the transcripts back to each participant for member checking and to ensure accurate interpretation. All participants agreed with the summarized interview responses. After the participants completed member checking and confirmed the transcription, I used NVivo to code the data.

Using the NVivo software, I identified the recurring themes in the interviews and supporting documentation. I compared transcripts from each interview, notes, website information, and publications. I incorporated Yin's (2018) data analysis steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. Disassembling required reading the interview transcripts and writing down topics the participant identified in their responses. Reassembling involved organizing the participants' topics and grouping related topics into themes among interviews. Interpreting the data consisted of developing a narrative from the themes and categorization. The conclusion step required linking the

key themes to recent studies outlined in the literature review. Table 1 shows the themes that emerged within the study.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentage of Responses for Emerging Themes

Emerging theme	*f*	% of total
Resource engagement	75	33
Effective communication	58	26
Technology management	44	19
People management	29	13
Work–life balance	20	9
Total	226	100

The resource engagement theme was mentioned 75 times and included 33% of the participant responses. The effective communication theme was mentioned 58 times and included 26% of the participant responses. The technology management theme was mentioned 44 times and included 19% of the participant responses. The people management theme was mentioned 29 times and included 13% of the participant responses. The work–life balance theme was mentioned 20 times and included 9% of the participant responses.

Resource engagement referred to the telecommuting employee's level of work-related interactions. Employees affected their own engagement levels through participating in team building and employee inclusion initiatives. The manager affected employee engagement levels by setting expectations and providing direct feedback. The telecommuting employee's level of engagement was also tracked through employee metrics. Metrics recorded active employee work, such as time spent on project based and non-project-based tasks.

Effective communication referred to the information shared between employees, managers, and team members. Successful telecommuting employees communicated with managers and team members when they needed support or could offer support. Recurring scheduled meetings ensured that employees and managers communicated on a consistent basis. Manager feedback provided employees direction and opportunities for correction when needed.

Technology management referred to the internal technology employees and managers used to be successful. Companies provided hardware, software, and online tools that impacted telecommuting employee effectiveness. Employees and managers also used technology to record project metrics, which ensured that work was completed in a timely manner and projects progressed.

People management referred to the management tasks of the manager. The managers forecasted work based on what the employee was working on, the anticipated duration of that work, and tasks the manager already scheduled the employee to work on that had not yet started. Managers also documented employee performance and achieved a careful balance between being a micromanager versus being completely absent.

Work–life balance referred to the employee's ability to separate their personal life and professional life. Positive work–life balance included flexibility, and negative work–life balance included distractions. In this section, I further discuss work–life balance for telecommuting employees. I also present the other four themes and specific participant responses.

Theme 1: Resource Engagement

Resource engagement, specifically individual employee engagement, was a consistent strategy mentioned by all participants while discussing productivity from telecommuting employees. Within the resource engagement theme, participants focused on five main topics: (a) team building, (b) setting expectations, (c) employee inclusion, (d) employee metrics, and (e) providing feedback. Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of total references to resource engagement.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of Responses Related to Resource Engagement

Topic	f	% of total
Team building	20	27
Setting expectations	18	24
Employee inclusion	14	19
Employee metrics	13	17
Providing feedback	10	13
Total	75	100

All four participants identified team building as a method that increased the employee engagement level from their direct reports. P1 stated,

We want to feel like even though we're virtual, you can build a sense of team. It doesn't have to come from sitting in the office. It can come from meetings, being on camera, and seeing people's faces once a week.

P1 and P2 were both from business C1 and stated C1 required webcam on specific client facing calls. P3 and P4, from businesses C2 and C3 respectively, also stated their organizations required webcam on specific calls. All four participants stated when they incorporated webcam into their team meetings it helped with team building. Seeing each

other's faces via webcam weekly or monthly helped keep resources engaged during group calls.

P2 stated opportunities to foster team building were not limited to attendance in group calls but suggested individual team members experienced greater team building when engaged in leadership roles during group calls, "we really try and encourage actual team members to lead some of the initiatives and presentations." P2 stated C1 allowed not only leaders, but individual contributors to present lessons learned or information regarding new releases and product updates at the team level as well as the corporate level. The review of online documents also showed C1 allowed individual contributors to present to customers during corporate events.

In addition to group calls and presentations, P3 identified employee and manager one-on-one meetings as a team building opportunity that increased employee engagement. P3 stated, "People want to feel like they're part of a team and not in no man's land. The one-on-ones and face to face interactions during team calls are good." The review of public documents for C2 showed individual employees often contributed to projects from a consulting perspective as the only employee who worked with a specific client. Using individual meetings with employees P3 measured their engagement level and assessed whether additional team building was needed.

P4 stated collaboration among employees and identifying knowledge experts within the team created team building opportunities, "It's really good to have them be SMEs or partners with other folks in the organization to help learn and help support and really build that collaboration." The review of public documents for C3 identified C3 as a

knowledge leader in the human capital management industry. P4 relied on the knowledge of tenured employees within the company to help train new hires and build the team.

In addition to team building, participants identified properly setting expectations as a necessity for keeping telecommuting employees engaged and productive. Managers needed to ensure employees understood when to be available, how to engage with customers, and when tasks were due.

P1 stated, "expectation setting is crucial" to keeping resources engaged, "although there's flexibility, you need to be on your calls that you're scheduled for, you need to be available for customers." The resource engagement level was managed by setting expectations upfront.

P2 set meeting expectations for both team meetings and one-on-one meetings to measure employee engagement. The participant stated "the expectation with my team is that webcam during our one-on-one is always used unless they have some reason they can't. I need to be able to see their reactions and see if people are equally engaged in the conversation." P2 stated C1 required webcam during several client-facing meetings so setting the webcam expectation during one-on-one meetings increased the employee's comfort level in using their camera.

P3 emphasized the importance of setting expectations up front during the hiring process and during employee one-on-one meetings. The participant stated setting expectations combined with monitoring resource engagement was a clear indicator of employee performance and productivity by stating "if I thought there was a problem, I bring it to their attention right away, because when review time comes along, it should

never be a surprise." P3 utilized the annual review process within C2 as an opportunity to reset expectations.

P4 also emphasized setting expectations regarding resource engagement level, and stated, "I'm setting the expectations up front, providing them the support they need by asking them how we can help." P4 relied on C3 to help employees remain engaged by putting the onus on the employee to request the things they need.

All participants stated it was not enough to build the team, the employee must also feel included. Employees who felt included were more likely to remain engaged. Participants relied on discussions with employees and company culture to help increase employee inclusion.

P1 stated employee inclusion required ensuring the employee felt supported, "making sure the employees have the support they need, making sure they feel they're part of the team and that they have all the resources available." P1 needed feedback from the employee to assess whether the employee felt included. P1 also required support from C1 to create an inclusive environment and provided any necessary support.

P2 wanted to increase the inclusion feeling in employees by "breaking the barrier of only communicating if they have to" through increasing the amount of team discussions within the company instant messaging tool "to celebrate anniversaries, announce birthdays, and provide kudos." P2 partnered with C1 to foster employee inclusion initiatives by sharing employee personal and professional milestones.

P3 implemented new onboarding techniques and increased employee inclusion which ensured "people who are so far away feel more connected to the corporate office."

P3 stated C2 struggled with onboarding telecommuting employees because the employee was not physically in the office. P3 initiated additional communication and opportunities for employees to connect with new hires. New hires experienced employee inclusion when existing employees helped to explain processes and mentored them.

P4 focused on the social factors of engaging resources to ensure employees felt included, "if you're engaged and social, you're usually productive and providing great service to our clients." The public documents for C3 identified customer on-site travel as a requirement for some projects as well as annual in-person corporate events for employees. P4 stated attending face-to-face events helped provide inclusion opportunities which kept employees engaged through social interactions.

