

8-23-2024

Effective Strategies for Improving the Performance of Underperforming Remote Federal Contract Specialists

Shaneika Imani Berryman
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Shaneika Imani Berryman

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

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Effective Strategies for Improving the Performance of Underperforming Remote Federal

Contract Specialists

by

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MBA, Walden University, 2017

BS, Urbana University, 2004

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2024

Abstract

At the onset of COVID-19, federal agency leaders had to increase workforce remote work capabilities to address the underperformance of teleworking employees.

Considering the employees' need for continued remote work while balancing this with the continued federal government functionality, improving employee performance regardless of work location is essential. Grounded in the job demands-resources theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies that remote managers use to improve the performance of underperforming remote federal contract specialists. The participants were seven remote supervisors who manage remote working contract specialists at federal agencies. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and publicly available government reports. Through thematic analysis, four themes emerged: communication and feedback, workload, performance management, and collegial cohesion. A key recommendation is for federal administrators to evaluate whether underperformance exists, if a fair performance evaluation method is used, if there is a significant workload imbalance, and if adequate on-the-job training has been conducted outside formal courses. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase the performance of contract specialists, ensure the appropriate expenditure of taxpayer dollars, and provide timely customer service to U.S. citizens.

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Dedication

I have learned that you cannot cluck around with chickens if you want to soar with eagles. Only the courageous spread their wings and fly. I thank God for those who pushed me out of the nest and propelled me to lift off. This success was achieved through prayer, faith, conviction, and hard work. Thank you, Mom, for showing me the value of education and encouraging perseverance until achievement. Amadi, Dominique, Caleb, Shyla, and Joshua inspired me by reminding me how proud you are of me and that I would finish this. You are my fabulous five. You told me repeatedly, "Mom, you've got this, and pursue your dreams." I posthumously honor Annie R. Berryman, my grandmother, who is a constant inspiration. Friend, cheerleader, my Walden University day one, and colleague Dr. Khabira Salter, you are appreciated.

Thank you for being a friend, traveling down the road and back again, well, you know. I thank my colleagues Devonne and Rodneyta for your ever-ready encouragement and doctoral declarations. To my friend Andreea, you have been a fantastic support and prayer warrior. Jazz, we started from the bottom under the NSU oak friendship tree; who would have thought it? Lol. Mr. Chris Caldwell, you pushed me to restart, and now it is finished; thank you. I express extreme gratitude to my extended family and friends for your listening ear, support, prayers, and concern. You all have supported my journey, and we share in this success. Faith has become a fact.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my Chair, Dr. Kenneth Gossett, for your guidance, support, understanding, affirmation, and diligence in helping me progress to completion. You believed in me and helped me embrace the process from the beginning without hesitation. I began to believe in myself and my ability to complete the project even more after every interaction with you. Thank you to Second Committee Member Dr. Edward Walker; I appreciate the commitment, collaboration, and quick feedback you both put forth in supporting my journey to the finish line. Ms. Jill and Ms. Sara, thank you for your guidance on editing so that I did not continue to make the same grammatical and syntax mistakes. Dr. Reginald Taylor, your video tools, rubric, handbook, and informative talks at the residency were a tremendous help. Thank you, Ms. Brittany Gladden and Dr. Richard Hay, for the great onboarding and student advising experience. To all faculty, librarians, Dr. Witty in Form & Style, and other support members of Walden University, you have been essential in achieving this academic goal. I am grateful to the research participants who helped me achieve this milestone. Thank you all for everything.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Since the federal government is one of the largest employers in the United States, with approximately 2.1 million federal civilian workers (Congressional Research Service, 2022), learning the strategies of how to support and increase federal worker performance could fuel social change. The current remote work policy allows the government to employ workers across the United States with varying skill sets. Some agencies may not otherwise have access if people were required to enter an office space in a specific locale (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2022). Considering the changes in work environments for government workers, it is increasingly important to determine employee performance, mainly because of pressure to bring employees back to the office. The federal workforce supports the nation in meeting transportation, academic, infrastructure, human services, and housing needs. Therefore, those responsible for human capital management processes and strategies must use best practices and have foresight for efficiency and effective government outcomes (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Human Capital Management, n.d.-a).

Background of the Problem

The federal government has been interested in employee performance since 1883. The Pendleton Act, or the Civil Service Act, established a merit-based system but did not include an evaluation mechanism (Office of Personnel Management, 2023). The Government Accountability Office (GAO) gave the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) four suggestions for improving the payroll reporting system. The GAO encourages OPM to improve the reliability of data standards, increase internal controls,

develop a process so payroll can be integrated into more extensive databases, and monitor error reports. Had the agencies provided the information to OPM during the GAO audit, OPM could have potentially improved telework reporting and provided Congress with better documentation, per request by Congress, when the parameters for the CARES Act were being considered (GAO-22-104282, 2022).

With the rise of COVID-19, federal agency administrators had to make administrative changes to improve and enhance remote work opportunities. The 118th Congress introduced H.R. 139, the Home Office Work's Unproductive Problems Act of 2023, also known as the SHOW UP Act, to address low productivity among remote federal government employees, including those working alternative work schedules. This law did not cancel telework but required all government entities to return to pre-COVID-19 telework policies. Although some in Congress have implied, during the enactment of this Act, that employee laziness and complacency cause underperformance, the counterargument offered is that other causes could be workload, total work hours, and management expectations (Li et al., 2022). A feedback system supplying appropriate software, an increased workforce, and adequate employee training to develop the requisite skills and knowledge could address Congressional concerns regarding employee underperformance (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem is that some remote managers at federal agencies lack strategies to increase the job performance of underperforming remote federal contract specialists. Therefore, this qualitative pragmatic inquiry aimed to explore the

strategies that remote managers at federal agencies use to improve the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists. The targeted populations were supervisory contract specialists and general managers who work remotely and supervise contracting specialists who had effectively implemented strategies to enhance the performance of contract specialists who were previously underperforming. Data for the project were collected through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, specifically targeting six or more supervisory contract specialists and general managers who were selected through snowball and purposive sampling. Social media sites, professional contracting management organizations, and colleague references were sources from which I obtained participants. Additionally, publicly available government reports about employee performance management strategies within the government were examined. I used Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) Job Demands and Resources theory (JD-R) as the conceptual framework for this study.

Research Question

What strategies do remote managers at federal agencies use to increase the job performance of underperforming remote federal contract specialists?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

An assumption in research is what the researcher accepts as truth without theoretical support (Poucher et al., 2019). When conducting a survey, a researcher holds a collection of assumptive beliefs and viewpoints that impact and inform the researcher's approach to their study, specifically its analysis, method, and design, which helps the

researcher determine the most effective means for obtaining information to answer the research question (Almasri & McDonald, 2021). I made the following assumptions in this study: (a) The participants answered the interview questions truthfully based on their personal experiences, (b) federal contracting managers will have dealt with underperforming contract specialists who work remotely and have employed strategies to improve worker performance, (c) the participants understand current policies and procedures regarding remote work and the handling of underperformance in workers, and (d) the interview participants view underperformance as a problem that hinders managers from having fully functional teams, thereby reducing the ability of the government to receive needed goods and services.

Limitations

A limitation is a reliance on participants responding truthfully (Coker, 2022). A researcher must not only be aware of but must also address the weaknesses in their study because those are the limitations that affect the study's validity (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Research limitations are potential factors, shortcomings, flaws, or conditions beyond the researcher's control (Zhou & Jain, 2023). In qualitative research, one possible limitation is ensuring that the participant sample size is adequate to gather the appropriate quality and amount of information (Giumelli & Van Roozendaal, 2017). The second limitation is the misinterpretation of the results and potential researcher bias. Considering these limitations, a sample size of seven remote federal government contract specialist managers was selected for this research, and data saturation was achieved by performing

enough interviews to ensure sufficient information had been gathered, and member checking was employed.

Transition

In this qualitative pragmatic study, I explored the strategies used by remote managers at federal agencies to improve the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists. Section 1 includes the background of the problem, business problem and project purpose statements, research question, assumptions, and limitations. Section 2 will include the literature review. Topics covered in the literature review include job demands and resources, worker motivation, absenteeism, burnout, organizational commitment, employee engagement, remote and alternative work, the Hawthorne effect, and transactional leadership.

Section 2: Professional and Academic Literature Review

Introduction

In this study, I explored the strategies that remote managers at federal agencies use to improve the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists. I reviewed academic literature to develop and support an understanding of this phenomenon. My focus was on job demands, job resources, employee engagement, burnout described by Bakker et al. (2007), organizational commitment, absenteeism, worker motivation, remote work locations, the Hawthorne Effect, and transactional leadership. My literature review included multiple data ideas for reference. I used peer-reviewed journal articles from databases such as Google Scholar, ProQuest, Sage Premier, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost, Science Direct, Research Gate, Business Source Complete, and Emerald Management.

Literature Review

I used multiple sources from the Walden University online library. To locate scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles for further evaluation, I searched for the following items: absenteeism, burnout, COVID-19, employee engagement, federal contract specialists, government contracting, Hawthorne effect, job demands, job performance, job resources, organizational commitment, performance appraisal, performance management, remote work, remote work locations, task performance, teleworking, transactional distance, work engagement, work performance, work productivity, and worker motivation. I found various references, including government

documents, journals, and books. Of the peer-reviewed references in this literature review, over 81% were under five years old.

Table 1

Review of the Literature

Type of Citations and References	Review of the literature before 2019	Review of the literature On/after 2019	Total
Peer-reviewed citations	14	66	80
Books	0	0	0
Dissertations	1	0	1
Total	15	66	80
Percentages	7.5%	82.5%	100%

Note: 82.5% of the peer-reviewed citations were within the past five years, and 18.9% were before 2019.

I used Google Scholar and peer-reviewed, as well as non-peer-reviewed journals, as a foundation for the business problem, interview questions, and information in the literature review. The literature review includes scholars' research and findings about improving employee performance. The management strategies will inform leaders on increasing employee productivity and efficiency in remote working locations.

Conceptual Framework

The (JD-R) theory was developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) to explain the influence that JD-R has on the well-being of employees (El Mouedden et al., 2022). The premise is that (JD-R) impacts employee job performance, well-being, burnout, and work engagement. The JD-R theory has successfully integrated insights from four theories of job stress and work motivation, including Herzberg's two-factor theory, Hackman and

Oldham's job characteristics theory, Karasek's job demands-control model, Siegrist's effort-reward imbalance model, and Hobfoll et al.'s conservation of resources theory (Bakker et al., 2023). Herzberg's two-factor theory, developed by Herzberg in 1966, suggests that two sets of factors influence job satisfaction and motivation: hygiene factors and motivators. Hygiene factors are extrinsic factors such as salary, job security, and working conditions that can prevent dissatisfaction when present but do not necessarily lead to satisfaction. The motivators are intrinsic factors such as recognition, achievement, and responsibility that can lead to satisfaction and motivation (Siruri & Cheche, 2021). Other factors contributing to job satisfaction include achievement, recognition, work, accountability, and advancement. In contrast, factors contributing to job dissatisfaction include working conditions, administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, company policy, and salary (Dong & Yan, 2022).

Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics theory, introduced in 1976, expands on Herzberg's two-factor theory by identifying five core job characteristics that determine employee satisfaction: autonomy, skill variety, feedback, task significance, and task identity (Berdicchia & Masino, 2020). This theory suggests that five core job characteristics—skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—determine employee satisfaction (Akuffo et al., 2021). According to Hackman and Oldham, the presence of these attributes in a work environment leads to increased motivation, performance, and pleasure for individuals. The job demands-control model, introduced by Karasek in 1979, highlights the interplay between job demands and the

level of control an individual has over their work as factors that influence job satisfaction and overall well-being.

The job demands-control paradigm emphasizes the interplay between job needs and control. According to this model, high job demands and low control increase stress and decrease job satisfaction. The model further indicates that job demands can cause significant stress and potentially result in adverse health outcomes, especially when job control is limited (Skillgate et al., 2021). The Conservation of Resources theory (COR), proposed by Hobfoll in 1989, is another foundational theory that underpins the JDR. This theory focuses on the role of resource loss and gains in individuals' experiences of job satisfaction and well-being. According to this theory, individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect their resources because resources are necessary for achieving goals and maintaining well-being. These theories offer valuable insights into the correlation between job characteristics and employee well-being, satisfaction, and motivation (Benge & Beattie, 2021).

The Siegrist effort-reward imbalance (ERI) model focuses on psychosocial work characteristics with a contradiction between costs and gains in social interactions. The concept is grounded in social reciprocity inherent in the employee/employer work arrangement (Ren et al., 2018). The theory further expounds on the idea that individuals will experience stress when they believe there is an imbalance between the effort exerted in their work and the inadequate rewards they receive. Further, repeated encounters of unfulfilled exchanges create persistent negative emotions characterized by feeling

deprived of rewards, leading to psychobiological stress reactions. Effort, reward, and over-commitment are the components that scaffold the model.

The term 'effort' refers to the external work requirements. The term 'reward' is derived from three distinct sources: salary, monetary compensation, or wages (termed financial reward), job stability and career advancement (known as a status-related reward), and the perception of esteem or acknowledgment received from others (socioemotional reward). Employees engage in over-commitment as a coping mechanism to address challenging circumstances by exhibiting excessive dedication toward work performance (Ren et al., 2018). One key difference between the original theorists' work from which JDR was derived and the JDR theory is that the original models use a narrow view of job characteristics. In contrast, the JDR offers a more comprehensive list of characteristics that instill job stress or motivation. In both the job performance and organizational context, all four theories indicate that physical, social, or psychological job demands and resources impact employee well-being. Furthermore, these factors may indirectly affect employee stress, behavior, and performance.

The JD-R theory incorporates a flexible and broad range of job characteristics, unlike its foundational predecessors that focused on a few. These diverse job characteristics influence burnout and work engagement (Ren et al., 2018). While each organization has unique characteristics and job requirements, the JD-R theory categorizes these characteristics into two groups: job demands and job resources (Demerouti, 2018). Job demands include a job's physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects that require sustained effort and energy expenditure. Demands may manifest as increased

workload, unexpected meetings, schedule changes, policy or organizational updates that may seem unfavorable, organizational changes and transitions, and emotional demands (El Mouedden et al., 2022).

There are two distinct stages within the JD-R theory. The initial stage pertains to the health impairment process (burnout) manifested by the increased frequency and intensity of job demands, such as workload, email demands, and interpersonal conflicts, resulting in an augmented need for employee effort. The second stage of the process involves job resources like skill variety, social support, and feedback to meet fundamental psychological needs and foster employee work engagement and motivation. Both job demands and resources must be balanced to ensure employees' well-being. An imbalance can result in unmet psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Li et al., 2022). However, with sufficient job resources, job satisfaction, work commitment, and well-being increase (Hakanen et al., 2021). The equilibrium between demands and resources in the workplace guarantees well-being and performance. Workload as a demand and social support as a resource are the most prevalent characteristics across various occupational groups. Managers should promptly acknowledge and tackle structural and organizational issues to promote continuous employee health and well-being.

Job Resources

Job resources are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational supports that assist individuals in reducing stress, burnout, and other negative aspects of the job arising from job demands. These resources can include social support, autonomy in

decision-making, feedback and recognition, opportunities for growth and development, and adequate time and equipment to complete tasks (Edney et al., 2018).

Social Support

One of the additional areas of interest within the JDR theory drawn from the COR is social support. Hobfoll (2002) defines social support as an individual's impression of support, tangible assistance, and self-support. Strong social support networks help people manage stress and achieve mental well-being due to their capacity to leverage their support system in navigating challenging circumstances. The social support construct emphasizes accumulating and enhancing resource gains over time instead of the depletion of resources resulting from stress-induced strain. Those with social support deal with stress better and achieve improved mental health because they can mobilize their support system to contend with situations (Hobfoll, 2002).

