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## Improving Employee Retention in the Virtual Workforce

Marissa Williams  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Marissa Williams

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Improving Employee Retention in the Virtual Workforce

by

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MPA, Strayer University, 2014

BS, Albany State University, 2011

Professional Administrative Case Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Public Administration

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## Abstract

The need for addressing employee retention in the virtual workforce is critical, particularly in the context of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) Region 4. High employee turnover rates can lead to significant disruptions and decreased organizational performance. This administrative case study involved identifying effective strategies to improve retention and engagement among virtual employees. The practice-focused question involved understanding key factors that influenced employee retention and developing actionable recommendations for the GSA. Insights can be applied across similar organizations facing virtual workforce challenges. Data were collected through in-depth surveys with employees that were hired between 2020 and 2023, focusing on their experiences with training, communication, motivation, and engagement. Analytical strategies included thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. Findings indicated comprehensive training programs, clear communication channels, regular team-building activities, and structured leadership development tracks are essential for retaining employees in virtual environments. Recommendations emphasized the importance of fostering supportive and engaging work cultures. Implementing these strategies can enhance employee satisfaction and reduce turnover, leading to improved organizational stability and performance. Implications for public administrative practice include the potential for creating more resilient and adaptable workforce management strategies, contributing to positive social change by promoting job stability and employee wellbeing in the virtual work era.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this project to every new hire and new employee to an organization who has ever felt that their voice and development needed to be weighed with greater time and experience. To those who shrunk out of fear of showing up strong because of their age, expertise, or other categorized factors. To those who were silenced by conditioned work environments due to preferences to stay the same versus evolving to something greater. This study represents a small step towards addressing new normality such as culture, training and development, generational communication, motivation, employee engagement, and encouragement in an organization through virtual and hybrid factors. The U.S. General Service Administration (GSA) is one of the best diverse and unique government agencies to work for specifically the Leasing Division where employees partner with other government agencies to assist with their fulfillment of their individual missions. These employees protect and serve the government through securing facilities and buildings to meet its needs. The Leasing Division often called the Real Estate Division is stated to be a foundational division that can take you many places in your career with GSA. The Real Estate Division contributes to the management, procurement, construction, and maintenance of a broad vast group of partnered government agencies and provides partnership to local communities and governments by driving commerce and influencing community development through its presence.

“Be the change, you want to see”- M. Gandhi

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## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	iv
Section 1: Introduction to the Case study .....	1
Organization Background and Problem Statement.....	2
Purpose.....	4
Research Question .....	6
Summary of Data Sources and Analysis.....	7
Definitions.....	7
Significance.....	8
Significance to Practice.....	8
Significance to Social Change .....	10
Summary .....	10
Section 2: Conceptual Framework and Relevant Literature .....	12
Literature Search Strategy.....	12
Conceptual Framework.....	14
Deliverable to the Client .....	15
Key Concepts in the Case Study.....	16
Literature Review for the Case Study.....	17
Relevance to Public Organizations .....	22
Summary .....	24
Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis .....	25
Practice-Focused Questions and Research Design .....	25



Roles of the Researcher and Client Organization .....	27
Role of the DPA Student Researcher .....	27
Role of Client Organization .....	28
Methodology .....	32
Sources of Evidence.....	32
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection .....	32
Strategy for Data Analysis .....	35
Analysis Systems .....	36
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	37
Analysis Procedures.....	38
Ethical Procedures .....	39
Summary .....	41
Section 4: Results and Recommendations .....	43
Data Collection .....	44
Data Analysis and Findings .....	44
Participant Responses and Analysis.....	47
Deliverables and Recommendations.....	51
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	53
Strengths and Limitations of the Study.....	54
Summary .....	56
Section 5: Dissemination Plan .....	58
Summary .....	59

References .....60

## List of Figures

Figure B1. GSA Total Employment .....	56
Figure B2. Distribution of Permanent Employees, by Grade Level .....	56
Figure B3. GSA Regions .....	56
Table B2. GSA Race/Ethnicity/Sex Groups and Respective Abbreviations .....	57
Table B3. FY21 Race/Ethnicity/Sex Demographic Group Statistics .....	57
Table B4. Nomination Rates to FY21 Competitive Development Programs vs. Participation Rates in Eligibility Pool .....	58
Table B5. GSA FY18 Mission Critical Occupations.....	58

## Section 1: Introduction to the Case study

The General Services Administration (GSA) identified a significant challenge in terms of effectively managing high and escalating employee turnover. Turnover rates were notable among recently hired personnel between 2020 and 2023. Various factors contributed to this issue, including the absence of a comprehensive development plan that incorporated leadership training and provided clear career progression information for staff, thereby influencing retention. Additionally, gender, experience, peer expectations, mentoring and training, perception of individual needs, virtual work environment, and opportunities to apply acquired skills in training programs also played roles in exacerbating the turnover problem. Addressing these multifaceted aspects was crucial in developing a holistic strategy to mitigate employee turnover and foster a more stable and engaged workforce within the GSA.

This disparity presented an organizational challenge due to post-pandemic environments and hybrid/virtual restrictions, leading to lack of retention among newly hired employees, disrupted organizational operations, low employee engagement, and lack of motivation among employees who had been with the organization for several years. Failure to stem increasing turnover represented a gap in public administration and human resources practices, which I addressed through the proposed qualitative case study. The GSA, like many other federal government agencies, was forced to implement virtual work environments for most of its workforce during the height of the pandemic. This resulted in challenges to new employee hiring, increased job resignations, low employee morale, and

minimized leadership development opportunities due to reductions in employee and cultural engagement.

### **Organization Background and Problem Statement**

The GSA is the largest public real estate organization in the United States. The agency ranked fourth as one of the best places to work between 2020 and 2021. This qualitative case study involved addressing results and recommendations to enhance current cultures and workplace environments.

The mission of the agency is to deliver the best customer experience and value in terms of real estate, acquisition, and technology services to the government and American people. As of Fiscal Year 2021, the agency has a total of 11,738 total employees on their roster (see Figure B1). The agency is working to implement additional support to create diverse working environments for career development.

The GSA was rated one of the top public sector organizations to work for; however, there have been internal issues with retention, culture engagement, and employee engagement. Hybrid and virtual restrictions exposed major challenges although the agency has hired several new employees since the height of the pandemic. Many employees have relocated or moved to new departments. According to Patro and Kumar (2019), engaging stress management strategies can positively influence employees' productivity levels, reduce labor turnover, improve interpersonal relations, reduce absenteeism, and promote physical and mental health.

In addition, promotional potential of employees has been concerning for federal

employees and their staff members as workload and manpower has been a driving force in terms of employee commitment to the organization on a retention basis. The generational makeup of the workforce has forced reassignments and manpower issues that resulted in reductions in the workforce.

High turnover among the leasing division demonstrates employee retention is an issue to investigate in the agency along with other issues such as communication, leadership development, motivation, and culture. The problem within the Region 4 U.S. GSA Leasing Division is high turnover rates among employees. Pandemic factors contributed to high and increasing numbers of employees retiring and/or leaving their jobs, which increased ongoing retention issues and turnover due to unanticipated sustained virtual workplace environments.

There has been a need to determine sources for high turnover in the Region 4 leasing division, which remain unclear. This study will assist with determining factors that are associated with high staff turnover and explore and identify root causes of employee turnover as well as opportunities to improve employee retention in sustained virtual work environments to address this gap in knowledge.