Resource engagement was impacted by attempts that increased employee inclusion, leadership's ability to set expectations, and the opportunities for team building. However, resource engagement was measured by employee metrics. Metrics applied to more than one theme in this study. Employee metrics regarding resource engagement referred the employee's level of effort in a project, to perform a task, or to meet a deliverable.

P1 evaluated metrics showing "if someone's being productive, how they're logging their time towards projects, and how they're moving their projects and deliverables along." Employees who were actively engaged also appeared engaged on paper via their employee metrics. P1 could view how much time the employee spent on each project and how much time the employee spent not performing project work. Through employee metrics, P1 evaluated the employee's work effort during each week.

P2 emphasized overall resource engagement levels by acknowledging the employee's efforts from both a billable and nonbillable perspective, stating, "we measure on productive utilization and survey results to measure productivity." C1 identified productive utilization as the billable time plus the nonbillable time an employee allocated to a project. P2 reviewed employee metrics as an opportunity to ensure employees were engaged and productive even when their billable hours were exhausted. Similar to P1, P2 used metrics to measure employee engagement levels, but argued an employee's nonbillable time also showed productive resource engagement levels.

P3 measured resource engagement by assessing the projects assigned to the employee, and the estimated effort on each project, stating, "I can gauge capacity by looking at who has each project along with the complexity of the project, to see who might have more capacity to take on another client." C2 was a project-based company with individual consultants fulfilling customer needs. P3 needed to understand the employee's true engagement level on each project to prevent over assigning work. The employee's engagement levels were assessed by reviewing employee metrics via timesheets and anticipated effort identified in a project's scope documents.

P4 measured resource engagement level by reviewing the employee's metrics holistically and adjusted when needed. P4 stated, "I'm forecasting, you're going to be working 10 hr a week on this project, 20 hr a week on this project, and then we measure that against what your actuals are and have discussions if there's a large variance." P4, like P3, also used employee timesheets to measure employee metrics, but then extended the data to include project metrics to determine if adjustments were needed. The

forecasted effort P4 identified was based on project metrics, and the actuals P4 identified were based on the employee's timesheet.

Employee metrics provided documentation regarding resource engagement and a telecommuting employee's productivity, but it did not provide the details behind the data. Employee feedback allowed employees and managers to discuss the employee's engagement and productivity. Feedback applied to more than one theme in this study. Providing feedback referred specifically to the employee's opportunity to provide their perspective and was essential to positive and continued resource engagement levels.

P1 emphasized receiving feedback from team members to keep employees engaged and providing a sense of ownership, "they're seeing the project through a different lens, so getting feedback from not necessarily just metrics or conversations, but from the team members." P1 requested feedback from employees to determine if there was an unknown issue or showstopper impacting the project. Employees provided details and notes that contributed to the metrics when assessing employee productivity.

P2 welcomed 360-feedback from team members so long as they were willing to include suggestions. P2 asked employees, "if you have something to complain about, then I'm going to ask you, what would you propose as a solution. So they can come back to the team with suggestions from a peer's perspective." P2 stated employee feedback was essential to improving productivity. However, if the feedback included complaints, the employee needed to be willing to help identify a resolution. Providing feedback tied closely back to employee inclusion and setting expectations by requiring employees to help in resolving the issues they experienced. P2 expressed that if C1 provided a solution

the employees did not like, it doesn't help to have C1 provide another solution the employees will not like. Instead, the employees needed to contribute to the resolution.

P3 stated resources could always remain engaged and if they were low on hours provided them feedback about their engagement level, stating "they should always be doing something, they should be taking training, they should be shadowing." Providing feedback to the employee helped the employee recognize there were additional ways to remain engaged. P3 used providing feedback as a conversation between the employee and manager that in some cases required P3 to initiate. The conversations regarding engagement level allowed employees to provide feedback about lack of work and for P3 to respond with opportunities to increase employee productivity levels.

P4 reached out to the employees for suggestions when their engagement levels were low, stating, "If their engagement levels were low, we want to put together an action plan. What is their feedback? Why is their engagement lower than others? Look to them for suggestions." Like P2, P4 requested suggestions directly from the employee to help increase engagement levels from less productive contributors. Like P3, P4 also initiated conversations to instigate feedback from employees.

P2 and P4 both stated engaged employees were highly productive and provided great support to clients. All four participants identified engaged resources as offering support to team members frequently and available to work with the customer. Successful telecommuting workers were available, engaged, and able to perform the work with minimal supervision (Krumm et al., 2016). Engaged telecommuting workers were available when needed, completed their work, and communicated with others.

Leaders measured resource engagement through employee productivity. P1, P2, and P3 discussed billable and nonbillable hours on a project to assess how productively a resource managed their time. P2 stated productivity measurements included comparing how much time the telecommuting worker spent on project-based work versus additional tasks or non-project work. All four participants conducted project reviews by assessing how much time each direct report spent on each project and determined if a team member needed additional work to remain engaged, or if a team member experienced overwork and risked burnout.

Resource Engagement Link to the Resource-Based View Conceptual Framework

The resource-based view conceptual framework was developed to explain how firms sustained the competitive advantage by implementing strategies to exploit their resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). The resource engagement theme identified several uses of intangible resources and strategic advantage opportunities within the participant responses. A firm's intangible resources included items that could not be touched but the firm still owned, including the firm's employees (Wang et al., 2018). All four participants identified the intangible resources (a) team building, (b) company culture, (c) onboarding processes, (d) software technology, and (e) and knowledge sharing as necessary to successfully manage telecommuting employees.

P2, P3, and P4 identified the internal team brand as a factor in telecommuting team success. Participants increased team engagement and provided employees an opportunity to participate in team activities through virtual conferencing tools which increased the resource's feeling of belonging. The participants stated they encouraged

peer connections through available intangible resources such as technology and knowledge sharing which promoted resource engagement and helped the resources feel like part of the team.

Resource engagement also aligned closely to the strategic advantage opportunities identified within the resource-based view conceptual framework. Firms obtained the strategic advantage by combining the value resources plus strategies brought to the firm (Barney, 1986). All four participants identified effective new hire training and frequent team member support as strategies that kept resources engaged. Each of the participants stated they met with telecommuting employees frequently and assessed project statuses and next steps then provided the right level of support to each team member to remain productive. In addition, P1 and P3 emphasized initially finding the right fit during the hiring process as an essential strategic advantage.

Resource Engagement Link to the Literature

The resource engagement theme aligned closely to the employee productivity and telecommuting employee topics within the literature. Employee productivity required the combined quality requirements of the customer and the productivity objectives of the organization (Harris, 2020). All four participants stated employee productivity was higher when they set expectations upfront, identified employee availability requirements, and identified the expected time to complete specific tasks. P1, P2, and P3 identified the billable versus nonbillable hours used to complete a task for a customer impacted the employee's productivity measurements within the organization.

Telecommuting employees, with relation to resource engagement, covered a significant section of the literature on telecommuting employees. Sochat (2021) identified strategies for telecommuting best practices. The strategies all four participants identified during the interviews that also aligned to Sochat's strategies included: (a) team building by connecting with others, (b) employee onboarding practices to make sure the employee was working on something they cared about, (c) using webcam during some meetings to ensure the appropriate method of communication was used for the relevant task, and (d) a feeling of belonging and accomplishment throughout the day.

Theme 2: Effective Communication

The second theme that emerged was the need for effective communication. P1, P2, and P3 stated effective communication was important because teams in an office collaborated using conference areas or sitting side by side at a desk while telecommuting workers did not have that ability. All four participants sited regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings and team meetings, or ad hoc employee calls as essential to remaining successful and maintaining productivity. P2, P3, and P4 also addressed the importance of employee autonomy while remaining in close communication. The leaders wanted to ensure employees completed their work, but not micromanage their team members. Within the effective communication theme, three topics emerged: (a) employee communication, (b) meetings, and (c) manager feedback. Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of total references to effective communication.

