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## Factors Impacting Leading Hybrid and Remote Teams in Higher Education in a Post COVID-19 Environment

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Juana L. Parillon

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Walden University  
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Abstract

Factors Impacting Leading Hybrid and Remote Teams in Higher Education  
in a Post COVID-19 Environment

by

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MBA, George Washington University, 2018

MS, Walden University, 2015

Dissertation Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial Organization & Psychology

Walden University

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## Abstract

The Coronavirus 19 (COVID-19) pandemic had a significant impact on post-secondary education in the United States with much of the focus during the height of the pandemic being on students and their instruction. Little attention has been paid to the experiences of supervisors in higher education, specifically, the lived experiences of supervisors and the factors that impacted supervisors leading hybrid and remote teams. With a phenomenological framework in the periphery, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences that supervisors of staff within higher education had after transitioning to either a hybrid or fully remote work model. The transformational leadership theory was used as a sounding board for understanding supervisor experiences within higher education. Structured interviews were used to garner detailed narratives of the phenomenon. Nine supervisors with at least 3 years' experience in a supervisory role and in a traditional university-setting (i.e., in person) were recruited. The factors that impacted supervisors who led hybrid and remote teams were identified across the nine participants through six themes: (1) culture shift; (2) employee first; (3) intentional connections; (4) leadership considerations; (5) mental health; and (6) resources. Study findings suggested that the experiences of supervisors of staff in hybrid and remote settings are complex and that leading hybrid and remote teams in a post-COVID-19 environment requires intentionality and strategizing. The results of this research can be used for positive social change to assist supervisors with maneuvering the new normal of hybrid and remote work.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Although virtual leadership may not have been a foreign concept for most, the way in which leaders (i.e., supervisors or middle managers) functioned was highly impacted in the transition to and from the Coronavirus 19 (COVID-19) pandemic (Birkinshaw et al., 2021; Park & Cho, 2020). In fact, it is undisputed that the COVID-19 pandemic shifted, perhaps permanently, the way in which employers approach the structural interface of work: whether face-to-face, hybrid, or fully remote (Birkinshaw et al., 2021; Dinh et al., 2021). Despite the many options available now, in March of 2020 most employers were forced to contend with either hybrid or fully remote work models, and for the better parts of 2020 and 2021, supervisors were left with minimal guidance on the best approaches to leading their teams amidst the new work modalities (Bartsch et al., 2021; Goncalves et al., 2021). Supervisors who were not accustomed to leading fully remote or hybrid staff teams encountered hardships as they navigated through the transition from in-person (pre-COVID) to fully remote (during COVID) to hybrid/remote (post-COVID), and not surprisingly, they sought guidance to address their concerns (Klus & Muller, 2021).

As the challenges towards leaders amplified, supervisors were often expected to maintain the cohesiveness of their teams (Darics, 2020). While those expectations were noted by many companies, supervisors that lead staff (as opposed to leading faculty or student workers) and supervisors that lead multiple staff who have different work designations (e.g., one staff member who works remotely for medical reasons while another who is working two days in the office and three days at home) were affected.

Equally as impactful was the notion that both hybrid and fully remote work models were concepts that would remain in effect for the foreseeable future and consequently, supervisors at all levels would have to learn how to lead virtual teams in diverse settings (i.e., hybrid and fully remote). Thus, identifying how supervisors who lead virtual teams were impacted post the COVID-19 work shift is critical to understanding what can be done to better support them as they embark on the “new normal” of work. The purpose of this research is to explore how supervisors of staff (not faculty) who are considered middle managers within higher education have been impacted by leading teams that have a mixture of hybrid or fully remote staff members in a post COVID-19 setting.

### **Background**

During the height of the pandemic, the concept of virtual teams became synonymous with the new way of working and consequently, studies regarding virtual teams flourished. Some studies strictly focused on the dissection of virtual teams and their functions (Dennis et al., 2022; Szelwach & Matthews, 2021), others discussed the concept of building relationships within virtual teams (Dinh et al., 2021; Mutha & Srivastava, 2021; Nordback & Espinosa, 2019), and others dissected the role that supervisors play in the context of remote work (Dinh et al., 2021; Park & Cho, 2020; Shockley et al., 2021). Few studies, however, have focused on the perspectives of supervisors while leading virtual teams in a post COVID-19 era (Birkinshaw et al., 2021; Park & Cho, 2020; Varma et al., 2022) and the impact that leading (overall) post COVID-19 has had on managers. Even less studies have focused on the perspectives and impact on supervisors (or middle managers) who lead staff (as opposed to those who lead

faculty) in higher education (Alward & Phelps, 2019). While the effects of post-pandemic work-shifts have affected many industries, how it has affected higher education has rarely been explored.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Alward and Phelps (2019) launched a study that explored the techniques used for traditional work models (i.e., fully in person) and how the use of these traits translated (effectively or not) to virtual teams. The study focused on 10 academic leaders in private universities that were balancing and navigating their roles as supervisors of virtual teams and the approaches that they used to facilitate the virtual landscape in higher education. The study was based on a phenomenological approach with a 10-question interview feature. The study also used the van Kaam method of analysis, which ultimately assisted in highlighting seven themes: training and development, trust, emotional intelligence, communication, employee recognition, leadership styles, virtual leadership competencies unique to higher education.

Unlike other studies, Birkinshaw et al. (2021) prioritized the perspectives of managers prior to and post COVID-19, with an emphasis on the behavioral patterns and the way managers work after moving to a virtual work model. This study considered the impact that being in a virtual setting had on the behaviors of managers. Birkinshaw et al. used three different surveys at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and compared these surveys to previous studies conducted. The three surveys focused on the following: effectiveness of managers in their activities, how managers spend their time, and how managers develop over time. The surveys sampled 82, 40, and 38 managers respectively,

with comparisons made to surveys made in earlier years (related to the same focal points). Several ways in which managerial work has evolved was narrated throughout.

Like much COVID-19 research that focuses on leadership, Dinh et al. (2021) used their research to report the perspectives of leaders, and the leaders' perspective of their teams once the shift to a virtual setting had taken place. This article involved the review of previous research and newly formed practices post COVID-19 as it pertains to trust, teams, and the leaders' perspective in the virtual setting. The authors were thoughtful in their approach as they embarked on an analysis of trust in the context of the virtual setting. Aside from research and practices, they also pulled from the experiences of a Fortune 500 Company executive and a physician at an academic medical institution. The theme throughout the article was that of trust, with emphasis on two trust types: cognitive (e.g., boundary setting, engagement, and maintaining clear roles) and affective (e.g., meaningful connections, inclusive community development, and fostering commitment). With studies abounding in the space of virtual teams, Mutha and Srivastava (2021) paid close attention to the way in which employees were engaged and the impact that their leadership had on that engagement. Aside from engagement, and although not quite the focal point, the study also used 'trust' as a bridge between engagement and leadership. Mutha and Srivastava surveyed 305 participants throughout eight industries. The study was based on the theoretical framework of the transformational leadership style and concluded that leadership influence impacts employee engagement within the virtual realm.

Park and Cho (2022), in their study, sought to uncover the impact that teleworking and non-teleworking supervisors have on their organizations. The study itself was based on a review of a 2011 U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board telework survey data. The authors extracted and reviewed the observations of 1,945 supervisors and using this data, the authors followed the approach of the sociotechnical systems theory and pulled from the job demands-resource model. With this framework in mind, two tests were established: a t-test (with four variables) and a regression analysis (with over eight variables). The results gave way to amongst other things, how non-teleworking supervisors are dispositioned in comparison to their counterparts who are considered teleworking supervisors, as well as the effects that these supervisors (both teleworking and non-teleworking) have on the organization.

Building on the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership, which were first introduced in the late 70s and later expounded upon by Bass in the mid-80s, Bass and Avolio (1993) offered a framework from which leaders can examine the culture within their organizations. In their paper, the authors proposed a dissection of the differences between transactional and transformational leadership, as well as the outcomes to the culture when leading with one approach or another. With this foundation set, the authors outlined the use of an “Organizational Description Questionnaire,” which is a 28-question survey that focuses 14 of its questions on a transactional approach and 14 of its questions on a transformative approach. The survey culminates with a score sheet that provides two separate scores: Transactional Culture and Transformative Culture, with an accompanying table to determine how high or low the organization scores.

## **Problem Statement**

The perspective of leaders has been sought after since Bass (1985a) introduced the transformational leader theory, and possibly before. As such, and as many others have alluded to, the voice of the leader is as necessary now as it has ever been (Alward & Phelps, 2019; Dinh et al., 2021; Park & Cho, 2020; Shockley et al., 2021). With this need to understand the perspective of supervisors, specifically middle managers in a post COVID-19 setting, also comes the inquiry of viewpoints and how that viewpoint affects the person and the individuals around them. Darics (2020) focuses on the way that a “boss” communicates in a digital setting and offers a discourse around the perspective of the supervisor from the lens of communication. Alward and Phelps (2019) took a slightly different approach and focused on the understanding of the entire supervisor experience within the higher education setting.

Although some studies may address the supervisor viewpoint, there is a greater need to understand how supervisors have been impacted post pandemic. For instance, a few studies highlighted how employees, to include supervisors, have relayed mental health concerns and the role that mental health has played in the way they operated in the workplace (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2021; Graf-Vlachy et al., 2020; Samantaray et al., 2020). Other studies have strengthened the notion that there is a greater expectation placed on supervisors to lead effectively during the pandemic (Bartsch et al., 2021; Darics, 2020; Hahang, et al., 2022). The lack of research in this space not only creates a gap, but also an urgency to understanding what can be done to better support supervisors as they embark on the “new normal” of work.



## **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences that supervisors of staff within higher education have had after transitioning to either a hybrid or fully remote work model. Within this exploration was an evaluation of the supervisor as a leader, the resources they obtained from their organizations and how those resources assisted with mitigating the new work models, and the impact that the shift to hybrid and fully remote work models has had on their leadership style.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions being used for this study are as follows:

1. How has the supervisor been affected by the supervising of hybrid or fully remote teams?
2. How has leading a hybrid and/or fully remote team impacted the leadership style of the supervisor?
3. What strategies have supervisors used when leading employees in either hybrid or fully remote settings?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in the transformational leadership theory, which was first introduced by Burns in the late 1970s, with the proposal of the terms ‘transforming’ and ‘transactional’ leadership, and later expanded upon by Bass in the mid-1980s, who was credited with coining the term “transformational leadership” (Bass, 1985a; Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leadership can be defined as the process of guiding people through the lens of a team-centered approach rather than a self-centered approach

(Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1990). The theory proposes that a transformative approach to leadership, which focuses on the development of others through the consideration of each individual and their distinctions, can benefit both the follower and the leader (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1990). In addition, it is contended that a transformative approach has a cultural and organizational shift, whereas a transactional approach does not have a similar impact and at times a negative impact (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass et al., 2003).

### **Nature of the Study**

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the specific research design includes a phenomenological approach, which focuses on the targeted population's individual experiences through one-on-one interviews. Phenomenology, a concept said to be originated by Edmund Husserl, explores the perspectives of individuals and their unique perceptions of a specific phenom (Burkholder et al., 2020; Stewart, 1933). In this case, the phenom was the experiences related to supervising teams that are either hybrid or fully remote and the impact that these experiences have had on the leadership style of the supervisor. Phenomenological theories and tools were used as a foundational springboard toward this study, which was conducted with supervisors from more than one higher education university.

A series of steps were used to determine how this study was conducted, ideally in the following order:

- Step 1: Collection of Data - Data were collected in the form of one-on-one interviews.

- Step 2: Transcribing & Coding - Interviews were transcribed through the ATLAS.ti software, and once the transcription process was complete, codes were be created for each of the passages contained within the interviews.
- Step 3: Data Analysis - Coded data were examined using the ATLAS.ti software, and thematic analysis was also used to identify trends and patterns.
- Step 4: Compilation of Study - After identifying trends and patterns, the findings were compiled and synthesized in Chapter 4.

### **Definitions**

The definitions being used throughout this study are as follows:

*COVID-19*: A respiratory disease that spread from person to person through the respiratory system (Center for Disease Control, 2021).

*Higher education*: A public or private postsecondary institution of learning (Code of Federal Regulation, 2022).

*Hybrid*: A blend of two components. For the purpose of this study, hybrid refers to working in person and working remotely (Merriam-Webster, 2022a).

*Pandemic*: A virus outbreak that is spread from person to person without an anti-viral available for distribution (Center for Disease Control, 2021).

*Remote/remote work*: A situation when an employee works primarily from home (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

*Supervisor*: An administrator in charge of overseeing a group of people or operation (Merriam-Webster, 2022b).

### **Assumptions**

Burkholder et al. (2020) explained that for an assumption to be valid, there must be a reason for it to exist. In this study, there are several assumptions that were inferred throughout this study. For instance, one assumption was that the supervisors who voluntarily participate will answer the questions openly and honestly. Another assumption was that the supervisors who participated offered examples related to how leading teams in various work modalities have impacted them in their role as supervisor. These participants have all been working at a traditional institution of higher education and not a university that is completely remote. Lastly, there was an assumption that the supervisor oversees two or more employees. Participants were selected based on their supervisory role (i.e., overseeing staff employees) and their oversight of employees who are either fully remote or hybrid.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study was specific enough that it focused on the higher education sector without a concentration of a particular gender, age, or racial group. The delimitations include not assessing supervisors who have been recently promoted within the last year or supervisors who only have one employee under their purview.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation or challenge anticipated for this study was that it was narrowly focused on supervisors of staff, without consideration to supervisors of faculty or student employees. A barrier that was anticipated at the outset was that individuals would not want to participate because they were still getting accustomed to leading

hybrid or fully remote teams. Another anticipated barrier was also that some organizations may not have finalized which work method they are incorporating, and supervisors are teetering between three different work styles (i.e., in-person, hybrid, or fully remote).

### **Significance**

This study is significant in that it considered how supervisors are impacted while leading hybrid and/or fully remote teams, how their leadership has been impacted, if in any way, and what considerations should be made by future supervisors confronting similar issues. Additionally, this study aspired to assist organizations in considering the perspectives of supervisors when cultivating training programs, enhancements to organizational culture, and policies and procedures.

### **Summary and Transition**

Many studies have asserted the relevance of studying the impact COVID-19 has had on organizations, especially on employees and supervisors (Bartsch et al., 2021; Birkinshaw et al., 2021; Charoensukmongkol, & Phungsoonthorn, 2021; Dinh et al., 2021; Goncalves et al., 2021; Graf-Vlachy et al., 2020; Hahang et al., 2022; Shockley et al., 2021; Szelwach & Matthews, 2021); however, these studies have failed to reflect the impact that the pandemic has had on supervisors and their leadership abilities. The lack of research in this area has created another gap: tips (based on empirical data) for supervisors who lead hybrid and/or remote teams. With sufficient research and data, there is a probability that a diagnosis of sorts can be gleaned, and future research can build

upon the efforts being proposed here. Consequently, the ensuing chapters will offer a myriad of insights on this study.

Chapter 2, which assesses the literature in greater detail, also offers a review of supervising in a higher education setting and how this differentiates from other industries. This chapter reviews the theoretical framework that aligns with this study and topic. Lastly, this chapter also uncovers the impact that COVID-19 had on industries throughout the globe, as well as higher education.