A qualitative study to better understand new hire perceptions of virtual training, communication, motivation, culture, employee engagement, and encouragement within the agency will help in terms of identifying factors which contribute to high employee turnover. This case study has significance for other organizations similar in structure to the GSA in order to better engage their workforce in terms of hybrid and virtual restrictions.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify factors contributing to high employee turnover in the GSA and improve employee retention in virtual environments. This included developing recommendations and strategies to improve high and increasing employee turnover rates among newly hired employees and increasing retention among existing employees in the GSA due to their transition from onsite to virtual work environments. Henriques (2012) stated relational value is the “extent to which one feels valued by important others” (p. ##?). Virtual and hybrid restrictions contributed to stressful work environments. This case study provided data so leadership could apply resources and implement strategic leadership development training to newly hired employees in order to improve communication, motivation, culture, and employee engagement, as well as more positive and engaged work experiences which increase retention and mitigate the impact of lack of continuous improvement development training in pandemic hybrid environments. Results of the administrative case study involve incorporating online survey results from employees as part of deliverables that would assist with identifying gaps that were associated with the administrative problem and opportunities to help other organizations. This proposed case study provided value to the target organization in terms of providing a staff training and development plan which illustrates scholarly-based solutions to this problem. GSA leadership had improved employee engagement by introducing a culture task force team, providing coaching resources to new hires and other opportunities to engage and increase employee satisfaction through sessions such as pep talk Tuesdays sponsored by the

Chief of Staff's office. These video sessions were conducted by colleagues and peer speakers who facilitated collaborative 30-minute conversations sharing their knowledge and expertise on subjects related to life and workforce improvement. Results were successful; however, they were limited due to new regional focus on virtual experiences. Findings of this case study could improve employee retention and remote learning solutions, identify gaps in training, create flexible learning opportunities, improve communication, encourage employee development, lead to technological growth, and reduce turnover in virtual workplaces.

### **Research Question**

How has the GSA's virtual workplace environments affected newly hired employees in terms of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction?

### **Summary of Data Sources and Analysis**

This qualitative case study framework consisted of descriptive analysis comprising an online survey result review to assess the extent to which the factors of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction in the virtual workplace contributed to high and increasing rates of turnover among newly hired employees in GSA. This qualitative case study also identified opportunities and strategies that could help reduce the high and increasing rates of employee turnover and job dissatisfaction in GSA.

The data collection for this case study consisted of 10-25 volunteers of newly hired employees participating in online surveys, which took 5-10 minutes. It was anticipated that the online survey results would contribute to exploring and identifying specific approaches



and challenges to improving employee retention, job satisfaction, and workplace mindfulness in GSA's sustained virtual workplace environments. This information, coupled with insights regarding job satisfaction and workplace mindfulness gleaned from online surveys with newly hired employees within 0-3 years of initiation, helped provide a clearer picture of specific challenges in the virtual workplace that negatively impact employee retention.

### **Definitions**

*Employee retention:* Organizational goal of keeping productive and talented workers and reducing turnover by fostering positive work atmospheres.

*Employee turnover:* Measurement of the number of employees who leave an organization during a specified time period, which is typically one year.

*Job satisfaction:* Feeling of fulfillment or enjoyment that a person derives from their job.

*Turnover intention:* Process of employees leaving their current jobs or willingness to separate from organizations.

*Virtual workplace:* A workplace that is not located in any one physical space but is a network of several workplaces that is technologically connected via the Internet without regard to geographical boundaries.

*Workplace mindfulness:* Being purposeful and present through inward and outward awareness of oneself, others, and surroundings.

## **Significance**

This study will lead to improvements in terms of retention and workplace culture by enhancing new hire training and promoting communication, motivation, value, culture, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and motivation for the GSA.

### **Significance to Practice**

Organizational impact on employees, managers, trainers, and the board of directors within the Public Building Service (PBS) was anticipated due to recommendations to address high staff turnover, improve the organization's retention problem involving virtual work environments, add new hires to their roster, address increased job resignations, and mitigate lack of leadership development opportunities resulting in reduced employee and culture engagement. Information from fiscal years 2019, 2020, and 2021 were reviewed to ensure most recent demographics within the current workforce were addressed. Online surveys were administered via personal interviews, and the same questions were used to engage senior leadership of the organization within focus groups. Online survey questions involved providing additional clarification through a qualitative analysis of employee and leadership perceptions of training, experience, communication, motivation, value, culture, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and motivation.

In the field of public organization administration, the case study contributed to closing the retention gap within organizations, increasing employees' engagement in virtual workforce environments, and developing staff development plans that assisted with employees feeling motivated and valued. Findings provided GSA leadership with

recommended leadership training and activities based on this qualitative inquiry to improve retention, culture, and employee engagement, motivation, and value.

Corporate performance, employee, and customer satisfaction also related to organizational culture and impacted workers' stress differently. As such, further research was needed to investigate other causes of stress on employees and how they affected worker performance.

### **Significance to Social Change**

Workforce environment satisfaction will increase through improved work functions for federal employees and public organizations. Findings will assist leaders in terms of influencing organizational culture, performance, employee engagement, retention, and potential factors that contributed to of hiring and retaining employees in the organization. Furthermore, these findings will increase understanding of employee viewpoints and values during times of transition as well as organizational changes across demographic subgroups within the federal sector and throughout the United States.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this case study was to identify factors contributing to retention and craft recommendations and strategies to improve high and increasing employee turnover among newly hired employees and decline of existing employees in the GSA. I examined retention trends within the organization with existing employees and mapped the current trajectory of these trends among newly hired employees. In Section 2, the literature strategy and literature review are addressed. In addition, I present

an analysis of concepts and documents that were necessary to identify solutions and recommendations involving retention challenges among new employees, job resignations, low employee morale, and lack of cultural engagement challenges within the GSA between 2020 and 2023.

## Section 2: Conceptual Framework and Relevant Literature

The problem for the organization was high and increasing turnover rates among newly hired employees, which caused an increase in retention challenges among existing employees in the GSA. The GSA's virtual workplace environment affected newly hired employees in terms of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify factors contributing to high employee turnover in the GSA and improve employee retention in virtual environments.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature search strategy for this qualitative case study involved a systematic exploration of peer-reviewed and practice-focused literature that was relevant to the practice-focused research question. Chosen databases were ProQuest, EBSCOHost, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar.

Key search terms for this case study were *employee retention*, *employee turnover*, *job satisfaction*, *turnover intention*, *workplace mindfulness*, and *virtual workplace*.

I focused on studies that were published between 2020 and 2024. However, I used older studies if they were deemed critically pertinent to the case study and contributed valuable insights.

The search process involved systematically entering combinations of key terms into selected databases and search engines and using Boolean operators (AND, OR) as needed to refine search results. The goal was to identify academic and practice-oriented literature that addressed relationships between virtual workplace environments and employee retention, turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction.

While my primary focus was academic and peer-reviewed sources, I also considered older studies if they offered foundational insights or were particularly relevant to the case study. It was anticipated that government, nongovernmental, and nonprofit resources was not required, given the specific scope of the case study.

This comprehensive literature search enabled synthesis of existing knowledge and identification of gaps and trends in literature, ultimately informing the qualitative case study and contributing to a nuanced understanding of factors influencing employee retention in GSA virtual workplace environments.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this administrative case study involved the relationship between work structures of public organizations and the impact of virtual and hybrid environments. I aimed to address potential factors contributing to turnover, offering insights for leaders to formulate strategies which support employees. This involved enhancing leadership development opportunities by integrating executive core qualifications and key performance indicators with on-the-job training. Such measures were anticipated to

foster professional growth, strengthen organizational culture, boost employee engagement, and add overall value.

Additionally, I addressed the importance of fostering discussions regarding retention of both new hires and existing staff, encompassing organizational transitions and succession planning. This was a means to maintain a competitive advantage for public organizations.

I used online surveys that were administered through a Google questionnaire link, enabling direct participant access. I aimed to investigate GSA employee experiences, engagement levels, and job satisfaction. Despite experiencing considerable employee turnover, specific sources of high turnover rates at the GSA remain unclear.