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage of Responses Related to Effective Communication

Topic	*f*	% of total
Employee communication	29	50
Meetings	15	26
Manager feedback	14	24
Total	58	100

All four participants emphasized employee communication as an essential tool when managing telecommuting employees. Employees who did not communicate, and worked outside the office, were less effective, and less productive than their peers. Effective communication with telecommuting employees often required employees who communicated frequently.

P1 encouraged employees "to reach out and have peer connections, fostering that in your team meetings is crucial." Employees needed to communicate with team members performing the same job. Telecommuting employees needed to communicate with more than their direct supervisor when they needed help. Fostering peer connections allowed the employees to connect with subject matter experts on the team for support.

Similarly, P2 stated employees must be willing to reach out to each other for help to be successful when telecommuting, "talking through troubleshooting and being involved in presentations, in a telecommuting world, lends to much more than if it was just managers communicating." P2 emphasized the importance of employees communicating with each other. Employee to employee communication allowed for knowledge holders to troubleshoot issues together as current practitioners.

P3 stated being in "constant communication and looking at what the employee is working on helps me determine their productivity." P3 identified communication from employees regarding tasks as a key tool when client issues occurred, stating, "I require their weekly updates to be detailed, so there are no surprises for me if something comes up." P3 used employee communication to know what the employee was working on and to provide support when needed. Public documents indicated that frequently C2 assigned a single employee to each client account, in some cases two to three employees to a client account. P3 relied on employee communication to know a client's status and to help instruct a backup resource in case the employee was unexpectedly out of the office.

P4 stated successful telecommuting employees were more willing to communicate with each other, stating for employees who work in an office, "it's pretty easy to collaborate getting the conference room if you need help. Remote folks need to be willing to raise their virtual hand." Reviewing public documents, C3 provided guidance and advice to new and potential clients regarding onboarding new employees. Managers needed to be available during new hire training and offered additional support, but managers did not know an employee needed additional help if the employee did not speak up. P4 identified successful telecommuting employees as individuals who communicated with managers and team members when they needed support.

Another communication strategy mentioned by all four participants was the importance of regularly scheduled meetings. All participants stated a recurring frequency, set duration, and shared agenda provided team members a cadence to remain productive. Employees could limit distractions overlapping the meeting time because they knew

when the meeting would start. Employees could increase their productivity during the meeting by preparing their supporting documentation ahead of the meeting based on the topics identified on the agenda. Employees could set a deadline cadence for individual tasks that were part of a future deliverable based on the meeting frequency. Employees could also limit distractions that occurred during the meeting by knowing when the meeting would end, and therefore, when they could address any other work-related or nonwork-related tasks.

P1 ensured team members knew what to expect on group calls, stating, "you know what you are doing, what you are bringing up, and what you are focusing on." P1 communicated ahead of the meeting and provided an agenda for team meetings and stated recurring project meetings aligned to deliverables already identified in the project plan. Team members were able to prepare relevant information for the recurring meetings which allowed them to effectively communicate project or deliverable status.

P2 created separate group calls to address specific needs on the team, "we hold a weekly work group call that does nothing but talk about schedules." P2 focused recurring meetings based on the topics they needed to communicate. One recurring meeting focused on schedules to ensure employees were remaining productive. P2 used recurring and individualized meetings to limit topic creep and cover the required items with the appropriate audience. C1 identified clients by industry and created projects by industry. P2 managed a team that overlapped industry work groups and scheduled separate status meetings for each industry work group.

P3 emphasized communication through regularly scheduled meetings, and "making sure they have what they need. Having our one-on-ones to make sure they are on track, and then monthly meetings so they can connect with everyone they work with." P3 identified the importance of team inclusion within scheduled meetings. Individual one-on-one meetings with employees made sure P3 and the employee were communicating. Since employees within C2 were spread out among clients, regularly scheduled group meetings provided an additional opportunity for the team to collaborate.

P4 stated consistent communication was important in managing productivity, and that it was necessary to connect with employees regularly to collect the subjective "narrative week to week and see if the story really matches the effort." P4 used regularly scheduled meetings as an opportunity to discuss productivity and for employees and managers to communicate the details. A lot could happen within a week, P4 recognized the importance of collecting subjective input from employees and managers regarding productivity. Managers had the opportunity to share concerns from a managerial perspective with the employee and ask questions. Employees had the opportunity to share concerns regarding tasks, deliverables, and overall projects with managers, request support, and ask questions.

Manager feedback differed from employee communication based on the communication initiator. Employee communication focused on information the employee shared, or support the employee pursued. Managers initiated manager feedback which provided support or guidance to the employee. The most agreed upon manager feedback method for ensuring effective communication to maintain productivity in telecommuting

employees, was regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings between the manager and the employee. Manager feedback tied closely to both the employee communication topic and the scheduled meetings topic within the effective communication theme, but due to the emphasis by participants, warranted separation as an additional topic within the effective communication theme.

P1 identified not only scheduled one-on-one meetings but also unexpected communication as an effective strategy, "you have your standard one-on-ones, you maybe have some project times, maybe you have team calls, but communicating outside of that, sort of randomly, and asking how you're doing, or what's going on, or checking in, is crucial to understand where they are [on their projects]." P1 stated escalated projects required additional visibility and manager follow up. Calling employees unexpectedly provided more insight into the status and the employee's focus on reaching the next steps. "Messaging someone on teams, calling them randomly" increased the frequency of communication. P1 also recognized the C1 manager open door policy meant employees could reach out to managers unexpectedly as well, which "keeps everybody on their toes."

P2 noted customer surveys as a topic that helped impact employee productivity. As a manager, the participant provided feedback to the individuals or teams regarding survey results, to make them aware of issues, but then pulled in employees and collaborated to resolve issues identified on the survey. P2 stated, "that's one of the things that we have to address, for our surveys, we're going to have a committee of resources and strategize some of the lower rated survey results." P2 provided manager feedback to

employees based on internal surveys and passed down from C1 based on customer surveys. P2 incorporated employees in resolving issues mentioned in the survey. P2 stated while the manager provided the feedback the employees needed ownership in the resolution.

P3 stated it is difficult to directly monitor employees when telecommuting, so one-on-ones with direct reports helped to identify, "what people are doing, how they're doing it, and how well they're doing it." P3 used one-on-one meetings to determine if employees needed additional support, or to provide manager feedback. C2 assigned one to two employees per client so client feedback directly led to manager feedback by identifying specific resources who needed training or management intervention.

P4 stated in addition to providing feedback, "project inspections happen to make sure on a weekly basis, time is being entered, and it's matching or aligning with the actual forecast of the hours that we planned for that employee." Managers provided feedback to employees when their forecasted hours did not match their worked hours. Reviewing timesheets with employees required managers to communicate concerns regarding employee productivity.

All three companies measured productivity in telecommuting workers by comparing what the employee accomplished against what the organization expected the employee to accomplish within a set period. Recurring meetings to review progress, helped managers check in with telecommuting workers and ensured they were on track to complete their tasks within the required time frame. In addition, P2 emphasized the importance of minimizing multitasking during recurring meetings. The set duration

identified for recurring meetings helped minimize multitasking because the employees planned around the meeting time and scheduled potential distractions for earlier or later in the day.

Effective Communication Link to the Resource-Based View Conceptual Framework

Capabilities and intangible resources were resource-based view conceptual framework topics identified within the effective communication theme. Capabilities referred to a firm's ability to combine resources and strategies to increase the firm's status within the market (Sajuyigbe et al., 2021). The capabilities identified in the interviews were not the same across all four participants. However, P1, P2, and P4 stated customer satisfaction surveys were evidence of successful telecommuting strategies. Customer surveys provided external feedback to the organization and were a form of documented communication about the telecommuting strategy. P3 provided similar employee communication emphasis but sought internal performance feedback and relied on additional executive support where needed. All four participants identified effective communication and feedback as one of a firm's key capabilities but P1, P2, and P3 emphasized external feedback while P4 pursued internal feedback.