Kabito and Wami (2020) conducted a cross-sectional survey in Ethiopian public secondary schools, with a response rate of over 96%. The study indicated a prevalence of work-related stress above 58%, dependent on the level of education, job demands, years of experience (less than five), and poor relationships with colleagues. When there is a balance between job demands and worker experience, the worker experiences a reduction in work-related stress. As shown in the Kabito and Wami study, relationships with colleagues who serve as social support reduce the impact of job demands. Social support also reduces worker alienation and social isolation, which is crucial when a worker is isolated from colleagues in a remote work environment.

Mehta (2022) investigated the loss of task identity, job insecurity, and work-from-home isolation with the mediator of work alienation among the 312 information technology (IT) professionals in India surveyed. The study's findings suggest that 35.8% of job insecurity is directly influenced by the isolation and loss of task identity among the remote working participants. The research discovered that work alienation played a complementary mediating role between task identity, job insecurity, and work-from-home isolation. These social resources may include supportive colleagues and supervisors who provide emotional support, guidance, and assistance when needed. Mensah (2021) states that social support can create a sense of belonging, interconnectedness, and employee well-being. Social support plays a crucial role in building resilience to work demands or fostering a supportive and collaborative work environment, wherein organizations can provide employees with the social resources they need to meet job demands effectively.

Job Autonomy

According to the JD-R paradigm, the well-being and productivity of employees are influenced by job-related and personal resources. Job autonomy refers to the extent to which individuals are granted independence and discretion in fulfilling their professional responsibilities (Galanti et al., 2021). In the Galanti et al. (2021) study, the researchers examined the impact of various factors on worker productivity, stress levels, and work engagement. The researchers administered a questionnaire to 209 employees who were working remotely. The questionnaire evaluated the influence of family–work conflict, work environment, self-leadership, social isolation, and job autonomy on these outcomes.

The data were analyzed, and results revealed that family-work conflict and social isolation had a detrimental impact on distant workers' productivity and job engagement. However, when employees could assume leadership roles and operate independently, it resulted in a notable improvement in production levels and overall engagement (Galanti et al., 2021). Worth and Van den Brande (2020) examined job autonomy from the lens of the observed shortage of teachers entering the profession in England. The researchers investigated the relationship between teacher autonomy, retention rates, and work satisfaction. Results indicated that when teachers have job autonomy, there is a significant impact on student performance because teachers can better manage their workload, enjoy greater job satisfaction, and be less prone to leaving the profession. The study results are essential for educational administrators (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020).

The study by Worth and Van den Brande (2020) yielded robust recommendations on educational administrators' management of teacher autonomy. Administrators have a certain degree of influence over instructors' actions because they can balance granting freedom and ensuring alignment with instructional objectives. Establishing a collective vision within the school community is vital, allowing educators to engage and participate meaningfully. In turn, this enhances the advantages derived from progressively granting teachers more autonomy, which is aligned with the overarching objectives of the school. Job satisfaction increases when teachers are allowed to act autonomously. Collaboration and communication within the school community increase teacher self-reflection, balance, organizational goal alignment, and autonomy (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020).

Kengatharan (2020) recognized the recent focus on teacher job satisfaction and autonomy. In the study, Kengatharan utilized theories such as self-determination theory, the JD-R model, and a student involvement theory to establish the link between teacher autonomy, student behavior, and job satisfaction. Data was collected from 703 state schoolteachers in Sri Lanka through a self-administered questionnaire. The findings indicated that student engagement in the classroom somewhat influences teachers' job satisfaction. Furthermore, the research revealed that teachers with higher levels of autonomy exhibit positive connections between job satisfaction and student behavior (Kengatharan, 2020).

Organizational Communication

Clear communication and feedback are tools used in successful organizations because they are essential for providing employees with the necessary information to meet job requirements and demands (Zito et al., 2021). Additionally, feedback helps employees identify areas needing improvement and sets them on the path towards success, rewards, and promotions (Bieńkowska et al., 2022). Dhone and Sarwoko (2022) evaluated human resource managers and the impact of internal communication on employee motivation and performance. The researchers concluded that communication is crucial for strengthening organizational harmony, success, and employee performance. In the study, forty-five workers completed Likert scale questionnaires. Results indicated that internal communication enhances motivation, performance, and morale. The study further revealed that when employees fully understand the company's vision, direction, and have clear work expectations and performance measures during feedback sessions, the mutual

understanding between the employer and employee is improved (Dhone & Sarwoko, 2022). Timely performance feedback, clearly defined job expectations, and organizational goals established and communicated by leadership lead to improved job performance (Gnepp et al., 2020). Dhone and Sarwoko (2022) identified a positive relationship between internal communication and employee motivation. As employees gain a better understanding of expectations, a drive for high performance emerges, propelling the company towards success, particularly when employees are empowered to provide feedback to their employers.

Internal communication is an essential aspect of human resource management within an organization. This study analyzes how employees perceive internal communication and the impact of internal communication and employee motivation on employee performance. The study also examines the role of motivation in the relationship between internal communication and organizational performance. For information gathering, a questionnaire was disseminated to the personnel of BPJS Malang City. The data were analyzed using Path Analysis, which shows that enhancing internal communication could improve employee performance.

Job Demands

The increased need for exertion represents job demands, depleting employees' physical, emotional, and cognitive capacities, potentially resulting in job strain, fatigue, and health issues (Li et al., 2022). When too many expectations are placed upon them, employees may experience physical and psychological strain, tiredness, and a loss of motivation.

Demands Further Categorized

The demands category can be further divided into subsections based on the psychological impact on the employee, as assessed by the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire. Mockało and Widerszal-Bazyl (2021) suggest further categorizing demands as either hindrance or challenge demands depending on the psychological outcomes. A hindrance demand is defined as work-related situations that hinder the successful completion of work tasks without benefiting the employee, such as company policies, bureaucracy, and job insecurity (Mockało & Widerszal-Bazyl, 2021). A challenge demand is characterized by inducing stress, such as a position of authority, a heavy workload, and time-related responsibilities. However, it differs from hindrances as the employee gains valuable benefits. As per Mockało and Widerszal-Bazyl (2021), hindrance demands lead to lower employee work engagement, higher turnover intent, decreased job satisfaction, and disengagement from job performance. In contrast, the study by Mockało and Widerszal-Bazyl (2021) demonstrates a positive correlation between challenge demands and work engagement, employee effectiveness, job satisfaction, and motivation to perform tasks. Nevertheless, despite the advantages, one drawback is the compromise on individual well-being.

Workload

The World Health Organization research indicates that the workplace is more optimal when the employee has job control or autonomy and the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the workload (World Health Organization, 2020). Work-related stress is less likely to be experienced by the worker when job objectives and skills match.

Employees with control over their workload, support from managers and coworkers, and the opportunity to participate in employment choices also minimize the risk of work pressure resulting from the workload. When Van den Oetelaar (2021) studied the workload management of two sets of nurses, they found that perception became a reality. During this study, the first group of nurses had a managed workload, and the other group had a more organic perceived workload. Nurse workload perception was assessed via a 5-dimensional survey to identify the differences between the organic and modeled workloads.

The results of the Van den Oetelaar (2021) study indicate that when the workload is high, there is an increased chance for nurse turnover, medication errors, reduced job satisfaction, adverse patient care outcomes, and physical illness for the nurses. Administrators must manage workloads appropriately. Yet this study differs in recognizing that perception and reality are two different phenomena and that other factors play into a balanced workload. For instance, a nurse can have ten stroke patients, and another may have ten with the flu. Although the number of patients is proportional, the workload between the nurses is disproportional because of the type of care required.

This study also revealed that patient care is reduced when nurses perceive workload as cumbersome. The employee's perception of the workload creates stress and anxiety. Thus, there is a direct correlation between the actual and perceived workload. Personal and environmental factors must also be considered, as the employee will perform better if the job demands are reduced. A key factor may be the employees' perception of the workload and what each individual can manage. Skaalvik and Skaalvik

(2018) aimed to understand the connection between JD-R, well-being, teacher turnover intention, engagement, and the school environment. The study involved 760 first through tenth-grade teachers from the Norwegian School System in the Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2018) study. The primary challenge and leading cause of teacher turnover intention and attrition across the global teaching workforce is workload and time pressure (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Work, time pressure, and teacher demands are faced on various levels: personal (conflicts with colleagues), system (legal requirements), and school/classroom level (class size). Time and work pressure can involve missing rest periods, rushing through curriculum subjects, teaching students with diverse skill levels and motivation, and managing disruptions (Karner & Honing, 2021).

Researchers found that when teachers perceived high job demands, their well-being decreased (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Two critical stressors in the work environment were time and workload constraints. In contrast, well-being increased when teachers felt supported or had significant job resources available, although the correlation was not absolute. The most critical determinant of teacher well-being was time pressure. However, work environment and workload constraints can be balanced when a teacher has positive collegial relationships and feels a sense of purpose and meaningfulness in job performance (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

No matter the type of demand placed on the employee, there is an indication that a more balanced and healthier workplace, as indicated by organizational conditions that promote health and well-being, has a significant positive impact on employee stress, health, and well-being (Asplund et al., 2022). Asplund et al. further indicate in their

qualitative study of Swedish municipal workers regarding work-related stress that the level of workload, issues with colleagues and leadership, as well as limited ability to influence work outcomes and opportunities, account for four out of ten occupational health-related illnesses such as exhaustion, stress-related disorders, feeling powerless, difficulty sleeping, panic attacks, and increased head, neck, and back pain. The study indicated that women were more impacted than men. The feelings of helplessness, frustration, anxiety, and dismay primarily stemmed from the workload in the Swedish study and the lack of control over the work environment and job-related tasks. A researcher could hypothesize that if employees are given more job control, job demands would become more manageable as they could shift their time and resources into categories and tasks that the individual employee believes they can handle.

Management Strategies

To balance job demands and resources, organizations can employ several strategies to redistribute tasks and increase breaks throughout the workday (Vieten et al., 2022). They can also enhance employee support by offering training and development opportunities, counseling, collegial and supervisory support, feedback, and rewards (Blum & Rigotti, 2021). Training and development opportunities boost employees' skill sets and equip them with additional tools to improve personal resources, potentially reducing the impact of demands. By implementing these strategies, organizations can create a conducive work environment that enhances employee well-being and satisfaction. Moreover, granting employees job autonomy and control through flexible

work arrangements or involvement in organizational decision-making increases their effectiveness (Heijkants et al., 2022).

According to Hobfoll (2002), job requirements necessitate allocating resources that possess intrinsic value. These resources play a significant role in increasing employee performance and can be accessed within an organization. They include salary, career opportunities, and interpersonal and social relations with supervisors and coworkers. To summarize, job resources such as autonomy, feedback, and social support are crucial in achieving work goals, coping with demands, and facilitating learning. Increasing employee resources empowers employees to have more control over their work, feel supported by colleagues and supervisors, receive information and guidance to improve performance, and feel supported by their colleagues and supervisors.

Worker Motivation

The Office for National Statistics in the United Kingdom (2021) reported that before the pandemic, only 5% of the workforce mainly worked from home, and only 27% occasionally did so. However, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2020) projected that 22% of employees will primarily work from home, and 37% will do so more often. Job requirements entail allocating intrinsically valuable resources such as pay, career information, performance feedback, and the support of superiors and employees, according to Hobfoll (2002). Koekemoer et al. (2021) stated that there is a limited understanding of COVID-19's impact on motivation, leadership, and employee performance despite its noticeable effect on the world. The researchers aimed to assess the interplay among leadership behavior, team efficiency, technological adaptability,

work enthusiasm, and overall performance in South Africa at the height of the nationwide lockdowns. Both from practical and academic perspectives, there was a solid interest in examining team productivity, job commitment, leadership dynamics, and tech adaptability during this period. Koekemoer et al. targeted 229 people working remotely through online platforms. They used advanced statistical methods, including structural equation modeling, to carefully review the data and considered diverse levels of pessimism and optimism. They found that work enthusiasm was rooted in positive leaders and efficient team members, enhancing two areas of performance: proactive behavior and adaptiveness. Both indirectly influenced proactivity and adaptability through enthusiasm for one's job. Thus, Koekemoer et al. concluded that organizations should encourage resources related to employment to increase work commitment, which will lead to positive results in performance, especially concerning remote work. Since the 2020 global pandemic, when the UK government advocated a work-from-home approach, many businesses have integrated remote work into their long-term plans. Managerial coaching is one way to enhance positive leadership behavior, as found by Burroughs and Grant (2023).

Burroughs and Grant conducted a qualitative analysis to delve into the role of managerial coaching in growing a sense of trust among remote employees. The researchers were guided by the social determination theory as their framework. They conducted comprehensive interviews with 15 workers and found that such coaching is pivotal for instilling and preserving trust so employees can feel confident in their skills and esteemed as people. Not only does this finding bridge a gap in knowledge in

managerial coaching, but it also reinforces the idea that employees who feel trusted are more critical than their trust in leadership regarding remote work performance. Burroughs and Grant concluded that training in managerial coaching could arm managers with the competencies to motivate and extend trust effectively to their teams who work at a remote distance. Furthermore, as teams become more remotely centered, managers must refine their communication skills and be more sensitive to the psychological needs of workers.

As in other studies on employee motivation, active encouragement is crucial to ensure that employees maintain consistent productivity. Many workers faced personal crises, such as family members falling ill or passing away due to COVID-19, placing significant financial stress on their families. Therefore, relying solely on self-motivation from employees was inadequate. The research by Supriyono and Susmonowati (2022) focused on assessing the effectiveness of remote work and identifying challenges faced by both employees and their supervisors in maintaining productivity while working from home. The researchers utilized a qualitative case study approach, conducting semistructured interviews with 10 participants, including eight from various departments and two managers. The study highlighted the significance of leadership motivation in ensuring employees' continued efficiency during the global health crisis.

Additionally, relying solely on self-motivation may not boost productivity when managers fail to offer motivational support. When employers establish high expectations without corresponding motivational incentives, employee stress escalates, leading to suboptimal performance. The researchers suggested exploring employee motivation from

different perspectives in future studies. Sanhokwe (2022) examined the blurred boundaries between personal life and work responsibilities, especially during remote work scenarios, and highlighted how an individual's unique personal circumstances can affect their engagement and efficiency at work. Using the conservation of resources theory as a framework, Sanhokwe delved into how external support and personal challenges impact work commitment and productivity. Sanhokwe aimed to understand the interaction between personal life factors and work dynamics to develop strategies for effective resource management, enhancing productivity and loyalty. Sanhokwe's study surveyed 185 employees from non-governmental organizations, employed structural models to analyze intermediary effects, and proposed interconnections supported by bootstrapping. The study revealed a positive correlation between work commitment and personal resources, with external support mitigating specific challenges related to work commitment, influencing the relationship between work productivity and individual life factors. The researcher recommended that business leaders strive to comprehend the intricate link between personal life circumstances and work responsibilities.

Although previous researchers suggested that those with solid self-discipline might cope more effectively, the specific reasons for this finding were not entirely understood. Troll et al. (2022) emphasized job performance as a significant challenge during the hasty transition to remote work globally. Troll et al. used a mixed-methods approach to examine how specific self-control strategies in remote settings might connect to an employee's work performance and their internalized self-discipline. The researchers analyzed 266 employees and identified prevalent strategies, including cognitive

techniques, workplace alterations, self-drive, and establishing clear steps to complete their work. Another quantitative assessment of 106 remote employees demonstrated that those with high levels of self-control usually outperformed those who did not share those levels. The results were robust in altering their office space and raising self-motivation. The research results of Troll et al. (2022) indicate that self-discipline plays a role in successful work engagement for professionals in remote workspaces.