### **Deliverable to the Client**

The primary deliverable to the client organization was a memorandum detailing findings and recommendations. Memorandums served to summarize findings and facts, document information for employees and organizations for historical reference, and facilitate written communication as records and notes for future use. According to Purdue University (2021), memos have two purposes: bringing immediate attention to and solving problems. McGrath (2021) asserted memos also provide directions and insights involving ways to improve.

There were several types of memos, including request, confirmation, report, and recommendation memos. Each memo had to adhere to a specific format and be addressed to a particular audience based on recommendations. Recommendation memos need to be brief, direct, and tactful. Deliverable memos contribute to the development of retention and

succession plans. A copy of the recommendation memo addressed to the U.S. GSA Region 4 chief of staff team was used for this administrative case study (see Appendix A). This memo included relevant content and suggested ways to achieve the agency's mission and goals through retention and succession plan strategies that were aligned with leadership development.

Furthermore, a research brief with senior-level leaders and leadership development plan were developed to enhance the new hire training experience. I aimed to increase employee engagement in virtual workforce environments and promote staff growth through leadership development plans, fostering motivation and career development.

### **Key Concepts in the Case Study**

This administrative case study consisted of client recommendations for the GSA. There are 11 regions that make up the GSA (see Figure B3). I focused on the Region 4 leasing division. The U.S. GSA is made up of two services: the Public Building Service (PBS) and Federal Acquisition Service (FAS.)

The GSA's mission is to provide the best customer experience and value in terms of real estate, acquisition, and technology services to the government and American people, specifically targeting federal customer agencies.

My goal was to enhance workplace morale, culture, training, and development while boosting performance and productivity. Using executive core qualifications (ECQs) and key performance indicators, recommendations were sought.

This approach involved implementing leadership development plans for employees to participate in competency tracks that were aligned with ECQs. Traditionally reserved for senior executive service employees, this innovative approach ensures employees at all levels engage in development frameworks. My focus was on creating momentum and progress, promoting the organization's mission of delivering quality customer experience, vision, and strategic values.

### **Literature Review for the Case Study**

The primary objective of this qualitative case study was to ascertain the factors contributing to the high employee turnover within the GSA and to devise strategies for enhancing employee retention in virtual work environments, including remote or telework setups. The central research question guiding this case study was: How had the virtual workplace environment at the GSA impacted newly hired employees in terms of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction?

While the concept of teleworking or virtual workplaces was not novel for many organizations and industries, the unexpected repercussions of the pandemic compelled numerous entities, including GSA, to transition into a sustained virtual workplace. This shift was prompted by government-mandated lockdowns and social distancing measures aimed at curtailing the spread of the coronavirus (Aufegger et al. 2022). The transition was acute and disruptive, consequently requiring many organizations to scramble to develop relevant human resources policies and identify needed technologies and systems to implement virtual workplaces (Mishra and Jena 2020). It was estimated that during the first few months of the



COVID-19 outbreak, more than 36% of the total U.S. workforce shifted to remote work. Of course, there were sectors whose transitions were not as smooth as others. Notwithstanding, the vast majority experienced implementation challenges (Gandhi et al. 2021). The major differences between virtual and traditional work environments were that employees were physically dispersed, communicating and working primarily through and assisted by digital technologies. However, each work environment impacted the employee in ways in terms of workspace relationships, task performance, overall job satisfaction, morale, motivation, limited opportunities for collaboration and supervision, and occasional social interactions (Aufegger et al. 2022). Aufegger et al. (2022) suggested that “employee satisfaction and productivity were highly dependent on the alignment between the design of a workplace, the culture, the work activities, and the technology used” (p. 1). As such, many organizations continued to experience challenges operating within sustained telework or virtual workplace environments. However, the literature on sustained telework or virtual workplaces and their impacts on employees were extremely limited to date. The few studies that did exist regarding the impact of sustained telework environments resulting from the pandemic underscored the challenges associated with maintaining employee morale, retention, and fostering “a sense of security and belongingness” (Mishra and Jena 2020). For example, one important case study conducted by Aufegger et al. (2022) sought to understand the dimensions of virtual workplace design, behaviors, environments, and specific tools that impacted collaboration and productivity. The case study identified insufficient or lack of effective change management to help employees adopt and accept virtual workplace

environments as a major challenge to employee retention. In addition, the lack of balancing between the physical, cultural, and sensorial elements in virtual workplaces was a challenge to employee productivity and well-being (Aufegger et al. 2022). An important remedy to these challenges, which bore the focus of this case study, was the criticality of self-navigation in virtual workplaces to help foster a sense of ownership among employees. Self-navigation was a concept that suggested that employees were responsible for navigating their careers within the organization. It was a bottom-up approach that focused on aligning, engaging, and empowering employees, which inevitably helped the organization to retain them (Aufegger et al. 2022). Therefore, it was important to ensure the virtual workplace environment responded to the employees' unique needs and supported self-navigation. The case study's recommendations included ensuring synchronous and asynchronous employee collaboration documents, work progress, and the availability of other employees in work processes through information sharing and project management and execution (Aufegger et al. 2022). Alternatively, Mishra and Jena (2020) explored the challenges of fostering employee morale in virtual workplaces from a management perspective. They conducted a case study that sought to integrate the concept of lean methodology in virtual leadership, which was predicated on continuously engaging with employees and building efficient teams to increase the effectiveness of virtual or digital workplaces (Mishra and Jena 2020). This research had significant utility in informing this case study for several reasons. First, it examined the need for organizations to shift to a more collaborative or democratic workplace culture to accommodate the unique employee and organizational demands of

virtual workplaces. The failure to make this shift would result in far-reaching implications, including low employee morale and unexpected and high turnover. Second, lean methodologies required continuous analysis to differentiate the tasks performed into value-adding, non-value-adding, and value-enabling, and as such demanded the participation of managers and employees in the decision-making process. This was often not considered as much in traditional workplace environments. According to Mishra and Jena (2020), this type of lean leadership could help can boost or improve employee morale while enriching their experiences in the “new normal” virtual workplace. Lastly, under lean leadership, employees were encouraged to effectively contribute to the organization and help with the development of virtual lean teams and tools that improved morale and productivity. For example, lean leadership could facilitate employee ownership of their deliverables, help create knowledge repositories online for employee reference, and cross-train employees virtually by providing them with access to learning and development modules (Mishra and Jena 2020). However, this required human resources to ensure that employees and virtual teams knew what deliverables were expected through properly designed goals and metrics and clarity of their role and responsibilities. In addition, employees in virtual workplaces must have the common tools to ensure productivity and the autonomy to take specific decisions related to roles and responsibilities (Mishra and Jena 2020).

Fayomi and Sani (2022) explored the implementation of a business digitalization strategy, including guidelines for micro, small, and medium enterprises intending to adopt virtual workplaces. Virtual workplaces were forced to evolve and adapt to changes in work

patterns, workforce, and work environments, or else suffer considerable disadvantages from which it would be difficult to recover, in which the post-pandemic agencies were still struggling to establish their missions around the new normal concept. As such, there was a need for rapid innovation, which also included increased flexibility and collaborative engagement. The case study cited the lack of control of technology issues within the workers' home infrastructure, communication issues such as poor communication quality and lack of visual contact necessary to read body language, and the reality that virtual workplace environments were not suitable for every employee as substantial challenges. More importantly, a major challenge was management's struggle to properly define and oversee the virtual workplace capabilities and performance of each employee (Fayomi and Sani 2022). The case study introduced 7 questions that organizations could use as guidelines when formulating a virtual workplace strategy. (Fayomi and Sani 2022). Questions about structural changes included "What types of operational changes did you expect?" while questions about finance included "How would you finance the virtual workplace adoption endeavor?" (Fayomi and Sani 2022). Again, the responses to these and other questions were intended to guide the development of strategies for virtual workplace environments. Graham and Dixon (2022) identified trust and empowerment as indispensable core features of virtual workplace environments, wherein the absence of either presented considerable challenges to the organization, resulting in employee dissatisfaction and turnover.