Intangible resources included items that could not be touched but the firm still owned (Wang et al., 2018). Firm's used intangible resources to sustain competitive advantage when they managed talent and aligned strategic goals (Miles & Van Clieaf, 2017). The participants in this study identified frequent and effective communication several times throughout the interviews as essential for aligning strategic goals. All four participants used their company's intangible resources of technology and intellectual

property and obtained project updates which ensured team members remained productive. The intangible resources were utilized to ensure effective communication during team meetings, individual meetings, and ad hoc calls.

Effective Communication Link to the Literature

The effective communication theme aligned to employee performance and telecommuting employees within the literature. Like a firm's capabilities in the resource-based view conceptual framework, employee performance used customer satisfaction surveys and internal feedback. According to Lippert & Dulewicz (2018) employee performance was measured based on whether an employee's adhered to their schedule, adhered to their budget, resolved conflicts, and effectively and efficiently utilized the available technology. Customer surveys provided external feedback on a telecommuting employee's performance when they resolved conflicts and effectively used the available technology. Internal performance reviews and immediate performance feedback included whether the employee adhered to their schedule and budget, as well as whether the employee resolved conflict and effectively used the available technology. The participants provided performance feedback based on surveys and their own observations.

At the most basic level, telecommuting employees were employees who used technology to communicate with team members (Krumm et al., 2016). Employees who relied primarily on technology for communication needed to be effective communicators. Both the employee and the manager held responsibility for effective communication. According to the literature, advancement in technology made it possible for both workers

and managers to better communicate through technologies such as email, instant

messaging, project collaboration tools, and social media (Fossum et al., 2019). In the

interviews, P1 and P4 stated telecommuting employees did not raise their hand as often

as employees in the office. Participants took advantage of the available technology, and

increased communication with their employees during team meetings and individual

meetings. The participants also used tools such as webcam which improved

communication effectiveness and reduced multitasking.

Theme 3: Technology Management

Technology management was the third theme, because the frequency was lower than the

first two themes, but it was emphasized heavily by all four participants. Specifically,

videoconferencing tools and project management tools for assessing the productivity of

telecommuting workers. Within the technology management theme, two topics emerged:

(a) company technology, and (b) project metrics. Table 4 shows the frequency and

percentage of total references to technology management.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage of Responses Related to Technology Management

Topic	f	% of total
Company technology	25	57
Project metrics	19	43
Total	44	100

Company technology referred to the hardware, software, and online tools the

company provided to the telecommuting employees and their managers. Company

technology included any tool the business provided employees to perform their work.

Common hardware examples when reviewing public employee recruitment documents

included a laptop, a monitor, a cell phone, and a tablet. Common software and online

technology examples when reviewing public project management methodology

documents and demos included Microsoft Project, Smartsheet, and Salesforce. Some

companies also referenced tools for creating an ergonomic workspace.

P1 provided the advice that when it comes to technology, "you definitely need

tools, and then you have to make use of them." When an organization provided

technology to the employees and managers, the technology was only as good as the

individual's ability to use it. "If you have tools to communicate and collaborate, then

communicate and collaborate. If you have tools to measure how you're doing, then go out

and measure how you're doing, and then react. You can't stand still whether it's with one

individual, your team, or the organization" (P1). P1 focused on the software and online

tools the company provided and actively responding to issues.

P2 stated when employees complained about the available technology, the

participant requested details, "[employees said] we need more tools, we need better

documentation." P2 worked with individuals to discover their concerns about the

technology and found in some cases "folks that have been doing this for a long time were

not psyched about changes." It was not always the technology, but sometimes the lack of

knowledge or experience with the technology that caused challenges. P2 strategized with

employees "getting them involved in the solution."

P3 emphasized the importance of the physical technology companies provided

and the impact on telecommuting employee success, such as laptops and monitors. P3

stated, "I try to give myself the tools I would need in a regular office and apply them to

home." P3 mentioned during the onboarding process, after hiring a new employee, "we talk about how their setup is at home. I make sure they have everything they need." P3 approached technology by focusing on an employee's hardware and physical setup and attempted to help employees create a more ergonomic workspace.

P4 combined the hardware and software approaches to technology and identified webcam as an essential tool for staying connected with telecommuting employees. When meeting weekly with direct reports, P4 stated, "making sure you're using both audio and video tools is the biggest thing when staying connected." Webcam required employees to use hardware with a camera as well as online tools that accessed and displayed the camera for a constant video stream during the meeting.

Participants identified both communication tools and project management tools as either software or online technology the organization provided. Project metrics referred to the methods in which employees and managers used the project management technology to track their progress. Project metrics differed from employee metrics because employee metrics within the resource engagement theme focused on the employee's level of effort, while project metrics within the technology management theme focused on the tools used for reporting the status of tasks and deliverables.

P1 stated when organizations provided "tools to measure," effective managers "do something with it." P1 claimed, "if you're standing still, you're going backwards." The technology was provided to record the metrics, and the metrics linked back to resource engagement when managers reacted on the metrics. The project metrics provided

managers insight into the completeness of deliverables and identified the tasks remaining. P1 connected with employees and communicated issues regarding outstanding tasks.

P2 used project metrics to increase productivity across the team, "if you have over 5 tasks in the next 5 days, let's get that work shifted to somebody who only has one or two tasks so we can spread that productivity out." P2 focused on the timing provided in the project metrics and compared the information to the quantity of tasks assigned to an individual. P2 divided the work among employees to ensure the team collectively met each target date identified in the project management tools.

P3 focused on the notes accompanying project metrics, "requiring employees to indicate on the billable and nonbillable time what they're doing. Looking at what they have helps me determine what their productivity is." P3 compared project metrics against an employee's reported time performing project work and not performing project work to determine if tasks were in jeopardy of falling behind.

P4 used project metrics to determine the overall project progress and "where we really are with the deliverables for those projects. Are we meeting the needs within the time we've planned in the timeline? If we are, then things are usually pretty productive." P4 reviewed the time allocated to tasks within a project and compared the data to the estimated time to complete those tasks to forecast whether the project would be completed on time.

All four participants identified webcam, online chat tools, and employee metrics as impacting telecommuting success. Some recurring meetings required webcam on, while other meetings encouraged webcam. Using webcam helped the leaders identify

who was paying attention and who was multitasking. Webcam also provided a feeling of meeting face to face with customers.

All three companies used an internal online chat tool. C1 and C2 used Microsoft Teams while C3 used Webex. The online chat allowed instantaneous messaging to other telecommuting or in office workers within the organization. Remaining online with the chat tool open notified others within the company of the employee's availability status and whether they were actively performing work. P1, P2, and P3 stated it was important for their direct reports to show as online for the full workday otherwise it was difficult to determine if the telecommuting worker was doing any work.

Project metrics were necessary to measure productivity, without metrics tools, and without the employee's physical presence in the workplace, it was difficult to assess the employee's progress. All four participants had direct reports who performed project implementation tasks, therefore, all responses regarding metrics were project-centric.

P1 and P2 stated a key metric was whether the hours billed on a project matched the actual progress on the project. Both P1 and P2 also looked at whether the hours used on the project matched the forecasted hours for the project. The first example was task specific, while the second example was project specific. In the first example, the leaders identified if the telecommuting worker was spending an appropriate amount of time on specific tasks or too much or too little time on those tasks. While in example two, the leaders determined if the project used the anticipated number of hours, or too many or too few hours.