Absenteeism

Aronsson et al. (2021) used their research study to delve more deeply into contrasting research findings on aspects of the work environment connected both to employees being at work or being absent when sick to discern why and when some employees decide to come to work when sick (also known as “substitution”). The study was conducted in Sweden using data between 2002 and 2007 from many cross-sectional questionnaires (n=130,161) in a national campaign for health enhancement. Many respondents were public employees and those from the private sector. The Aronsson et al. (2021) study involved examining how motivation and health mediated five workplace element effects, including collegial support, interference between family life and work, job autonomy, role discord, and work demands related to the decision by workers to come to work when ill or stay home. They found that increased workload was the main reason behind higher substitution than absence. As a direct effect, higher collegial support resulted in lower absences, whereas increased support lowered both absenteeism and presenteeism regarding motivation and health.

The most significant factor was work autonomy, which promoted health and decreased absenteeism and presenteeism. However, work-to-family life conflicts and roles were associated with a decrease in health and an increase in both types of illness-related work behavior. Aronsson et al. concluded their study by highlighting research contradictions concerning working when sick, being absent due to sickness, work demands, and support. Therefore, they recommended understanding the importance of the substitution effect for strategies and workplace practices in occupational health.

Ryoo et al. (2023) discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased remote work and telecommuting. They mention the controversial adverse effects or positive benefits for the worker. The researchers' main objective was to determine the difference in occupational health risks between those who commuted to their workplace daily in person and those who worked remotely during the pandemic. Ryoo et al. used a cross-sectional approach drawing from data from the 6th Korean Working Conditions Survey (from 2020 to 2021). The focus group consisted of 12,354 salaried white-collar employees. Health conditions like insomnia, depression, musculoskeletal discomfort, anxiety, eye strain, fatigue, absenteeism, and presenteeism were self-reported. Ryoo et al. (2023) used advanced statistical analysis and considered gender differences to assess the health outcomes for remote workers. Of the studied participants, 338 men and 318 women were teleworkers. The comprehensive regression model determined connections between telecommuting and various health issues such as insomnia, fatigue, pain in the musculoskeletal system, and eye strain. There was also a

significant gender disparity; female telecommuters showed a heightened risk for depression and insomnia compared to those commuting daily.

Ryoo et al. (2023) concluded that telecommuting is strongly linked to rising health challenges in the South Korean workforce, especially for women. While more studies are necessary to confirm causation, they suggest that public health interventions can mitigate potential adverse effects related to remote work. Since technology has advanced remote work, there has been a noteworthy change in work dynamics, with time and location becoming more flexible. However, the relationship between well-being, health, and remote work is still being determined.

Heiden et al. (2021) aimed to identify associations between the duration and frequency of remote work and stress levels, health perceptions, recovery periods, work-life balance, and intrinsic motivation toward work among university faculty. As a result, they distributed five surveys to academic staff, including lecturers and tenured professors in Sweden. This digital survey comprised the Work Stress Questionnaire, recovery evaluation items, the General Health Questionnaire, sections of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire, and the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction at Work scale, receiving responses from 392 participants. Using advanced statistical analysis, Heiden et al. discovered significant variations based on the frequency of remote work among different faculty groups ($p < 0.05$). Their analysis revealed that unclear organizational structures and related conflicts led to heightened stress levels in individuals who teleworked multiple times per week compared to those who teleworked infrequently (e.g., once a month). While exploring the relationship between telework

duration (weekly hours) and the mentioned factors, Heiden et al. found no significant correlations. Ultimately, the researchers concluded that their study did not determine whether stress arises from frequent telework or if preexisting stress prompts more telework.

Burnout

Freudenberger and Maslach first identified burnout in the 1970s as a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion and decreased professional motivation and engagement (Demerouti et al., 2021). Burnout has been defined as a critical issue in the work-related domain, impacting individuals across various professional fields. Burnout is characterized by two fundamental dimensions: Exhaustion includes stress-related weariness, despair, psychosomatic problems, and anxiety; Cynicism, sometimes called depersonalization, is characterized by apathy, mental detachment, and work disengagement (Demerouti et al., 2021). Burnout is a physical, psychological, and emotional response to a high-pressure work environment that impacts performance. Work stress is the common culprit that creates burnout (Wulantika et al., 2023).

Burnout results from high stress levels created through occurrences on an individual and organizational level, according to Edú-Valsania et al. (2022). Burnout stems from a lack of leadership, management, and organizational structure on the corporate front. Although it was initially thought that burnout only affected service workers, evidence indicates that so many professions have been impacted that the World Health Organization has classified burnout as a syndrome in their 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases. From a psychosocial perspective, those who

experience burnout have symptoms of frustration, exhaustion, and demotivation. These feelings can sometimes result in negative outbursts towards colleagues and chronic health issues (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022).

In Wulantika et al. (2023), 31 Jayakarta Suites Bandung employees used an online questionnaire to examine how social support and job burnout affect employee performance. The study found that while social support does not affect performance, burnout partially affects employee performance. The study findings further indicate that when employees' workloads are well managed, they have a good relationship with their coworkers based on praise, acknowledgment of their ideas, encouragement, and employee performance support. Social support in and of itself does not increase employee performance, but when combined with adequate workload and work saturation, it does affect employee performance (Wulantika et al., 2023).

In a quantitative study, Lafraxo et al. (2021) assessed the prevalence of burnout among 30 nursing staff to determine the socio-demographic and professional characteristics of burnout. The participants took two surveys: the Copenhagen Inventory on burnout and a two-section self-administered survey, to assess the relationship of burnout to experienced nurses and socio-demographics. The researchers then asked the nurses to use an app-invented tool designed to train, evaluate, and provide support. 83% agreed to use this solution. The Burnout Scratch and Inventory tool are used to create a prevention tool to teach people about the causes of burnout, assess their physiological health, offer support in the form of occupational psychology and psychiatry, and as a means of self-awareness and a social support system (Lafraxo et al., 2021).

In the context of the job demands-resources model, burnout occurs when demands exceed resources and continue over time. Burnout is not inevitable; actions can be taken to moderate the effects of stressors (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022), such as workload management. Appropriate time management and job crafting have reduced stress because employees have control over how their day unfolds. Additional support includes exercise, deep breathing, and relaxation techniques.

Organizational Commitment

Fatahun et al. (2023) defined organizational commitment as the degree to which employees are involved and identify with an organization. Job demands and resources significantly impact worker commitment. Job demands refer to the various aspects of a job that require effort from the worker. These demands include workload, task interruptions, organizational changes, and emotional demands (El Mouedden et al., 2022). When job demands exceed available resources, it can lead to unmet psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy, potentially resulting in lower levels of worker commitment (El Mouedden et al., 2022).

Job resources are factors within the work environment that can facilitate the successful completion of tasks and promote worker well-being (Ceryes et al., 2023). These resources can include social support, performance feedback, and autonomy. When job resources are present and accessible, they contribute to a positive working environment that enhances workers' well-being, satisfaction, and commitment (Liu et al., 2022).

Candel and Arnăutu (2021) claimed that while telecommuting became essential for adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic, its interplay with employees' personal characteristics and work outcomes has not been sufficiently studied. The researchers examined how telecommuting influences the connection between psychological entitlement and work-related elements: job satisfaction, counterproductive work behavior, and organizational citizenship behavior. Additionally, Candel and Arnăutu considered job satisfaction as a link between psychological entitlement, counterproductive work behavior, and organizational citizenship behavior. The researchers surveyed 253 employees, some working remotely and others at the job site (Candel & Arnăutu, 2023). The study delved more deeply into the consequences of telecommuting management implications, examining how remote work influenced the relationship between psychological entitlement and counterproductive work behavior, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior. Candel and Arnăutu found a negative correlation between psychological entitlement and job satisfaction for remote employees. Furthermore, they observed that job satisfaction mediated psychological satisfaction and counterproductive work behavior, but only among the telecommuting participants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a new era of work dynamics. The transition to remote work has potentially intensified the overlap between professional and family responsibilities, adversely affecting the balance between work and family life and, thus, organizational commitment (Neo et al., 2022). Such an imbalance is particularly challenging for women, who often take on a more significant portion of household and

family responsibilities. Neo et al. (2022) used a sample of 754 employed married mothers in Singapore to explore their challenges during COVID-19 and how they affected their work-family balance. The researchers indicated that the COVID-19 situation raised work-family tension. Significant determinants of this conflict during the pandemic include dedication to their profession, the overwhelming demands of their job role, the pressures of parenthood, and the degree of family support. Neo et al. argued that factors from work are not the sole contributors to family interfering with work issues and lower organizational commitment. As the COVID-19 pandemic has been prolonged, combining family and work has become more common everywhere. Thus, policymakers should avoid the conventional perspective that work and family are individually distinct spheres. Instead, upcoming policies should include measures that cater to both aspects simultaneously.

Rumambi et al. (2022) used a quantitative approach to understand the dedication of civil servants to their public service organizations and how work culture can impact public service outcomes in sub-district Tomohon, Indonesia. Findings reveal a strong and positive correlation between organizational commitment and public service performance, emphasizing the importance of carefully selecting candidates with high organizational dedication. Using a merit-based system for hiring may help employees with solid corporate ties fulfill their roles and responsibilities effectively. Furthermore, Rumambi et al. demonstrated that organizational commitment and work culture significantly influence employee performance. These factors contribute to 53.50% of the variance in public service performance, while the remaining 46.50% can be linked to other factors. Thus,

the researchers illustrated how organizational commitment and work culture could shape the performance of civil servants at the sub-district level in Tomohon to align with their respective sub-districts' specific roles and functions.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement practices keep employees motivated, increase organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and enable employees to connect meaningfully with the organization and its leadership, according to Anand and Acharya (2021). This engagement drives financial outcomes and organizational marketplace achievement. The core of employee engagement is the willingness of a worker to put in effort, perform well, and show loyalty to the company (Anand & Acharya, 2021). Giaque et al. (2022) used a job demands-resources framework when engaging 1,373 Swiss Cantonal federal public administration workers. The framework considered both pre-telework and telework stages, job-related factors, relationship factors, and organizational climate variables affecting employee engagement, fatigue, and performance. Results from the study indicated that although employees maintained consistent levels of engagement, they also gained increased job autonomy and work-life balance compared to when not working remotely. However, there was a decrease in collegial collaboration and a perception of increased job strain.

The researchers found that two essential resources—autonomy to organize one's work and coworker collaboration—improve employee engagement and perceived performance and reduce exhaustion. Giaque et al. (2022) found that forced telework moderately impacted employees' working circumstances. Mandatory telecommuting is

linked to more task autonomy, personal initiative, work-life balance, and judgment under mandatory telecommuting. As indicated by the participants, some areas of concern raised by the study are that required telework arrangements hinder collaboration with coworkers, team members, and supervisors. Participants also reported fewer activities and less work-related skill development. Increased employee engagement creates an opportunity for higher productivity levels and improved financial outcomes. In an integrative literature review, Chanana (2021) found that employers must be more intentional about employee engagement in this era of remote working.

Armed with this information, human resource managers have actively sought out ways to engage employees, such as online family engagement activity nights, webinars led by industry experts like TED Talks, virtual learning courses, skill development, brown bag lunches, and team meetings over video conferences, benefiting both businesses and employees (Chanana, 2021). Deep breathing, training workshops, pharmacotherapy, video conferences, and team building have also proven helpful (Babu & Balamurugan, 2022). Staff development initiatives help employees learn new skills and grow professionally (Chanana, 2021). By integrating these activities, employees become more committed to and motivated for the company.

Borst et al. (2019) sought to fill the gap in the JD-R model of work engagement literature by surveying the lesser-researched population of public administration professionals. The researchers conducted a detailed study examining the job and personal resources of 9,465 individuals. Borst et al. discovered a positive correlation between employee access to resources and public service motivation and the subsequent

enhancement of work engagement. When employees experience corporate policy, regulations, and rules (“red tape”), they become less creative and productive. Some even feel alienated. This red tape reduces engagement, and employees feel constrained by it. In the traditional JD-R model, all job characteristics are treated equally. Like other public administration-related studies, this study separates job characteristics into work-related and organizational-related resources.

Work-related resources include collegial teamwork, job autonomy, and recognition, while organizational-related resources entail opportunities to develop new skills, performance evaluation, and supervisor support (Borst et al., 2019). According to the Borst et al. study, public servants exhibit higher work engagement with job autonomy, colleague support, supervisory assistance, skill development opportunities, and performance evaluation. Engaging public administration employees possess personal resources and intrinsic motivation and are motivated by appropriate job resources that promote growth, learning, competence, relatedness, and development or assist in achieving work goals extrinsically. Organization-related employment resources such as performance evaluation and training enhance the likelihood of goal achievement. Furthermore, cheerful public service-oriented employees with a positive attitude and expertise contribute to increased work engagement (Borst et al., 2019).

The researchers also found that work engagement mediates the relationship between public employees' jobs and personal resources, commitment, and turnover intention. Higher proactivity and public service motivation (PSM) reduce public servant turnover intention. Furthermore, external factors, not personality features, impact

employee commitment and turnover intention. However, personality and environment affect public servants' work engagement, which suggests that public servants' work engagement is a more profound cognitive state than commitment and turnover intention. Borst et al. (2019) also found that public employees perceived that rules and red tape do not lower their work engagement and organizational commitment nor increase turnover intention. This study encourages managers to increase employee engagement by prioritizing job autonomy, peer collaboration, and job content to improve engagement outcomes. Even during crises, business and organizational leaders must ensure that staff have the resources, supervision, and support to perform well (Lee & Jo, 2023).

Kyei-Frimpong et al. (2023) examined the role of supervisory support as the link between an employee's organizational commitment and their empowerment. Using a quantitative research design, the researchers surveyed 274 hotel workers over seven months. This population was crucial to study because they experience varying workloads due to seasonal demands, limited job growth and development, and unpredictable work schedules. The results of this study indicate that with more responsibility, employees show increased loyalty and commitment and benefit from empowerment (Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2023). These uncertain times have led businesses to strategize on maintaining marketplace competitiveness, safeguarding their employees' health and well-being, and ensuring business survival (Lee & Jo, 2023).

In moments of crisis, determining employees' mental well-being is imperative because there is a direct correlation between employees' mental health and performance. Studies have examined the relationship between job resources, employee engagement,

and mental health. Lee and Jo (2023) surveyed 1092 corporate employees to understand how job autonomy and personal mental health influenced role performance (the behaviors typically exhibited at work) and prosocial extra-role performance (behaviors benefiting the organization mediated by employee engagement). Like the study by Borst et al. (2019), Lee and Jo's (2023) analysis revealed that job autonomy and psychological well-being (personal resources) significantly impact job performance, particularly in terms of private initiative and pro-social conduct. The study findings further emphasize the importance of employee engagement as a psychological reinforcement for individuals facing rapid transformations in the work environment.

Remote and Alternative Work

Within the last ten years, there has been a dramatic change in the remote, telework, and alternative work landscape for both industry and government. Many federal government leaders did not readily embrace telework, even though they were fully authorized via the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, signed into law by Barack Obama. This law was established to provide an official telework framework, define roles and responsibilities, increase work-life balance for employees, enhance recruitment of new employees, and retain those currently using telework while requiring OPM to create a website to explain telework and collect data for adequate reporting (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Telework Enhancement Act, n.d.). Teleworking was not a new phenomenon to the federal government. For example, during Hurricane Irene, employees were required to report their location and work status, whether on leave or offsite (Brown, 2016). For the government, it seemed a more natural and justifiable option to use

telework during a crisis to ensure continuity without hindrance, as was the case during the worldwide health crisis of the COVID-19 outbreak.