Chapter 3, concentrates on the research method and explores the construct of the design and how the design was executed. Along with a review of the design was an inquiry into the participant pool and how the participants were selected. The data collection and analysis are critical elements of this section, as are the study's trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 shares a thorough overview of the results gleaned from this study. The chapter outlines how the lived experiences of supervisors of staff in higher education who lead hybrid and/or remote staff were elucidated during our one-on-one interviews. Throughout this chapter there is an exploration of the three research questions that prompted this study, a summary of the participant selection process, the limitations to the selection process and participant pool, and an analysis of how data was gathered. Lastly, the chapter offers a synopsis of the themes that materialized from the data.

Chapter 5 reiterates the purpose of this study and discusses the themes that the data analysis produced. This chapter also expounds upon the lived experiences of the

supervisors as told from their perspectives. A summary of the study ensues, with a conclusion of recommended approaches for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The concept of leadership and leading has evolved over the years, with 2020 serving as an opportunity to examine the construct of leadership and its malleability during the strain of the COVID-19 pandemic. Supervisors, specifically, were tasked with adjusting (e.g., shifting to remote leading – for some, and engaging in a different management style altogether – for others) as the world of work altered and the urgency to make modifications in the workplace became apparent (Smyth et al., 2021). It is no surprise then that literature prior to and after COVID-19, and related to leading in virtual spaces, focus on the benefits of virtual teams, the traits necessary to be effective while leading a virtual team, and how communication and trust are critical to leading virtual teams, to name a few (Alward & Phelps, 2019; Dinh et al., 2021; Mutha & Srivastava, 2021; Shockley et al., 2021; Szelwach & Matthews, 2021). Little research however has focused on the perspective of the supervisor and even less on the impact that leading staff in both hybrid and remote settings within higher education has had on the supervisor, let alone their leadership style.

Consequently, and without the exploration of the supervisor experience, it is difficult to assert what trends have originated from the impact that supervising during the pandemic has had on the leadership style of supervisors. With minimal research to glean from (i.e., Alward & Phelps, 2019), the higher education community of supervisors is notably devoid of researched examples they could use to help inform their managerial efforts. This community of leaders is also omitted from contributing to the narrative associated with supervisors that lead staff daily and lead these staff members in both the



hybrid and remote work modalities. As such, an exploration of the supervisor perspective is critical to the field.

### **Literature Strategy**

The tactic employed during the search for literature related to this study consisted of multiple attempts to find literature that seemed to be elusive. It was evident that the selection of the databases that were used to retrieve the literature was as important as organizing the keywords for this study. Upon selecting this topic, it was clear that although the Walden University Library and other university library resources were being exhausted, that the combination of databases and keywords being used was garnering minimal results. As such, and due to time constraints, the assistance of a university librarian was elicited. This approach proved to be beneficial as specific databases were identified (which broadened the opportunities for the collection of literature available) and keyword groupings were solidified (which assisted in specifying the literature needed for the purposes of this study).

The databases that were considered were ERIC and Education Source, SAGE Publications, EBSCO, APA PsycINFO, Business Source (complete and premier), and SocIndex. These databases were sourced in both the Walden University Library and another university library. Several key words were used when searching through the previously mentioned databases, such as leader, manager, supervisor, remote work, virtual teams, COVID-19, and higher education. Multiple keyword combinations were exhausted to ensure that the maximum amount of literature related to this study was revealed. These combinations included leader or manager or supervisor, remote work,

and higher education, as well as leader or manager or supervisor, virtual teams or virtual, and higher education. The granularity of the keyword search was successful, but it is important to note that there were other challenges associated with retrieving literature for this study.

Of primary concern was the fact that there was little research related to the perspective of supervisors who are leading in virtual settings or leading employees who are strictly virtual during and post COVID-19. Most of the literature focused on the perspective of the employee or the considerations that the supervisor should be making in thinking of the employee experience (Bartsch et al., 2021; Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2021; Park & Cho, 2020). There was some literature which focused on COVID-19 and leadership and COVID-19 and leading in a virtual setting, but these were primarily related to the employee perspective and virtual teams (Shockley et al., 2021; Szelwach & Matthews, 2021). There was even less literature focused on higher education and the impact on leadership post-pandemic. To temper a lot of the nuances associated with this search, a concerted effort was made to focus on specific keywords and keyword combinations. In addition, it was helpful to minimize the search to peer-reviewed articles and those published between 2018 and 2022.

### **Evolution of Leadership Theory**

In the early 1950s and 1960s there was a flourishing of leadership research and consequential theories that permeated the field. Of note were the studies that took place in Ohio State University, which focused on the structures that affect leadership (Fleishman, 1953; Fleishman & Harris, 1962), and the University of Michigan, which

focused on relationship-specific and task-specific leadership styles (Bass, 1959; Likert & Reigel, 1954). These studies, and the researchers who led them, assisted in advancing the conversation surrounding leadership and leader development while other theories were being evidenced. Several theories, such as: contingency theory (Fielder, 1964), leader legitimacy framework (Hollander, 1964), leader categorization theory (Lord et al., 1984), transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985a; Burns, 1978), transactional leadership theory (Burns, 1978), and situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1972, 1982) materialized and served as the basis for future considerations in the field.

Albeit numerous theories have contributed to the framing of leadership, there have been many discussions (and studies) that have emerged since the theorizing of leadership began. A foundational debate to the advancement of the theory of leadership has been nature versus nurture (Adams et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 1998). One concept (nature) supports that a leader is born with leadership characteristics, while the other (nurture) suggests that a leader is taught how to develop leadership characteristics (Adams et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 1998). Studies have showcased explorations of the two stances to, among other things, determine if there is a formative tie-in to leadership being regarded as innate or as learned (Adams et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 1998).

The exploration of a leader's grounding has also prompted studies that qualify if leaders become more effective with training (Kragt & Guenter, 2018), through their circumstances (Sobratee & Bodhanya, 2018), placement within an organization (Pieterse et al., 2019), or based on their leadership results (Likert, 1958), while others have focused their attention on interpreting the differences between a leader and a manager (Leroy et

al., 2018; Pieterse et al., 2019). Sobratee and Bodhanya (2018), for instance, noted that the leader, which can exist at any level within the organizational structure, is the person, while managing is the action one takes when seeking to achieve tasks. Similarly, Leroy et al. (2018) contended that a leader and a manager are not mutually exclusive and that both must exist for a successful supervisor (a combination of both the leader and the manager) to materialize. Based on the history and theoretical lens that has been established, a deeper dissection of major theories is necessary for the enhancement of this research.

One of the hallmarks in the development and realizations of leadership theory has been its continuous growth throughout the past few decades. The interest in this topic has remained steadfast and has morphed through a variety of leadership vignettes that have presented themselves in a facet of industries (Offermann & Coats, 2018). In addition to converging into a multitude of sectors, leadership theories ballooned in the last 20 years with over 700 articles written on over 60 different established and emerging theories (Dinh et al., 2014). With so many theories to choose from, this study will highlight six leadership theories and models that are the most relevant to the foundational scope of this analysis.

### **Theory X and Theory Y**

In 1960, Douglas McGregor asserted that supervisors approach situations with their employees based on assumptions that they (the manager) have of people's character and how people operate in the workplace (Russ, 2011). These assumptions operate under two opposing viewpoints: Theory X, which emphasizes a negative approach towards employees, and Theory Y, which underscores a positive approach towards employees.

According to McGregor (1960), a manager who leads with a Theory X-focused style is often less trustful of the employee, believes the employee dislikes work and for that reason the employee requires more oversight (Gürbüz, et al., 2014). Conversely, a Theory Y focus proposes that a manager has a positive outlook and therefore views employees in the workplace as those who enjoy being at work and those who require less supervision (Burke, 2011; Lawter et al., 2015).

### **Contingency Theory**

Unlike Theory X and Theory Y, Fiedler's (1964; 1967) contingency theory assesses individualistic leadership style against a myriad of leadership scenarios (Popp & Hadwich, 2018). The stylized leadership element of the theory is grounded on either a "task-motivated" or "relationship motivated" approach (Waters, 2013, p. 326), which Fielder contends prompts a discovery of the manager's leadership style. Using a three-pronged situational analysis, Fielder (1967) reviewed the leader-employee relationship, the employee task structure, and the leader's positional power. Based on the intersection of these situational variables, eight possible situations arise which assist in further defining what type of situations compel a leader's success. The theory itself assists in uncovering the effectiveness of a specific style in a particular leadership scenario while also noting that a leader may not be effective in all situations (Waters, 2013).

### **Situational Leadership Theory**

As with the contingency theory, the situational leadership theory, originally introduced by Hersey and Blanchard (1972, 1982), focuses on the relationship between leader and employee with a caveat that the leader should shift their style based on the

maturity of the employee (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). Essentially, an employee that has a low maturity level should be met with higher structure and an employee with a higher maturity level should be met with lower structure (Thompson & Glaso, 2015). With a nod to contingency theory, situational leadership theory also offers to find a balance between task-motivated and relationship-motivated leadership styles (Henkel & Bourdeau, 2018). This theory, albeit one that stems from the contingency theory, illuminates a facet of the leader/subordinate relationship, but does not test organizational bandwidth like maturity models do.

### **Maturity Models**

A key component of the organizational perspective involves measuring the growth of organizations as they mature, hence the term maturity model. The model itself has been curtailed to reflect the needs of particular sectors and has been crafted for industries ranging from construction to information technology, credit unions and everywhere in between (Becker et al., 2009; Oswald & Lingard, 2019; Serenko et al., 2016; Spruit & Pietzka, 2015). While the broadening of the maturity model remains persistent, there has been a focus on micromanaging the attributes of the highs and lows of the organization's development. This approach to gauging an organization's success or failure has extended to the conceptualization of leadership maturity models, which also evaluates the growth trajectory of a leader (Hogan, 2008). With a staggered approach in mind, the leadership maturity model opts to view the growth of the leader as they move through different stages: a viewpoint that reflects a semblance of the situational leadership theory (Anthony & Antony, 2021).

### **Transactional Leadership Theory**

Since its introduction to the field by Burns (1978), the transactional leadership theory has maintained that a core element of the leader's relationship with the employee happens through the management of tasks and directional components of all operations (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008). Some have postulated that the theory correlates the intersection of (active and passive) management and reward and the necessity to lead (Sane & Abo, 2021), while others contend that a transactional leadership style is critical to overseeing and promoting employee performance and cannot be separated from the essentials a leader is required to possess to succeed (Young et al., 2021). In essence, a leader is viewed as being effective when they own both the transactional skills and the transformative skills while in their role (Dartey-Baah, 2014). Despite its focus on the procedural functions of a leadership style and consequently, its effects on an organization, the transactional leadership theory is not the only theory that effectuates change. In fact, the theory is often associated with the transformative leadership theory, which is regarded as indispensable to the progression of any organization (Bailey & Axelrod, 2001).

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

The perspective of leaders has been a sought-after phenomenon since before Bass (1985a) first introduced the transformational leader theory. It was during this introduction that Bass expounded upon Burns' (1978) previous work related to transactional leadership and leadership that transforms and proposed that transformational leaders are those that put the needs of the employee and the collective

group before their own (Bass, 1990). This is a different viewpoint from that of the transactional leadership theory, which focuses on a task-oriented approach. The two theories, however, often intersect at the crossroads of employee outcomes (Tyssen et al., 2014; Vecchio et al., 2008).

An emphasis on the employee is only one of many considerations that a leader makes when using the transformative leadership style. According to Bass (1985a), the transformative leader has a keen awareness of self and constantly strives to do what is right for the group and the organization, not what is always popular. This leader reflects on the goals that are required of the group and how they can influence the employee to buy-in to the achievement of that goal (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Bass (1990) also described the characteristics of the transformational leader as one who possesses charisma, inspires, promotes intellectual stimulation, and provides individual consideration. These leadership characteristics formed the framework of what became known as the Four I's: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Avolio et al., 1991; Bass & Avolio, 1994,).

The first "I" (e.g., individualized consideration) denotes the active role that a leader takes in ensuring that each employee is considered as a sole entity. The employee's needs are centered, and the leader works to "build" the employee through professional development, employee advocacy, and "symbolic concern" (Avolio et al., 1991, p. 13). Individualized consideration is also actualized when employees' capacities increase through the mentorship of a transformative leader (Bass & Avolio, 1994).



Symbolically, the efforts infused into the individualized consideration approach, also correlate with the next “I”: intellectual stimulation.

As with individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation also focuses on the employee experience, with one caveat, the emphasis of this characteristic is on shifting an employee’s mindset for the team’s greater good. Transformational leaders tap into their ability to stimulate their employee’s intellect by broadening and reframing how problems are viewed, approached, and tackled (Avolio et al., 1991). Essentially, these leaders offer a solutions-based approach which considers existing or fresh problems with a “creative” tactic and in a new way (Avolio et al., 1991; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Tracey & Hinkin, 1998). Not surprisingly, when coupled with individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation has the propensity to achieve inspirational motivation (Avolio et al., 1991).

The characteristic of a transformational leader that espouses inspirational motivation is one that is grounded on a leader’s ability to communicate their vision and showcase behaviors that instigate action (Avolio et al., 1991; Bass, 1990). Specifically, transformational leaders that cultivate inspirational motivation are viewed as individuals that can shift the vitality of employees for the purpose of accomplishing the mission (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformational leaders that exemplify this characteristic also demonstrate a commitment to efficiency and goal achievement, staying calm under pressure, and the continued upkeep of vitality in employees (Avolio et al., 1991; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Tracey & Hinkin, 1998). In addition to the attributes noted here, inspirational motivation also merges seamlessly with idealized influence, which epitomizes individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation.

As with all other characteristics, idealized influence is achieved with employees at its core. The main distinction of this characteristic, as opposed to others, is that idealized influence is realized when individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation are in place. Specifically, it is after trust is developed and a bond is fostered that the leader/employee relationship can encompass a semblance of idealized influence (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Tracey & Hinkin, 1998). This influence is especially critical as employees begin to have faith in the efforts of a leader and what that leader can accomplish in the future (Avolio et al., 1991). Overall, the four characteristics described in this section contribute to the organizational culture and in many cases define how successful or unsuccessful an organization can be (Bass, 1990). It is the leaders' behavior and connection to the employee, however, that resounds throughout the transformational leadership theory.

Despite its focus on the leader/employee relationship, and since the development of the transformational leadership theory, others have offered to illustrate the ethical and moral qualities of a transformative leader (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), how a transformative leader impacts job satisfaction (Braun et al., 2013), and the way in which transformative leadership affects the organization (Bass et al., 2003). A deeper review of the literature suggests the ways in which leaders who base their leadership style through a transformative lens have a transcendental effect on the employee and consequently, throughout the organization (Bass, 1995). This "effect" resonates with most because it offers both an altruistic response from a person or group of people and because the employees themselves learn this behavior of transcendence (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). In

addition, the consideration of so many elements (i.e., ethical decision-making, altruism, and effectiveness) all speak to the way in which leaders must make professional determinations often using only their learned skills. Consequently, it is important to understand the perspective of the leader when considering ways in which the leader's skillset should be enhanced.

With this framework in mind, this study set out to explore the experiences that supervisors of staff within higher education have had after transitioning to either a hybrid or fully remote work model in a post-COVID-19 setting. Studies have worked to share the experiences and voices of supervisors (Alward & Phelps, 2019; Dinh et al., 2021; Park & Cho, 2020; Shockley et al., 2021), but there has been little research that focuses on supervisors who worked during and after there were shifts in the workplace that were prompted by COVID-19. Even fewer studies have focused on supervisors in higher education (Alward & Phelps, 2019). The lack of research in this space not only creates a gap, but also an urgency to understanding what can be done to better support supervisors as they embark on the "new normal" of work. As such, this study is significant in that considered how supervisors are impacted while leading hybrid and/or fully remote teams, how their leadership has been impacted, if in any way, and what considerations should be made by future supervisors confronting similar issues. Additionally, this study will assist organizations in considering the perspectives of supervisors when cultivating training programs, enhancements to organizational culture, and policies and procedures.