All four participants measured overall project progress and identified if the project was where it should be in the project timeline. Similarly, all participants measured how much time was dedicated to each phase of the project. These measurements provided the leaders with valuable productivity information such as how much billable time telecommuting works spent on each project and how effectively the employee used their time.

Technology Management Link to the Resource-Based View Conceptual Framework

Participant responses in the technology management theme aligned most closely to firm capabilities within the resource-based view conceptual framework. Capabilities referred to how a firm controlled and utilized resources efficiently and effectively and achieved competitive advantage (Hamdoun, 2020). All four participants emphasized videoconferencing tools, instant messaging tools, and employee metrics as essential technology in their strategic success. P1 stated, managers used the technology available and organizations provided telecommuting employees with the same technology they had in the physical office. P1 stated managers tracked team member progress on assignments, ensured the project was where it should be, and assessed the billable and nonbillable time reported to the project. The example illustrated the firm's capabilities when managers combined employee resources and technology resources to ensure projects were completed within budget and achieved the competitive advantage.

P2 provided employee and project metrics as technology management examples. Managers reviewed each resource's number of assigned projects, the number of hours the resource recorded to meet deliverables, and properly documented the tasks completed.

The firm's capabilities combined employee resources, made sure team members were assigned an achievable amount of work, and technology resources through tracking metrics to achieve the competitive advantage in timely deliverables. P3 also provided an example for achieving the competitive advantage in timely deliverables but added the project phase to the technology management resource. In addition to measuring the hours required to meet deliverables, P3 included the amount of time dedicated to each phase of the project. P4 identified the same resources as the other participants for reaching the competitive advantage, but also questioned if the hours each resource recorded matched their level of effort.

Technology Management Link to the Literature

The technology management theme most closely aligned to employe productivity and telecommuting employees in the literature. Successful employees achieved the quality requirements of the customer and the productivity objectives of the organization (Harris, 2020). The technology management pieces of employee productivity focused on metrics. Employee metrics and project metrics provided a view of the employee's productivity level. P1, P3, and P4 identified the project management fundamentals, on time, on budget, and in scope as factors toward maintaining employee productivity. P1 and P2 stated they measured employee productivity by comparing the employee's actual hours to the forecasted hours for completing a task. P1, P2, and P3 stated managers often focused on the recorded billable hours, but managers should also look at nonbillable hours to determine if employees were remaining productive. All four participants stated project metrics were another indicator of employee productivity. Participants identified

project progress, task progress, and amount of time dedicated to each phase as a view of employee productivity within the project.

Telecommuting employees used technology to communicate with team members (Krumm et al., 2016). All four participants stated videoconferencing tools were technology management resources essential to telecommuting employee success. The specific technology used by the telecommuting employees varied by company. Holistically, the participants referenced online chat tools such as Microsoft Teams and Webex, videoconferencing tools such as Microsoft Teams, Webex, Zoom, and GoTo Meeting, and project management tools such as Smartsheet, and Microsoft Project. Several participants also mentioned the physical workspace as contributing to telecommuting employee success. P3 suggested setting up a dedicated workspace when working from home. P1 stated file sharing through online tools helped with knowledge transfer. All four participants emphasized a laptop and additional monitors as necessary technology to manage, for telecommuting employees.

Theme 4: People Management

People management referred to the leader's managerial role over the resources. The main topics within the people management strategy included (a) forecasting, (b) scheduling, (c) employee documentation, and (d) management balance. Table 5 shows the frequency and percentage of total references to people management.

Table 5

Frequency and Percentage of Responses Related to People Management

Topic	Frequency	% of total
Forecasting	9	31

Scheduling	7	24
Employee documentation	7	24
Management balance	6	21
Total	29	100

Forecasting referred to the telecommuting worker's anticipated level of effort. The participants forecasted a specific bucket of hours per resource within a project based on the project's timeline and complexity. Managers also forecasted the number of projects assigned to an individual simultaneously based on the number of hours already forecasted for the resource per project, as well as each project's timeline.

P1 reviewed employee forecasted time compared to actual recorded time when managing direct reports to assess individual productivity levels. "You can certainly see how they're being productive and where the gaps are" P1 stated, "you can see if someone's being productive by how they're logging their time towards projects and if the deliverables are moving through the project phases or not." P1 identified inconsistencies between the hours employees reported and the progression of deliverables as an indicator of low productivity and the need for management intervention.

P2 stated accurate forecasting within the department was somewhat new, "once a project was assigned to a person, they basically owned it." In managing the resources, P2 realized the process "was very reactive, they only passed work off if they needed an emergency backup." P2 worked with direct reports and developed a transition strategy to share project work among employees which improved the performance of individual team members and increased the productivity of the overall team.

P3 forecasted project needs holistically to manage team member capacity, "I can tell by looking at a spreadsheet, if I have 70 open projects, I can see who's assigned to

each for additional forecasting." P3 incorporated employee metrics and forecasted levels of effort when assigning new projects. C2 provided clients an estimated number of hours based on the project's scope and P3 forecasted the employee's weekly use of those hours based on the project schedule to determine which employees were available.

P4 managed team member's productivity by comparing forecasted hours to actual hours and project progress, "As long as the productivity is aligning with our forecast, we know things are good. It's when we see a disconnect with a bunch of recorded hours, but nothing was done that we have problems." P4 managed employee time by reviewing where the employee said they were to where the project actually was to determine if corrective action was necessary.

Scheduling referred to individual employee schedules and the telecommuting workers availability. Setting regularly scheduled meetings was a topic within the effective communication theme because consistency helped to develop a cadence for communication. Scheduling within the people management theme focused more on the employee's attendance in project meetings, managers assigning attainable deliverables, and employees meeting set deadlines.

P1 stated successful people management with telecommuting employees required ensuring direct reports were available when they were needed. P1 informed employees, "although there's flexibility, you need to be on the calls you're scheduled for, you need to be available for customers. Some projects are spread across time zones, and you need to be available for your meetings." Scheduling calls in advance helped employees know when to be available. P1 referenced people management when an employee took

advantage of the telecommuting flexibility and did not attend required meetings or respond to customers.

P2 reviewed scheduling during people management and project metrics through technology management hand in hand. P2 identified employees with "over five tasks in the next five days" and employees with "less than two tasks in the next five days." P2 stated after reviewing the upcoming schedule, "we started to look at sharing that work." P2 intervened when team members were overbooked to review individual schedules and identify employees with availability.

P3 stated while telecommuting, "affords people the flexibility they need," effective people management with telecommuting employees also required flexibility from the organization, "being able to decide whether or not somebody can work a certain schedule, and giving the manager that leeway, is very helpful and contributes to the flexibility we can offer for telecommuting." Telecommuting employees could schedule specific working hours or meetings to align with obligations outside of work.

P4 identified scheduling as a people management complication when leading a telecommuting team, "we have a lot of flexibility on when you do things, but sometimes during the day when they're needed, they may not be available." P4 shared concerns about employees new to telecommuting who did not properly schedule their day. Flexibility provided resources some autonomy but employees needed to follow a consistent schedule so managers knew when the employee would be available.

Employee documentation referred to whether employes were completing the tasks assigned. Employee documentation aligned closely to employee metrics in the resource

engagement theme and project metrics in the technology management theme. Employee metrics focused on reporting the employee's level of effort, project metrics focused on the tools used to report the status of the individual tasks and deliverables, employee documentation closed the loop by evaluating the employee's performance and whether the employee was doing the work.

P1 identified the amount of time a task remained outstanding as a key indicator of employee performance, "How long has a deliverable been in a certain status? How long did it take to get there? Are we seeing back and forth conversations to move the task along?" P1 identified metrics as helpful, but suggested managers need to document the "conversational status, talk with the employee about what they need to get done, and then follow up, did they get it done?" Employee documentation was a method P1 used to identify gaps and a path forward.