As of March 3, 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in more than 90,000 confirmed cases and over 2,946 deaths across 72 countries (Li et al., 2020). This situation presents a significant global threat to public health. The WHO declared a worldwide public health emergency due to the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested, uncovered, and revealed the strengths and weaknesses of agencies, federal leadership, administrators, and the capacity of the agency's technology systems to continue supporting an appropriate working environment. Previously resistant supervisors were no longer able to prohibit alternative working locations. COVID-19 required employees, administrators, customers, and families to adjust to a fast-evolving home-work-life context, propelling business operations globally into the need to address alternative workplace options, rapid onsite COVID testing (Van der Scheer et al., 2022), new ways to engage in meetings, social distancing (Zito et al., 2021), technological personal and organizational issues (Zito et al., 2021), and the rearrangement of homes for use as alternative office space (Galanti et al., 2021). The government instituted mandatory vaccines and on-site workplace testing, closed businesses and schools, and asked people to quarantine at home (Meyer et al., 2021). Fear, panic, and uncertainty ensued. The threat of disease transmission from one person to another was severe; therefore, social isolation was at an all-time high. Family members could not visit sick and dying loved ones in hospitals, and many people felt isolated and frustrated (Meyer et al., 2021).

In many cases, new demands were placed on workers, forcing them to balance their available resources and demands, as well as the pandemic, work, societal isolation, and childcare needs. A longitudinal 3-month study by Meyer et al. (2021) surveyed 789 employees' psychological well-being across each monthly iteration concerning job demands, resources, and exhaustion. They divided the study into three sections: (a) identified issues of job insecurity, (b) personal and job-related resources such as job autonomy, and (c) personal partner or collegial supports and the division of privacy between what was happening at work and what was happening in a person's home. In both the Asplund (2022) and Meyer et al. (2021) studies, women exhibited more stress and adverse health outcomes than men depending on workload, personal and job demands like work-life balance and childcare, compared to the resources available to them. Men showed little fatigue or exhaustion related to the pandemic and work-from-home demands (Meyer et al., 2021).

The U.S. Government has provided many federal employees with workplace options. Alternative work locations include traditional office workplaces, telework, or remote work. In the proposed study, the definitions of telework, agency worksite, and remote work stem from the Federal OPM's perspective because the study's population will consist of federal remote workers and managers for whom telework is a formal arrangement. These terms allow an employee, under a written telework agreement, to carry out scheduled recurring work at an agency worksite (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2021). Remote work is a formal arrangement in which an employee conducts their regularly scheduled work at an agreed-upon alternative worksite outside

the agency's worksite within or outside the agency's commuting area (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2021). An agency worksite refers to the centralized Federal agency location where typical agency activities are routinely performed (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2021).

Over 70% of federal employees who responded to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey indicated their use of telework since the onset of COVID-19. However, there is a disparity among those who utilize the available telework options (Kim, 2023). The OPM has issued supplementary policy guidance to assist federal agencies in expanding remote work opportunities (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2021). Meanwhile, as OPM was establishing supplementary guidance, Congress was working to revert remote work back to the pre-COVID policy state through the Show-Up Act (Show-Up Act of 2023, 2023). In the Show-Up Act of 2023, agencies must revert to pre-pandemic telework policies, practices, and levels for executive agencies while providing an agency study that includes information on the real estate impact, dispersal of employees, relative locality pay and related costs, opportunities gained by expansion either financially or in human capital, as well as a plan to ensure that every teleworking employee has the requisite equipment to perform their work functions (Show-Up Act of 2023). These efforts to reset the pre-pandemic standard are supported by some Congressional members who believe that remotely working employees are underperforming and causing a reduction in customer service at several agency departments (Show-Up Act of 2023).

The U.S. Office for Personnel Management (2021) indicated that remote work is there to help agencies attract a highly skilled and talented workforce who may be within or outside the agency commuting area and recruit new employees while retaining current employees. There has even been evidence of cost savings from remote work for the agency in terms of reduction of real estate assets and other facility expenses.

Implementing measures to enhance employee job opportunities that cater to individuals with mobility-related or other qualifying disabilities has increased the appeal of such positions (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2021). Despite the potential advantages, organizations could consider and have experienced challenges implementing remote and alternative work environments and maintaining employee performance. One of the challenges in performance management is the need for supervisors to adapt their communication to ensure it is effective and ongoing (Doberstein & Charbonneau, 2022).

Managers must correspond with workers regarding work assignments and expectations in a concise manner to ensure the directions are understood (Doberstein & Charbonneau, 2022). In this era of equity, diversity, and inclusion, employees must feel included in the opportunity to telework. Kim (2023) analyzed the use of teleworking among federal employees and its correlation with demographics, leader support, and organizational backing. The study utilized data collected from U.S. federal employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Post-pandemic, 71% of participants reported increased teleworking. Federal employees engaged in telework differently based on age, ethnicity, and gender both pre-pandemic and during the crisis. Effective leadership and organizational support mitigated gender-based telework disparities, although age and

ethnicity gaps persisted. The study by Kim suggested that organizations could develop management strategies that facilitate remote work for elderly, disabled, and minority employees. The research explored demographic factors that impede teleworking, emphasizing the importance of planning, consideration, and organization.

Hawthorn Effect

The observable difference in the behavior or performance of participants who actively know they are participating in an experimental research study is termed the Hawthorne Effect (Campbell et al.,1995). Fundamental principles of the Hawthorn Effect are that the person under investigation must feel the need to increase performance, know that they are under study, and have a feedback loop to record the changes that should be in place (Campbell et al.,1995). The Hawthorne effect was first observed in experiments conducted at Western Electric's Hawthorne Works between 1927 and 1933. Several female employees who were experts in wiring relays were selected from the general population and given a separate workspace and treatment; as a result, their output and productivity increased (Chiesa & Hobbs, 2008). Even after the researchers returned to the initial settings after repeatedly modifying the labor conditions during the experiment, output productivity increased (Campbell et al.,1995).

One follow-up question is whether there would have been an increase in productivity if participants were observed in their natural environment without being aware that they were being watched or if the change in climate or becoming aware of the observers was the catalyst for the subsequent unintentional shift in participant behavior (Chiesa & Hobbs, 2008). Referring to this original experiment, Nossaman and Nossaman

(2022) discussed observational bias, which occurs when caregivers or patients change their responses to the care itself when they are conscious of the conditions of the study; the modifications are referred to as the Hawthorn effect. Sedgwick (2012), for instance, examined how effective an integrated care program was for patients returning to work who had chronic pain in their lower back. This new program in an outpatient venue combined work and patient interventions. Sedgwick used a randomized trial design wherein the controls received regular care, and the trial patients received combined interventions. The researchers measured how long patients were away from work to when they returned to work fully. The second measure was pain intensity and function. Those patients receiving integrated care returned to work sooner than those in the control group, which Sedgwick attributed to the Hawthorn effect, in which the shortened absence came not only from the integrated care but also from the patients' awareness of being in such a study.

In a longitudinal study measuring the smoking habits of 6,000 11–12-year-old adolescents, the researchers found that over five years, there was a reduction in smoking compared to the non-study group of their peers (Murray et al., 1988). When the genders were measured, the girls were markedly lower. The boys in the original study group did not inhale while smoking as much as the comparative group (Murray et al., 1988). Some could attribute this result of a lower incidence of smoking to the Hawthorn effect due to the students' knowledge that they would be surveyed several times more. Other considerations, such as the effect of parental or teacher intervention, loss of interest in

smoking, and the lower participant response rates to the surveys over time, could also explain the differences (Murray et al., 1988).

If a researcher were to examine the Hawthorn Effect on underperforming contract specialists, the researcher could begin with a remote manager requiring contract specialists to show worker engagement and accountability by requesting workers to turn on Microsoft Teams and maintain their signal on the green, requiring workers to sign in and out via email, conducting random audits of contracts, while offering ongoing performance feedback to improve employee productivity. If the study results in a worker's performance decreasing based on the contract specialist believing that their performance was being monitored, then the changes could be attributed to the Hawthorn effect. A work performance increase grounded in the Hawthorn Effect would be indicated by measuring how many employees turn on their Microsoft Teams work light, already naturally indicate their sign-in and out via email, regularly attend scheduled meetings, and prepare their files for auditing before they know that they will eventually be monitored. Participants should then be retested after being told the monitoring has ended so researchers can ascertain change.

Transactional Leadership

The leadership style used by managers impacts the workers' productivity and organizational success. The transactional leadership style includes rewarding or punishing employees based on meeting organizational goals and quantifiable performance outcomes (Mendoza Solis et al., 2023). Transactional leadership has four characteristics: active management by exception, passive management, contingent

rewards, and laissez-faire (Abdelwahed et al., 2023). Transactional leadership is the connection between the leader and the employee, with organizational leaders striving to identify the needs and expectations of employees to comprehend the factors that motivate, activate, and propel them toward achieving the organization's objectives (Andriansyah et al., 2023).

Once those motivations are identified, the organization provides the employee with appropriate rewards when organizational goals and objectives are met. Within a transactional leadership culture, the leader demonstrates a continuous commitment to monitoring and evaluating corporate expectations of employees, their responses to the rewards provided, and achieving performance goals and objectives (Andriansyah et al., 2023). In a remote setting, it may or may not be more challenging to use the transactional style as the primary leadership style as efficiently as in the traditional work setting since it requires a regular exchange between the employer and employee. There is a significant gap in the literature regarding transactional leadership and remote work.

There are various leadership styles, yet the overall goal of each style is typically the same: to either increase compliance or offer directives to help a group perform a task with an intended outcome. Transformational leadership is often compared to transactional leadership style. Transactional leadership is based on task performance outcomes to achieve organizational success. In contrast, transformational leadership focuses more on uplifting the people who will subsequently meet the organizational outcomes (Abbas & Ali, 2023). Sinclair et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of promoting leadership excellence in real-time work and the current digital landscape, as the study's timeframe

began before the COVID-19 pandemic. A quality enhancement initiative was utilized to identify the needs of remote workers and understand their experience with distant leadership. Sinclair identified a necessity to improve communication between leaders and their team members. Leaders should understand tasks, engage teams in decision-making, and provide timely support.

A transformational leadership approach informed such change strategies, specifically conducting daily online briefings using virtual evaluations and meeting with employees monthly to boost managers' understanding of the workforce. This quality enhancement effort was already underway when the global pandemic emerged, and the newly remote workers felt even more isolated from colleagues and superiors. Thus, they provided positive feedback regarding the changes. They understood more in the present than in the past the importance of genuine human connection and leadership support as the teams tackled new challenges. The transformational leadership framework provided a supportive atmosphere and, thus, better relationships among team members, primarily due to the regular and consistent leadership outreach efforts.

Sinclair concluded that for leadership to be genuinely effective in remote work, maintaining communication and nurturing connections with employees is a top priority. When comparing transactional versus transformational leadership across 41 studies with the specific country of occurrence as moderators at the project level, Abbas and Ali (2023) found that those using the transformational style experienced tremendous project success due to the collective focus on the project success. Yet project-level variables such as size and type also played a moderating role between leadership style and project

success when the country of occurrence was also considered: the economic standing, collectivist cultures versus cultures that value individualism, and power distance (the distribution of power among country occupants) also played a role (Abbas & Ali, 2023).

One difference may be that transformational leaders effectively communicate the vision to their subordinates, embrace change, and encourage flexibility by inspiring workers to innovate, think differently, and create change in their enterprises, ultimately motivating them to do more. Therefore, this leadership style is expected to work well in sectors that value change and innovation for sustainability and growth, such as IT. As a result, transformational leadership is the more appropriate style for project managers.

Baig et al. (2021) examined the impact of leadership styles of laissez-faire, transformational, and transactional leadership on employees' performance at a textile company. Data were collected from lower and upper management at the textile company. The results indicated that ineffective leadership techniques have hindered the textile industry's financial potential, leading to lower employee performance and productivity compared to other textile-producing nations and causing the industry's collapse. The study suggests that transformational and transactional leadership approaches can enhance textile worker performance in Pakistan. In their study, Baig et al. (2021) proposed that transformational leadership can boost employee performance.

Irrespective of leadership style, employee performance is paramount for organizational success. An effective supervisor, mindful of Key Performance Indicators such as being Informed, Involved, Interested, and Inspired, is more effective and can increase employee engagement (Mukherjee, 2023). These Key Performance Indicators

(KPIs) center around maintaining a high level of employee engagement. This involves creating a conducive work environment that nurtures a sense of purpose and significance in employee tasks. Motivated and engaged employees are more likely to surpass expectations in their contributions to the organization's achievements and are also more likely to stay with the organization for an extended period. To motivate employees, companies can establish a vision for the future, promote a strong atmosphere of teamwork and collaboration, and recognize and celebrate employees' significant contributions to the company's success (Mukherjee, 2023).

Ultimately, the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of Keeping People Informed, Involved, Interested, and Inspired is a new method for evaluating the attainment of a company's goals and objectives. By prioritizing these four vital areas, companies can be more confident that their staff are actively motivated to achieve the company's success.

Transition Statement

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry explored the strategies remote managers at federal agencies use to improve the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists. In Section 2 of this study, I presented the literature review covering several topics within the conceptual framework, such as burnout, absenteeism, the Hawthorn effect, and employee engagement. The literature indicates that employees are more engaged when they have the needed resources. Furthermore, leadership style matters, depending on whether the worker is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. In the transactional style, leadership has to be purposeful in engaging an employee to determine how they would like to be rewarded or recognized for work performed to increase the

chance for contribution to organizational productivity. Supervisory support, collegial cohesion, and autonomy are job resources that workers value. In contrast, workload is a job demand that hampers worker engagement, especially when the worker lacks adequate supervisory support or training. Lastly, albeit potentially unexplored and outdated, the Hawthorne effect is still relevant for supervisors to understand whether employees are more productive when they perceive their work is being observed and productivity is analyzed, compared to when they are left to themselves to determine their own peak productivity periods.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Section 3 includes information on areas related to ethical research, the nature of the project, the population, sampling, participants, data collection activities, and interview questions. It also discusses data organization and analysis, reliability and validity, dependability, credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation.

Project Ethics

The primary means for collecting data in qualitative studies is the researcher. Therefore, adhering to interview procedures and member checking is critical to avoid researcher bias and improve rigor, dependability, and research quality (Johnson et al., 2020). I had not had any prior interactions with the research participants. We perform the same job function, but I do not work with any of my participants. I obtained participants using both snowball and purposive sampling methods. I also do not supervise remote working contract specialists. The contract specialists I manage are in the office with me.

In compliance with federal regulations and Walden University ethical standards, students must take several steps to protect research participants (Walden University, 2019). Before conducting this study, I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB; approval number is 02-02-24-0406692. My CITI certification is in Appendix C. To reduce risk and ensure the safety of every participant, the interviews were ethically conducted by following proper interview protocols and procedures, establishing an initial set of interview questions to ensure consistency among participants, obtaining participant consent, allowing participants to withdraw at will, and following confidentiality procedures (see Adashi et al., 2018).

The 1979 *Belmont Report* by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Study provides rules to protect study participants. The *Belmont Report* guidelines include beneficence, which involves the ethical treatment of humans and risk minimization. Respect for humans also requires giving research participants the freedom to participate or withdraw after giving informed permission (U.S. Office for Human Research Protection [OHRP], 1979). The interview questions are in Appendix B. Once the participants were identified as eligible candidates and they agreed to participate, the consent form was digitally sent to inform them of the purpose of the study, the approximate length of time the interview would take, and the offer to answer any participant-related questions.

All seven participants responded with consent and scheduled within one week of receiving the requests for interview participation. Although participants were asked to sign the consent form and plan their participation, they were informed they could withdraw without consequence. The withdrawal process was simple; it could be initiated by writing “I withdraw” before the interview or verbally indicating their intent to withdraw when asked before the interview to affirm their consent or withdrawal. The participants were offered the chance to ask clarifying questions. Participants were compensated \$15 via an Amazon gift card for participation in the study. The participants' names and responses gathered from Zoom audio recording interviews and any publicly available documents related to my research will be maintained on a password-protected secure drive and destroyed five years after study completion. Finally, participant privacy

and confidentiality were ensured by assigning an alpha-numeric label to the transcribed recorded information and assigning codes P1 through P7.