## **Academic Administration**

The origin of academic administrations (synonymous with institutions of higher education) can be traced to the colonial era (Thelin, 2011; Thwing, 1906). For some, the birth of this system began out of a necessity to perpetuate the teachings of the most prominent scholars of the era (Thwing, 1906), while for others this formation occurred to maintain a recurrence of people who could contribute to society (Thelin, 2011). Despite its origins, the expectation of what academic administrations should be has morphed. There is a belief that the organization, and the leaders who oversee it, will operate within the scope of a moral high ground, and make decisions for the betterment of the institution (Curren, 2008). These decision points include being fiscally responsible, ensuring that students are receiving a suitable education, and making substantial contributions to society (Weingartner, 1999) through a sound organizational structure and operational resilience (Department of Education, 2023).

### **Organizational Structure and Operations**

Since 1636, when Harvard University, the first university in the United States, was established, the notion of higher education blossomed with two intents: to contribute to the social construct of the public by educating students and furthering research and to offer a value proposition to its students that no other entity could (Levin, 2000). According to Levin (2000), one of the purposes of the institution is to provide research, instruction, and service to its communities through a set of professionals (i.e., administrators) that share a commonality of beliefs. This purpose, suggests Levin, works in tandem with other functions, such as: training individuals to have a set of skills that

they can use in the workforce, make technological advances, propel research (both medical and otherwise), and contribute to commercial developments. While these are just a few of the many reasons for the formulation of higher education institutions, these organizations are maintained with a continuum of leaders at their helm.

Since its inception, the leadership structure of universities has followed a pyramid (top-down) makeup, and the organizational composition has been one of departments and schools (Hoffman & Summers, 2000). The pyramid structure which typically consists of a president or chancellor who is selected to oversee all operations of the university, trickles down to senior vice presidents (SVP), vice presidents (VP) and deans who report directly to the president/chancellor and senior and middle managers who report up to the SVPs, VPs, and deans (Alfred & Rosevear, 2000). There are also department chairs (chairs), who are tenured faculty who oversee the administration of departments that relate specifically to their field. Chairs typically report to the provost who oversees all faculty-related matters and who reports directly to the president/chancellor. These SVPs, VPs, deans and chairs are then tasked with overseeing administrative departments (e.g. admissions, advancement, communications, information technology, library, registrar...etc.), schools (e.g. The Graduate School, School of Engineering, School of Public Health...etc.) and academic departments (e.g. Department of Africana Studies, Department of Anthropology, Department of Psychology...etc.), respectively.

Each leader, regardless of what department or school they oversee, is tasked with ensuring that support to students (i.e., via recruitment, enrollment, classes, mentoring, research...etc.) is continuous and that administrative operations remain intact. These

efforts contribute to the maintenance of the two main revenue streams of the university: students and the federal government (Honeyman, 2000). And while all efforts lead back to ensuring the well-being of students (i.e., ‘the who’), economic, societal, and cultural shifts have the propensity to shape the way in which a university redirects ‘the how’ of their operations (Hoffman & Summers, 2000). It is the leader, and consequently the middle manager, who is tasked with moving forward the top-down vision for the university, however. As Levin (2000) stated:

The dilemma for managers of the academic institution is that they are charged with responsibility for organizational action, yet the meaning and ultimately the values of action and its outcomes are subject to interpretation and dispute. (p. 30)

Essentially, the responsibility of the institution and how it is propelled forward belongs to the president/chancellor, but the ownership of the operations belongs to the managers.

### **Leadership & Management**

The hierarchical structure of a university’s leadership can be categorized into two pillars: faculty and staff. Each pillar offers a distinct roadmap for job responsibilities and career progression. Faculty are hired to, among other things, perform instructional duties, while staff are hired to, among other things, perform administrative and non-instructional duties (Kezar et al., 2011). As such, the trajectory that each path takes is quite different. Faculty members, for instance, make their way from the completion of an undergraduate program to a graduate program, to either post-doctoral appointments or research nomination through tenure-track or non-tenure track routes (Flores & Olcott, 2020). Staff

members on the other hand, are not always required to have a degree to enter a position, and like faculty, have to work their way up to a more senior job title and role.

### ***Faculty Positions***

Most institutions offer guidance for both faculty and staff on their career trajectories. Claremont Graduate University (2017) for example, offers a “career road map” that outlines the stages that an individual goes through (from first year as a PhD to faculty appointment) and the different tracks that are available to those seeking to pursue a faculty designation. The John Hopkins School of Medicine (2023), Boston University’s Office of the Provost (2023) and countless others, provide similar guidance to current and future faculty seeking career and promotion guidance. The commonality with the information these schools are proposing is based on an agreed upon lineage of progression that unfolds atypically depending on which of the pathways is selected (see Table 1).

### **Table 1**

#### *Faculty Career Progression*

Designation	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Non-tenure track	Lecturer	Sr. lecturer	Advanced/master Lecturer
Tenure track	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Full professor/professor
Administrative	Assistant dean	Associate dean	Dean

*Note.* These examples are not all encompassing.

It is important to note that although Table 1 highlights the most prominent levels in each designation, this list is not exhaustive. For instance, there are other roles that

would fall under the non-tenure track umbrella, such as adjunct and visiting professors. The same applies to administrative designations which might culminate with an individual being appointed to a provost or president position.

Another level that is not noted in Table 1 but is equally as important is that of department chair. The role of department chair is not required for promotion. In fact, an individual is typically assigned this role after they have obtained tenure, have reached a certain level of prominence in their field, and have had tenure (and often, notoriety) for a few years (Flores & Olcott, 2020). With each progression there is an added level of responsibility, whether teaching more classes, mentoring more students, conducting more research, or leading an entire department. The department chair role, however, is the one role that has a level of supervision inscribed in its job description.

### ***Staff Positions***

Like faculty positions, staff positions require some level of experience in the field before one can attain a certain status. Regardless of whether that experience is derived from a skillset (i.e., a specific craft and/or licensure certification) or educational endeavor (i.e., pursuing a degree in a specific field), staff positions have their own set of criteria attached to them. Most notably, job descriptions typically address the need for a certain number of years of experience coupled with an educational requirement. An entry level position may only require a high school diploma, while a mid-level position might require 5 to 7 years of experience, a graduate degree that closely aligns with the job field, and supervisory experience (in some cases). A senior level position, depending on the rank, may require over 10 years of experience, a terminal degree (in some cases), and a



certain number of years in a supervisory role. Table 2 showcases some examples of career progression through the staff ranks:

**Table 2**

*Staff Career Progression*

Designation	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Entry-level	Assistant director	Financial analyst	Line cook
Mid-level	Associate director	Sr. financial analyst	Lead cook
Senior-level	Director	Financial supervisor	Dining supervisor

*Note.* These examples are not all encompassing.

Aside from the way that staff positions are ranked, there are a variety of differences that set them apart from faculty positions. One stark difference is that staff positions are often regulated by business hours, while faculty positions are less stringent and more independent. Staff positions are also designated as non-exempt (meaning employees who are paid per hour) and exempt (meaning employees who are salaried). Another difference is that mid-level and senior-level positions are more often prone to having a supervisory designation, while faculty roles are less likely poised to include supervision in their role description. Regardless of how faculty and staff are distributed throughout the university, they both have a role to play in the greater success of the student and the organization (Florenthal & Tolstikov-Mast, 2012), but not without the guidance of policies and procedures.

### *Policies & Procedures*

As with any other organization (i.e., corporate, military, or public sector), and despite their designation as public or private, universities within the United States are governed by laws that mandate specific compliance-related actions. Laws ranging from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2023), which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin and other protected categories, and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 (Department of Justice, 2023), which prohibits sex discrimination in any program receiving financial assistance, to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Action (known as HIPAA; Department of Human and Health Services, 2023), which requires health information privacy for all, begin to frame the constructs of a university's policy framework. These laws are only a few of the laws that are required for compliance. Others, specific to employees, fall under a variety of categories, such as: personal and family leave, bargaining agreements, overtime payment (for non-exempt employees), disability and accessibility, academic freedom, and many others.

Typically, once a university understands the laws required to conduct business, they create their own policies and procedures that share a dualism of effects: honor the law and set cultural precedent within the organization (Hoffman & Summers, 2000). It is this culture that attracts both students and employees and assists the university in thriving (Alexander, 2020). The policies and procedures also help shape the way in which work is actualized (aside from the people themselves) and assists with employee retention within the organization (Alexander, 2020). In fact, many organizations strive to be employer of

choice with the speculative understanding that there is a cyclical effect to the employer/employee collaboration; one which suggests that the culture of the employer attracts the employee, but it is the employee that continues to forward (for the most part) the cultural agenda of the employer (Frost et al., 1985). This cultural cycle continues through a transformative lens and with the manager at the helm (Nidiffer, 2000).

### ***Team Formations***

The concept of team development and progression has been around for decades and undoubtedly evolved over the years (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Fapohunda, 2013; Fitzpatrick, 2000; Hartwig et al., 2020). At the precipice of each of these teams, is a manager/supervisor that is tasked with upholding the policies and procedures of the organization, fulfilling the mission of the work, and maximizing the potential of each employee (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Khan & Wajidi, 2019). The leader of the unit is also charged with ensuring that team cohesion exists for the work to be effectuated (Fapohunda, 2013). This requires the leader to make a multitude of considerations, for instance: what happens to the work product of an employee who suddenly must be out of the office for an extended period of time, how is cohesion created if employees work in different states on alternate days, or how should employees who do not buy into the vision of the manager be led?

With these reflection points in mind, managers often rely on their own leadership styles and skillsets to make professional judgements on day-to-day interactions (Bass, 1985a; Bass & Avolio; 1993). How they approach decision-making also contributes to the organizational culture and the employee experience: a nod to culture cycle (Nidiffer,

2000). As organizations shift however, the manager is required to adjust and learn to navigate the new landscape of the road ahead. Those shifts do not happen in a vacuum. They present themselves as layoffs (i.e., which requires doing more with less), budget cuts, and leadership changes. Consequently, considerations for the broader organizational structures and how supervisors lead within them should be made; as well as a regard for what support, if any, are given to supervisors who were impacted by leading virtual and hybrid teams during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Organizational Shifts During COVID**

There is no question that the COVID-19 pandemic obliged a seismic shift in the way many, if not all, organizations conducted business (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). The notion of ‘business as usual’ quickly became antiquated (Costa et al., 2021). All industries from construction (Pamidimukkala et al., 2021), to health care (Awan et al., 2022; Hahang et al., 2022), retail (Kim, 2020), and higher education (Jena, 2020; Marinoni et al., 2020; Rashid & Yadav, 2020) were forced to transform the way in which they operated. Consequently, each industry had to work through stoppages in the supply chain (Pamidimukkala et al., 2021), an influx of sick patients (Awan et al., 2022; Hahang et al., 2022), a completely shut down economy (Kim, 2020), and a stop to how institutions of higher education operated (Marinoni et al., 2020). The constraints placed on organizations quickly permeated to the management ranks.

### **Leadership and Management Changes**

Managers had to rapidly pivot and remain flexible as senior leaders received guidance from federal authorities and industry leaders. Leaders had to contend with the

precautionary measures imposed by the Center for Disease Control (i.e., social distancing and the use of personal protective equipment), how to coordinate schedules, and the introduction of flexibility of work modalities amidst the uncertainty (Lim et al., 2020). For most managers, there was an involuntary prompt to learn how to lead teams virtually (Newman & Ford, 2021). During this time, most employers were forced to contend with either hybrid or fully remote work models and for the better parts of 2020 and 2021 supervisors were left with minimal guidance on the best approaches to leading their teams amidst the new work modalities (Bartsch et al., 2021; Goncalves et al., 2021). How COVID-19 impacted teams was also consequential.

### **Team Changes and Remote Work**

Leading in a virtual or hybrid setting is not a new phenomenon, but it was certainly one that was exacerbated with the inception of the pandemic. As some managers transitioned into their new work modalities post March 2020, they were responsible for considering the ever-changing personal responsibilities of some of their employees, for instance, the mental health and well-being of their employees, as well as the employees' personal obligations (i.e., children who were unable to attend school or immunocompromised family members; Shipman et al., 2021). For those who oversaw traditional in-person teams, the shift to a virtual or hybrid setting posed a new set of deliberation points, such as the best communication style to use while leading virtually (Shockley et al., 2021), toggling between being focused on tasks versus relationships (Birkinshaw et al., 2021), ensuring work was fairly distributed (Henry et al., 2021), establishing and/or developing trust (Dinh et al., 2021) and assuring the performance of the team remains

optimum (Brown et al., 2021). Each of these situational exposures drove these teams, managers in particular, to determine some of the benefits and challenges of the virtual workplace (specifically), and how to best capitalize on the setting itself (Szelwach & Matthews, 2021).

### **Use of Technology and Its Impact**

Organizations that transitioned to a fully remote work modality during the height of the pandemic were met with specific technological tools (e.g., email, video conferencing, and chat) to assist with communication. The use of these tools exposed several of the benefits and challenges that accompany working remotely (Szelwach & Matthews, 2021). The benefits, for instance, included an ability to work from anywhere and simultaneously working on group projects, productivity increase across teams, and a reduction in operational costs (Mutha & Srivastava, 2021; Szelwach & Matthews, 2021). Conversely, the challenges abounded. Communication became constrained through email interpretation and as such, trust in work productivity came into question. Another major challenge was the overreliance on audio and video conferencing for meetings, which created a semblance of “Zoom fatigue” (Szelwach & Matthews, 2021, p.77). Lastly, leaders spent more time prepping for meetings and leading meetings that took place virtually (Dyer et al., 2013). These constraints posed opportunities for autonomous decision-making and a modernization of the way in which business was done. The application of the same effects as they relate to higher education cannot be overlooked.

### **Shifts in Higher Education During COVID**

As previously stated, the effects of COVID-19 did not stop at one industry, but rather impacted all. The burden felt by institutions of higher education was as significant as other industries, but the focus itself was predominantly on students (Johnson et al., 2020). There was an urgency to determine how the institution would shift their operations and how online learning, specifically, would take place with the least amount of disruption possible (Berr et al., 2021; Bouchey et al., 2021). Students inevitably transitioned to online learning and faculty adjusted (Bouchey et al., 2021; Rashid & Yadav, 2021), but there were other prominent changes. For instance, faculty and staff had to also shift their operations online, which for some meant learning how to navigate the virtual world (Szelwach & Matthews, 2021). It was leaders, however, that were required to be the nimblest (Goncalves et al., 2021; Smyth et al., 2021).

### **Leadership and Management Changes**

Leaders in higher education had to consider the mental, financial, and emotional burdens that were placed upon their core clientele: students (Aucejo et al., 2020). There were other mechanics at play when thinking of the student experience, for instance how would the pandemic affect in-person learning, recruitment, sports, budgets, tuition, and teaching (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020) and the future of learning for these students (Dorn et al., 2020). Essentially, COVID perpetuated paradigm shifts for those institutions that were not fully onboard with distance education learning and created a pathway for distance education to become a method of instruction (Aristovnik et al., 2020).

Being a conduit for learning was only one of the many concerns facing leaders in higher education. They still needed to guide their respective workforces. Careful thought needed to be exercised when thinking of the many roles that exist within higher education, such as dining services employees (where would they be if the institution was closed), landscapers, athletic coaches, recruiters, admissions officers, and faculty who only used traditional modes of lecturing. There was also a need for leaders to subside fears and the doubts that permeated the workplace, to include what would happen in the future with existing and future employees.