P2 identified the need for documenting challenges in people management, "you've got your folks that have been doing this for a long time and not really psyched about the changes." P2 stated more tenured employees struggled with change. Documenting processes, and providing written feedback helped to motivate employees to follow new corporate initiatives or process changes.

P3 emphasized the need to follow the same, or similar, employee documentation and notification processes with telecommuting employees as managers would in the office, "I believe in addressing issues as they happen, not waiting to have the conversation, I have HR on the call as well." P3 stated it can be difficult to tell what a telecommuting employee is doing. To prevent misinterpretation of manager feedback

from an employee, P3 follows a set documentation process and the same warning system used within the corporate office.

P4 stated managers needed to discuss concerns with employees, document performance variances, and from a project perspective ask, "are we meeting the needs within the time we've planned?" P4 did not document employee performance issues without also asking the employee for feedback. Employees who were not meeting deliverables required an additional review from a project metrics perspective before documenting the issue as poor employee performance.

Management balance referred to balancing between micromanaging resources or being completely absent as a manager. Managers over telecommuting employees did not see their employees in person and in some cases did not connect with employees daily. Managers needed to balance between over communicating and under communicating with their employees.

P1 recognized the difficult balance in managing telecommuting employees, stating, "you don't want to be overbearing. You don't want to be micromanaging. You need to give folks space to breathe and the space to succeed. But at the same time, you have to be involved." P1 offered employees the ability to do their work, while also providing support and tracking progress.

P2 provided employees autonomy over their work but incorporated customer and internal feedback as people management tools, stating, "We measure productive utilization combined with survey results. I'm not a micromanager. I expect my resources to sort of run their own business if you will." P2 provided guidelines to team members

regarding billable and nonbillable time allocated to their projects. P2 allowed employees to gauge their own progress. However, using the weekly scheduling meetings, P2 also reviewed outstanding tasks with employees to determine if they needed help.

P3 focused on the company culture for managing telecommuting employees, "it's a combination of both me and the corporate office trying to create an environment where we are not micromanaging. We want you to be able to have flexibility in your schedule." However, P3 also identified a challenge for managers over telecommuting employees, stating, "I need to be able to trust that they're doing what they're supposed to do."

P4 identified a difficulty in balancing management approaches between tenured telecommuting employees and new hires. P4 stated, "our virtual group is very tenured. They've been virtual most of their career and they can get things done. When we hire new folks who are virtual, the time to ramp up learning takes longer versus somebody in the office." P4 explained the reason within the effective communication theme stating, "it's pretty easy to collaborate getting the conference room if you need help. Remote folks need to be willing to raise their virtual hand." The conflict occurred when managers needed to balance the lesser managerial needs of the tenured folks and the greater managerial needs of the new hires.

People management was a theme that varied in methodology among the four participants but emerged as a consistent theme among all participants. P1 and P4 focused on the measurable number values of people management. Both participants updated their employee forecasting based on the anticipated deliverables and where they resided on the project timeline. To track productivity, participants measured how much time was

required for each task and the time it took to reach each task within the project. The emphasis was on balancing employee capacity against business needs. Capacity was based on how many hours a worker was forecasted to spend on an assigned task and how many hours remained available in the employee's schedule. Business needs were based on remaining tasks that needed to be assigned to an employee.

P2 provided an example that combined forecasting measurements and schedule management within the people management strategy. Through recurring weekly calls, the team reviewed schedules over the next 5 days. Team members with more than 5 days of forecasted work scheduled over the next 5 days required assistance to be successful. Team members with less than 2 days of forecasted work scheduled over the next 5 days needed additional work assigned. The team shared tasks based on resource schedule and forecasted work allowing more workers to be productive.

P2 and P3 focused more on the need for management balance when interacting with telecommuting employees. Because the employee and manager were not in the same physical location, managers could not walk over to the employee's desk to see what they were doing. Both participants emphasized the need to trust that the employee was doing their work. Effective managers neither micromanaged their employees. nor were absent.

All participants mentioned project tracking as not only a technology management strategy but also a managerial strategy. Accurate employee timekeeping, reviewing an employee's allocated project hours, recorded billable hours, and recorded nonbillable hours was a tool that evaluated whether a direct report was remaining productive and how efficiently they were performing the work. The participants forecasted hours for their

employees based on how much time a task required and then regularly reviewed the actual hours with the employee and identified gaps in either the scope of the task or capabilities of the employee.

People Management Link to the Resource-Based View Conceptual Framework

The people management theme aligned most closely to the capabilities and intangible resources in the resource-based view conceptual framework. Barney (1991) developed the resource-based framework to explain how firms used their current resources and capabilities to sustain competitive advantage. P2 referenced forecasting capabilities when managing employees and assessed resource availability and project assignments which allowed more employees to be equally productive. All four participants identified timekeeping and project scheduling as essential people management capabilities.

Intangible resources included employees, because employee productivity could not be bought and sold or easily imitated (Feng & Gerhart, 2021). P3 and P4 stated company dynamics influenced specific telecommuting employee capabilities, such as company culture and management expectations. Company culture either helped or inhibited telecommuting success. Telecommuting employees were limited by the intangible resources available to them including technology and fellow employees. The company provided and utilized the resources that impacted the telecommuting employee productivity.

People Management Link to the Literature

The people management theme linked to project work and telecommuting challenges in the literature. Rating project work helped project managers better manage the people and found areas for improvement (Bogdan & Marginean, 2020). P1 and P4 stated effective people management required comparing an employee's estimated level of effort with the employee's actual time to meet deliverables. Incorporating project schedules and anticipated project work helped participants assess employee performance and identified areas for improvement. P2 focused on schedule management and provided an example of how reviewing project work against employee schedules ensured direct reports remained productive. P1, P3, and P4 identified project forecasting as a necessary people management tool because they aligned remaining project work to the anticipated project timeline.

Telecommuting challenges occurred when workers struggled to manage their own workday, maintain their technology, and effectively separate their work time and family time (Ingusci et al., 2021). All four participants identified the need to balance between not micromanaging their employees but also not being absent. However, P1 and P3 also stated it could be challenging to trust the telecommuting employee was doing the work. The participants faced challenges balancing some people management tools. Managers frequently and consistently checked in with telecommuting employees and used tools such as videoconferencing meetings, instant messaging, and email. However, the managers needed to make sure they allowed the resource enough time to perform the requested work without checking on the employee too frequently. The challenge was,

frequent and effective communication was essential to people management, while too frequent and excessive communication caused distractions and employee unrest.

Theme 5: Work–Life Balance

The work–life balance theme referred to the separation between an employee's work-related tasks and obligations and the individual's personal life. Work–life balance was a common theme within the telecommuting employee literature and during the participant interviews. Work–life balance was a challenge for the telecommuting employees discussed in this study because all direct reports worked from their home, lacking the physical separation most office workers experienced between their work and their personal life. Within the work–life balance theme, two topics emerged: (a) positive work–life balance, and (b) negative work–life balance. Table 6 shows the frequency and percentage of total references to work-life balance.

Table 6

Frequency and Percentage of Responses Related to Work-Life Balance

Topic	*f*	% of total
Positive work–life balance	11	55
Negative work–life balance	9	45
Total	20	100

Positive work–life balance referred to employees who did not experience an overlap between their workday and their personal life. Positive work–life balance responses included flexibility and relied on company culture and team cohesiveness.

P1 identified daily flexibility as the greatest benefit for telecommuting employees, stating, "being a virtual employee does allow a lot of flexibility." However, P1 also warned, "even though there is flexibility, being at home, or going to an appointment, or

things like that, we still need you to put in that 8 hr a day." P2 suggested telecommuting employees could fulfill non work related tasks during the day but if they did, then they needed to still work that missed time.