Nature of the Project

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project aimed to explore the strategies used by remote contract managers to increase the performance of underperforming remote workers. Researchers use qualitative research methodology to understand an event from the participants' viewpoint as it naturally occurs and is experienced (Atmowardoyo, 2018). Qualitative researchers use open-ended interview questions to assess participants' thoughts, feelings, and knowledge (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The researcher interprets those experiences via inductive data analysis, focusing on the recurring themes and details of a problem experienced under natural conditions (Yin, 2018). In pragmatic inquiry, the general belief is that research should stem from a motivation to provide practical and implementable information, address fundamental problems, or resolve uncertain circumstances, which is achieved by studying effective patterns of behavior or ways of acting (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). I chose the pragmatic inquiry design for this study because underperformance is a fundamental problem to be explored, and the managers' strategies and effective patterns discovered could be applied throughout the government system.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

I interviewed seven supervisory contract specialists and general managers working remotely at federal agencies within the United States. They evaluate and conduct performance reviews of 1102 contracting specialists working remotely at federal

agencies. Semistructured, open-ended questions were used to identify the strategies to increase remote contract specialists' job performance.

Data Collection Activities

The primary instrument in qualitative study data collection is the researcher. To reduce researcher bias and increase rigor, reliability, and research quality, following the interview protocol and performing member checking is imperative (Johnson et al., 2020). I used semi-structured interviews with seven managers of federal agencies who work and manage remotely to enhance understanding of the strategies used to increase the performance of underperforming remote workers. Structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, document analysis, and focus groups are data collection methods the researcher can employ in qualitative data research (Busetto et al., 2020). The identifying characteristic of a structured interview is that there are a limited number of formalized questions to ask (Ruslin et al., 2022). The semistructured interview was selected because it includes the flexibility of asking additional follow-up probing member-checking questions in response to the participant's initial response (see Ruslin et al., 2022). At the onset of the interview, I introduced who I am and why this research is being conducted (see Appendix A).

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was planned to ensure consistency; each participant received a similar introductory experience. The participants read the confidentiality statement and approved or declined interview consent. Participants were informed of how the results would be used and asked to answer the interview questions honestly (see Naz et al., 2022). All participants were asked the same interview questions

within the interview protocol (see Appendix B). In the interview process, I was the primary data collector; the information was audio recorded on the Zoom conferencing app and subsequently transcribed. Since Zoom automatically records a video feed when an audio recording is made, I deleted the video recording after the interview. I made an audio recording with my iPhone audio notebook application as a backup. Member checking and transcription review were performed as they are appropriate for use to ensure the validity and accuracy of the data interpretation to affirm that the interview was transcribed correctly and interpreted in a way that captures participants' thoughts, words, and feelings accurately (see Motulsky, 2021). McKim (2023) suggests that giving summaries of participants' comments is more practical, as going through a full transcript may prove cumbersome; therefore, my participants were provided summaries.

Interview Questions

1. What are the benefits of having employees performing well in their work-related roles?
2. How do you determine the level of employee performance?
3. How do you identify underperforming employees?
4. At what point do you address underperforming employees?
5. What strategies do you use to improve employee performance in a virtual environment?
6. How do the strategies used in a remote environment differ from those chosen in a non-remote environment?
7. How did you communicate these strategies to employees?

8. How did you implement these strategies?
9. What were your key challenges when implementing strategies to improve performance in a remote environment?
10. What strategies are the most effective for improving employee performance?
11. What strategies are the least effective for improving employee performance?
12. How do you evaluate the success of those strategies?
13. What else might you add to this discussion about strategies to improve the performance of employees in a remote environment?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

Data Organization Technique

Organizing data is an essential step in research. Effective data organization techniques can ensure secure and accurate data management (Dilger et al., 2018). Not taking this step can risk participant privacy if leaks occur. I filed the data electronically on a secure password-protected computer, where it will remain for five years. The transcripts and audio files are also in a password-protected location, as outlined in Pathirana et al. (2020).

Data Analysis

I used semistructured, open-ended questions to interview the seven participants. I later analyzed the interview data using thematic analysis, as Yin (2018) described, including compiling, assembling, and disassembling information to ascertain the themes of the interviews with ATLAS.ti software. The transcribed interviews were analyzed, and approximately 29 themes were generated per participant. Fusch et al. (2018) stated

that information from observations, surveys, interviews, and documents is used for methodological triangulation. The transcription and coding of data are called data analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). According to Yin (2018), there are five steps in data analysis, which are (a) compile the database, (b) disassemble data, (c) reassemble data, (d) interpret data, and (e) conclude. To ensure replicability, I will describe the process and follow the steps offered by Yin as closely as possible.

Compile the Database

I analyzed the data collected during the semistructured interviews, which were captured via Zoom audio and transcribed by the system. I then uploaded the audio recording to the Microsoft Word transcription service to analyze it further for accuracy. Gathering data from interviews, organizational documents, and government documents is also a means of ensuring that information is collected at a level of depth, which is the triangulation of data (see Yin, 2018).

Disassemble Data

Once member checking occurred through the participants' review of documents, the transcripts were uploaded into ATLAS ti for analysis. The system then analyzed the data to organize, discern, and code the themes based on the research question. Three or more participants agreed to the 20 common themes and terms identified by ATLAS ti., I charted the top seven from each participant's standard theme list and placed them on an Excel spreadsheet under the participant's assigned number of P1 through P7. I then analyzed the participant transcriptions, identified quotes that explained the themes clearly, and located those unique in how the supervisor used strategy.

Reassemble Data

The identified theme words were color-coded and grouped to create overarching thematic categories. After establishing the themes, they were correlated with current literature and the conceptual framework. This coding and theming practice enhanced data reliability and validity (refer to Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To support the research, another Excel document was created containing the participant numbers and interview questions to capture significant participant quotes that best exemplify the commonly and uncommonly used themes by participants.

Interpret Data

The data was collected via semi-structured interviews and online documentation from the GAO and OPM. Current online literature was reviewed to ensure that the gathered data was complete and replicable by others. My primary focus as the researcher was on the themes and data from the interviews and literature to determine if the participant interview results were similar to or different from those outlined in federal personnel management supervisory documents. In qualitative data analysis, it is essential to find information related to the research question being answered (Yin, 2018). Several themes emerged throughout the interviews regarding the strategies that remote managers at federal agencies use to improve the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists. Utilizing the strategy discovered during the participant interviews could enhance taxpayer customer service.

Conclusions

The principal goal of research is to answer the overarching research question and draw conclusions from the findings. The primary question in this study was: What strategies do remote managers at federal agencies use to increase the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists? I collected information from the interviews, publicly available government documents, and literature for analysis to shape my findings. Altogether, this information was used to address the research question.

Reliability and Validity

The concepts of reliability and validity in qualitative research diverge from those in quantitative studies. Usually referred to as trustworthiness, Stahl and King (2020) described the difference by stating that the qualitative method is more process-oriented, storied, and intimately connected to human experience than quantitative research. Kniess and Walker-Donnelly (2022) warned against limiting research to quantitative or “surface-level qualitative data” (p. 159). Although there is much to learn from hearing another’s narrative, how trustworthy the report is depends upon the person offering the information. Further, trustworthiness applies to the idea that the data are reliable, and conclusions obtained from the findings are robust; research interpretations of the findings are closely aligned with the intended meanings conveyed in the original data (Janis, 2022). Maximizing rigor in a qualitative study is crucial to increase generalizability. Rigor and generalizability can be achieved through thick data collection and analysis descriptions, an audit trail, and triangulation of data sources or investigators (Hays & McKibben, 2021).

Dependability

Dependability is the qualitative form of reliability, representing the extent to which another researcher could replicate the study's findings (Janis, 2022). Improving dependability can be achieved through an audit trail that includes documenting the data analysis process and acknowledging any potential biases. By sharing aspects of the study such as raw data, data analysis software, data organization, and field notes, researchers enable readers to better understand and assess the research process, thereby enhancing the dependability of the study (Janis, 2022). I maintained an audit trail detailing the data collection, analysis, and organization procedures. Dependability then transitions into the first facet of validity: credibility. Dependability and credibility are closely linked (Ahmed, 2024).

Credibility

Credibility ensures that the research addresses the findings from the participant's point of view (Johnson et al., 2020). The interviews were audio recorded on the Zoom platform to increase study credibility, thus allowing simultaneous audio recording and direct transcription. To help triangulate the data and transcription, the audio source available on Zoom provided a downloadable recording and transcript that could be verified with one another. A Word document was then opened to the transcription button on the Home page, and the downloaded Zoom audio was uploaded for a second transcription verification, after which another transcript was produced. All participants were allowed to review the transcripts. Johnson et al. (2020) indicate that member checking should be performed, and the participants can read the transcripts. The study

participants were asked to confirm how accurate and complete the transcripts were and if the written documents genuinely reflected the intent and meaning of what they contributed to the study as procedurally indicated. If any changes were required, they were made, and the transcript was sent to the participants for further verification.

Transferability

Transferability is determined by future researchers rather than the present one. However, the goal of the present researcher is to communicate to these researchers partly by describing the sampling process clearly, including where the study was located, descriptions, limitations, and how long it took to collect and analyze the data (Nassaji, 2020)—revealing the research setting, essential participant characteristics and research framework to enable other researchers to do the same (Essa et al., 2019).

To enhance the transferability for future researchers, I enlisted seven supervisory contract specialists and branch managers responsible for evaluating the performance of 1102 federal contract specialists. Both supervisors and employees operate remotely from various locations across the U.S. Supervisors boast over seven years of supervisory experience and a decade of contracting experience, overseeing an average of 8 employees each. I conducted the interviews via Zoom with the camera switched off following IRB protocol guidelines. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. One notable limitation arose from time zone disparities and scheduling constraints. The interview process spanned approximately two weeks, with an additional week allocated for transcription and download. Member verification was conducted over a three-day period after participants received the transcripts.

Although I cannot guarantee the transferability of my findings, I meticulously followed scholarly techniques for interview protocol, observations, data collection and analysis, and audit trail to record each step of the process carefully. This approach may enhance transferability for future researchers, as suggested by Nassaji (2020).

Confirmability

One way to enhance confirmability is by asking probing questions during the interview and formulating questions from different points of view (Ahmed, 2024). I formulated 13 questions. During the interview, when participants' answers were insufficiently detailed to obtain rich data, follow-up and clarifying questions were asked. Findings must be presented without bias, fairly and accurately from the beginning to the end of the process (Ahmed, 2024), which I can do using bracketing and member checking (McKim, 2023) to make sure the participants confirm the findings were interpreted accurately. Johnson (2020) claimed that persistent observation of the targeted sample is essential to the confirmability standard and attaining data saturation.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is achieved when collecting and analyzing data but fails to yield new results that impact the study (Alam, 2021). Mohr and Metcalf (2018) defined data saturation as when research participants cannot offer more data. Qualitative researchers frequently gather sufficient data to achieve saturation (Gill, 2020). Data saturation is the point in a research investigation where no additional information can be obtained from interviews and observations. I analyzed the semi-structured interview responses throughout the conversation to determine data saturation. This analysis sometimes

generated further questions about the research subject contingent on participants' disclosure of critical themes and practices. Member checking was also performed. Qualitative researchers frequently ensure data saturation to substantiate the chosen sample size (Gill, 2020). For this study, participants had to be competent and willing to discuss their experiences related to the research issue. Qualitative research sample sizes are chosen to fit the phenomenon being examined (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The purposive and snowball sample enabled enough participants to reach data saturation.

I ran every transcript through the ATLAS ti system to ensure data saturation. The ATLAS ti system message on the fifth participant popped up, stating that no new theme codes were available. I re-ran the transcript twice and received the same message. I then interviewed two additional participants and processed their transcripts. Participants five through seven did not yield any new discernible theme codes. Even though data saturation was achieved after Participant Four, I interviewed all willing participants.

Transition and Summary

Section 3 includes an overview of ethical considerations, the nature of the project, a population description, sampling, and participation requirements. Data collection activities include data analysis and interview questions. The research's reliability and validity cover aspects like dependability, credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation. I used methodological triangulation through semi-structured interviews, member checking, and a review of government documents to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. Section 4 will start with a preliminary overview and present the research findings, analysis, and impact on business and social change statements. This

study will conclude with recommendations for action, suggestions for future research, reflections on my experience within the DBA doctoral study process, and the study conclusion.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Introduction

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry explored the strategies remote managers at federal agencies use to improve the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists. The data was collected through one-on-one semistructured interviews with seven participants and analyzed using ATLAS.ti. Participants were labeled as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P7. Each participant was asked the same 13 questions. Transcribed Zoom audio recordings, Microsoft Word, ATLAS ti, and Microsoft Excel were used to organize and identify themes following Yin's method of data analysis: compiling the database, disassembling data, reassembling data, interpreting data, and concluding. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: communication, workload, performance management, and collegial cohesion. I compared the findings to existing literature and the conceptual framework.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What strategies do remote managers at federal agencies use to increase the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists? I conducted interviews with seven supervisors and managers of 1102 series federal contract specialists who all work remotely across various federal government agencies and have had to employ strategies to increase employee performance in a highly skilled career field experiencing a shortage of employees needed for the performance of nationally impactful work. The study participants' positions include division director, branch manager, contracting officer, and supervisory contracting specialist. The average

number of years in their supervisory positions is 2.5, with an average contracting period of 11 years. The average number of employees managed was seven.

Employees Performance

To retain highly qualified employees in the competitive business market, companies must prioritize their employees' training, development, and retention (Brown et al., 2018). Employee performance is crucial to attaining organizational objectives. Highly productive and efficient employees enhance a company's production and the quality of products or services it can offer. They also increase customer and employee satisfaction and establish a positive reputation for the organization (Triansyah, 2023). Performance can be defined as the organization and employee agreeing on excellent performance, clear standards to show how performance will be measured, and established expectations (Brown et al., 2018).

Benefits of Employees Performing Well

Study participants were also asked about the benefits of employees performing well. P7 responded:

Ultimately, the benefits of the 1102 career field are mission success, right? If our contract specialists, COs (contracting officers), and employees are not performing adequately or efficiently, it can cause severe mission failure, work stoppages, and service lapses.

P7 expounded on other results that could arise from 1102's performance, such as the reduction of "contractors getting over on the government, government waste, funding

issues, i.e., anti-deficient contracts. Employees are crucial to mission success and ensuring we can catch cost overruns and award contracts on time.” P5 shared:

The significant benefit is increased project completion efficiency and customer service. Employees feel better about their jobs and have a better overall culture and workplace. P5 further stated that my job is easier with a high-performing team; it makes my day awesome. Employees who are happy and perform well tend to say it reduces team conflict, increases cohesiveness, and rewards people more often.

P6 shared, “The benefit of having employees perform well is providing good customer service. We have customers who come to us with requirements, and they often have very urgent needs.” P6 then presented the impact statement:

Well-trained 1102s who understand the Federal Acquisition Regulation, agency regulations and policies accompanying the specific requirement can be executed on time, perform a good cost analysis, and award cost-effectively. Furthermore, It also serves the agency and our customers well. We were supposed to be stewards of the taxpayer dollars. So ultimately, it helps our taxpayers.

Identifying Strategies to Improve Performance

I asked the research question: What strategies do remote managers at federal agencies use to increase the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists? The participants identified the following methods for re-engaging the employee that they have found helpful: communication, workload, performance

management, and collegial cohesion. Table 2 illustrates the themes related to the conceptual framework.