### **Team Changes and Remote Work**

The impact of remote work was felt differently among groups within higher education. For example, individuals whose primary roles designated them as essential personnel (i.e., facilities management, emergency response...etc.) and those that remained in traditional in-person roles (i.e., food service workers, landscapers...etc.) had vastly different experiences than individuals who could perform their work remotely (i.e., secretaries, administrators, and faculty members). For those individuals that were able to transition to remote work, the same benefits and challenges that were previously mentioned resonated here. There was an overuse of video conferences and “back-to-back” meetings (Szelwach & Matthews, 2021), as well as a reacquaintance with team dynamics, personnel management, and flexibility (Goncalves et al., 2021; Smyth et al., 2021). Despite the variations in perception of outcomes, some suggest that a rewarding aftermath from the pandemic was the emphasis that institutions placed on the mental



well-being of their staff and how this focus enhanced organizational offerings for employees (Smyth et al., 2021).

### **Use of Technology and Its Impact**

As with other industries that were not accustomed to online only functions, the transition to a fully remote experience was required. Since the dependability of instruction was extrinsically connected to technology, universities who were not offering online instruction had to make a rapid shift to appease the expectation of virtual learning (Aucejo et al., 2020). Some institutions, like Liberty University, University of Phoenix, and Walden University, who already had a virtual platform and online educational presence, were among the few that were prepared to continue their operations when the pandemic shut down others' processes. The impact to this change in operational commitment was that higher education institutions would offer more virtual learning opportunities, flexibility for employees (i.e., a hybrid work model), and an openness to process reconfigurations when necessary (Costa et al., 2021).

### **Summary and Transition**

This chapter, which assessed the literature in greater detail, also offered an overview of leadership theory, a review of the transformational leadership theory and the theoretical framework being proposed for this study. Within its contents, the chapter also shared a synopsis of the structure of an academic administration, with an emphasis on the employee structure. Lastly, this chapter showcased how COVID-19 has impacted industries as a whole, and higher education specifically, and how this impact has resonated with leaders, employees, and collective teams.

Chapter 3, which concentrates on the research method will also explore the construct of the design and how the design was executed. Along with a review of the design, will be an inquiry into the participant pool and how the participants will be selected if more than 12 participants volunteer to be in the study. The data collection and analysis are critical elements of this section, as are the validity of the study's trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 shares a thorough overview of the results gleaned from this study. The chapter outlines how the lived experiences of supervisors of staff in higher education who lead hybrid and/or remote staff were elucidated during our one-on-one interviews. Throughout this chapter there is an exploration of the three research questions that prompted this study, a summary of the participant selection process, the limitations to the selection process and participant pool, and an analysis of how data was gathered. Lastly, the chapter offers a synopsis of the themes that materialized from the data.

Chapter 5 restates the purpose of this study and discusses the themes that the data analysis produced. This chapter also expounds upon the lived experiences of the supervisors as told from their perspectives. A summary of the study ensues, with a conclusion of recommended approaches for future research.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

This study was conducted with the university setting in mind and focused on understanding the impact that leading hybrid and remote teams has had on supervisors of staff. A selection of nine participants was made (out of a potential eight to 12 participants) without a focus on demographic self-identification. All participants were interviewed on a one-on-one basis using both a recording device and typed notes. Individuals who failed to consent to recording or who do not supervise more than one employee were automatically disqualified. Upon the completion of all interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed using the ATLAS.ti software, and once the transcription process was complete, codes were created manually for each of the passages contained within the interviews prior to coding through the ATLAS.ti system. Coded data was examined using ATLAS.ti and thematic analysis was used to identify trends and patterns. After identifying trends and patterns, the findings were compiled and analyzed. Results will show which factors impacted supervisors as they lead hybrid or fully remote teams.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study was grounded in the transformational leadership theory and used the phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of supervisors who have staff that are either hybrid, remote, or both and how leading staff in these work modalities has impacted them. The impact that supervising staff who are hybrid and remote has had on supervisors of staff was gleaned via the examination of the supervisor's experiences and the review of their beliefs, attachments, and reactions to the impact. This approach was

formulated as the most appropriate based on the understanding that there is no impact-related list to pull from or categories that a researcher can assess. As such, and with the phenomenological approach in mind, the following research questions were crafted:

RQ1: How has the supervisor been affected by the supervising of hybrid or fully remote teams?

RQ2: How has leading a hybrid and/or fully remote team impacted the leadership style of the supervisor?

RQ3: What are the strategies you use when leading employees in either hybrid or fully remote settings?

The concepts being reviewed with these research questions align with the phenomenological approach chosen for this study. The primary goal in using these specific questions was to ascertain the impact that supervisors have sustained by leading fully remote or hybrid personnel. One of the traditions that defines this approach is the understanding of participants' experiences and the retrieval of these experiences to conceptualize a phenom that has not been studied previously.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Burkholder et al. (2020) suggested that the role of the researcher is multi-faceted and can range from an individual who collects data (i.e., qualitative studies) to someone who listens intently to others' perceptions without incorporating their own bias into what is being shared (i.e., phenomenological studies). Babbie (2017) also noted that, amongst other things, a researcher should avoid imposing their own ideologies after being exposed to participants' experiences as these may lead to direct bias in the study and an additional

cascading of unintentional and negative consequences. Notwithstanding the constraints, a researcher's role is one that can have long-lasting positive impact on both participants and the field in which the researcher stems from as long as ethical considerations are made on behalf of the researcher, and trustworthiness is established throughout the entirety of the study (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Upholding trustworthiness and the ethical imperative within a study is also a critical part of the researcher's role (Burkholder et al., 2020). However, the researcher can only control how they present the information, ensuring that there is a clear articulation of the process in which the participant is opting into may decrease the probability that trust is broken at the onset. Another highlight, which may be unknown to the participants, is the researcher holding themselves to the highest of ethical standards and ensuring that the welfare of the participant is at the forefront (Begun, 2018).

With many of these considerations in mind and after reviewing the literature, it is evident that my role had to be one of observer-participant (Babbie, 2017; Burkholder et al., 2020). During the interviews I conducted, I observed the body language of the participants and the emotion they displayed when discussing specific topics. I also participated by interviewing each person and asking precise questions about their experiences. In addition to the perspective of an observer-participant, I also monitored the conflicts of interest that may have surfaced throughout the study.

One of the anticipated dilemmas that was present at the inception of the study was how having a current professional relationship with the participant would impact the interview with that participant. For instance, I currently work at an institution of higher

education and solicited voluntary participation from individuals in other institutions, who may on occasion collaborate with my institution. One of the ways that I mitigated potential tension was to ensure that my role within the institution and my role as a researcher were clearly defined to the participants. It was also necessary to inform the participants that they would not receive any incentives for participating in this study, including any perceived incentives from my role at the institution I work for.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Pool**

The participant pool for this study consisted of nine supervisors who oversee staff employees within an institution of higher education in the United States, which aligns with the common sample size in phenomenological studies (Burkholder et al., 2020). To participate they must be considered a “middle manager” (i.e., not a newly designated supervisor and not an executive leader that oversees a division or a department) and must have been in a supervisory role since 2019. The pool itself included supervisors from various institutions, with a diverse representation of participants from both public and private institutions. The number of participants was limited to less than 12 to ensure that each participant’s experience was given enough credence. If saturation occurred during the process, and depending on where within the process, the participant number would have been reduced to eight.

### **Participant Selection**

Prospective participants were invited to participate in this study via LinkedIn and affiliated university groups (which were available via an email listserv). Participants

selected for this study were selected based on several factors. For instance, participants must be currently supervising two or more staff employees who are designated as either fully remote or hybrid. The supervisor's personal designation as remote or hybrid was not a point of consideration within this study. The supervisor must also be considered a "middle manager" (i.e., not a newly designated supervisor and not an executive leader that oversees a division or a department) and must have been in a supervisory position since 2019. Consideration for demographics (i.e., race, gender, age, etc.) was not emphasized in this study but was requested in an initial survey questionnaire (Appendix B) and noted in the results section.

Once a prospective participant declared their interest in participating in the study, they received an email (Appendix A) requesting their voluntary participation in the study. The email contained a link to a survey questionnaire (Appendix B), which asked for specific information related to the intent of the study. The survey was available electronically and the answers submitted by those who complete the survey was stored in a secured drive. Participants who met the study's criteria were invited to participate in the study. The selection criteria propose that a participant:

- Must be a supervisor (middle manager) at an institution of higher education
- Must work at a traditional (in-person) institution of higher education and not a fully remote university
- Must have been a supervisor since 2019
- Must supervise two or more staff employees
- Must supervise employees who are either hybrid or remote, not fully in-person

Once all survey responses were received, the number of selected candidates were condensed to no more than 12 participants. If the selection pool were to have been less than eight, another request for participants would have been sent via LinkedIn and the affiliated group listserv. If the selection pool was more than 12, the remaining participants (beyond the 12 selected) were to be held in a reserve pool. All participants, whether chosen to participate or not, received a follow up email discussing next steps (Appendices C and D).

### **Instrumentation**

A key element of this study was the one-on-one interviews conducted with each of the participants. A semi-structured list of questions (Appendix E) was used during the interview. Clarifying questions were asked as necessary, and in some instances, it was necessary to request that the individual expound upon a particular question. These questions were open-ended and explored via Zoom interviews. All interviews were recorded and the audio files, along with the transcripts, were stored in a secure drive that was used for research purposes only and stored in a locked safe. The transcripts were reviewed twice for accuracy and all transcripts were written in the manner the participant shared them.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this study was derived primarily from one-on-one interviews with supervisors of staff employees that have been impacted by leading hybrid and remote teams post COVID-19. All interviews were conducted in a virtual setting. A maximum of 12 participants were selected using a survey questionnaire (Appendix B)



and based on specific criteria. Upon the selection of the final nine participants, they were invited to consent to the study and being interviewed. After providing their consent, participants were invited to coordinate a 1.5-2-hour interview to explore each of the questions designed for the study (Appendix E).

Since the basis of this study is grounded on the phenomenological approach, participants were directed to answer as openly and honestly as possible. They were reminded that all answers are confidential and that elaborate answers are welcome. Open-ended questions were also used to generate answers without prompting. There were instances where some answers required clarification or where follow up questions were needed to fully ascertain what the participant was conveying.

During the interviews all sessions were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Each session was methodically transcribed and reviewed twice for accuracy. The responses were also coded with the pseudonyms of each participant and each participant was listed as Participant 1, 2, 3...etc., depending on the order in which they were selected to participate. There was no instance that warranted further clarification from a participant (i.e., a portion of the audio was inaudible); however, each participant had the opportunity to review their individual transcript for accuracy or inconsistencies with their intended response. No follow-up interviews were necessary for the completion of the one-on-one interviews. The goal was to interview all intended participants (i.e., originally 8-12 participants) within the span of 60 days and transcribe the interviews within 30 days after all interviews had taken place. This goal was achieved, and all nine participants

were interviewed within the proposed 60 days and interview transcripts were returned (for the most part) within 2 weeks of each interview.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study was completed with the use of the ATLAS.ti software. ATLAS.ti is a software that assists researchers (both experienced and inexperienced), in private and public organizations, to translate their data into a variety of analytical subsets. ATLAS.ti can be used when dissecting quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods data. The software allows users to upload their data and, in this case, assess the data for trends, to include reviewing the participants attitude and behavioral patterns. Although the program offers many tools, it was imperative to maintain oversight of themes and patterns that may not be observed by the program itself.

The first step in the data analysis was to transcribe all audio-recorded interviews into text. Once the audio of each interview was fully converted into text, the transcribed text was verified by listening to the recording while simultaneously reviewing the text. After conducting an initial review of the content, any discrepancies (i.e., unintelligible words, understanding of the meaning of a term, etc.) were clarified during the second review of the audio/text and would have been further clarified by sending the transcript to the participant for review. Pursuant to this process, conceptual themes were highlighted within each interview through open coding. Although themes can be manually labeled through open coding, axial coding, and/or selective coding (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 224), this study benefitted from the open coding approach.

Once the accuracy checks of the audios and transcripts had been completed (with the researcher and through participant verification), the transcribed data was uploaded into ATLAS.ti. Upon uploading the transcribed text into ATLAS.ti, the software was used to examine the data, track patterns throughout, and obtain thematic outcomes. The output from ATLAS.ti was triangulated with the manual coding that was done after the audio was transcribed to text. ATLAS.ti also offers the option to manually code or auto code sentences and paragraphs within a text. Both features (i.e., manual and auto-coding) were explored, but not relied upon for accurateness or elimination of bias. Once all document information was consolidated, and upon the completion of the coding review, the information was exported into an excel spreadsheet. The content of the output enabled a relationship analysis between the research questions and the information obtained from the interviews.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The concerns that arise as it pertains to the trustworthiness of a phenomenological study abound. According to Burkholder et al. (2020), a study can lack trustworthiness if the researcher does not allow the participants to speak for self during the interview process, if the researcher influences the interpretation of the results with their own biases, or if, amongst other things, the study does not elicit enough data. For the purpose of this study, each element of the interview process was described to the participants. The interviews consisted of one-on-one interviews that took place virtually. All interviews were recorded to ensure that all transcripts reflect the actual language of the participants and not any additional content that I might have formulated.

Since it was anticipated that participants were from institutions of higher education, a culture that I am a part of, there was a level of comfort and reliability between the participants and me. The study was grounded in the transformational leadership theory and as such, the purview of the study remained through that lens rather than my own. All responses were transcribed and reviewed twice (once when transcribing from audio to text and a second time when comparing the text to the audio) prior to finalizing. During the interview, I sought clarification on specific points to ensure that the participant's experience is accurately depicted.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Many studies contend that the ethical considerations one makes in their research is as critical to the success of the study as any other consideration made throughout (Babbie, 2017; Begun, 2018; Burkholder et al., 2020). Others, such as the American Psychological Association (2020), offer guidance through their Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (American Psychological Association, 2023) and suggest that psychologists (i.e., researchers) should have integrity, respect for others, and conduct themselves in a fair and just manner. Walden University's Institutional Review Board offers a Research Ethics Approval Checklist (Walden University, n.d.) to assist in mitigating with any ethical concerns. In addition to using this checklist, the study was protected from potential ethical offenses by maintaining a professional demeanor with participants and ensuring they maintained a professional demeanor with me. The study may have also touched on concerns that the supervisors may have had or are experiencing

while in their roles at their current institution, yet the participants did not express any discomfort with answering any of the answers openly or at all.

Apart from the previous ethical considerations, other parameters were put in place to ensure adherence to ethical guidelines. Participants were asked to sign a consent form to participate in the study and were reminded that this is a completely voluntary process which they could recuse themselves from at any time. Participants were also given pseudonyms to both maintain a semblance of anonymity and protect their identities. Any data retrieve from emails, surveys, consent forms, interviews and recordings were stored in a secured drive and a hard copy of all documents were secured in a safe for a minimum of 3 years. Any data that is not directly relevant to the study was deleted.

### **Summary**

This chapter assisted in reviewing the use of the phenomenological approach and maintaining the qualitative stance. An exploration of the rationale for participant selection and the criteria used to select participants was also provided in this chapter. In addition, an overview of the role of the researcher and how this role correlates to the trustworthiness and ethical makeup of the study were included. A comprehensive articulation of the data collection and analysis was also provided, with special emphasis made to highlighting the features of the ATLAS.ti program.