The case study recommended three essential leadership components that helped organizations to flourish despite challenging fluctuations in their physical environment.

These were (1) defining routines (recurring team meetings), (2) delegation of ownership, which demonstrated leadership trust in their employees and teams, and (3) fostering a culture of independence that had leaders at every level of the organization (Graham and Dixon 2022). The recommendations and strategies briefly examined in the aforementioned studies underscored the challenges in virtual workplace environments. It was underdetermined if GSA used any of these strategies until the research was conducted in the context of the research question. However, it was safe to assume that some strategies and practices were involved in maintaining, if not improving, its current virtual workplace environment. It was anticipated that analysis of the online survey data would provide such insights.

### **Relevance to Public Organizations**

The public sector had become a competitive advantage in the job market area. The ability to compete in the private sector had primarily evolved to the efforts of employment value. Many companies were learning how to navigate in the virtual environment while remaining steadfast in their performance and efficiency. A virtual work environment was entirely remote, meaning employees worked from various locations, often using digital tools to communicate and collaborate. This setup allowed for flexibility and could reduce overhead costs like office space and utilities. On the other hand, a hybrid work environment combined remote work with in-person work at a physical office or designated locations. This model blended the benefits of remote work, such as flexibility and reduced commuting time, with face-to-face interactions for collaboration, team building, and certain tasks that

benefitted from in-person presence. Hybrid setups could vary widely, with some employees working remotely most of the time and others coming into the office regularly, depending on the company's policies and the nature of the work. It was previously noted that there was a significant amount of limited information available concerning new hired employees' culture and employee engagement and how these factors attributed to their motivation, communication, ability to feel valued, and to stay within the public sector or specifically the federal sector and its impact in post-pandemic hybrid and virtual workplaces. New concepts of working and interacting with colleagues, employees, and leaders had caused a shift due to the lack of in-person accessibility. These factors might cause or limit employees' engagement or reduce it. The ability to train and maintain your career goals in the virtual arena might be hard for those new to the concept to grasp and adjust to the demands and new challenges the virtual work environment brought while allowing the "new normal" to shape strategies for navigating leadership development and employee engagement while maintaining a career ladder motivation. Jacobson Rubin Selden (2002) stated that a well-designed training system contributed to a public organization's performance by ensuring that employees had the knowledge and skills they needed to meet the demands of their current and future jobs. Training might also help governments attract and retain workers in an increasingly competitive job market (p.485). Jacobson Rubin Selden (2002) found that employee training could be tailored to improve individual and programmatic needs of the organization and help employees fit into the larger organizational structure (p.485). This helped employees contribute to achieving the organization's mission. The findings from this

project informed leadership within GSA with a resource to assist in providing a comprehensive plan that identified strategies and practices retention issues through succession planning and provided a developmental training guide incorporating executive core qualifications and key performance indicators alongside on-job training within the organization that overall would assist with professional growth, culture/employee engagement, and increased value. This plan connected the newly developed “New Hire Training” for the Leasing Division in Region 4 and incorporated discussion points that involved leadership scenarios and change management opportunities to integrate the individual employees’ needs with the organization’s needs. The findings might apply to other federal organizations.

### **Summary**

This section included a discussion of the literature strategy and review to inform the case study. In addition, I presented an analysis of concepts and documents that were necessary to identify solutions and recommendations to address retention challenges among new employees, increased job resignations, low employee morale, and lack of cultural and employee engagement challenges that had faced the U.S. GSA Region 4 leasing division between 2020 and 2023. Section 3 includes the practice-focused research question and research design, my role as the researcher and client organization, methodology, strategies for data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

### Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

The administrative case study was focused on the employee retention declines within the U.S. GSA, particularly among new hires. This issue hampered the agency's ability to leverage expertise in terms of delivering innovative solutions to customers and supporting their missions. My ultimate goal was to contribute to the establishment of an effective, sustainable, and transparent government for the American people. The GSA, comprised of the PBS and FAS, is driven by the imperative of maintaining diversity and achieving high performance as key elements for meeting objectives. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify factors contributing to high employee turnover in the GSA and improve employee retention in virtual environments. Participants were newly hired employees. In this section, I address the practice-focused question, sources of evidence, my role as the researcher and client organization, archival and operational data, procedures for recruitment participation, data collection strategy, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and a conclusion.

#### **Practice-Focused Questions and Research Design**

The primary objective of this qualitative administrative case study was to address factors that contributed to high turnover rates within the GSA and propose strategies for improving employee retention in virtual work environments. I addressed a knowledge gap related to high employee turnover within the GSA, specifically among newly hired employees. This issue has resulted in elevated retention challenges among existing employees within the agency. Virtual workplace environments that were implemented by



the GSA have been identified as significant in terms of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction among newly hired employees.

The qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, perceptions, and sentiments related to virtual work settings. These questions and responses were important because I aimed to identify and analyze specific elements of virtual workplace environments that influenced employees' intentions to leave. Turaga (2021) said:

An attitude of responding is most important today because that is the one choice we have in life. Research shows that as we learn to think and respond at work, conflicts reduce and more mature and composed discussions are possible, thus leading to effective teamwork and productivity.” (p. 55)

### **Roles of the Researcher and Client Organization**

#### **Role of the DPA Student Researcher**

The U.S. GSA continues to be one of the top innovative public organizations that partnered with the private sector to provide goods and services to other federal agencies and the public. As an employee who started her career as a recent graduate student trainee and worked my way from a trainer into a management position within the leasing division, I have seen the sustainability of the GSA continuing to grow. I aimed to discover and understand the GSA's administrative practices such as structure of the organization and employee/leadership development training programs and services that were designed to

provide resources for new and current employees in order to feel valued and engaged in organizations. My role was to collect and analyze data using the qualitative case study design which included online surveys and observations. The only data collection instrument was online surveys; therefore, risks were minimized, and there were no conflicts of interest in this study because online surveys were anonymous with no identifiers. I determined if participants were vulnerable individuals. I did not exclude anyone because of bias or discrimination. New hires were the only participants for the study who provided responses to seven questions through the anonymous online questionnaire. Throughout the research process, I remained objective while analyzing collected data to identify gaps and trends in current practices.

### **Role of Client Organization**

The federal government and various public service organizations had continued to keep up with the growing private sector by filling in the diversity and competency gaps via civil service programs such as the pathways internship program, recent graduate program, and presidential management fellows' programs these efforts had made strides in GSA (General Service Administration) but had created mixed results on the effectiveness of the low retention rate and employee engagement. The federal public sector created diverse environments by partnering veterans and civilians with various educational, professional, and personal experiences. Among this diverse workplace environment were students and recent graduates who created workplace, enrich the atmosphere with their culture, talent, and fresh perspectives. The virtual and hybrid arena had opened the discussion on

generations' support and their ability to be managed and identify their individual value into the organization. This discussion could be connected to managerial styles by leaders to create a level playing field for employees. Research from Arlington and Dwyer suggested that “the one-size fits-all management style was no longer relevant with the four generations currently representing the largest portion of the federal public-sector workforce” (Arlington & Dwyer 2018). These results provided a better understanding of relationships between generational cohorts and cohort perceptions of managerial effectiveness within the context of the federal public-sector workplace. Moreover, the results served as a notice to current managers about how different generational cohorts viewed managerial effectiveness. These results could further provide an opportunity to improve not only the relationships with between managers and their employees but also how leaders managed overall. The organizational structure of GSA was made up of real estate acquisition services and technology aspects such as GSA Smart Cards that were utilized for purchasing. Under the real estate and acquisition components, GSA was made up of two internal organizations which were the Public Building Service and Federal Acquisition Services. The U.S. General Service Administration (GSA) was the client organization for this case study and the target internal organization was the Public Building Service. This organization’s key goal provided workplaces by constructing, managing, and preserving government buildings and by leasing and managing commercial real estate. GSA's acquisition solutions offered private sector professional services, equipment, supplies, and IT to government organizations and the military. GSA also promoted management best practices and efficient government