Table 2

Overarching Themes Related to Conceptual Framework

Themes	Job Demands	Job Resources
Communication	Non-communication from the Specialist	coaching, mentoring, feedback, one-on-ones
Workload	Beyond employee knowledge level, mundane, requires challenge, customers	Training, time management, trackers
Performance Management	Evaluation, reviews,	clear expectations, DPMAP (standard performance rating system)
Collegiate Cohesion and Supervisory Support	Inconvenient meeting times Power dynamics Performance Improvement Plans	on time training, feedback, coaching, local gatherings, brown bags,

Theme 1: Communication

According to the online materials from the OPM, effective performance management relies heavily on communication. Communication is both a fundamental management component and a skill. Effective communication is essential for conveying objectives, accomplishing tasks, and acknowledging employee accomplishments (Communication Skills, n.d-c.). Communication is the exchange of information by verbal and non-verbal methods (Hemamalini & Jyothi, 2024). OPM has issued guidelines for managers who need to communicate with employees as they address performance issues. The four guidelines are: (a) Establish a productive rapport with employees, (b) ensure

that information and feedback are readily available, (c) encourage employees to participate in the development and planning of activities, and(d) recognize and commend high-performing individuals (Communication Skills, n.d.-c).

Basic conversation skills are essential for quickly conveying information and building better connections with others (Hemamalini & Jyothi, 2024). P6 emphasized the importance of communication in remote settings, highlighting that a lack of communication can lead to feelings of isolation. It's crucial to communicate regularly. Similarly, P2 likened non-communication to allowing someone to be on an island, emphasizing the need for support and connection. P2 emphasizes the significance of supervisors engaging with employees and genuinely caring for their well-being. Trust is also foundational for establishing relationships, with open communication channels being key to staying connected with employees, especially those who may not have been recently engaged.

Email Correspondence

Email is one of the most common forms of communication in a remote environment. It can serve as a resource when organizational, one-to-one correspondence is required and even be used to address underperformance when necessary. For example, P6 uses multiple communication methods as a strategy to enhance accountability, identify areas of struggle for workers, and improve performance:

I communicate through Teams, emails, and phone calls. I require employees to email me daily when they log on, list what they will be doing and what they have accomplished and let me know if improvement strategies are working. When I'm

not seeing much production, it might be because they're struggling and may be afraid to speak up.

The use of email can also create job demands for employees. The sheer number of emails causes workflow interruptions, increasing job dissatisfaction, stress, time pressures, and work overload (Wijngaards et al., 2024). To address the interruptions caused by emails at work, scholars have investigated the effectiveness of email batching, which means that employees are processing emails at designated times. In examining whether the work interruptions and employee exhaustion could be reduced, Wijngaards et al. (2024) conducted a quasi-experimental study in a Dutch financial services organization to discern under what circumstances email batching would be most effective where the employees in the intervention group encountered fewer email interruptions than participants in the control group. Study results show that emotional exhaustion was reduced through the initial activity of email batching but leveled off to no difference as time passed in work engagement. P3 and P2 both had comments regarding emails. P3 indicated that the use of email is essential, but there are issues with its use:

I have noticed that when we send emails, we must remember that words have meanings. When my staff sends an email that goes to leadership, sometimes it can become an issue for discussion. Although I think employees should have autonomy to send messages, they must stay professional. So, when it's too much to explain, call.

P2 agreed with this sentiment, “Communication, communication, communication. I can’t emphasize that enough. The number one thing is asking for help. Pick up the phone and call versus continuing down that path with email trails that get longer and longer.”

Feedback

The government promotes providing ongoing feedback and coaching to its managers. The manager is expected to meet with the employee at least once every three months to facilitate discussions about performance and development (Communication Skills, n.d.-c). During feedback meetings, it is important to ask open-ended questions and provide a wide range of observations, performance data, and information to encourage, inspire, or recommend changes (Communication Skills, n.d.-c). One of the recommendations provided by the government is to ask open-ended inquiries. Performance feedback focuses on recipients’ behavior and achievements, such as their ability to complete tasks and achieve goals, unlike other forms of managerial feedback, like reporting productivity percentages (Gnepp et al., 2020).

Some have considered eliminating annual performance reviews; however, doing so would necessitate more frequent but less formal performance feedback meetings in addition to the yearly and midterm reviews (Gnepp et al., 2020). Feedback is a crucial activity, albeit regarding employee performance or the contract procurement package received or contract actions performed by the contract specialist. P5 further explained that detailed correction information is essential when providing feedback regarding a solicitation or procurement package. “I don’t just say correct the grammar; I say on page one, paragraph six, you have several misspellings and incorrect dates. Please revise, state

whether you addressed the corrections, and highlight your answer in yellow.” Timely feedback and clear performance expectations communicated by leadership to employees increase employee job performance (Gnepp et al., 2020), yet facilitating feedback sessions can be complex, and participants are not always willing to accept feedback. According to P7, “They must want feedback. Suppose someone is not open to feedback or criticism. Then, you will have a combative person who may disagree with the change or corrective action.” Many times, the responsibility of communication falls on the supervisor. Still, there is potential that things would work more smoothly in the workplace if contract specialists also took an active role in voicing their opinions.

P1 shared, “It is simply not about the workload difficulties they face with a contract action; it is about empowering them to share their insights and concerns and ensuring they understand the organization’s mission.” In contrast, supervisors are not the only ones who have performance expectations. Sometimes, employees express the need for supervisors to communicate information regarding the organization. For instance, P1 said:

I tend to flow, but it depends on the person. Some people want details and organization. One person kept asking me what my vision was, and I didn’t have one. I wanted to respond, “The vision is for you to do the work, and I will help you improve things.

The indication after the response was that the worker could not perform the work well if they did not understand the strategic mission and vision of the organization, followed by the supervisor’s goals for the team. The employee’s voice is crucial in the

communication process. OPM indicates that employees should take an active role in their evaluation by actively monitoring their performance while assuming accountability for their learning and growth. In contrast, managers should include employees in the performance assessment and planning dialog during these continuous planning and development meetings (Communication skills, n, d-c).

Theme 2: Workload & Workload Management

When participants were asked how they determine the level of employee performance, all participants mentioned specialized software data outputs, Excel spreadsheets, personal methods, or SharePoint trackers, and communication as key to workload management. P2 stated that regarding workload, “I hold weekly meetings with underperforming individuals who have known issues. We review workloads, identify issues, and track progress on a weekly basis during these calls, which proves to be highly beneficial in the virtual environment.” P3 responded, ‘Work that is satisfactory or unsatisfactory is identified through workload reports, necessary leadership updates, and attending meetings.’ Whether through meetings or software usage, communication regarding workload remains crucial. P5 noted that even in discussions, there can be a loss in translation; hence, an alternative strategy is proposed for workload management. “Employees often nod in agreement during conversations, hoping to retain the information, but for noticeable performance enhancements, documenting the details becomes essential,’ P5 elaborated while emphasizing the necessity of proper documentation during quality reviews of specialists’ contract files.

Instead of embedding comments via track changes in a document, I create a spreadsheet with a column for the page number, another column for the text needing to be changed, and one that references the policy. The final column asks whether the changes were made, whether the employee accepted or rejected the change, and the date of correction, as this increases the likelihood that the employee will make the change.

P5 indicated, “Even if you don’t want to create a spreadsheet with all the columns, make a list where the employee must respond if they agreed, accepted, or made the changes. This process helps the reviewer communicate expectations to employees.” These techniques and tools for workload management are quite universal.

A workload is the number of tasks and activities an employee must complete within a specific time, according to their job description (Nasrul et al., 2023). Both workload and work stress are classified as job demands. P7 shares the following:

I look at some things, such as employees’ capabilities, and then at myself to see if I might have overloaded the employee. I will then adjust a couple of things. For instance, if I have given an employee five actions, but they can only handle three, maybe I have overburdened them; they can’t work on it, or perhaps they lack the knowledge base. A conversation must be initiated once I reduce the workload and reassess the employees and requirements, and they still aren’t performing.

Like P7, P2 states that workload is assigned based on complexity and the skills and knowledge set of the 1102. Follow-up meetings are scheduled to assess progress. Despite being virtual, P2 maintains an open-door policy, allowing employees to ask

questions. Work status assessment commences with the spreadsheet-based workload tracker. If the tracker indicates no progress, P2 initiates inquiries, assigns a mentor, and utilizes templates for support.

P3 offers another perspective; perhaps the employee is not meeting metrics due to boredom or being issued the same or similar task repeatedly and wants a challenge.:

Sometimes, employees seek more diverse challenges at work. For instance, one of my team members was assigned a specific task, limiting their exposure to various responsibilities. This scenario often occurs with mid-level managers like me and past leaders I have worked with. When an employee excels in a certain skill, the usual practice is to assign all tasks in that area, following the saying,

P3 says, “The benefit of employees performing well is being rewarded and recognized. Contracting specialists can prioritize projects and better manage their workload, work, and leave days.”

Theme 3: Performance Management

Once the employee receives a workload, performance management occurs by assessing how well the employee performs the assigned tasks. Performance management aims to identify, evaluate, and enhance individual and team performance, ensuring alignment with business goals and enhancing overall organizational performance (Brown et al., 2018). This process takes place between the employee and the supervisor. The supervisor oversees the employee’s performance, and employees must effectively manage the execution of mission requirements from receipt through contract award.

Employee evaluations are based on their ability to meet requirements and factors like teamwork, communication, and business acumen.

According to Yoon (2021), just as people struggle to establish a method for self-evaluation, organizations and their employees also have challenges in creating a flawless system for assessing the performance of their staff. Difficulties in evaluating performance may be expected in some corporations, but the federal government has outlined how employee performance management is conducted by its supervisors. The steps include planning, monitoring, developing, rating, and rewarding the employee (Office of Personnel Management. Performance Management Cycle, n.d). The participants shared the methods they used to perform these steps. First, planning is defined as setting performance expectations and goals for groups and individuals to help achieve organizational goals. Planning also includes the criteria for evaluating expectations and goals.

Employee participation in planning improves their understanding of the company's goals, tasks, rationale, and performance expectations (Office of Personnel Management, Planning, n.d.). P6 illustrates the process succinctly by stating the following:

The level of employee performance, the metric, and the standard are predetermined. The managerial staff works with HR to determine the position description, performance standards, and expectations. The employees are then measured against that. Once metrics are in place, the employees are given a beginning-of-the-year review, a midterm review to check in and ensure

everything is on track, and an end-of-the-year performance evaluation. During the end-of-the-year review, we inform them about their performance, areas for improvement, and outstanding achievements. Success can be assessed through the workload tracker and feedback from customer service survey responses received via the link at the bottom of our email.

Monitoring is the second step in the government performance management process. Management involves regularly reviewing performance and providing feedback to employees and work groups on their progress in achieving objectives. Continuous monitoring allows assessing employee performance and promptly resolving difficulties (Office of Personnel Management, n.d.). P6 refers to the workload tracker and customer service surveys as means of monitoring. P6 states:

When the customers are not calling and complaining, the metric of 75% completed PALT times is being met, and closeouts are being performed at a certain percentage; this creates the belief that the contract specialist is successful.

When packages are not made actionable and specialists are not hitting metrics, the specialist may need more training or coaching to increase their performance.

P7 indicates his method of approach, saying:

I don't step in to give instructions. I don't step in pointing fingers or giving blame. I step in with respect and say, "Hey, OK, what's going on here?" I noticed that this is taking a little bit longer. Are you having any issues with the customers? What's happening? You never want to go in and make it seem like you're just pointing fingers at the employee. Ultimately, you know, I handle it

from a mentoring perspective. Figure out what the problem is. I ask the employees for their ideas on how to resolve this problem. The next step in the strategy is to resolve the issue or inform them if they're going down the wrong track.

The third step in the structure for employee performance management is development. Development involves improving performance through training, assigning duties that require new skills or more responsibility, enhancing work processes, or utilizing other methods (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, n.d.). P5 states, "Turning on your camera and asking the employee to do the same allows us to collaboratively review documents or emails that require joint assessment." P4 emphasizes the value of dedicating time to working with individuals rather than simply reviewing and returning work with fix-it instructions. P5 recommends screen sharing for virtual teams working with employees facing challenges and needing support. P5 further suggests that in a virtual setting, employees are encouraged to:

Walk me through the process, walk me through your work, but also walk me through your rationale as to why you're doing this. I need to know this so that I can better understand what the individual is doing because what they're doing may not necessarily be wrong; it just maybe that I'm not used to the process they are using. This information allows me to assist, aids me in helping as a supervisor, and is a learning opportunity to gain a different perspective on how to get the same job done.

P1 takes a slightly different approach wherein the questions focus on supervisory internal evaluation and then questioning the employee as to their needs and the appropriate approach that should be used to address those needs. P1 states:

First, I will think you're not improving, and I'm trying to help. What am I doing wrong? What do I need to change to try to get this across? Do I need to get someone else involved? Do I need to change my communication strategy? Change my words, and I'll ask them whether I am getting the point across. Is there something I'm doing that isn't helping you? Do you need something more from me?

Following the steps of planning, monitoring, and developing comes rating. Rating pertains to evaluating an individual employee or a group's performance according to the characteristics and standards specified in their performance plan. This assessment entails condensing the performance and bestowing an authoritative rating (Office of Personnel Management Performance Management Cycle. Rating, n.d). The rating process is described through the actions taken by P5 when evaluating employees throughout the year. P5 says,

I have my metrics in place, and the employees receive a review at the beginning of the year. They also receive a midterm review so we can check in to ensure we meet all our metrics. We then conduct a final end-of-year performance evaluation where we inform them about their performance, areas for improvement, and areas where they excelled based on workload output. We also share their customer

service surveys by including a link at the bottom of our email, allowing customers to provide feedback on our performance.

Finally, at the end of the process comes the period of rewards. This involves delivering incentives and acknowledging employees' performance and efforts, both individually and collectively, to support the agency's goals. Recognizing good performance can range from expressing genuine gratitude for work completed to providing the most coveted organization-specific awards and implementing official monetary incentives and recognition award programs (Office of Personnel Management Performance Management Cycle. Rewarding, n.d). P3 and P4 both agree that rewards come in the form of formal recognition, time off, and monetary awards. Other opportunities such as leadership courses and special assignments are also available for those who perform well. In conclusion, P4 encapsulates the findings perfectly with the statement:

I will always focus on communication and knowing if an individual has the tools to succeed. The only way to determine if an individual is underperforming is by providing them with all the necessary tools for success. However, if they still fail to meet expectations, we as supervisors, managers, and leaders must focus on that individual because everyone learns differently. It is our responsibility to assess whether we have adequately prepared that individual for success and, if not, to identify what they need to succeed.

The goal is to have a well-performing cadre of employees. Although all employees receive some training and development, some catch up quickly while others

need additional support between rating periods. Some do well during their work tenure, whereas others run into difficulties.

Theme 4: Collegial Cohesion and Supervisory Support

Workplace social support encompasses two distinct forms of help: collegial support and supervisory support. Collegial social support includes the level of social and emotional integration and trust among colleagues and the help provided by colleagues with work duties (Kiema-Junes et al., 2020). Supervisory support includes emotional, informational, instrumental, appraisal, and sponsorship support. Emotional support involves showing concern and trust, while informational support involves sharing information and career guidance (Kang & Kaur, 2021). Instrumental support includes sharing resources and assigning challenging tasks. Appraisal support entails giving constructive feedback and acknowledging employees' skills. Sponsorships enhance employees' capabilities and improve their career progression and professional satisfaction (Kang & Kaur, 2021). The participants seem to engage most in the informational role of supervisory support.