Chapter 4 shares a thorough overview of the results gleaned from this study. The chapter outlines how the lived experiences of supervisors of staff in higher education who lead hybrid and/or remote staff were elucidated during our one-on-one interviews. Throughout this chapter there is an exploration of the three research questions that

prompted this study, a summary of the participant selection process, the limitations to the selection process and participant pool, and an analysis of how data was gathered. Within the text of the chapter, there are tables which, among other things, showcase the participant demographics and themes that emerged from the data. Lastly, this chapter offers a synopsis of the themes that materialized from the data.

Chapter 5 restates the purpose of this study and discusses the themes that the data analysis produced. This chapter also expounds upon the lived experiences of the supervisors as told from their perspectives. A summary of the study ensues, with a conclusion of recommended approaches for future research.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This chapter includes a thorough overview of the results gleaned from this study. It begins with an exploration of the three research questions that prompted this study. It then presents the lived experiences of supervisors of staff in higher education who lead hybrid and/or remote staff. What follows is a summary of the participant demographics, selection process, and the limitations to the selection process and participant pool. Data collection and analysis are explained. Tables showcase the participant demographics and themes that emerged from the data. Lastly, the chapter provides a synopsis of the themes that materialized from the data.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions (RQs) that guided the development and approach of this study are as follows:

- RQ1 - How has the supervisor been affected by the supervising of hybrid or fully remote teams?
- RQ2 - How has leading a hybrid and/or fully remote team impacted the leadership style of the supervisor?
- RQ3 - What strategies have supervisors used when leading employees in either hybrid or fully remote settings?

### **Participant Demographics**

Although the demographic makeup of each participant was not the focal point of this study or even a lateral consideration, it may have contributed to the lens of each

participant's leadership style and perspective. Nine participants were selected for this study out of 13 who applied to be considered. Of the nine selected participants, a little less than half (44%) self-identified as White or Caucasian, while the other half self-identified as Black or African American (11%), Hispanic or Latino (11%), or a variation of all races combined (33%). Over three fourths (78%) of the participants self-identified as female, one participant self-identified as male and another participant as non-binary (Table 3). While the racial and gender demographic makeup of this participant pool were not focused on, all participants were expected to have at least 3 years of supervising experience and supervising at least two staff employees. Of the nine participants, four (44%) stated that they have anywhere from 3-9 years of supervising experience and over half (55%) stated that they have 14 years of supervising experience. Additionally, 66% of the participants stated that they supervise anywhere from 2-5 employees, and the other 33% stated that they supervise more than 10 employees. Lastly, two participants worked for public institutions and seven worked for private institutions (Table 3).



**Table 3***Participant Demographics*

Data figure	#	%
<b>Race</b>		
American Indian or Alaska Native		
Asian		
Black or African American	1	11%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		
White/Caucasian	4	44%
Hispanic/Latino	1	11%
Two or More	3	33%
Decline to Answer		
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	1	11%
Female	7	78%
Nonbinary	1	11%
Trans		
Additional designation		
Decline to answer		
<b>Years as supervisor</b>		
3–5	2	22%
6–9	2	22%
10–13		
14–16	1	11%
16+	4	44%
<b>Number of employees</b>		
0–2	1	11%
3–5	5	56%
6–9		
10–13	1	11%
14–16	1	11%
16+	1	11%
<b>Institution type</b>		
Public	2	22%
Private	7	77%

*Note.* Age demographics were not collected for this study.

These demographic data points are akin to that of post-secondary institutions throughout the United States, which report the statistics of their institutions (to include the racial and gender demographics of managers) to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS, 2023). IPEDS compiles and publicizes the data of colleges and universities that have federal financial aid programs with the United States government (IPEDS, 2023) and according to their website, “[IPEDS]...is a system of interrelated surveys conducted annually by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).” While using this database, individuals can pull institutional data that mirrors, to some degree, the racial and gender demographic composition of the ones derived in this study. Specifically, that managerial positions, apart from those in historically black colleges and universities or minority-serving institutions, are occupied by over 50% of individuals who identify as White and over 60% of individuals who identify as female.

### **Review of Data Analysis Process**

As previously outlined in Chapter 3, an invitation to participate in this study was posted on LinkedIn and emailed through several list serves. Many people inquired about the study, but only 13 individuals filled out the survey and consent forms. Of the 13 individuals who filled out the survey and consent forms, only nine met the criteria for participation. Each of the nine qualified participants was invited to interview in person or virtually. All participants opted for virtual interviews. The interviews took place over a span of two months. All interviews were conducted within the 2-hour timeframe proposed in the study design with the shortest interview being 40 minutes and the longest

interview being 1 hour and 39 minutes. During the interviews I was careful to maintain my neutrality and professionalism with all participants. Specifically, I made certain not to lead participants on when they were answering any of their questions or prompts or when they asked me for specific examples. I safeguarded my facial expressions to showcase neutrality and dissuaded from sharing suggestions of approval or disapproval with any thought process they presented. I also ensured that my feedback was succinct and consistent throughout all nine interviews.

After finalizing the interviews, all steps described in Chapter 3 (i.e., transcribing and checking for accuracy) were followed. Transcribing the data was the most time intensive as it required the text to be verified against the audio. There was no disputing the recorded audio and the transcribed text that was outputted from that audio, which allowed bias to be minimized, if not fully eliminated, during the transcribing process. With that said, I endeavored to minimize bias in the assessment of the data by avoiding forced conclusions. All participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy and inconsistencies and only one participant submitted minimal changes to their transcript.

### **Coding**

After the audio was transcribed, transcripts were reviewed and finalized, and the coding began, the data analysis process became more complex. Every step related to the coding process required another level of self-check and a conscious effort to mitigate bias along the way. All interview transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti and each transcript (the shortest being 20 pages and the longest being 47 pages) was coded accordingly. Open

coding was used to identify data that explained the experience of the supervisor. The process of navigating through the raw data led to the formulation of meanings and emerging patterns. Although there was a variation of roughly 26 questions per participant, most responses mirrored each other from one participant to another. Not surprisingly, themes began to materialize (Tables 4 and 5). The theme development process was also stringent. Many meanings and patterns intersected with each other and fell into multiple categories. Thus, determining what overarching themes were most suitable required a deeper level of critical analysis. Once the themes were identified they were cross-referenced against the three RQs.

### **Participant Responses**

As previously shared, the participants demographic makeup (Table 3) was not a focal point in this study. The participants' lived experiences, however, were depicted in their responses and the data derived from those responses were siloed into three groups: personal impact, leadership style impact, and strategic approach. Participants shared positive and negative reactions to some of the questions posed and highlighted notable similarities in their responses. One overarching theme remained consistent: the COVID-19 pandemic impacted everybody. Whether the participants spoke about their personal journeys, the experiences of their staff or the university at large, the resounding effect of COVID-19 sent shockwaves in 2020 that have notably rippled into current day.

All participants shared the angst with which they navigated the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and similarly how the discussion alone prompted lingering emotions for some. Regarding the start of the pandemic, Participant 2 (P2) shared that

“people were scared and...the whole thing was so crazy it went through this thing where people are like, OK, be afraid. Be very afraid.” Participant 8 (P8) reflected that “it [was] almost like PTSD going back and thinking about [the pandemic].” Participant 5 (P5) acknowledged that “it’s hard to disentangle the fear and the stress of being thrust into a pandemic that no one had seen before and...and then working remotely. Like the two things become conflated and...and so I think that it's hard to separate them well.”

While some participants reflected on the emotional effects of the pandemic, others pointed out the way in which they were forced to alter their leadership styles. For example, Participant 1 (P1) said “I had to be very mindful about folks feeling engaged in a way that I'm not sure I would have otherwise...” Participant 3 (P3) reflected on the notion that:

the fear is that because so many managers are only used to managing in the in-person space that anyone who happens to be in person with them will therefore gain benefits just by virtue of being in person and not by virtue of their work, which means now there's an equity issue.

For P5 and Participant 7 (P7), the experience of navigating the changes that were prompted by the pandemic, specifically working remotely, did not have such a significant impact. P5 was of the mindset that they “trust [people] to get things done” and similarly, P7 conveyed that “just because you're not in person doesn't mean that you can't be effective and productive in the work.”

One of the strategies employed by all participants during and after the pandemic was that of a mindset shift. P2 noted that they had to shift their expectations of wanting

everything done immediately and recognized that “putting everything online makes everything appear as if it should be instant.” P3 offered that one of the strategies they implemented was remaining flexible. Specifically,

...because we were not just caring for our work, but we had to care for the students and for the staff who cared for students and so it meant, you know, you can imagine the university environment, the rules were changing on a daily basis.

Both P3 and P7 shared some hardships that surfaced with the shift in mindset and when making considerations of others. P3, for instance, noted that “the biggest thing was I think recognizing that all of my staff had to go home all of a sudden and people had very different working environments.” P7 noted that “the challenge is just trying to understand...understand that the boundaries have changed, have shifted and then understanding them and trying to be respectful.” Aside from considering work environments and boundaries, Participant (P4) pointed to navigating how they perceive work modalities as a continuous process of self-reflection. P4 stated:

And...and so the only way it's impacted me in the way that I do this work now is that I have to just remove myself out of that situation and stop thinking about them as remote or hybrid or in person and just see them as these are just different sort of modalities for work.

Despite the many changes that the COVID-19 pandemic brought about, all participants recognized that the pandemic had in fact made undeniable shifts. They shared anecdotal perspectives that were interlaced with emotions and in some instances,

the way in which they have become accustomed to university operations now. P4

summarized their thoughts by saying:

It would feel weird right now if someone...if a policy were to come out from my college right now and they say we're abandoning all remote and hybrid and we're only going to move back to in person pre pandemic. That would feel jarring to me.

### Emerging Themes

All questions included multiple data points from each participant. The data points (i.e., participant responses) were reviewed for each question and for each question multiple code categories began to emerge. After codes were identified and the coding process was completed, meanings and patterns began to organically develop. This process of response retrieval, code categorization and meaning and pattern development was followed for each question. Table 4 showcases an example of this process with Question 1 (please describe your leadership style).

**Table 4**

#### *Question 1 Data Analysis*

	Participant responses	Code categories	Meanings and patterns
P1	Inclusive leadership Incorporate voice of others Ensure they feel empowered Ensure they feel supported Appreciate their work Giving opportunities to grow	Inclusive  Hands off	Fosters a climate of transparency and team-building
P2	Transparency Strengths-based Hands off/No micromanaging Protect employees	Invested in success	Allows for greater flexibility and trust

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	<p>Provide flexibility Offer solutions</p>	<p>Strengths-based</p>	<p>Allows for employee growth</p>
P3	<p>Invested in success of staff Believes in professional development Lead by example Encourages a balanced life (setting boundaries)</p>	<p>Servant leadership</p>	<p>Focuses on the employee's power rather than weakness</p>
P4	<p>Emphasizes Communication Leads with emotional intelligence Servant leadership Compassionate Empathetic Models collaboration (behavior) Meets staff where they are Lets staff know they are not their jobs and that they are human beings Attentive to staff needs</p>		<p>Provides support and compassion</p>
P5	<p>Has developed style over last 20 years through corporate and higher ed experiences Not a person who has to see people in the office to know they're working Believes people are professional Believes people can manager their own time Fairly cooperative style Work together with people to meet their needs</p>		
P6	<p>Believes people should work in area of strength Works to ensure people spend time in an area that is strong for them Rule = 80% of job doing things they love to do More hands off once person is in area of strength</p>		
P7	<p>Adaptive/flexible to the situation Be just more of a resource Inclusive collaborative Has to be a micromanager at times Accessible and inclusive</p>		
P8	<p>Direct/blunt-style</p>		

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	Ensure team and supervisor are on the same page at all time
	Address all concerns
	Flexible
	Trusts team
	Not a micromanager
P9	Collaborative leadership style
	Enjoys bringing team together
	Strives to be creative

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*Note:* Color coding illustrates relationship between data, code and meaning and pattern.

After all questions were analyzed, and data garnered, a total of 91 codes materialized and 91 meanings and patterns were identified from the codes that emerged. Consequently, as the review of the data deepened, six themes (i.e., Culture Shift, Employee First, Intentional Connections, Leadership Considerations, Mental Health, and Resources) became most prominent. Table 5 showcase the codes (1-91), their corresponding meanings and patterns designation and the theme that they coincide with.

**Table 5**

*Code Categories, Meaning and Patterns, and Themes*

	Code categories	Meanings and patterns	Theme
1	Acclimating to Leadership	Fine tuning biases and adjusting the way in which to lead	Culture Shift
2	Accomplishments	A sense of purpose permeated and a lot of work was completed	Leadership Considerations
3	Accountability	Learning how to set goals and hold people accountable while balancing being in person and remote	Culture Shift
4	Balance of Hybrid	The dynamics of remote and in person exposed different ways in which balance needs to be considered	Mental Health
5	Budgetary limitations	The immediateness of the pandemic exposed unknown funding requirements	Culture Shift
6	Centering the Employee Experience	Focus on ensuring that the employee feels valued and heard	Employee First

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7	Chaotic	A lot of uncertainty with the pandemic and how to respond	Culture Shift
8	Collaboration/Groups	More opportunities to meet and connect to share information	Intentional Connections
9	Communication	Learning different communication styles and implementing more communication tactics Ensuring that information is being circulated Ensuring that there is an exchange of information	Leadership Considerations
10	Community-building	Intentional approach to connection	Intentional Connections
11	Compassion	An approach to viewing the employee as a whole person	Employee First
12	Connections	Getting to know colleagues more intimately	Intentional Connections
13	Department/Mission first	Ensured that the focus of the work was not lost	Culture Shift
14	Differences in family dynamics	Some employees had to navigate children/family in the workplace	Employee First
15	Disconnected	Relationships are impacted by the lack of connection when employees are remote Disparity between the way in which remote and hybrid employees connect to each other	Culture Shift, Intentional Connections
16	Disparities	Differences in the way people lead or their schedules	Leadership Considerations
17	Education	Allows people to learn from others and get information in real time	Resources
18	Emotions	How the employee felt during the pandemic was impacted	Employee First
19	Engagement	A lot more communication	Culture Shift
20	Equipment	Allows people to work from anywhere	Technology
21	Fairly Small Teams	Allowed for greater connection	Leadership Considerations
22	Flexibility	More options for workshops, meetings, employees and families without having to rely on accommodations or vacation More freedom to do personal tasks and interact with colleagues in different ways Ability to work freely in a new work modality Being able to work from anywhere/getting job done from anywhere	Culture Shift

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23	Friction	Tension between hybrid and remote employees based on their work lens and perceptions of each other	Culture Shift
24	Fully In Person	Expected to be in the office at all times	Culture Shift
25	Fully Remote	Required individuals to work from home	Culture Shift
26	Funding	Lessens the stress of paying for particular items/another level of support	Resources
27	Hands off	Allows for greater flexibility and trust	Leadership Considerations
28	Happiness/Safety	Some people enjoy the flexibility of a hybrid schedule and feeling safe	Employee First
29	Higher Engagement	More planning communication	Leadership Considerations
30	Hybrid is the new normal	The transition through COVID has normalized hybrid work	Culture Shift
31	Hybrid schedule	A mixture of in person and remote allows for more options for employees	Culture Shift
32	Hybrid/Flexible	Some jobs were essential and required to be in person/others could be remote	Culture Shift
33	Hybrid/Remote work experience	Some flexibility with work style	Culture Shift
34	Impact	Multiple ways in which the pandemic affected the employee life cycle and operations	Culture Shift
35	Impromptu Check-Ins	Lack of check-ins created a barrier for obtaining information quickly	Check-Ins
36	Impromptu Meetings	Allowed for easy access to colleagues and quick flow of information	Check-Ins
37	In Person	Expected to be in the office at all times	Culture Shift
38	Inclusion	Assisting in helping others feel comfortable Assisting in helping others feel comfortable	Employee First
39	Inclusive	Fosters a climate of transparency and team-building	Employee First
40	Inconveniences	Dealing with the nuances of working in a hybrid and remote setting	Culture Shift
41	Increase in meetings	Created a habit of back-to-back scheduling and zoom fatigue	Culture Shift
42	Instant Results	An assumption that remote equates immediate access/response	Culture Shift
43	Institutional Benefits	Flow of information and incentives	Resources