operations through the development of government-wide policies. As society had evolved and advanced in the use of technology, there was a continuous need to revitalize the federal government so it's the mission for the organization and needs to keep up with the private sector. The mission of the United States General Service Administration "had evolved to provide stewardship of the way the government used and provided real estate acquisition services and technology. Through our Public Buildings Service, Federal Acquisition Service, and various staff offices, we provided workspace to more than 1 million federal civilian workers, oversaw the preservation of more than 480 historic buildings, and facilitated the Federal Government's purchase of high-quality, low-cost goods and services from reliable commercial vendors" (General Service Administration 2022 p.1.) This mission had created opportunities for customer agencies and stakeholders to work together to create a business relationship that was able to thrive and support the American economy while driving an opportunity for Fair and Reasonable procurement strategies to be engaged in. The organization's need for this administrative case study was critical for future planning and retaining talent and supporting the agency's mission and overall strategic vision. The focused approach of creating and implementing action plans had resulted in a regional project for the Public Building Service Sector of Region Four General Service Administration. The project campaign "the Grow People to Keep People" which was anchored out of the GSA Chief of Staff office had afforded me the opportunity to access resources and Internal documents/policies in the areas of call minutes for national staffing, regional budget for hiring, and execution of the current organization plan, culture

engagement, employee viewpoint survey results, operational records, and on-job shadowing to conduct the study specifically access to participants and documents provided. GSA experienced reorganization twice in the last 8 years and was approaching one in the next few years again due to the shifting in management ratio from 8 employees to 1 manager. The manpower issues with limited hiring, reduction in culture and employee engagement, and lack of promotional potential had resulted in numerous employees moving to different departments or taking laterals for less stressful positions from the Real Estate Divisions. The findings from this administrative case study would discuss gaps in current practices that work in the office versus virtual environment would need to be filtered through to ensure practices and methods were up to date with the situational hybrid work environment while identifying factors of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction in the virtual workplace contributed to high and increasing rates of turnover among newly hired employees in GSA.

## **Methodology**

### **Sources of Evidence**

The qualitative research involved exploring and understanding ways to improve retention and drive engagement in the virtual environment. The researcher acted alone as a one-party instrument in the qualitative studies in which data was collected by way of in-depth surveys. The proposed sample was between 10-25 people and was determined using maximum variation sampling. The factors used to determine the participants were newly hired employees from years 0- 3 years with the organization. The personal survey questions

focused on providing additional clarification through a qualitative analysis of employee and leadership perceptions of training experience, communication, motivation, value, culture, and employee engagement job value satisfaction and motivation.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Creating and implementing a qualitative case study involving staff within GSA potentially furthered the understanding of employee viewpoint surveys and the importance of leadership training within the initial elements in a new hire's career within the organization.

The project focused on creating/implementing an R4 PBS Retention/Succession Internal Development Plan. This set of training revolved around the concept of the region's need to "Grow People to Keep People" which was a project/campaign targeted at retaining employees, increasing morale, and employee engagement. Extending value to General Service Administration by identifying factors of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction in the virtual workplace contributed to high and increasing rates of turnover among newly hired employees in GSA and assisted with the production of an R4 PBS Retention/Succession Internal Development Plan. Before staff members participated in the interview/questionnaire, I communicated via electronically the importance of maintaining confidentiality and participants' rights during the qualitative investigation. I constructed information that gave an accurate account of the organizational trends that would aid in the recommendations discussed in Section 4. The integrity of the case study and interview relied on trust. I had an excel spreadsheet of the collected information from

each participant which would assist in the monitoring of bias or subjectiveness throughout the research. This large gap in service allowed me to understand the viewpoints and perceptions of senior employees to new hires based on coaching and development for the respected Branch that was being evaluated. The online survey focused on newly hired employees from year 0 -3 years with the agency and were participants of the current new hire training program. The organizational theory was the conceptual framework for the case study for qualitative investigation. The evidence generated for the administrative case study consisted of an online survey. This information would help to assist with the recommendation letter and regional assignment to retain employees, provide Succession Planning, and enhance Individual Developmental Plans. The evidence would emphasize a board division focus and disseminate to a branch focus assess gaps in the organization and create bridges to further assist with the concept of “Grow People to Keep People. Current New Hire Training SOP provided cradle-to-grave procurement focus training to assist leasing specialists to performance levels of journeyman LCOs. As a result of the generated evidence, the goal would be to enhance the current program by incorporating leadership development training tracks for new hires. The interview questions (Appendix A) were designed to assist in the evidence and determination of how GSA currently retained new hires through organizational alignment, training, employee engagement, and assessment of individual career goals. It was assumed that the current new hire training program and overall culture methods currently used had not been effective in maintaining employees; therefore, this was an area where participants’ surveys could provide considerable insight

and direction to improving and identifying challenges, gaps, and opportunities for improving the new hire experience by diversifying the development of leaders thus enabling new hires to have buy-in to the organization. Survey questions that were administered to the new hires were applicable to senior employees and first-line managers. This created a diverse perspective and responses to gain additional insight into how GSA perceived the retention of new hires in the federal workforce and how that issue might be resolved. The contrast of data was key to a qualitative case study such as this by utilizing the same questions for all new hires for the survey avoided data overload that might contribute to various ambiguous loopholes and complicate the findings while data was being collected. New Hires employees of the United States General Service Administration were utilized to conduct the online survey on retention. The initial step for the approval of the research consisted of the executed consulting agreement being presented to the IRB for acceptance. An invitation letter was provided to the participants detailing the scope of work, purpose of the qualitative case study, and permission to participate in the proposed qualitative case study. The IRB approval code was required before initiating invitations to the participants. Upon the approval of the IRB team to conduct the qualitative case study, a conversation was initiated with the Lease Acquisition Officer, who was over the training for the new hires for the Public Building Service to detail the ethical procedures that must occur before selections and surveys could be conducted. The qualitative research involved exploring and understanding ways to improve retention and drive engagement in the virtual environment. The researcher acted alone as a one-party instrument in the qualitative studies in which data



was collected by way of in-depth surveys and questionnaires and case study. The proposed sample was between 10-25 people and was determined using maximum variation sampling. The factors used to determine the participants were newly hired employees from years 0- 3 years with the organization. The comprehensive recruitment and data collection plan utilized word of mouth and email invitations as recruitment strategies. Word of mouth was effective for reaching potential participants in specific communities or groups while email invitations could reach a wider audience. Google Forms was used to collect survey results due to its user-friendly platform for organizing and analyzing responses. Developing the survey questionnaire myself allowed for tailored questions aligned with research objectives. Participants reviewed the consent form before deciding to participate, ensuring ethical guidelines were met. For data analysis, Excel or Google Sheets was used based on data complexity and suitability for qualitative study analysis.