P7 meets with their team every Tuesday afternoon, hosting brown bag sessions with the interns. Each intern is asked to pick a topic to research and discuss with the supervisor and colleagues. P7 then gives real-life experiences as an illustration of the discussion topic. Some sessions include guest speakers, virtual room gaming in jeopardy style, or discussing family and other personal and professional matters. P6 also hosts a weekly brown bag but is considering adding interactive games and physical meetups to encourage an environment that fosters collaboration because it is crucial for the team's

performance. To build cooperation and camaraderie, P5 hosts a team meetup called “Snack Break.” During the snack break, the members bring the day’s snacks, such as popcorn and soda, to the virtual room. P5 says,

With our snacks in place and cameras turned on, the snack break is a non-formal collaborative conversation about a topic but no agenda. This format gives people the opportunity to discuss what concerns them. These conversations may trigger something that causes others to say, “I would like to know how to do that, “or “Oh, I had to do this on my project; I can help you with that.” You never know what you would get out of those snack breaks. The sessions were only 30 minutes long but had to be approved by management because they occurred during work hours, even though we ate a snack and talked about work-related stuff to help improve our process.

P2 states,” Weekly meetings are held, and I’m open to suggestions from my team. We collaborate, and I encourage everyone to share lessons learned and good news stories about accomplishments. Our email distribution for our team seems great.” P4 offers in-person interactive opportunities to build camaraderie with the team and shares the methodology:

We will get together, do an activity, and have lunch, and we won’t focus on work. I have nine people on my team. And, of course, there are always two or so people who cannot participate based on the location of the activity. To mitigate that, I rotate locations, and for those who still cannot attend, I send them a gift card so that I can take care of their lunch so they’re not left out.

When performing remote work, support from a worker's personal team and interaction with colleagues and supervisors can increase overall worker engagement. The Kiema-Junes et al. (2020) study indicates that workplace social contact and support may boost work engagement because of the additional support and resources. In Kiema-Junes et al., the Northern Finland birth cohort of 46-year-old women, the researchers evaluated how social support from a colleague or supervisor and a spouse, family, or friend affects professional engagement (vigor, devotion, and absorption). Study results indicate that supervisory and collegial support were linked to work engagement similarly. The study pioneered the finding that supervisory and collegial support affect work engagement similarly. Supervisor support has been linked to higher job satisfaction, emotional commitment, and lower job turnover. Supervisory assistance is essential for work-life balance and workplace well-being. Peer and collegial support boost employee engagement. Previous research has shown that peer and colleague support affects employees' work attitudes. Clear and effective communication is essential for maintaining positive relationships and promoting a successful team dynamic. Team members have diverse backgrounds and perspectives, coming from various walks of life.

For team members to collaborate effectively and foster efficiency and adaptability, employees and supervisors must trust and understand one another's roles and responsibilities (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1997). Both supervisory and collegial support was applied when P3 shared during a Thursday huddle that one of the workers had a ton of work requirements and was behind in required training. P3 indicated to the team that the member was already working later hours and that a similar request

would be made if any other member was in this situation. Members with bandwidth offered to assist, and the work was accomplished very quickly. P3 was pleased and pleasantly surprised that the team volunteered and was so supportive. Finally, P4 provides instrumental support to the 1102 employees when monthly one-on-one sessions are used to discuss employee projects. P4 states:

We talk about their goals so I know, throughout the year, what I need to do to ensure that I'm helping to accommodate their needs. I've learned that if I work with my team to help accommodate their needs and push them forward, whether it be something they need to do personally or professionally. I support them in those areas, and their productivity rises

Correlation to the Literature and Conceptual Framework

As a reiteration, the job demands job resources theory is the conceptual framework guiding this study. Job resources are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational supports that assist individuals in reducing stress, burnout, and other negative aspects of the job arising from the job demands. These resources include social support, autonomy in decision-making and job performance, feedback, communication and recognition, growth and development opportunities, and time and equipment to complete tasks (Edney et al., 2018). Job demands require increased exertion, reducing employees' physical, emotional, and cognitive capacities (Li et al., 2022). Job demands include increased workload, time pressure, role ambiguity, and poor social relationships. The participants highlighted workload and social relationships as two overarching themes regarding improving employee performance.

Theme one points out communication and feedback as job resources in JDR.

Clear communication and feedback are tools used in successful organizations, essential to providing employees with the necessary information to meet job requirements and demands (Zito et al., 2021). Similarly to what government literature informs, research has indicated that internal communication is vital in fostering engagement. In a multiple case study designed to explore the communication strategies that four retail industry business managers used to improve employee motivation, Obi (2018) found that effective communication and information exchange are crucial in influencing employee motivation and increased performance. Dhanesh & Picherit-Duthler (2021), using the relationship between management theory and JDR, indicate in their study of 304 employees who worked remotely during the pandemic that two-way communication and internal crisis communication content predicted employee engagement. Furthermore, when an organization provides employees with adequate communication resources, it can enhance employee well-being outcomes, such as positive employee engagement (Dhanesh & Picherit-Duthler, 2021).

Through social exchange theory and JDR, Eva et al. (2019) examined how supervisors' and coworkers' feedback affects employee innovation and work engagement and how psychological contract breach may mediate supervisor appraisal and employee innovation. In this study, 300 Chinese workers and 64 supervisors were surveyed. Eva et al. (2019) found that supervisory feedback indirectly affects innovation and that coworkers' input can enhance supervisory feedback. Frequent feedback from multiple sources should be provided to employees as it increases employee engagement and

proves that the organization is committed to employee psychological well-being.

Workload and performance management are resources and demands. In the Wang et al. (2021) study, a mixed method was used to explore work characteristics and individual worker personality differences to understand what challenges came with remote working during the pandemic and how the individuals coped with them. For the qualitative portion of the study, a semistructured interview format was used to identify four challenges and four virtual work characteristics. The challenges identified were work-home interference, ineffective communication, procrastination, and loneliness. The virtual work characteristics were social support, job autonomy, monitoring, and workload. The quantitative portion surveyed 522 participants from various industries like engineering, teaching, editing, and manufacturing who had no experience working remotely before COVID-19. The participants were asked about work characteristics and task performance, self-discipline, work challenges, loneliness, and procrastination. The quantitative portion of the study concluded that this study's findings align with current literature on worker performance, well-being, and effectiveness, which can be improved based on the characteristics of the job. Supporting job resources is collegial support and job autonomy. Some worker demands include uneven distribution of workload, monitoring of an individual's personal home life, and procrastination.

Vander et al. (2020) examined social support in their study of eight hundred seventy-eight international telecommunication employees who frequently telework to understand whether a relationship exists between the number of weekdays an employee teleworks and their level of engagement, mental stress-related complaints and

engagement indicative of personal well-being. The researchers found that the job characteristics of social support, participation in decision-making, task autonomy, and work-family conflict, but not the number of teleworking days, were directly associated with work-related well-being. Employees teleworking more days a week reported less social support from their colleagues, which is associated with higher stress levels, exhaustion, and reduced engagement. The researchers found that it was not the extent or amount of teleworking that had the most significant impact but the level of autonomy and the interaction between colleagues that had the most significant effect on employee well-being.

Implementing Strategies

Least Effective Strategies

Supervisors have specific authority and power to oversee and direct employee work experiences. Some strategies have been found effective, yet some are less effective in improving performance. For instance, P1 states, "Yelling or reading the riot act to somebody, I've hated seeing people do that. I've seen them do it in person. I've heard him do it online. That's so counterproductive, especially if it's in front of somebody else." P3 and P1 agree that yelling at someone is the least effective strategy. P1 adds, "I've been in virtual meetings, and someone will get called out, and then there'll be an email fight afterward. Let's not call people out in front of others. It creates discontentment." Fischer et al. (2021) indicate that yelling at an employee is abusive supervision. Abusive supervision is defined as a subordinate's perception of the extent to

which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact.

A second ineffective strategy for addressing underperformance is confrontation avoidance, wherein the supervisor ignores and does not address deficient performance.

P4 says:

There are managers, supervisors, and even team leads who don't like to have the perception that they're not liked; therefore, they are not confrontational and do not want to address issues. They use another strategy that does not increase productivity or performance, such as redoing somebody's work for them.

P4 then continues to say:

If you don't tell somebody what they're doing is incorrect or shouldn't be done in a specific way, and you take the documents, review them, and make the changes yourself, then you are not genuinely helping that individual to learn. Yes, you're getting the job done, but if you're delegating that work and you see it come back, take it, and redo it, what's the point of delegating it in the first place?

People who come into the career field and agencies with varying degrees of knowledge and training are typically given a template or told to copy and paste an existing acquisition. P6 shares:

I've seen it come up quite often when training is conducted, and a person states, "Hey, here's an example; try to figure it out, but unfortunately, my agency does that often. We have people with varying experience levels or no experience—working in contracting. Even if they have experience, one agency may do

something different from the other, and they must learn how the particular agency does the work. So, I don't think that saying to someone, here's an example, take a stab at it, is the best way, especially in a virtual environment. Yes, we're all busy, but find the time for one-on-one training.

The participants indicate that communication is vital. The least effective strategies include Ignoring the employee, not ensuring they have the tools and training required to perform the job, and not offering clear, actionable feedback. More effective strategies can be employed to support the manager in addressing underperformance.

Most Effective Strategies

The participants agreed that the most effective strategies are centered around communication using methods such as one-to-one meetings, Teams or Zoom meetings, and chats while being friendly and engaging, allowing employees to come up with solutions to their issues by asking thought-provoking questions and being a good listener were most prevalent. P1 shares that the most effective strategy has been "not necessarily being their friend but their acquaintance that they are not worried about, they're not afraid of, so they will come to talk to me about anything." P4 emphasizes "communication, communication, communication, and meeting with employees face to face whenever possible as it increases engagement." However, P4 also indicates that in this remote environment, there are other opportunities to engage a team if they cannot meet face to face: "You can do virtual lunches on Zoom or Teams, cameras on and have lunch together, share in successes, virtual birthday parties. Communication and intentionality are imperative."

P5 says, “I think the most effective strategy is to turn your camera on and ask that employee,” “Hey, can you turn your camera on and look? Let’s look at each other and have a conversation.” P6 adds to the conversation,” I frequently communicate with my team using Microsoft Teams. I encourage the use of cameras versus audio to see expressions. If an employee needs training, I schedule time. I also work with them if they are struggling with something.” Adding that personal touch is critically important, and several participants have stated the strategy of having the camera on. Yet, there are times when an agency policy dictates whether the use of cameras can be requested of employees. For instance, P3 indicates:

You should have that personal touch and get to know your employees even though they are remote. HR told me we cannot force people to turn on their cameras. I could not believe it. My camera is always on, and others say, “Oh my goodness, you are not shy about showing up in the virtual world? I responded, “I might as well let you guys know who you are speaking to.”

Luebstorf et al. (2023) found that turning off the camera during videoconferences was stressful, contradicting another study conducted by Shockley et al. (2021), who found it less stressful. In the Luebstorf study, meeting facilitators were interviewed instead of meeting participants. The participants may have a different point of view than that of the facilitator regarding camera use. Another reason for the difference in the study may be the timing in which the study was conducted. In Shockley et al., data were collected during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic after a summer of reduced restrictions and increased personal liberties.

In contrast, Luebstorf et al. (2023) collected data in spring 2021 after the long COVID-19 winter of 2020/2021, when restrictions were tighter. Thus, the people we questioned had been socially isolated for a while. The lack of social interaction in many sectors of life may have made cameras a valuable way to interact with people during and post-pandemic activities. The study's meeting leaders noted that activating the camera promotes virtual meeting etiquette and team dynamics but should be balanced with the wishes of attendees who may switch off their cameras (allowing them to leave the meeting). Luebstorf et al. (2023) concluded that it would be interesting to study camera usage in client meetings, virtual educational meetings like training seminars, and virtual coffee break meetings to identify any contradicting effects. The researchers also found that videoconferences without pre-meeting interaction stress participants. In-person meetings are better for introverts when they include preliminary interaction. This initial interaction is the conversation that happens before the meeting starts when all team members arrive early and wait for the meeting facilitator.

One strategy found effective is keeping cameras on with increased online interaction. Some participants also employ frequent communication and coaching through work problems. P7 offers a few strategies that could encourage employee performance:

Supervisors should be giving the person a chance to correct their issue and learn from it, allowing people the freedom and flexibility to work toward remedying issues, keeping that open line of communication, and fostering that environment where they can come to you for anything, open door policy, being available and,

nonjudgmental. Listen, listen to listen, but not just respond. Many people I have worked with in the past listen to and respond instead of trying to figure out what the employees are trying to say. Listening to their employee's state of mind, whether it's their emotions regarding the situation or how they feel and think about it, but not feeding into that so much, but just empathy and then suggesting resolutions. I let them devise a solution and tell me how they want to proceed. I want them to have freedom and flexibility and exercise their thinking and judgment. Most importantly, I want them to be comfortable with how they will move forward at the end of the day.

According to the participants, interactive activities and nonwork-related conversations such as chats and chews are effective strategies. Additional strategies include rewarding workers with leadership programs and classes that they are interested in, special duty assignments, on-the-spot time off, or monetary awards. When issues arise, coaching and mentoring methods have been the majority approach. This approach increases job autonomy and critical thinking coupled with supervisory support.

Challenges When Implementing Strategies in a Remote Environment

Despite management's efforts to improve employee performance using strategies, there are times when an employee does not show effort towards improvement but is evidently running down the clock until retirement or perhaps needs increased oversight not available in the remote work environment. Participants 1, 4, and 5 directly addressed this issue. P1 states:

I haven't had this problem yet, but I know other managers do of just the employee not caring, not wanting to improve, just wanting to keep going the way they are. They're filling a seat and going to retire eventually, and that's all they care about. You have apathy in both the office and remote environment. It's easier to get away skating if you're remote than if you're in the office.

P4 backs up this sentiment, stating:

It will be challenging to implement anything strategically, especially since you're in a remote environment. You don't always see that person, so you're unsure if they're actually working, to be honest, due to the agency. There's no method to monitor if someone is working, so communication is paramount.

P5 follows the same thinking about the main challenge: knowing whether the person is working. P5 then continues with the sentiment, "When you're remote, some people are not as accountable to themselves or the job. There are distractions at home, such as kids, pets, phone calls, and TV; some are not focused or productive, yet others are, depending on the person." Regarding the challenges of implementing strategies in the remote environment when working with an employee to improve performance, P5 further states:

I don't want someone who moves the mouse to keep their light green on Teams and then tells me they worked all day and that one action I've been waiting on for three days should have taken 20 minutes. What's happening? I don't like to criticize or punish remote workers. While working from home, you know you're at home. The mailman will arrive, so you'll get up, put a load of clothes in the

washer, and rest. Even if we were at the office, you would make coffee, shred documents, chat at the water cooler, and go to get coffee or a Xerox machine. You would move around and have distractions. Nevertheless, I want to see them be as productive when they're not in front of me as when we're in the office, and I can see what they are doing.

Based on the participants' responses, it is evident that they have some difficulty in knowing whether their workers are working productively or just doing enough to get by until the workload status reviews are revealed. The participants do not have eyes on the employees in the remote environment when they are in an office. Gong et al. (2022) examined this topic by exploring the challenges supervisors face in adequately assessing remote workers, which could affect employee performance assessments and development decisions. The study identified four tactics by Gong et al. to support supervisors: effective communication, training and development, technological savvy, and feedback. According to the study, efficient communication is exemplified by employees who consistently offer comprehensive updates and feedback through established communication channels. This communication helps supervisors remain informed about progress and issues. In training and development, firms must provide programs that enhance supervisors' proficiency in remote management. Acquiring proficiency in digital tools and understanding the complexities of remote work dynamics are crucial competencies. Supervisors can utilize project management and collaboration technologies like Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Asana to oversee job progress efficiently and stay updated on their team's activities (Gong et al., 2022). Finally, establishing a mechanism

for consistent feedback can provide supervisors with vital observations regarding employee performance and areas that may need improvement. These communications can be accomplished by using virtual one-on-one meetings and performance reviews. By incorporating these resources, supervisors can overcome remote work challenges and understand their team's productivity and well-being. Additionally, virtual networking, enabling virtual social interactions, might help supervisors promote team unity and develop a deeper understanding of their staff, including virtual coffee breaks, team-building exercises, and casual progress updates.