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44	Intentional	Conscious effort to engage with employees and think about their work settings	Employee First
45	Intentional check-ins	More connection time with staff	Check-Ins
46	Invested in success	Allows for employee growth	Employee First
47	Lack of Check-Ins	Delay in responses/intentional meetings	Check-Ins
48	Logistical considerations	Thinking of all aspects of a planning process	Culture Shift
49	Mental Health	The impact of the pandemic was felt by everyone	Mental Health
50	Mentally drained	Provided a psychological component to the dynamics of work that wasn't fully there prior to the pandemic	Mental Health
51	Mindful connection	Intentional about creating connections among staff and leading with that vs. work	Intentional Connections
52	Minimal Assistance	Perception that organizations did not do enough	Resources
53	Missing human interaction	Created a sense of silo and disconnect	Intentional Connections
54	Mon-Fri 8-5pm	Set schedule did not fluctuate	Culture Shift
55	More staff/work	Allowed for more help and assistance with all the gaps that the pandemic assisted in uncovering	Resources
56	No Commute	Cut down in travel time, gas, and parking fees	Culture Shift, Leadership Considerations
57	No impact	Leadership remain untouched by the shift to hybrid/remote	Leadership Considerations
58	No Zoom Experience	Lack of technological understanding	Culture Shift
59	Organized/prepared	Needed to ensure that all tasks were tracked and followed through on	Leadership Considerations
60	Policies	Gives people a sense of clarity as to what is expected and allowed	Culture Shift, Resources
61	Policies/Resources	Provided guidance during time of uncertainty	Culture Shift
62	Policy development/University response	Universities were attempting to figure out the best approach to navigating the impact of the pandemic	Culture Shift
63	Preparation	Allows individual to be organized for meetings, employees and unforeseen circumstances	Leadership Considerations

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64	Productivity	Understanding how and if people are doing the work they are tasked with	Leadership Considerations
65	Providing Autonomy	Trusting employees to do their work and work independently	Leadership Considerations
66	Relationships	Understanding how to build/maintain connections with leaders, peers, and employees The pandemic assisted in establishing relationships	Employee First, Intentional Connections
67	Remote/Online	Requirements and mandates imposed to stay at home (nationwide)	Culture Shift
68	Respect the Person	Allows of the employees to be considered wholistically and not just in their work capacity	Employee First
69	Self-Care	Allowed for mental health protection during the pandemic	Mental Health
70	Separation of COVID/Working remotely	Fear of pandemic was happening as people were being required to work. Uncertainty in personal and professional roles.	Mental Health
71	Servant leadership	Provides support and compassion	Leadership Considerations
72	Sharing Documents	Easily sharing of documents between teams	Leadership Considerations
73	Shift in Culture	Acceptable to be working in a remote or hybrid setting	Culture Shift
74	Situational differences	Disparity in personal and professional situations layered with work modality differences	Leadership Considerations
75	Strengths-based	Focuses on the employee's power rather than weakness	Employee First
76	Support/Meeting Needs	Recognizing that different people have different needs	Employee First
77	Supporting staff	Affording staff flexibility and understanding has been an undertone of the leadership process	Employee First
78	Team Dynamics	Impact on connections, interactions and how people work together	Intentional Connections
79	Team meetings/Check-Ins	Allowed individuals to get to know each other better	Leadership Considerations
80	Tech Support	Assistance with technology in the home	Technology

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81	Technology	Learning curve with technology varied and there was no way around it Navigating through technological challenges and finding ways to overcome distance Navigating technology issues	Technology
82	Tools	Allows for efficiency and the ability to get the work done collaboratively. Assists in supporting employees in their work and how they collaborate with others.	Technology
83	Training	Educational sessions and sharing of best practices	Resources
84	Trust	Provided to individuals while they are remote and hybrid	Employee First
85	Work balance	Used to navigate competing priorities and personal schedules	Leadership Considerations
86	Work/Life Balance	Adjustment to new work environment/ overworked employees	Employee First
87	Work/Life Balance & Happier Employees	More time with family and a balance between personal and professional	Employee First
88	Workflow	New employees and existing had to figure out workstyles	Leadership Considerations
89	Workshops/Best practices	Awareness of what others are doing	Resources
90	Zero Experience with Hybrid/Remote	No experience leading hybrid or remote teams and unprepared for COVID transition	Leadership Considerations
91	Zoom meetings/workshops & fatigue	Provided a new way of meeting and increase in meetings, which exhausted people's schedules	Culture Shift, Technology

A careful review of the data revealed that multiple participants shared similar perspectives to some of the same questions and from one question to another.

Specifically, when questions were asked, participants would refer to the same outcome in their answers although the questions were invariably different. For example, when participants were asked these two questions, one answer was similar throughout:

- Question 6: How did your organization shift operations during COVID?

Participants answered in ways that directly implicated their organization's willingness or requirement to remain flexible. For example, some participants highlighted their organization's "shift to hybrid" (P3) or "flexibility with personal responsibilities" (P1) as noteworthy examples of this concept of flexibility.

- Question 9: What are some of the benefits you encountered as a supervisor, if any, when your organization shifted its operations during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic? Flexibility was overwhelmingly shared by all participants. Whether the answer included being able to work remotely, use other meeting modalities (i.e., Zoom) as needed or the "flexibility of doing chores" (P7), flexibility was the key term here.

Despite words differing from participant to participant, as noted earlier, there were consistent similarities in the experiences that these participants communicated throughout their interviews, which assisted in identifying overarching themes. As such, after all 91 codes and meanings and patterns were processed in Atlas.ti, six specific themes became apparent and will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

### **Identified Themes**

As previously noted, a careful review of the 91 meanings and patterns led to the identification of six broad themes (i.e., Culture Shift, Employee First, Intentional Connections, Leadership Considerations, Mental Health, and Resources). Although the six themes listed here captured the meanings and patterns that were derived from the participants experiences, some of the same meanings and patterns were identified within different themes. For instance, flexibility was one of the patterns that was consistent

throughout all nine interviews. Not surprisingly, it was noted that there were five codes and meanings and patterns that intersected between themes (Table 6). Whether it was flexibility at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic or flexibility with hybrid schedules in present day or flexibility with how to create intentional connections, flexibility intersected with multiple themes. Flexibility aside, the review of each individual theme is critically important to understanding the experiences of participants.

**Table 6**

*Five Intersecting Codes/Meanings and Patterns*

Code	Meanings and patterns	Themes
Disconnected	Disparity between the way in which remote and hybrid employees connect to each other	Culture Shift Intentional Connections
No Commute	Cut down in travel time, gas, and parking fees	Culture Shift Leadership Considerations
Policies	Gives people a sense of clarity as to what is expected and allowed	Culture Shift Resources
Relationships	Understanding how to build/maintain connections with leaders, peers, and employees	Employee First Intentional Connections
Zoom meetings/workshop fatigue	Provided a new way of meeting and increase in meetings, which exhausted people's schedules	Culture Shift Resources

*Note.* Not all meanings and patterns were provided for each code pairing.

**Culture Shift**

Culture Shift, for instance, was one of the most prevalent themes because it included context that was widely shared by all participants. All nine participants described their work modalities, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as fully



in-person and as remote immediately after the proliferation of the pandemic at the latter end of March 2020. Four of the nine participants (P1, P2, P3, and P9) had some experience leading hybrid or remotes teams, while the other five participants (P4, P5, P6, P7, and P8) had no experience whatsoever. Their experience levels tied into the shift they personally had to make with using technology and leading remote teams, which addressed why some participants felt more comfortable leading remote teams than others. Participant's experience levels also evolved while other cultural shifts were happening around them. Specifically, shifts were taking place at the individual level (i.e., as people, as employees and as supervisors), within the work (i.e., learning to work exclusively from home), and within the institution (i.e., acclimating to the structural changes that were happening organizationally and within respective departments).

At the individual level, participants vocalized that there was both uncertainty and fear in how to operate at the height of COVID-19. It was evident that because there was little guidance at the time, and that logistical and strategic functions were curved to meet the moment, that all participants were 'on hold' as they awaited guidance from their respective institutions on how to proceed in their work capacity. Synchronously, all participants were navigating the uncertainty of a pandemic, its impact on them and their families, and changing family dynamics at home (for some participants). P3 noted that a lot of their personal culture shifts came with having "to go help [their school aged children] get on zoom and help [their children] get to their class..." Other participants noted living alone and having to think through the "psychological impact" (P9) that being isolated had on them personally, their families (immediate and extended), and their

colleagues. These intersecting dynamics contributed to how the work was effectuated and how the work evolved.

Another culture shift belonged to the work that the participants and their teams were responsible for and how that work was approached. For instance, overcoming technological ignorance (i.e., with Zoom, Microsoft teams, Google chat...etc.) was one obstacle to getting to the work, let alone getting it done. There were technological learning curves that took place across participants, which needed to happen for them to effectively guide and lead their teams. Once this obstacle was subdued, participants described the impact of the work in relation to teamwork. P2 noted that “[their] department is very much based on teamwork and teamwork online looks a little different than it does in person.” As such, shifting from a fully in person schedule to a fully remote schedule was one culture shift. When another shift to a hybrid schedule took place, a new set of challenges surfaced.

As the normalcy of a standing pandemic set in, and institutions began to transition back to their campuses, the move to a hybrid work modality also impacted institutional culture. P4, who identified as someone who worked for a public institution, described their organization’s initial culture shift to remote work as:

We really did not understand how we were going to make this work because as a state institution, we have become so accustomed to bureaucracy that there was almost like a mistrust of people working from home.

Everyone was forced to contend with a remote work model and required to implement structures of accountability. This accountability culture morphed again when the hybrid

work model was introduced as people began to integrate back to their organizations. It was the organization's acceptance of "hybrid work as a permanent fixture" (P3) that may have prompted a cascading tolerance of the concept. Participants noted the physical change of the work (i.e., from in office to remote to hybrid) and the shift in mindset that needed to take place at the individual level and the institutional level, and how these impacted how the work materialized.

### **Employee First**

Aside from the personal and professional cultural shifts that were noted, participants also described the many ways in which they aspired to put employees first, which was the second relevant theme. One consideration that was made by many of the participants was the care and consideration with which they thought of their employees during the height of the pandemic. For instance, P8 described it as:

We were concerned, I was concerned about employee engagement at this point because we're all by ourselves; we're at home. Within my team at that time...look, I had three individuals that were not married, not living with a significant other, not living with their parents so I had three people on my team that were home alone. That was a concern for me because of mental health and stuff so what we ended up doing...weekly meetings as an office...

This passage from P3 not only outlined the notion of Employee First, but also traversed into the Mental Health theme. P3's passage also nodded to the sentiments of each participant as they considered the individuality of their employee's circumstances. For instance, participants described some employees who lived alone and others who had

family members living with them, to include children who were in school. Participants mentioned being keenly aware of maintaining equity throughout the team, while still trying to honor individual requests for accommodations (i.e., familial- or health-related). It was clear from their responses however, that participants were more flexible with employee's requests for personal accommodations at the height of the pandemic more so than they are now. Nonetheless, this subtle shift in flexibility did not negate the overall culture shift that took place in putting employees first.

With a focus on the employee experience, most participants highlighted the importance of being intentional and 'compassionate' when considering employees as a whole. At the height of the pandemic, the major observation conveyed was how to care for employees and see them as people, not their statuses (P4) and more recently, how to ensure employees "feel supported, connected, and valued" (P1). This holistic approach also made space for the changes and adjustments that took place when employees transitioned to a fully remote work model, and then for some to a hybrid work model. Some of the shifts noted in the Culture Shift theme seemed directly tied to the employee experience and consequently, to participants instinctively 'employee first' approach.

Outside of employee engagement, participants described thinking introspectively about each aspect of a decision. While most decisions were individualized, participants noted being mindful of how decisions should be considered in the context of the individual juxtaposed to the team. This deliberate regard for the dynamics of decision-making became more intricate as participants explained decisions that included balancing

hybrid and remote employees simultaneously. A consideration for a book club, for instance, manifested into a deep reflection as noted by P3:

...we wanted to get books for everyone in our in our DEI space. And so, we had to offer like five options for books. So, a hard copy, you know, an audio book, you know, Kindle, whatever but then also, if you want a hard copy, are you on campus so we can get it to you through [office] mail or are you physically someplace else where we have to mail it to your house, which also might incur additional shipping costs. So, we have all these kind[s] of questions that come out...you have to ask people where are you located?

As this passage suggests, some decisions had a second and third-order effect of consequences that participants expressed not always being prepared for until being in that situation. Participants also noted that while they centered the employee experience in most of their decisions, their institutions eventually created parameters (i.e., policies and procedures) which supervisors were required to operate in. As such, one decision could implicate logistical, budgetary, and time constraints that may not have been top of mind. These types of decision-making considerations also extended to the employee's mental, physical, familial, and professional well-being. A part of those reflections was described by participants as Intentional Connections.

### **Intentional Connections**

Many of the participants described losing the opportunity for quick or casual 'check-ins,' when the pandemic was in full stride, as something that they longed for. Consequently, all participants opted to make Intentional Connections (the third theme) a

part of their daily routines during, and now years removed from, the pinnacle of the pandemic. P5, for instance, stated:

I started having more meetings with my direct reports. You know checking in with everybody once a week and also, we increased....in the beginning, we increased the number of like team meetings that we were having just so that people could stay in touch.

Staying connected intentionally became a hallmark of participants' relationship preservation technique. Participants described the broad implications of intentional connections as a dual purposed approach: to ensure the team maintained a semblance of the team dynamics they had prior to working remotely and to ensure that employees did not feel fully isolated with remote work. In the former, participants noted the disconnectedness that existed among their teams when everyone was required to work remotely and the effects it had on team dynamics when transitioning to a hybrid work model. Participants also expressed being aware that working remotely created a lack of "human interaction" (P4) and suggested this was one of the reasons for creating intentional spaces.

Another component of the Intentional Connection theme directly intersected with Employee First when getting to know the individual behind the title. Participants stated they made it a point to ask about people's personal circumstances to learn how to best support them. Some participants also lamented the opportunities that existed when working in the office that were no longer available when institutions moved to remote work only. P8, for instance, stated:

It was about more intentional check-ins. It was more intentional, getting my face or my voice in front of my employees because we took it for...I was taking for granted like every day in the office prior to COVID, I'm seeing you, your mom's doing better in the hospital, or your garden has got this...your tomatoes are coming in fresh or whatever. We definitely took advantage or took that for granted.

As teams shifted to a hybrid model, participants also emphasized maintaining the intentionality of seeking connections years removed from the height of the pandemic. P1 stated that they strive to ensure that they are “making time for connection at the beginning of each meeting and checking in to make sure folks are feeling connected.”