P2 utilized forecasting and scheduling when discussing work–life balance, stating when the team shared tasks, "people who are under booked can get their productivity higher, and we can gauge that work–life balance for people who are overbooked." P2 shared tasks on the team to reduce the amount work overlapped into the personal lives of some employees. Balancing work between the team reduced the likelihood of overworked employees missing out on personal life outside business hours by reducing their workload but also reduced the likelihood non-work-related distractions impacting the attendance of the underworked employees by increasing their engagement levels.

P3 stated "you know with COVID, if anything, it has shown that people can be at home and can work remotely. Bringing people back to the office isn't necessary considering we've been able to survive the last couple of years." P3 identified work location as a positive work–life balance attribute, stating, "if we have learned anything, it's that we can work from anywhere."

P4 identified task flexibility as a positive influence on work–life balance, stating, "we have a lot of flexibility when you do things." P4 stated flexibility in performing a task, with a firm due date, allowed employees flexibility within their workday and workweek. The employee knew the date a task was due and had a set amount of time to complete that task. The employee assessed the time it would actually take to complete the task and could determine if more or less flexibility in their workday was available.

Negative work–life balance referred to employees who experienced an overlap between their workday and their personal life. Negative work–life balance could occur when an employee's work impacted the employee's ability to participate in their personal life. In some cases, employees worked late into the evening, in other cases employees worked over the weekend. In both cases, the employee missed the ability to relax or engage in non-work activities outside regular business hours. Negative work–life balance could also occur when an employee allowed their personal life to interrupt the workday. In some cases, employees were offline and unavailable for a significant amount of time during business hours, in other cases employees engaged in non-work-related activities that caused distractions during the workday. Negative work–life balance responses included distractions and employee specific differences.

P1 identified the lack of disconnect between the employee's home and office as negatively impacting the employee work–life balance, stating, "folks don't drive to work and drive home and have that disconnect, and they're likely to start earlier in the day. They're likely to be engaged later in the day." P1 was concerned about employees overworking when they lived and worked in the same location. Telecommuting employees were not impacted by telecommuting time, so could begin working as soon as they awoke, or could continue working until they went to sleep. Telecommuting employees also had access to their work computer or work tools at any time which meant even if the employee stopped working at close of business they could begin working again during the evening. P1 stated the physical separation between the office and home

often also limited the employee's access to work tools outside the office, which helped with employee work–life balance.

P2 stated being overworked and overwhelmed caused a negative work–life balance for some telecommuting employees. P2 stated as a department overbooked team members were closely reviewed and "we start to look at sharing that work." Employees with too much work assigned had to work after business hours or on the weekend to complete tasks.

P3 experienced work–life balance challenges with employees who took advantage of the flexibility, stating, "sometimes, I just have people disappear." P3 engaged expectation setting from the resource engagement theme, and company technology from the technology management theme to correct the challenge by informing the telecommuting employees that "everyone needs to be on Microsoft Teams, the whole wok day. It can say you're busy. It can say do not disturb. But you need to be online the full day."

P4 stated distractions caused a negative work–life balance for some employees, "sometimes when they're needed, they may not be available. You have to hunt people down when you expect them to be around." P4 experienced times when employee's allowed their personal life to impact their performance and attendance at work.

The strongest example of work–life balance for telecommuting workers was work flexibility. In the case of all four participants, their telecommuting direct reports had flexibility over their daily schedules. Each task had a deadline, but for tasks not requiring an immediate turnaround, the employee had some autonomy over when they completed

that task. The employees also had some level of work schedule flexibility. In most instances, if the employee put in the expected level of work during the day and was online for most of the day, if the employee needed to start later, take a longer lunch, end earlier, work a split day, or complete a non-work-related task during a reasonable amount of time, they could.

Company culture and team cohesiveness impacted successful work–life balance for telecommuting employees. P1, P2, and P3 discussed employee work–life balance regularly in management meetings and made sure direct reports were experiencing a positive work–life balance and strategized ways to improve. P3 emphasized structure by way of structured days, scheduled meetings, and scheduled breaks, as a method for ensuring work–life balance for direct reports. P1, P3, and P4 identified feeling as a team positively impacted an employee's work–life balance. All participants identified team building as a positive impact on work–life balance through recurring casual-themed videoconferencing calls and in person annual team gatherings.

Poor work–life balance occurred when either work or life were out of balance. If an employee spent too much time on personal things during the workday, they had an abundance of life in the work–life balance (Avgoustaki, 2015). If an employee spent additional hours working beyond the 40-hr workweek, they had an abundance of work in the work–life balance. Work flexibility was also identified by all four participants as a negative aspect of work–life balance for employees who were easily distracted or did not have effective time management skills. P1 and P3 stated the telecommuting workers knew they could be doing other things during the day and some resources disappeared

during the day. P1, P3, and P4 stated some employees struggled without the disconnect between work and life that came from going to and leaving from a physical office building.

Employee productivity and performance was at risk when work-home spillover occurred due to poor work–life balance (Benlian, 2020). According to P1 and P4 overworked employees were less productive and had more errors than their counterparts. Personal distractions while working from home were one of the concerns for work–life balance in telecommuting workers, but so was overworked employees who were working during personal activities or time with their family outside their normal working day. All four participants emphasized looking beyond the metrics and tracked whether resources were feeling overwhelmed. P2 stated it was important to actively increase work–life balance for employees who were overbooked.

Work–Life Balance Link to the Resource-Based View Conceptual Framework

The work–life balance theme most closely aligned to the competitive advantage aspect of the resource-based view conceptual framework. The value resources plus strategies brought to a firm impacted the firm's competitive advantage (Barney, 1986). The participants varied in their strategies regarding work–life balance, however, all participants agreed work flexibility and tracking resource burnout contributed to maintaining the competitive advantage. Valuing telecommuting resources by managing work–life balance impacted the firm's competitive advantage through decreased costs of turnover and reduced productivity. P1 and P4 identified overworked employees as a

contributor to project errors. P1, P2, and P3 sited assisting telecommuting employees by facilitating a strong work–life balance environment was essential to valuing resources.

Work–Life Balance Link to the Literature

Work–life balance aligned to the literature on employee productivity. Work–life conflicts and potential distractions prevented some employees from telecommuting (Lott & Abendroth, 2020). Similarly, some employees were discouraged by the decreased natural interactions when telecommuting due to the heavy reliance on technology (Lauring & Jonasson, 2018). P1 and P4 claimed distractions were more prevalent from home. P1, P3, and P4 stated some resources struggled with work and home crossover as telecommuting employees. P1 and P3 identified employee productivity issues with some telecommuting employees when those resources disappeared during the day or completed non-work-related tasks during working hours. P3 provided productivity suggestions to help employees manage work–life balance throughout each day by creating their own structured workday, included scheduling meetings, and scheduling breaks. P2 used a weekly work–life balance gauge for employee productivity in which they increased the deliverables for those under booked and increased work–life balance for those overbooked. P1, P3, and P4 expressed caution in the impact work flexibility conflicted with work–life balance. The three participants stated telecommuting gave employees flexibility and the ability to work from anywhere, but the work-to-life overlap and the life-to-work overlap both negatively impacted employee productivity. Work-to-life overlap occurred when employees continued to perform work tasks during non-working hours, and life-to-work overlap occurred when employees performed non-work tasks

during working hours. Telecommuting employees suffered on a personal level due to the decreased social interactions and suffered on a productivity level due to poor work–life balance (Das Swain et al., 2020).

Applications to Professional Practice

Telecommuting work increased during COVID 19 and was here to stay. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore successful strategies that business leaders in human capital management organizations used to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute. The findings suggested that telecommuting strategies were necessary to ensure employee productivity. The conclusions of this study provided valuable insights on telecommuting strategies in human capital management organizations. Insights from participants demonstrated beneficial and effective telecommuting strategies applicable in the human capital management industry.