### **Strategy for Data Analysis**

The online survey questions were used to conduct a qualitative analysis of employee and leadership perceptions regarding training experience, communication, motivation, value, culture, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and motivation. The data system utilized for recording, tracking, organizing, and analyzing survey submissions included Microsoft Office applications like Word and Excel, as well as Google applications such as Sheets and Forms. These tools facilitated efficient data organization, form creation, and the generation of charts and tables. This streamlined process enabled the showcasing and display of findings and collection efforts. The Forms database and direct links to users'

software devices recorded information and quotes from participants verbatim, ensuring authenticity to the interviewees' submissions. This approach prevented data manipulation or alteration to fit individual narratives, standards, outliers, or missing information; therefore, the information collected only illustrated factual data being utilized to provide solutions for GSA's retention challenges and new hire engagement. Qualitative research design provided valuable insights into the identified problem. I utilized a purposive sampling method to conduct a case study involving employees (participants) from region 4 leasing selected based on specific criteria. This research strategy ensured the reliability, validity, and diversity of the data collected. Reliability, also referred to as dependability, was a crucial aspect of qualitative research, ensuring that the research findings could be trusted.

### **Analysis Systems**

Identifying factors such as turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction in the virtual workplace contributed significantly to addressing high turnover rates among newly hired employees at the General Services Administration (GSA). This effort aimed to support the development of an R4 PBS Retention/Succession Internal Development Plan. I had emailed invitations to 10-25 Region 4 leasing employees inviting them to participate in this administrative case study and research component. The email provided information about the purpose of the case study, informed consent procedures, and confidentiality measures to ensure participants' understanding and willingness to contribute their perspectives on virtual environments and retention topics.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of the case study and survey results hinged on maintaining integrity. Before any data was collected, I ensured that the procedures aligned in the consent form were ducted and organized for clarity. The collected information in an Excel spreadsheet and Google Sheets for each participant aided in monitoring bias or subjectivity throughout the research process.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility was used to evaluate the quality of qualitative research design as it was seen as a criterion that would be able to showcase whether the research was legitimate by providing data sources while the researcher examined the case study from a different perspective. The researcher utilized a methodological Triangulation approach by utilizing multiple employees (participants) and their perspectives to gather a comprehensive understanding of the topic of retention. Triangulation was valuable because it helped researchers validate their findings by ensuring that conclusions were not based on a single method, data source, or viewpoint. It strengthened the overall robustness and trustworthiness of the research outcome. There were several limitations to this professional administrative case study. First, there might be challenges in obtaining the sample size of 25 GSA employees and 10 managers and supervisors to interview for the case study. Second, because the participants interviewed were current employees of GSA, there might be some reluctance to provide truthful and honest information related to their turnover intentions, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction. Third, the findings derived from the case study

might not be relevant to other contexts due to participant sampling from one organization (GSA). Tables similar to the one illustrated below had been utilized by GSA to assess the training needs and efforts of understanding to capture the new hires' experience and was a useful tool in identifying trends in new hire and career dynamics. After the collection of the data was confirmed, the information was organized and analyzed to identify possible trends and factors that would lead to a solution for GSA's retention and new hire employee engagement challenges.

### **Analysis Procedures**

The purpose of this study was to focus on how the GSA's virtual workplace environment affected newly hired employees in the key areas of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction. Thus, this study could lead to insight into factors that contributed to high turnover so that leadership could consider strategies for improving retention. Through the recommendations provided, it was hoped to improve the new hire experience and to aid in closing the retention gap within the organization, increasing employees' engagement in virtual workforce environments, and the development of staff development plans that would assist with employees feeling motivated and valued. These items had been an issue for GSA for many years, but the focus had been highlighted in the pandemic which had caused an increase in hiring and continuous virtual/hybrid strategies with restrictions. The data collected for this case study method that was utilized were the survey results from the new hires.

## **Ethical Procedures**

The procedures utilized to ensure ethical protection of the participants in the PAS were participant confidentiality form that would be administered before the questionnaire was given. The form would allow one participant to answer at a time, participants had one time to answer, and the participant did not have the option to edit their answers once submitted. The recruitment materials used for this administrative case study included an invitation letter that would be sent electronically to all new hires that were hired in the last 3 years in the Leasing Division within the Public Building Service at the U.S. General Service Administration. There were no foreseen ethical concerns related to the recruitment materials or methodology that was utilized as the approval was provided by the Lease Acquisition Officer, which was over the development of the new hire training for the PBS Leasing Division. The process and plan to establish participants with the questionnaire and feedback were administered as a volunteer-based feedback and opportunity with no incentives provided other than it was mentioned that the information gathered would assist with enhancing the environment for new hires. Gaining access to the new hires was not an issue as I worked as one of the trainers and the Leasing Division Ambassadors for several years to know which in this role I served as a liaison to the new hires and assisted with getting new hires accumulated in their role and served as a buddy outside their branch.

## ***Consent and Privacy***

There were no ethical concerns as once the consulting agreement/participant consent form were approved; the participant was granted access to the form to answer. If their

individual did not choose to refuse to consent to the participation or confidentiality the participant was not granted access. No additional requirement was needed to participate. In addition, if the participant refused to consent to the participant's confidentiality their information would be deleted and not reviewed. To gain access to the new hires, the approval of the Lease Acquisition Officer would be attained, which would involve the new hire training program that currently existed to review and understand the gaps in engagement and retention with new hires within the PBS Region 4 Division. The survey results would remain anonymous, and the information utilized in the participant's feedback would be summarized for the findings in the administrative case study which were reviewed and maintained by the DPA Student Researcher. The IRB would have access to the survey results and the Regional Chief of Staff's Office to review the findings and assist with the overall support of employees and new hires.

#### ***Client Organization Approval***

The U.S. General Service Administration project commitment granted access to gain insights on better the organization and access to participants or data. (See Appendix B: General Service Administration Project Commitment.)

The human participants are current employees who work for region 4 Leasing Division- General Service Administration. The treatment of the participants was professional and courtesy which allowed their ability to participant to be strictly decided on their own accord without incentive or guidance. There are several institutional permissions, including IRB approvals that are needed for the proposal phase and will be obtained for the

completion of the PAS to include relevant IRB approval numbers, and ethical concerns related to data collection. These items could include participants' refusing participation or early withdrawal from the case study and response to any predictable adverse events and a plan to address them which are not relevant to this case study as the participant participation was strictly voluntary.

### **Summary**

Resolving retention issues for the GSA could result new hire onboarding and development experience have been adjusted by Region 4 through enhancing the new hire training, onboarding processes, and development structures to assist with succession planning in order to make the GSA more attractive to incoming and existing employees. As a result, more new hires and existing employees will stay within the Region 4 leasing division. The deliverable is a memorandum of recommendations that might be used to enhance other divisions, increase employee engagement, and improve leadership development.

In Section 4, I address data findings for this qualitative administrative case study. This includes categorized themes and trends regarding GSA retention challenges and answers to these challenges. Findings were presented in the form of recommendations for creating and implementing PBS retention and succession plans through a training series targeted at retaining employees, increasing morale, and improving employee engagement. Leaders who maximize their understanding of generational, cultural, and value differences increase the success of organizations. In addition, data assisted with resolving retention

issues of newly hired employees, including increased job resignations, low employee morale, lack of leadership development opportunities, and reduction in employee and cultural engagement.

#### Section 4: Results and Recommendations

The GSA Region 4 Real Estate Division, which houses the largest federal inventory out of all U.S. regions, identified a need to improve its retention and succession planning efforts within the agency by focusing on improving culture and employee engagement of its employees, who were hybrid or virtual. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify factors contributing to high employee turnover in the GSA and improve employee retention in virtual environments.

Findings from this qualitative study provided valuable insights regarding challenges posed by virtual workplace environments and recommendations for improving employee retention strategies within the GSA. By addressing these issues at their root, the agency could create more conducive virtual work settings, ultimately enhancing the overall satisfaction and commitment of its employees. This study was not only timely but also critical in terms of identifying opportunities and recommendations to aid in development of new training approaches for employee engagement, job satisfaction, motivation, and overall culture improvement.