### **Leadership Considerations**

The thematic throughline for Leadership Considerations proposed a compilation of threads that tied in directly with the other themes. Within the considerations made, participants pointed to the organizational shifts that took place institution- and department-wide, as well as their needing to keep the work moving along despite the challenges that surrounded them. One source of frustration for participants was the inability to obtain quick turnarounds for work products, P4 described it as:

Sometimes I was waiting 24-48 hours for something to get to me, whether it be a memo or...or response to an e-mail because people's inboxes were growing with demands. Sometimes things get buried in there and you started feeling like, am I being ignored? Am I not being made a priority? And it was just the fact that we were all being inundated with a lot of emails.

Aside from the timing, and consequential increase of deliverables, participants also noted an upsurge in communication. Most notably, “learning communication styles” (P1) and “being able to pick up on cues” (P3) were two of the skillsets that all participants mentioned obtaining in the last few years. Specifically, learning communication styles of individuals and how those individuals communicate among each other and learning the nonverbal cues of team members.

Patience was also a common leadership consideration made by participants. They described having to exhibit patience with their employees and developing other skillsets. For instance, P2 noted:

...I passed the point where I was just trying to drive the department forward in a top-down kind of way and I've been able to return more to a kind of a...you know, I'm still a strength-based person. You know, I'm probably a better listener than I ever was before. I've probably learned a little bit about that too.

Patience, as expressed by participants, extended to more than employees. There was a resounding connection to patience with the process, individuals, and uncertainty. A procedural component that required heightened endurance presented itself as the balance of personal and professional circumstances layered with work modality differences. Examples included having employees who needed to remain remote (due to family or health concerns) while others transitioned to a hybrid schedule and ensuring that there was a consistent flow of information despite personnel and work changes.

Another leadership consideration that made its way into almost every interview was being more organized. Each participant noted having to keep up with the demands of



the work and the work of their employees, both hybrid and remote, and using ‘organization’ to mitigate knowing who’s always doing what (and to the extent possible). This notion of being organized spanned all participants despite their leadership styles. It also required participants to dedicate more time to becoming organized, maintaining and updating tools for organization, and following up on any work that was being tracked through these organizational efforts.

### **Mental Health**

Another theme that was consistent and relevant throughout this study was Mental Health. This theme showed up in many of the answers given by participants. They often noted how much they considered the mental health of their employees and seldomly, but enough to refer to, discussed their own bouts with mental health within the context of navigating work and the pandemic. One of the main quarrels of the participants was that there was no separation from work when remote work became the standard. This showed up in participant’s descriptions of their dual relationship with virtual meetings: a convenience and a fatigue-inducing tool (when exposed to abundant meetings).

All participants noted that there were little to no boundaries between work and personal and that they would often work 12-hour days, which started to lead to burn out. Aside from the incessant work hours, some participants described missing interacting with others. P4 shared that “it did feel lonely at one point, because you were literally just working in your place, and you didn’t...and I needed that human interaction.” This sentiment also nodded to a psychological component of work that was felt by everyone at the height of the pandemic. Specifically, the intensity of the uncertainty and the amplified

remote work created discord between known work criterions and what could be forthcoming.

Self-care was also a notable element of the mental health discussion. P1 suggested that “trying to model that self-care in ways that are kind of countercultural to [their] current institution has been a pretty intentional thing.” Participants conceded to taking care of their employees and considering ways in which they were taking care of self. One participant noted that “three years later, [they] have very significant boundaries in place” (P6) and admitted that this stance came about because their “boundaries were constantly being pushed.” Participants also reflected still feeling the aftereffects of leading hybrid and remote teams and suggested that they’re creating boundaries to “protect their own mental health” (P4), whether that’s through shorter meeting times or logging off at a designated time to spend time with their families.

Another form of self-care presented during all interviews was the seeking and receiving of support from others. P9 discussed seeking support from their colleagues and their counselor and offered that:

We still have to consider the mental wellness impact from COVID that is long lasting. I think our organization and society as a whole, needs to do a better job of dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic in terms of mental and emotional wellness.

During all interviews there was an acceptance of the fact that the mental health discussion was not as prominent as it used to be. Participants also noted that although the pandemic

brought with it a lot of ambiguity, it also created pockets of relief (i.e., little to no commute time, more time with family and flexible schedules).

### **Resources**

The last theme, which resonated throughout this study, was that of Resources. All participants described the use of technology as being a cornerstone of their hybrid/remote supervisory experience. They referenced using Zoom, Google (chat), Slack, and/or Microsoft Teams to interact with their respective teams and maintain a semblance of cohesion when leading hybrid and remote teams. Participants also noted other resources that were helpful. P5 for instance, stated that “[they] ended up kind of putting together [their] own guidelines around like zoom [and] Zoom meetings.” Despite the resources shared by their organizations, some participants, like P4, noted the disparity in resources:

So, there's a lot of sort of inequities that are built in there and that can give the perception of, well, yeah, you're giving us resources, but you're not giving us the same type of resources you're giving remote workers. So, another example would be I have some hybrid workers similar to me who will say something like I need dual monitors because it is a lot easier when you have two monitors to be able to work when you have, you know documents and the spreadsheet open here. And I've heard from this institution we'll go back and go well, we can't provide those resources, but I've seen them provide that same resource to a remote worker.

Other participants are still waiting to receive resources. For example, P3 notes that they “would love there to actually be a formal one- or two-hour workshop, explicitly about how to lead in a hybrid or remote with hybrid remote teams.”

One of the key factors of having more resources was also how the amplification of resources positively impacted the work. It was clear that participants noted the increase in flow of information as a positive outcome of having to rely more on technology. Participants also complimented the ability to obtain information in real-time and how this real-time receipt of information contributed to an awareness of what others were doing.

### **Theme Analysis**

The thematic composition of the data reflected that participants were impacted in a myriad of ways during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: as people, employees themselves, supervisors and in the many other roles that each participant held. The way in which the 91 codes and meanings and patterns were dispersed throughout the themes is emblematic of where the supervisors reserved the most insights regarding their experiences. A breakdown of the dispersion of context can be quantified as follows: Culture Shift (34), Employee First (17), Intentional Connections (8), Leadership Considerations (19), Mental Health (5) and Resources (13). Combined, this breakdown amounts to 96 meanings and patterns, which is five over the originally presented 91 codes.

It was not alarming to see Culture Shift as the most widely regarded impact experienced by the participants as they led and are leading individuals in dual work modalities. It was surprising however, to see that Mental Health was the least regarded given how some of the participants described the stress they experienced when leading hybrid or remote employees and the considerable considerations that they needed to make on a daily basis. One theme that was introduced, and somewhat unexpected, was

Intentional Connections. It was interesting to hear how all participants were forced into a remote work environment and took upon themselves to cultivate intentional connection points with their employees and have continued in that vein. Two themes that were unsurprisingly relevant were Leadership Considerations and Employee First. Participants highlighted these as being critical to their everyday supervisory experiences, regardless of their leadership styles.

### **Summary and Transition**

In this chapter, a thorough overview of the results gleaned from this study were shared. The chapter explored the three research questions that prompted this study and presented the lived experiences of supervisors of staff in higher education who lead hybrid and/or remote staff. Throughout this chapter there was a summary of the participant demographics, selection process, and the limitations to the selection process and participant pool. The data collection and data analysis were also explained. Within the text of the chapter, tables were presented which, among other things, showcased the participant demographics and themes that emerged from the data. Lastly, this chapter provided a synopsis of the themes that materialized from the data.

Chapter 5 presents and interprets the themes that emerged from this research. The chapter also expounds upon the lived experiences of the supervisors as told from their perspectives and how these findings associate with the research questions. A review of the limitations and delimitations of the study is presented and recommendations for future research is detailed. The recommendations are discussed in the context of future research in higher education and how these results can be applied for positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore how supervisors of staff who are considered middle managers within higher education have been impacted by leading teams that include hybrid or fully remote staff members in a post COVID-19 setting. The data collected revealed positive and negative reactions to the questions posed and highlighted notable similarities in participant responses. Each participant espoused a different leadership style, yet they all concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic had an undeniable impact on them as employees and as supervisors. Specifically, the participants provided examples as to how their leadership styles were influenced by leading employees that were either hybrid or fully remote.

Participants described their leadership styles at the onset of all interviews, with most responses falling within two categories: *inclusive leadership* (i.e., eight out of nine participants) and/or *servant leadership* (i.e., four out of nine participants, Table 4). Despite the way in which each participant self-identified their leadership style, they all agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic provided experiential opportunities to lead hybrid and remote teams and amplified the ways in which they engage and connect with their employees. In thinking of their leadership styles years removed from the height of the pandemic, participants described being hyperaware of “disengaged employees” (P1) and intentionally “making time” (P1, P4, and P5) for check-ins, meetings, and intentional connections. Participants also described the benefits and challenges with leading hybrid

or remote employees as having optimum flexibility (i.e., as a benefit) and struggling to balance the dynamics of this new normal of work (i.e., as a challenge).

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The data collected in this research confirmed that supervisors in higher education have been impacted by leading teams that have a mixture of hybrid or fully remote staff members and that there are a variety of factors that contributed to that impact. This research also found that during the onset of the pandemic, supervisors described putting the needs of the employee and the collective group before their own (Bass, 1990), which coincides with Bass' (1985a, 1985b) transformational leadership style. As the stabilization of working within the confines of the COVID-19 pandemic permeated throughout, there was a shift in focus from solely on the needs of the employee to the needs (e.g., work) of the organization, which required a transactional leadership style (Burns, 1978). Not surprisingly, as the shifts in work modalities have taken place (from fully remote to hybrid and remote), supervisors reported continuously toggling between the transformational leadership style (Bass, 1985a, 1985b) and the transactional leadership style (Burns, 1978).

#### **Research Question 1**

*How has the supervisor been affected by the supervising of hybrid or fully remote teams?* Participants discussed a variety of ways in which they have been impacted by supervising hybrid or fully remote teams. A clear connection can be made to the thematic highlights noted in Culture Shift. Throughout that theme it was noted that the transition from leading in person employees to fully remote and then hybrid and

remote teams led to several adaptations, which affected the way in which each participant led. The effects of those transitions were in some instances positive (i.e., the creation and continuation of intentional connections) and in other instances adverse (i.e., coping with the mental health of self and others while still trying to lead multiple employees.) One cannot consider a culture shift, however, without exploring the ways in which the participant excelled and was challenged.

When asked about areas where they personally excel when leading hybrid and remote teams, participants highlighted *centering the employee experience* (six out of nine participants), *providing autonomy* (four out of nine participants), *communication* (three out of nine participants) and *preparation* (two out of nine participants) as the most noteworthy areas. When asked about areas where they are personally challenged when leading hybrid and remote teams, participants noted *balancing team dynamics* (seven out of nine participants), *assessing productivity* (six out of nine participants), *expecting instant results* (four out of nine participants) and *dealing with inconveniences* (four out of nine participants), as the most prominent challenges. These personal achievements and pitfalls provide a holistic view of the supervisor experience within and beyond the height of the pandemic. Although many of these areas were cultivated in 2020, participants have built upon the framework created and adapted new leadership customs that some shared were not there prior to March 2020.

Based on these responses, the participants expressed constantly negotiating new norms, while navigating the obstacles that arise from working with teams in varied modalities. They also voiced being ‘mindfully’ intentional about the employee, the



employee's family dynamics and at-home work set up, scheduling meetings when the employee is in the office (if hybrid) and respecting the person (not just the employee). Participants also gave a nod to the benefits and challenges of dealing with technology (i.e., the flexibility it provides, and the glitches technology sometimes offers) as an example of something that contributes to their supervising experience.

### **Research Question 2**

*How has leading a hybrid and/or fully remote team impacted the leadership style of the supervisor?* Some participants (P3, P4, and P8) noted that leading hybrid teams has had little to no impact on their leadership style; however, the majority of the participants (with the exception of P7 and P9) all acknowledged that leading remote teams has had an impact on their leadership style. Regardless of the impact that each participant claimed, they all acknowledged the many leadership considerations that needed to be made when supervising hybrid and fully remote teams. Specifically, each participant was asked how their leadership style was impacted when supervising hybrid teams, remote teams, and employees in dual settings (i.e., one hybrid and one remote simultaneously).

When discussing how their leadership style is impacted when supervising hybrid teams, participants emphasized four key areas of importance: *mindful connections* (six out of nine participants), *leading with trust* (four out of nine participants), *becoming more organized and prepared* (four out of nine participants) and *considering people's schedules* (i.e., in office versus out of office - two out of nine participants). These four areas have a dotted line to the transformational leadership approach that Bass (1985a,

1985b, 1990) often outlines. The four areas also make a case for the ways in which these participants care for the individual employee while determining the best course of action when making professional judgements.

When discussing how their leadership style is impacted when supervising remote teams, participants almost unanimously stated that leading remote employees required a higher level of engagement. They described this higher level of engagement as everything from planning more and being more flexible (P3), to being “more hands on” (P6) and using “more shared documents” (P5). Two participants (P3 and P4) also expressed feeling disconnected from their remote employees, as opposed to those employees who work fully in person or hybrid. To qualify their feelings of disconnection, P3 specified that they were “dealing with not seeing people for a while” (e.g., if people have their cameras off while on Zoom compounded with those remote employees not being in person). In a similar vein, P4 stated that “the relationship is more transactional.” All the reasons provided by the participants in relation to leadership shifts when leading remote employees, directly correlate with a transactional leadership approach and a task-focused perspective. The nuances of this approach, as Hinkin and Schriesheim (2008) implied, are married to the management of tasks and directional components of all operations.

When asked how they had been impacted by supervising employees in dual settings, participants noted four major efforts: being intentional, respecting each person individually, navigating technology, and making many leadership considerations. Participants spoke at length about their conscious efforts to engage with employees and

their work settings. This included thinking about the resources available to the employees and the participants in their supervisor capacity. Participants noted some initial frustrations with figuring out hybrid meetings and workshops and the technological challenges that these posed. All of these efforts were rooted in leadership considerations and with mental health in mind.

### **Research Question 3**

*What strategies have supervisors used when leading employees in either hybrid or fully remote settings?* The strategies implemented by each participant were wide-ranging and, in some cases, alike. One of the most popular strategies was the implementation of increased team meetings and check-ins. Participants (P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P9) pointed to a higher frequency of team meetings and check-ins as a strategic incentive to both work towards “intentionality” (P3) and continue “building relationships and trust” (P7). All participants who recognized check-ins as a strategy, previously noted how working remotely (at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic) contributed to the forming of this habit of ‘intentional check-ins’ (i.e., connections). This strategy clearly intersects with the theme of Employee First, which centered most participant’s approach to leading.

Participants also described using tools as another strategy when leading employees in hybrid or fully remote settings. Specifically, they described using tools like Microsoft Teams (P6), Google shared drives (P9) and calendars (P5, P7) more frequently to keep track of work and schedules despite the work modality of any employee. The use of tools became a major strategy when participants considered the need to close the gap

created when employees were in dual settings. Specifically, participants noted having to stay in touch with their employees regardless of their work modality and different tools assisted in doing that. Tools also created a level of transparency and immediate information sharing that remained consistent at the time of these interviews and an efficiency that could not be denied.

These strategies of more frequent team meetings and higher use of tools synchronize with another strategy exposed by participants: the transmission of communication. One participant noted how they “[came] up with a communication strategy [to] stay in touch with staff” (P7), and another emphasized the importance of “learning communication preferences” (P1). Communication, albeit not a clearly advertised theme, was a cornerstone of each of the themes previously mentioned. How communications took place (i.e., via email, shared document or in a meeting) was equally as important as when (i.e., with what frequency and at what time during the day).