Based on the semistructured interview responses and company documents review, I found that leaders must implement telecommuting strategies to maintain employee productivity. These strategies included resource engagement, effective communication, technology management, people management, and work–life balance. Resources must be actively engaged in their work to be productive and positively support customers. Managers and employees must frequently and consistently communicate with each other and within project teams to make sure deliverables were on time, within scope, and within budget. Leaders must use the technical tools available for communication, project

alignment, and employee metrics. Organizations must go beyond the metrics and track work–life balance among telecommuting workers.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change included enabling leaders to invest in telecommuting workers which could increase the applicant pool for organizations and improve the work–life balance for employees.

Recommendations for Action

The study included two data sources: semistructured interviews with four business leaders and a review of public corporate data. The participants provided their lived experiences managing telecommuting direct reports. Five themes emerged, providing business leaders strategies for maintaining productivity while managing telecommuting employees. The first recommendation for action includes improving employee onboarding experiences to ensure resource engagement from day one. All participants identified resource engagement as essential to employee productivity and project success. New hire onboarding represents the first interaction an employee has with an organization. Telecommuting employees were onboarding from an external location. To prevent feeling like they were on an island, organizations should invest in their onboarding tools and frequently connect with telecommuting new hires. The second recommendation for action requires investing in the internal company technology. All participants identified effective communication and technology management as essential to telecommuting worker productivity. Effective communication methods require up to date and easy to use technology including internal communication tools,

videoconferencing tools, project management tools, and technology for accurately measuring employee metrics. The third recommendation for action includes actively measuring employee work–life balance. Employees with personal distractions during the workday struggled to complete work on time while overworked employees suffered from productivity and performance issues. Leaders must monitor work–life balance among their direct reports to prevent work home spillover.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was comprised of four business leaders from three human capital management organizations whose teams were located within the United States and who successfully implemented strategies to maintain telecommuting employee productivity. Using semistructured interviews, participants shared their lived experiences managing telecommuting employees. I recommend future studies including a quantitative study within each organization to measure the productivity of the telecommuting workers in human capital management organizations. Two of the companies involved in the study started requiring some telecommuting employees to physically report to the nearest work location. None of the companies provided evidence in their public corporate documents for the decision to return to the office other than to reverse some of the COVID 19 increase in telecommuting workers. The employees who agreed to return to the office would have productivity and performance data within their organization as both a telecommuting employee and an in-office worker. It would be beneficial to document with substantial evidence the productivity of the telecommuting employee working from home versus working within an office.

Reflections

The doctoral journey provided many perspectives regarding telecommuting and project-based work. As a telecommuting employee, I found it interesting which aspects of telecommuting each of the managers focused on during our semistructured interviews. It was challenging to remain the objective researcher and not influence responses. In my personal experience, I was more productive as a telecommuting employee versus working in the office because fellow coworkers in the office were more distracting than the life distractions within my home, but none of the managers mentioned distractions in the work place, only distractions at home. However, I managed to collect data without providing my subjective experiences as a telecommuting employee. I increased my knowledge in effective telecommuting strategies and I will strive to implement these strategies as a leader in my future roles.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore successful strategies that business leaders in human capital management organizations used to maintain productivity from employees who telecommute. Five main themes emerged: (a) resource engagement, (b) effective communication, (c) technology management, (d) people management, and (e) work–life balance. Business leaders may use the research findings to improve their telecommuting strategies by implementing team building activities to increase employee engagement and investing in technology to enhance communication and work–life balance for their employees. Telecommuting employees may use the research to help improve their work methods by increasing their level of

engagement as an employee, taking advantage of available technology, and frequently communicating with managers and team members. Increased awareness of telecommuting strategies contributed to enhancing the overall telecommuting experience for both business leaders and employees.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to manage productivity in a telecommuting workforce?

2. What are the key components of your telecommuting strategy?

3. How do you measure productivity in telecommuting?

4. How has your organization assessed the effectiveness of the strategies for managing telecommuters?

5. What strategies are most effective in managing telecommuting productivity?

6. What key challenges arise when implementing the strategies for managing telecommuting productivity?

7. How did you address these key challenges?

8. What suggestions have you received from fellow leaders within your organization that influenced your strategies for maintaining telecommuting productivity?

9. What additional information can you provide regarding telecommuting strategies within your organization?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What You Will Do	What You Will Say: Script
Introduce the interview and set the stage.	Good Morning/Afternoon. My name is Rachael McCalmon and I am a doctoral student with Walden University. Thank you for taking the time to participate in the study called "Telecommuting Strategies in the Human Capital Management Industry". The interview will be recorded to assist with analysis and theme identification. Reminder, you are a volunteer in this interview and are not required to provide a response if a question makes you uncomfortable or you are for some reason unable to respond. Your information and participation in this study will remain confidential.
Watch for nonverbal cues. Paraphrase as needed Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth responses.	1. What strategies do you use to manage productivity in a telecommuting workforce? 2. What are the key components of your telecommuting strategy? 3. How do you measure productivity in telecommuting? 4. How has your organization assessed the effectiveness of the strategies for managing telecommuters? 5. What strategies are most effective in managing telecommuting productivity? 6. What key challenges arise when implementing the strategies for managing telecommuting productivity? 7. How did you address these key challenges? 8. What suggestions have you received from fellow leaders within your organization that influenced your strategies for maintaining telecommuting productivity? 9. What additional information can you provide regarding telecommuting strategies within your organization?
Wrap up interview and thank participant	I would like to thank you for your time and participation in the study.
Schedule and confirm a date when the participant will receive follow-up member checking via email	I will review the recording of the interview we completed today. I will provide you with a summary of my comprehension of your answers to each question by next week. I will ask for your confirmation by email if the information is accurate and complete. You will also be able to add any information I missed. To ensure I maintain confidentiality and do not provide the context of our interview to an email address in which you are not the sole user, what email address would you prefer I use for verifying my notes?

Follow-up Member Checking	
Ensure member checking by sending an email to participants with a summary of their responses.	I have reviewed the recording of the interview. Below is a summary of my understanding of your responses. Please confirm by email if this information is correct for the following questions. Please let me know if I missed anything and if there is anything you would like to add. 1. Interview question and synthesis of the response – one paragraph. 2. Interview question and synthesis of the response – one paragraph. 3. Interview question and synthesis of the response – one paragraph. 4. Interview question and synthesis of the response – one paragraph. 5. Interview question and synthesis of the response – one paragraph. 6. Interview question and synthesis of the response – one paragraph. 7. Interview question and synthesis of the response – one paragraph. 8. Interview question and synthesis of the response – one paragraph. 9. Interview question and synthesis of the response – one paragraph.
Guidelines for Individual Interviews	

- The interview and individual responses are voluntary, the participant my withdraw at any time with no consequences.
- All responses are personal and not considered public information.
- Breaks are permitted.
- There are no right or wrong answers and participants may choose not to respond to a question if desired.
- Interviews will be recorded.

Appendix C: Introductory Letter

Good [Morning/Afternoon] [Insert Name],

I am conducting a study on telecommuting strategies in the human capital management industry as part of my Doctor of Business Administration degree through Walden University. As telecommuting continues to grow across the globe, organizations with telecommuting employees need to understand successful strategies other business leaders utilize to remain productive. The goal for this study is to provide awareness regarding successful strategies some business leaders use to manage telecommuting employees. I am contacting you to request your participation in this study. Requirements for the study include individuals working for a human capital management organization, with a minimum of 2 years in their managerial role, and currently manage telecommuting employees. Participation is completely voluntary. Participants have the right decline responses or stop the interview at any time during the study. There is no monetary incentive attached to this study. The study will be conducted in an interview format, utilizing video-conferencing tools and will be recorded to ensure accurate notes. Participants will receive a summary of the interview for a chance to confirm or add to the content. I will maintain participant privacy and confidentiality. Please let me know if you are interested in participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Rachael McCalmon