#### **Data Collection**

This case study involved a comprehensive examination of the current state of employee retention and succession planning. I used the qualitative method and semi-



structured surveys with participants. Online survey evidence was employed to gather information. This varied approach ensured well-rounded perspectives regarding the issue. I chose a qualitative data analysis to identify patterns and correlations within data. The sample was carefully selected to ensure diverse representation within the organization.

Data collection for semi-structured survey questions included seven questions for new hire employees. Responses were in-depth and detailed (see Appendix A).

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The purpose of this professional administrative case study was to identify factors contributing to high turnover and lack of retention in GSA virtual work environments, specifically focusing on new hires from 2020 to 2023. The practice-focused question was: How has the GSA's virtual workplace environment affected newly hired employees in terms of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction.

I used online surveys with participants, concentrating on turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, job satisfaction, and employee engagement. I aimed to develop actionable recommendations for the GSA to improve retention and engagement in virtual work environments, ultimately benefiting both the organization and its employees.

### **Participant Responses and Analysis**

The findings revealed the need for training and development, more engaged environments when in person, promotional opportunities, cross-divisional connection opportunities, and more individual time with management for career coaching and development on a regular basis. Overall, people enjoyed working in the virtual environment,

but participants acknowledged a need for a collaborative, engaging environment for networking. Participant responses highlighted a lack of buy-in for career advancement in the Leasing Division and structured training with the trainers and managers.

The topics of interest for onboarding and educational components based on GSA Region 4 participants included but were not limited to their experience on the first day, ongoing training and development, and interaction with their peers and managers. This list provided the basis for informing the management team on the development of increasing value in the employees and their experience. Most participants provided short answers, and others provided additional commentary for change management. The implications resulting from the findings for the client organization would create an achievement of employees feeling heard and actions being taken to create a better work environment.

Implications of not moving forward with action items would have resulted in employees exploring new jobs outside of the Real Estate Division, where the work was not as cumbersome, and systems were already being implemented for employee feedback and value management. (Turaga, 2021) states “,participant/recipient needed to believe as accurate and truthful what they were being told and how they were being advised to behave in the future; they needed to be able to make sense logically and in rational terms of what had been proposed; and they needed to see how they could both achieve and implement what they were being advised to do differently in the future. It was important for employees to know they were valued, and an environment conducive to upholding the words that were stated would build trust and encourage more productivity and a sense of on-job fulfillment.

Data was crucial in uncovering the underlying reasons for the high turnover rates and understanding how the virtual environment affected the mentioned areas. By combining participant feedback with detailed analysis, it's clear that GSA's virtual workplace environment has had a mixed impact on newly hired employees. While the flexibility and autonomy of virtual work are appreciated, there are significant areas for improvement in onboarding, training, engagement, and communication. Addressing these issues through structured programs, clear communication, and enhanced engagement activities can significantly improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions, fostering a mindful and productive work environment.

### **Deliverables and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to focus on how the GSA's virtual workplace environment affected newly hired employees in the key areas of turnover intention, workplace mindfulness, and job satisfaction. The findings identified factors contributing to high employee turnover in GSA and sought to improve employee retention in virtual environments, which would be done as we delved into the organizational structure of the GSA and presented two recommendation memorandums.

The first memorandum was aimed at enhancing the New Hire Training for the Public Building Service, Leasing Division. This involved the implementation of a leadership development program and the creation of a comprehensive resource guide that would be utilized during the onboarding phase as a training and career development resource for both current and existing employees. The insights gained through this research served as a

catalyst for informed decision-making, enabling the Chief of Staff to implement targeted training initiatives that aligned with the "Grow People to Keep People" philosophy and effectively addressed the organizational challenges identified in Section 1.

The second memorandum was directed towards the Chief of Staff and proposed enhancements on a regional basis as the deliverable for the creation and implementation of a Region 4 PBS Retention and Succession Internal Development Plan, which was designed to align with the overarching concept of "Grow People to Keep People." This emphasized the need to invest in training and development initiatives tailored to the region's specific requirements and focused on an official job-shadowing project opportunity within divisions to foster awareness and create opportunities to grow employees to sustain culture development and the job environment. Section 3 of this memorandum encompassed the research design, research rationale, target population and sample, sampling procedures, sources of evidence, and the methodology employed to analyze data collected in this administrative case study. These elements were crucial to substantiate the conceptual framework and background detailed in Section 2, ultimately facilitating the extraction of valuable insights to address the organizational problem highlighted in Section 1.

The recommended measures sought to address the identified problem by fostering a more robust and supportive environment for new hires. The leadership development program aimed to equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles, contributing to the agency's overall success. Additionally, the resource guide for

onboarding and training/development served as a valuable tool to streamline processes and provide a structured framework for both new and existing staff.

In conclusion, the proposed recommendations were tailored to enhance the overall employee experience within the GSA, particularly within the Public Building Service, Leasing Division. By prioritizing leadership development and providing a comprehensive resource guide, the agency could take significant strides towards improving employee retention and, consequently, achieving its mission of delivering innovative solutions for the benefit of the American people. I believed formulating a focus team to connect with divisional partners within the employee board for future research addressing similar topics and using similar methods would be useful.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The credibility of my research was shown by employing a methodological triangulation approach, which involved gathering data from multiple employees (participants) and their diverse perspectives. This approach helped validate my findings by ensuring that conclusions were not based on a single method, data source, or viewpoint. By collecting data from various participants, I mitigated the risk of bias and enhanced the legitimacy of my research. Additionally, before any data was collected, I made sure that the procedures outlined in the consent form were adhered to and organized for clarity, further strengthening the integrity of my research.

Transferability in my research was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and methods. While there were limitations due to the

specific sample size and context (GSA employees), I aimed to enhance transferability by documenting the data collection and analysis processes meticulously. This detailed documentation allowed other researchers to assess whether my findings could be relevant to their own contexts, thereby facilitating the application of my results to different settings.

I ensured the dependability of my research by maintaining detailed records of the data collection and analysis processes. By keeping consistent and thorough documentation, I made it possible for my study to be replicated, demonstrating the reliability of my findings over time and under different conditions. A table showcasing the results further aided in monitoring bias and subjectivity, providing a clear overview of the collected data.

Confirmability in my study was achieved by using multiple data sources (triangulation) and by organizing and analyzing the data systematically to identify trends and factors objectively. The use of a table to showcase the results helped ensure that the findings were based on the data collected rather than personal biases. This approach reinforced the objectivity of my research, ensuring that the results were shaped by the participants' inputs.

The overall trustworthiness of my research was reinforced by the methodological rigor and ethical considerations I put in place. Maintaining integrity throughout the research process was crucial. This included ensuring that procedures aligned with the consent form, organizing data collection methods clearly, and addressing potential limitations transparently. By acknowledging limitations, such as challenges in obtaining the sample size

and potential reluctance of participants to provide truthful information, I further enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of my study.

By implementing these strategies, my research on employee retention at GSA was robust and trustworthy, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic through multiple perspectives and rigorous methodological approaches.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The strength of this study was that the employees were familiar with me and therefore had buy-in to the study and understood its potential to formulate change management within the Leasing Division. Limitations included sampling, which was discussed in Section 2, of those who actually filled out the survey. Many employees wanted to discuss privately or provide commentary outside the survey, which was not utilized. In addition, the limited number of participants might not showcase a need, but the resulting component supporting the study would be the Employee Viewpoint Survey, which was done every year in the summer and results were provided at the end of the fiscal year. This survey had a more advanced approach to determining a larger range of potential issues within the organization, but it was so broad that it often did not break down to individual teams due to those who might or might not participate.