This commitment to communication, like others, contributed to another strategic approach: valuing self-care. P1 noted that it was important that their employees see them “model self-care” and vital that “staff [are] getting to see [the] supervisor as [a] person.” P3 offered the notion of “being flexible when people are sick” as another means for valuing self-care, while P4 and P8 suggested that “[allowing] cameras to be off during Zoom meeting[s]” and “individualizing what works for employee,” respectively, feels more authentic to them. Overall, self-care was bound to the mental health considerations that each participant noted respecting when it came to them and their respective employees.

## Discussion

The nine participants selected for this study discussed their views and feelings regarding the leading of hybrid and/or remote employees. All participants expressed the triumphs and challenges they experienced during the supervision of their employees, specifically during the onset, and years removed from, the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The participant's experiences correlate directly with Bass's (1990) transformational leadership theory in that each participant expressed an element of supervisory altruism for their employee's needs and for the overall team dynamics. Surprisingly, this study uncovered that participants merged transformational leadership with hints of transactional leadership (Burns, 1978) to effectuate the leading of both hybrid and remote employees and to maintain team functions. This study also discovered that the transactional leadership style was more so the core element of the relationship with remote employees rather than hybrid employees.

The performance-based and task-oriented approach to supervising and leadership (i.e., transactional leadership) was one of the ways in which participants alluded to ensuring that the employees under their charge were managed in and outside of the office. It was the transformational leadership style, however, that navigated how all participants approached their roles and work. According to Bass (1985a), the transformative leader has a keen awareness of self and constantly strives to do what is right for the group and the organization, not what is always popular. Based on the data collected, it was evident that participants exhibited some of the characteristics of the Four

I's (individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence – previously outlined in Chapter 2).

All participants emphasized a need to maintain a functioning team and department, while still taking into consideration the 'employee first' and 'mental health' components that existed when supervising hybrid and remote employees. Participants mentioned being cognizant of the personal circumstances of each employee (e.g., employees who lived alone versus those who lived with families, as well as personal health) and the compassion required to maintain that cognition. This behavior coincided with the individualized consideration characteristic, which among other things denotes the active role that a leader takes in ensuring that each employee is considered as a sole entity. All participants remarked having a heightened sensitivity to their employee's individual circumstances, especially at the height of the pandemic, and being more thoughtful of such individualization now.

Another characteristic that was vaguely highlighted in speaking with participants was that of intellectual stimulation. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was an intimidating novelty, at some point it became an approachable custom. As such, participants described learning how to thrive in the new normal of hybrid and remote work and engaging new perspectives in the process. Specifically, new outlooks on how to maneuver the landscape that was set forth by COVID-19. This mindset shift, and consequent intellectual stimulation, was not mentioned directly but it was described as participants recollected the transition from fully in person to fully remote to hybrid and remote work.

Two less obvious characteristics that derived from participants in this study were inspirational motivation and idealized influence. One of the primary reasons inspirational motivation was not as prominent was because everyone (including the participants, their superiors and direct reports) were inundated with the pandemonium of COVID-19. All participants described COVID-19 as the first pandemic that they lived through and as such they sought guidance from others and struggled to respond to specific asks due to lack of knowledge. One could also deduce that to ascertain whether idealized influence was achieved or not, an opinion from the participant's direct reports must be available. Without the perspective of the employee, it is difficult to ascertain the effects of each participant's leadership and if those effects rise to that of transformational leadership.

The layered nuances of the leadership considerations that were made reflected a participant pool that put the needs of the employee and the collective group before their own (Bass, 1990) through the promulgating of intentional connections, individual considerations, and an employee first mindset even when this approach went against a leader's own leadership style (e.g., P5). A review of each participant's leadership style highlighted the ways in which their style may or may not have contributed to an easier adaptation of the transformational leadership style. For instance, participants who self-described their leadership styles as primarily inclusive (P1 and P7) or primarily servant leaders (P3 and P4), described their supervising experience with hybrid and remote teams as one that required greater flexibility, but also one that prompted more intentional check-ins and frequent guidance. These types of attributes were characterized by the participants as innate, which to some degree coincides with the transformational

leadership approach. Other participants, who are more hands off (e.g., P2), suggested that “...some employees need more hand holding than others and in general, I'm not a hand holder, so that doesn't come completely naturally to me.”

Despite the approach they sought while leading hybrid and remote employees, each participant was clear about their respective missions and how they wanted to contribute to the outcomes of their department and in turn organization. Whether they invoked a task-oriented approach to leading their remote employees (e.g., P4) or one that's 'adaptive' and 'flexible' (e.g., P7 and P8), each participant described elements of the transformational leadership style. It was evident from the data collected that although the participant may not have led through a transformative lens, that the COVID-19 pandemic in some ways forced pieces of that lens to be adapted.

### **Limitations**

The findings of this research confirm that some of the limitations introduced in Chapter 1 were legitimate. Since this study was narrowly focused on supervisors of staff in higher education, there was no consideration for the experiences of supervisors of faculty or student employees or senior executives. These untapped groups may have offered broader perspectives on the impact that leading hybrid and remote teams has had on them. It is also prudent to assert that this research should not serve as the perspective of all supervisors of staff in higher education. Another limitation of this research was its exclusivity to participants who have been supervising since 2019. There's no certainty that expanding the timeframe of this criteria, to perhaps 2020 or 2021, would have garnered different results, but one could speculate that there may have been similar



responses to current day strategies used when leading hybrid or remote employees. Aside from the two limitations noted previously, there was no indication that participants would not want to participate because they were still getting accustomed to leading hybrid or fully remote teams. There was also no indication that organizations may not have finalized which work method they are currently incorporating.

### **Delimitations**

This study was limited to supervisors (middle managers) of staff in higher education who: had been supervising since 2019, have at least two employees under their purview who are either hybrid or remote (not fully in person) and supervisors who work in a traditional school (i.e., not a fully remote school). These criteria were intentionally selected to maintain the narrow focus of the study. They also assisted in exposing the commonalities and differentiators amongst this group of participants. Based on their responses, and throughout the course of the study, there was no indication that dishonesty was a factor worth considering. All participants seemed to respond positively to the questions and the way in which the study was being effectuated, except for one participant who voiced their dislike for the number of questions and length of time to complete the interview.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

A main consideration of this study was supervisors of staff in higher education who have been supervising for a minimum of three years. Since the study was narrowly focused on the experiences of nine individuals, a parallel study that includes the surveying of a large population of supervisors may be optimal. In addition, it may be

ideal to focus on the supervisor's leadership style solely. Understanding the leadership style of the supervisor prior to the pandemic and then after, may also signal to new research opportunities.

Another potential expansion of this study could include a focus on the demographics of the supervisors. For instance, focusing on a specific racial, gender, or gender non-conforming populations could introduce perspectives that were not clearly defined in this study. It is also worth noting that a racial focus could include voices from individuals who self-identify as internationally based. For the purposes of this study, there was no delineation as to whether an individual was a citizen of one country or another nor was there a consideration as to whether the institution was within a specific country.

Another way to broaden the participant pool would be by including supervisors of faculty or student employees. While this study did not consider supervisors of faculty or students, having such a population may offer a critical lens that was not offered here. Another recommendation for research is one that is specific to public or private universities. Focusing on either public or private institutions, could both narrow the participant pool or expand it depending on the other factors consider. An additional future consideration for research could be one that highlights the supervising of hybrid or supervising of remote exclusively (i.e., either or, not both). It was evident from this study that each work modality posed its own series of benefits and challenges and conducting tailored research could help inform how each work modality is explored and cultivated.

Another future research consideration might include focusing on the timeframe in which the supervisor has been in a supervisory capacity (i.e., five years versus 20 years). Although this study captured the years each participant has served as a supervisor, there was no dissection as to how the years of leadership experience may have contributed to the ways in which each supervisor responded to the leadership obstacles explored in this study. In thinking of time intervals, it may be worth exploring how long a supervisor has been at their respective institution and how this has impacted their ability to lead and respond to different scenarios.

Lastly, A thematic outlier in this study was mental health, as such a focus on the mental health of supervisors in higher education who supervised during the height of pandemic may be warranted. This focus on mental health could also be studied by surveying supervisors who lead virtual teams (specifically), hybrid teams (specifically) or a combination of both. A subset of any of the previously proposed variations (i.e., demographics, time in service, or supervisor type – student or faculty) may offer an assortment of results that may enhance this study or explore other versions of it.

### **Implications for Social Change**

It is undisputed that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted all industries, to include higher education. The work of administrators who carry out the missions that drive these organizations was also severely impacted. These administrators, specifically supervisors, play a critical role in how the work is accomplished, which is where the need to understand their perspectives stemmed from. Among other things, this study highlighted the emerging themes that arose from leading hybrid and remote teams and began the

conversation around the impact that leading hybrid and remote teams has had on supervisors of staff.

This study also showcased how the lived experiences of these supervisors are showing up in their current day supervisory practices, which means that there is a potential that other supervisors of hybrid and remote employees are sharing similar experiences. By focusing on the lived experiences of supervisors of staff, this study derived real-world accounts of ways in which supervisors view leading hybrid and remote teams and their approaches to some of the most common concerns (to supervising) that permeated after the height of the pandemic.

By applying the findings of this research, leaders in higher education may be able to showcase the lived experiences of supervisors of hybrid and remote staff in higher education and how these experiences could be leveraged to create programs specifically for supervisors. Leaders may also leverage the findings in this study to conduct their own focus groups and data retrieval. While some themes were blatant in this study, the discovery process to uncover the evolving needs of supervisors must continue. As evidenced in this study, the habits formed after March 2020 continued into present day and will continue to advance in the future: requiring new leadership tactics that are yet to be discovered.

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to fill the research gaps that currently exist regarding the impact that leading hybrid and remote teams has had on supervisors of staff in higher education and sought to explore the outcomes of such research on considerations that supervisors

can make in the future. The transformational leadership theory was used as a framework for understanding a specific supervisor experience within higher education and its implications. It was determined that supervisors led through the prism of the transformational leadership lens and pulled from the transactional leadership approach when navigating a multitude of scenarios.

Results showcased the factors that impact supervisors as they lead hybrid or fully remote teams and underscored the need for future research in this area. One of the undeniable themes that permeated the results of this study included the major culture shifts that took place at the individual, team, and institutional levels. These culture shifts also created a series of ‘new normal(s)’ that supervisors are contending (and competing with) to this day. As such, the necessity to investigate this topic further, seems more pressing now than ever.

By conducting this study, supervisors (and senior leadership) may also be prompted towards further discourse related to supervisors that have been impacted in their leadership roles in higher education. Needless to say, advocating for further research and continued conversation on this topic seems almost intuitive and extremely important to the progression of leadership as a whole. As we continue to develop a nuanced approach to leadership in a hybrid and remote world, it is imperative that we keep the conversation going and center the supervisor experience within it.

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## Appendix A: Email to Participants

Dear Colleague,

My name is Juana Parillon and I am both an administrator at [a university] and a doctoral student at Walden University. I am launching a study as part of my dissertation, which will seek to understand the impact that COVID-19 has had on supervisors who have led hybrid and fully remote teams.

You are receiving this email because you are designated as a supervisor of staff who has been in a supervisory role since at least 2019. Although I know you are currently tasked with competing priorities, my goal is to make this process as seamless and convenient as possible. Prospective participants will be asked to fill out a short initial survey to determine if they qualify for this study and participate in a 1.5-2-hour audio recorded interview. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure discretion of identities and the recording will be used to accurately capture the content of the interviews.

Your input in this study will assist in understanding how COVID-19 has impacted supervisors and consequently their leadership styles. Please know that your participation is completely voluntary and you are welcome to recuse yourself at any point. You can contact me at [email] or [phone number] or my dissertation committee chair [chair name] at [chair email].

If you are interested in participating please email me at [email].

Kind Regards,

Juana L. Parillon

## Appendix B: Selection Survey Questionnaire (Electronic)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Demographic Information

Select one or more of the following racial/ethnic categories to describe yourself:

American Indian or Alaska Native  Asian  Black or African American  Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  White/Caucasian  Hispanic/Latino  Two or More  
 Decline to Answer

Select one or more of the following gender categories:

Male  Female  Non-binary  Trans  Additional Designation  Decline to Answer

Questions

1. How long have you been a supervisor? (please include the month/year when you became a supervisor)
2. How many employees do you currently supervise?
3. Describe the work designation of your employees (i.e. in-person, hybrid, remote). List employee and designation (e.g. Employee 1 – hybrid, Employee 2 – remote...etc.)
4. What type of employee(s) do you supervise? (Options - Staff, Student, Faculty, Other)
5. Are you currently overseeing a division or department?
6. What is your university's structure (Options – traditional (in-person), hybrid (in-person and online), fully remote (online), other)

## Appendix C: Notification to Supervisors Not Selected

Dear [Name of Participant],

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey questionnaire. Based on your responses, you do not meet the criteria to participate in this study. While this may not be the response you hoped for, I am incredibly grateful for your interest in this study.

Kind Regards,

Juana L. Parillon

## Appendix D: Notification to Selected Supervisors

Dear [Name of Participant],

Thank you again for taking the time to complete the survey for this study. Based on your responses, you meet the criteria to participate in the study. Next steps include the following:

- We will need to set up a mutually convenient time for this interview. Please take a look at the availabilities I have using this [LINK]. If there are no dates/times that coincide with your availability, please send me an email with your availability and I will work to match schedules. Email reminders will be sent prior to the interview date for your convenience.
- Interviews can be conducted face-to-face (if in Rhode Island) or virtually (i.e. Zoom, Google Meets, or other technology), please let me know what your preference is.

Feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

Kind Regards,

Juana L. Parillon

## Appendix E: Interview Questions

Interview Questions  
Phenomenological Study

*Directions: This interview was designed to assess the impact that COVID-19 has had on your leadership style, specifically when leading hybrid and remote teams. Our time together will be between 1.5-2-hours. As a reminder, this is a completely voluntary interview, and you are welcome to stop at any time. What questions do you have before we begin?*

1. Let us begin with an overview of your process, please describe your leadership style.
2. What was your experience with leading hybrid and remote teams prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Describe the structure of your department and how it functioned before COVID-19?
4. How did the structure and functions of your department work during COVID-19?
5. Describe the structure of your department and how it functions now?
6. How did your organization shift operations during COVID?
7. How did you feel when the shifts in your organization took place?
8. What were some of the supervising challenges that you encountered, if any, when your organization shifted its operations during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. What are some of the benefits you encountered as a supervisor, if any, when your organization shifted its operations during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

10. What is your experience with leading hybrid and remote teams now?
11. How has your leadership been impacted by supervising employees that are hybrid?
12. How has your leadership been impacted by supervising employees that are fully remote?
13. How have you been impacted by supervising employees that are in dual settings (i.e., hybrid and remote)?
14. Tell me about any strategies you have used to lead employees who are hybrid or fully remote.
15. What are some challenges with leading hybrid and remote employees?
16. What are some benefits with leading hybrid and remote employees?
17. What are some areas where you are personally challenged when leading hybrid and remote employees?
18. What are some areas where you personally excel when leading hybrid and remote employees?
19. How are the overall team dynamics impacted by the differences in status (i.e., hybrid and remote)?
20. How have you dealt with the impact on team dynamics?
21. How are individuals that you supervise impacted by the differences in status (i.e., hybrid and remote)?
22. How have you dealt with the impact on individual employees?

23. How has your organization assisted supervisors who supervise hybrid and fully remote employees?
24. What resources have you received from your organization since supervising hybrid and fully remote employees?
25. What else would you like to share regarding the impact that leading hybrid and remote teams has had on you?