As mentioned by Gong et al., technology plays a part in assessing job progress, team updates, and productivity in 2022. The participants also identified technology as a challenge. P3 indicates, "Sometimes the VPN connectivity is faulty; you want to ensure that employees have suitable access and connectivity when working remotely." P7 states that:

We use our contract writing system that sets the milestones and follows the procurement acquisition lead time, but it doesn't allow for human error or unexpected delays. That's where we, as managers, come in. We must keep these contracts moving and do it effectively and passionately. "Passionate" is a big word there because we must keep morale up while not hurting or insulting folks.

Implementing strategies in a remote environment can be challenging due to a lack of early and frequent communication about workload, cameras, and faulty technology. Although the challenges create difficulty, working remotely has advantages and disadvantages for the employee and employer.

In-Office versus Remote Work Differences

In question six, participants were asked how the strategies used in a remote environment differ from those chosen in a non-remote environment. P4 states:

We have employees on a compressed work schedule from 6:00 in the morning, working four 10-hour days. Their productivity does not seem to decrease; everything gets done, including reports. As managers, we can offer these hours without dictating specific work hours; employees personally make the request in our agency.

P7 indicated that at home, “I don’t mind staying online for 30 minutes to over an hour because I’m not battling in traffic anymore, which increases productivity. I can pay more attention to my work and the details.” Additionally, P7 states, “I can sit down and take time to read something and not rush through documents; my work is much more thorough. Some employees say their work is more thorough because they can take their time now.” Although productivity may increase, interaction between colleagues may also be a by-product of working remotely. P4 states that:

In a virtual environment, you must intentionally reach out to someone, whether to ask for assistance or check up on them. Regardless of the situation, there’s a need for deliberate action; otherwise, you’ll risk isolation unless someone reaches out to you. Intentionality is crucial in a remote setting.

Remote work, while not a new concept, has been thrust into the forefront of work environment necessities by the COVID-19 pandemic. The key to boosting performance and production in this setting lies in the worker's ability to be autonomous and

accountable. Clear organizational rules and frequent engagement with supervisors and colleagues are crucial factors that can significantly increase the potential for success in a remote environment. This knowledge empowers us to navigate the challenges of remote work effectively. Mentorship, family support, and supervisory guidance also significantly reduce employees' difficulty connecting with colleagues and social isolation (Taksi-Deveciyan & Alay, 2023). Finally, my findings align with current literature, such as those of Ng et al. (2022), who examined the relationship between remote work, emotional exhaustion, and job performance. Their results indicate that external supports like technological knowledge, government, organizational support, personal attitude, flexibility, and job autonomy significantly impact remote workers' job performance.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project explored the strategies remote contract managers used to increase the performance of underperforming remote federal contract specialists. The participants offered invaluable input on the strategies and tools they have used to improve the performance of underperforming employees. This includes ensuring proper developmental and formational training, providing adequate performance feedback and evaluation regularly (without supervisors waiting until the employees significantly underperform as evidenced by metrics and customer complaints), and communicating expectations and information frequently through meetings, level one supervisors, and one-on-ones. Each theme in my data analysis is communication, workload, performance management, and collegial cohesion, which work together

seamlessly to support the success of the business, contract specialist, and government functions.

Once warranted to become contracting officers, contract specialists are the only individuals empowered to obligate government funds as appropriated by Congress. In fiscal year (FY) 2020, defense contract obligations reached \$421.3 billion, marking a 41 percent increase compared to FY 2015. This rise can be attributed to budget caps and reduced foreign deployments that decreased Department of Defense (DoD) contract expenditures during that period (Sanders et al., 2023). The recent spending surge coincided with notable acquisition and strategy adjustments.

Product spending has increased, and Other Transaction Authority (OTA) agreements for research and development have partially replaced traditional contracts. With the implementation of the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act nearing completion and the Biden-Harris administration preparing to unveil a new National Security Strategy, it is an excellent time to contemplate the last five years of acquisition processes and how the changes will affect future defense acquisitions (Sanders et al., 2023). Contract specialists have an impact on several industries. Therefore, their ability to perform well is crucial to federal government functioning and business success. For instance, \$637 billion was spent on federal contracts to procure goods and services ranging from IT-related products and aircraft to drugs and biologicals in fiscal year 2021 (GAO Innovations, 2022). During the same time, COVID-19 drug and biological spending increased from \$35 billion to \$52 billion (A Snapshot of Government-wide Contracting for FY 2021 (Interactive Dashboard), 2023). These services and commodities

were purchased from businesses large and small by contract specialists who perform market research to discover those capable of providing goods and services promptly at a fair and reasonable price as mandated by the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

The Biden administration's emphasis on infrastructure, technology, and clean energy reflects the country's budget and priorities, aiming to boost innovation and enhance business success (House, 2023). Collaborations between small businesses and contracting experts exemplify how partnerships can elevate business achievements. The Biden-Harris Administration has articulated its commitment to expanding access for small businesses to federal contracts exceeding \$700 billion (White House, 2024), global purchaser of goods and services. Federal contracts are pivotal in fostering economic growth in marginalized communities and leveraging diverse talents nationwide. These endeavors align with the Investing in America initiative and the President's objective to raise the share of federal contract funds allocated to socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, set to reach 15% by Fiscal Year 2025, marking a 50% increase from the initial term (White House, 2024). In a landscape emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion alongside expanding minority business opportunities, Brunjes and Kellough (2018) explored the relationship between the minority status of contract specialists and the allocation of federal contracts to minority-owned enterprises. The study concluded that the presence of minority college-educated contract specialists in federal decision-making roles correlated with increased federal contracts awarded to minority businesses.

To make these substantial connections in support of the taxpayer and government and adequately expend taxpayer dollars by ensuring fairness to the government and contractor and reasonableness in price, thorough training of the contract specialist is critical. The training should be comprehensive from foundational to continuing to further develop and enhance the function of the contracting professional. It gives them the acumen, tools, regulatory guidance, and capacity to conduct market research, ask pertinent questions, and follow proper procedures. The importance of this training is evident in the execution of government supplies, construction, research, development, and services crucial for governmental operations. Contract specialists handle a wide array of purchases, ranging from military aircraft like the F-16 and tanks to infrastructure like highways and everyday items such as pens and laptops used by government personnel to serve citizens. A proficient contract specialist is a pillar of strength for the U.S. The investment in recruiting, training, and building trust with the authority to allocate taxpayer funds is significant and should be taken seriously by supervisors. Implementing strategies to support underperforming personnel will enable supervisors to provide aid and direction to guide them back on track.

Implications for Social Change

The underperformance of contract specialists in business reduces the availability of qualified public service employees, resulting in a diminished capacity of the federal government to procure the necessary goods and services essential for the functioning of national federal programs. Positive social change can occur when federal officials know how to enhance the performance of, stabilize, and retain virtual contract specialists.

Competent, fully performing contract specialists better serve taxpayers, defense, and national consumers. COVID-19 provoked organizational change for government employees. Specialists transitioned their lives like those globally while maintaining the necessary functionality of government. The GAO indicates that telework is a workforce tool during times of crisis to preserve government functionality (U. S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], (n.d).)

In 2020, the Office of Management and Budget directed federal agencies to allow workers to perform work duties at home to prevent the spread of disease; in 2023, agencies were directed to have employees return to their work centers. Yet, the agencies were not left without direction, and the GAO offered these six suggestions regarding how agencies could implement practices supportive of the transition: program planning, telework policies, performance management, managerial support, training and publicizing, technology, and program evaluation (U. S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], n.d.). These suggestions directly correlate with this study, and their implementation could facilitate organizational social change. Study results and literature reviews reveal that supervisor support is crucial to worker performance. Ng et al. (2022) discovered that providing technology and supervisory support influences workers' productivity when exploring the relationship between remote work, emotional exhaustion, and job performance. The results indicate that external support, including technology expertise, government and organizational support, and internal attitude, flexibility, and job autonomy, impact remote workers' job performance.

Outside of organizational change is the impact of thriving small businesses on community relations and economic well-being. A well-functioning contract specialist who has been trained will partner with the Small Business Administration, seeking opportunities to set aside contracts for the designated categories for contract awards. Telework benefits government agencies and federal workers. The benefits include improving staff recruitment and retention, reducing office space costs, and improving work-life balance. Telework helps firms achieve their goals during interruptions. Federal human capital managers see teleworking as a flexible labor strategy. By recruiting and retaining competent workers, skills gaps may be closed.

Further, employees can potentially experience increased job satisfaction and engagement. Many have celebrated the reduced travel time and personal work-related costs such as clothing and food (Elshaiekh et al., 2018). Parents can flex their time, pick their children up from school, spend time with them (Bathini & Kandathil, 2019), make appointments, and care for aging parents. There is potential for a win-win for Congress and contract specialists if an understanding of underperformance can be reached. Finding the balance between the federal government and the workers will best serve the public interest.

Recommendations for Further Research

An interesting phenomenon for future research is how a worker can experience social isolation while simultaneously having electronic work-related interactions via conferencing and other online platforms several times weekly. A researcher could examine the effect of agency-established performance expectations, job autonomy, and

leadership style on employee engagement. Quantitative research could ascertain the impact of the worker's birth generation, technology use, and alternative work flexibility on turnover intention. There is also an opportunity to learn which leadership style is most conducive to managing Baby Boomers and Generation X in a virtual or hybrid work environment.

Conclusion

This inquiry aimed to identify and evaluate the strategies used by federal contract supervisors to increase the performance of underperforming remote contract specialists. As discovered within this research study, communication, workload, performance management, and support from colleagues and supervisors serve as pillars of support towards improved employee performance. The seven participants indicated that communication is crucial from hiring to retiring. Communication includes feedback, coaching, training, one-on-one meetings, evaluation, position descriptions, and performance discussions. Communication was the most effective strategy, regardless of whether the member was performing well or underperforming. The least effective method was negative or toxic communication in the form of yelling, a disrespectful tone, and aggressive presentation towards colleagues at meetings and in emails. The most effective strategies are communication and one-to-one training.

The second theme is workload, which supervisors contend with as new requirements are distributed to the contract specialists. Meeting timelines indicate performance and underperformance when specialists do not meet customer needs. Trackers, Excel spreadsheets, and software are means of tracking, but even those

methods have flaws. The third theme is performance management. The government indicates that performance should be managed through communication, evaluation, assessment, and improvement. In the contracting career, these steps are actioned through the initial position description. Performance management includes using evaluation tools such as software, discussing the position descriptions and evaluation factors with employees from the time of hiring, and again at the periodic reviews. Supervisors should also frequently perform one-on-one reviews not tied to official review schedules. The third theme of supervisory and collegiate support emphasizes their role in employee engagement and productivity. Social support from colleagues and supervisors creates an engaging environment and reduces the potential incidence of social isolation.

Federal business leaders could find it particularly beneficial to intentionally engage with employees irrespective of the employee location by using opportunities such as brown bag training, physical meetups, interactive online activities, virtual birthday celebrations, and short burst training breaks throughout the month. Finally, all participants agreed that underperformance should be addressed as soon as a potential issue is identified.

This study fills a contextual gap that exists within literature. There is a decent body of existing research on the topics of leadership, workload management, remote work, and employee motivation, the individual drivers of engagement. The focus is generally in relation to job satisfaction and turnover intention. and the drivers of engagement, not performance. This study focuses on asking business leaders what strategies they have used actually to drive performance. How does the leader engage,

motivate, communicate, inform, increase, and measure performance? How does the leader know when the method is or is not working? This study fills in the gap of what strategies leaders have used that work, the difficulty of implementation, and the competing priorities of remote versus office work when increasing performance.

Finally, the focus on the contracting career field in the U.S. federal government is unique as there is not much literature on this population in any capacity. This population's responsibility, albeit in office or remote, has a paramount impact on the expenditure of annual congressional appropriations. This population must be fully performing as they handle all taxpayer money allocated for spending in service of the US federal government and US federal construction, supplies, and services.

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Appendix A: Invitation

There is a new study about employee performance in remote work that could help business leaders better understand the benefits and challenges of using strategies to improve remote worker performance. For this study, you are invited to participate in a confidential interview about the strategies remote managers at U.S. federal agencies use to improve the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists.

About the study:

One 30–60-minute phone interview that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)

You will receive a \$10 Visa gift card as a thank you.

To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Participants must be supervisory contract specialists or general managers who work remotely and evaluate and conduct performance reviews of 1102 contracting specialists also working remotely for U.S. federal agencies.
- Must have used strategies that improved employee performance
- Must work at a U.S. federal government agency.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol



What I will do	What I will say—script
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the interview and set the stage. • Ask the participants to tell me about themselves. • Reconfirm the statement of consent and withdrawal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My name is Shaneika Berryman. Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to participate in this study and speak with me today. The research question is: what strategies do remote managers use to increase the job performance of underperforming remote contract specialists? • I am a Doctoral Student at Walden University and hold a Master of Business Degree from Walden University. I have worked for the government as a 1102 Contract Specialist for eight years. • To confirm my understanding: You have agreed to participate in this interview through your response to the email I sent you, and you acknowledged being interviewed

	<p>through your signature on the consent form. Please remember that participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and you can change your mind anytime.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any concerns that you may have? • Thirteen questions will be asked, and the interview will be audio-recorded and will last 30-60 minutes. Please do not state your name or your organization's name during the interview. • Lastly, I wanted to ensure I had transcribed and interpreted our semistructured interview correctly. I will schedule a member-checking follow-up based on your availability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn on the Zoom recording feature. • Introduce participant(s) with the coded identification and note the date and time. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the benefits of having employees performing well in their work-related roles?

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin the interview with question 1 and follow through to the last question.• During the interview, non-verbal cues will be observed and paraphrased as appropriate.• Ask follow-up questions for more depth and clarity.• End interview. Discuss member checking with the participant(s).• Thank the participant(s) for their participation and give them my contact numbers for follow-up questions and concerns if needed.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. How do you determine the level of employee performance?3. How do you identify underperforming employees?4. At what point do you address underperforming employees?5. What strategies do you use to improve employee performance in a virtual environment?6. How do the strategies used in a remote environment differ from those chosen in a non-remote environment?7. How did you communicate these strategies to employees?8. How did you implement these strategies?9. What were your key challenges when implementing strategies to improve performance in a remote environment?10. What strategies are the most effective for improving employee performance?
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	<p>11. What strategies are the least effective for improving employee performance?</p> <p>12. How do you evaluate the success of those strategies?</p> <p>13. What else might you add to this discussion about strategies to improve the performance of employees in a remote environment?</p>
<p>Wrap up the interview and thank the participant</p>	<p>Script</p> <p>This concludes the interview; do you have any questions for me? If so, answer; if not, thank you sincerely for meeting today and participating in the interview.</p>
<p>Schedule follow-up member checking interview</p>	<p>Script</p> <p>The follow-up interview will take place on XXX date and XXX time and should last only thirty minutes. Should you need to reschedule, please let me know.</p>
<p>Follow-up Member Checking Interview</p>	

Appendix C: Citi Certificate

		Completion Date 29-Oct-2023 Expiration Date N/A Record ID 57838445
This is to certify that:		
Shaneika Berryman		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.
<p style="text-align: center;"> Student's <small>(Curriculum Group)</small> Doctoral Student Researchers <small>(Course Learner Group)</small> 1 - Basic Course <small>(Stage)</small> </p>		
Under requirements set by:		
Walden University		
 <p style="text-align: center;"> CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative </p>		
<p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;"> 101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US www.citiprogram.org </p>		
Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w42cc2502-0a19-4013-acca-8bc376ac05c5-57838445		