Participation in surveys was a known potential limitation but was overcome by the feedback provided by the employees who participated, as many of them had similar viewpoints, which showcased a theme and achieved its purpose of providing data research that showcased a problem within the organization that could be resolved with the findings

and recommendations. Under the article developed by the White House, “Strengthening our Federal Workforce,” the current Administration believed that a constructive employer-employee relationship was essential to sustaining a federal workforce that delivered for Americans. From Day One, the Administration committed to rebuilding this relationship by making critical investments in its people and its workplaces. The initiatives advanced under the first priority of the PMA, Strengthening and Empowering the Federal Workforce, were bringing a new level of strategic focus and visibility to the workforce. The Administration’s workforce agenda emphasized a whole-of-Government approach with cross-agency collaboration to meet common challenges and share leading practices. It marshaled agencies’ significant workforce data to build evidence that advanced its understanding of the current and future civil servants that Government would need to meet the mission today and into the future. Above all, it invested in people, in particular through new approaches to assess and fill urgent talent needs at all levels within agencies, as well as elevating innovative practices and scaling promising initiatives (White House, 2024). Overall, this showcased another strength of the study as it aligned with the president’s agenda in creating a more sustainable workforce, which ultimately connected to proper retention and succession planning.

### **Summary**

Section 4 focused on addressing the high employee turnover within the General Service Administration (GSA) Region 4 Real Estate Division. The study identified factors



contributing to employee turnover in a predominantly virtual workplace environment and offered recommendations to improve employee retention.

The study revealed that the virtual work environment had posed significant challenges, leading to high turnover rates. Employees expressed the need for better engagement, appreciation, and support. The research utilized qualitative methods, including semi-structured surveys with key participants. The data collected provided insights into the employees' experiences, engagement levels, and job satisfaction.

The recommendations included the development of a Leadership Development Program aimed at equipping employees with necessary skills and knowledge. Additionally, a Comprehensive Resource Guide was proposed to streamline onboarding and provide structured training for new and existing employees. The Region 4 PBS Retention and Succession Internal Development Plan focused on job-shadowing projects and tailored training initiatives. These recommendations aimed to foster a supportive environment for new hires and improve overall employee retention within the GSA.

Building on the insights and recommendations provided in Section 4, the upcoming section, Section 5, focused on the dissemination of this work. This included strategies to communicate the findings and recommendations to the leaders of the client organization experiencing these challenges. Additionally, it explored how the outcomes and products developed could be applicable to a broader audience, including the potential impact on positive social change and alignment with the social determinants of health.

## Section 5: Dissemination Plan

Dissemination of this work to leaders of the GSA Region 4 Real Estate Division involved several strategic steps. These included organizing a detailed presentation for the leadership team as well as highlighting key findings and actionable recommendations. Additionally, a formal memorandum summarizing study results and specific recommendations tailored to the organization's needs was provided. Workshops and training sessions were conducted to discuss implementation of recommended leadership development programs and resource guides. I ensured continuous engagement with the leadership team through regular updates and follow-up.

This study has broader applicability beyond the GSA Region 4 Real Estate Division. Retention and succession planning strategies could be adapted and implemented in other regions facing similar challenges. The leadership development program and comprehensive resource guide could serve as best practices for other public and private organizations. Sharing study findings through industry publications, conferences, and professional networks will help reach a wider audience.

The potential social change impact of this study was significant, particularly in terms of social determinants of health. Enhancing employee engagement and retention contributes to better job satisfaction, which positively affects mental and emotional wellbeing. Reducing turnover and improving job stability could lead to economic benefits for employees and their families. Fostering a supportive and appreciative work environment

promotes a positive organizational culture, which could have ripple effects on broader communities.

### **Summary**

Section 4 includes valuable insights into the challenges of employee retention within the GSA Region 4 Real Estate Division and offered targeted recommendations to address these issues. Section 5 outlined the plans to disseminate these findings to the organization's leaders and discussed the broader applicability and potential for positive social change. By implementing these strategies, the GSA could enhance employee satisfaction, improve retention rates, and contribute to a more supportive and productive work environment.

This study underscored the critical importance of addressing employee turnover within the GSA Region 4 Real Estate Division by enhancing engagement, support, and professional development in a virtual work environment. Through targeted recommendations such as leadership development programs, comprehensive resource guides, and tailored succession plans, the study offered actionable strategies to improve employee retention. The broader applicability of these findings extended to other organizations facing similar challenges, promoting a positive organizational culture and contributing to economic stability and well-being. Ultimately, the study highlighted how strategic interventions in employee retention could lead to significant positive social change, aligning with the social determinants of health and fostering a more supportive and productive work environment.

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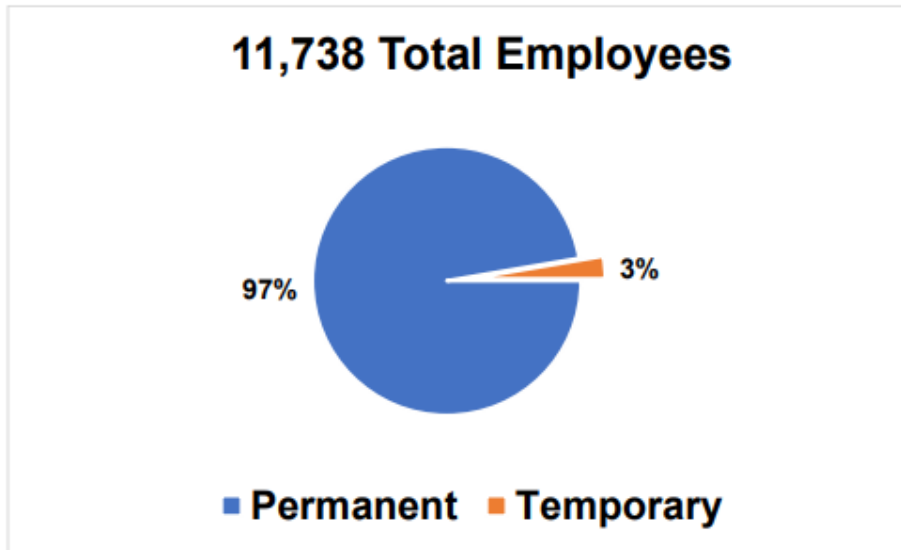
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**Figure B1**

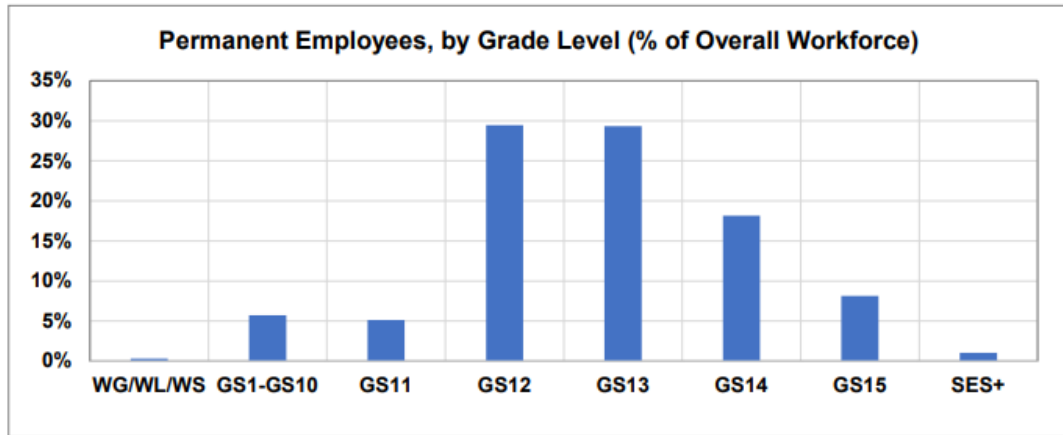
*GSA Total Employment*



**Figure B2**

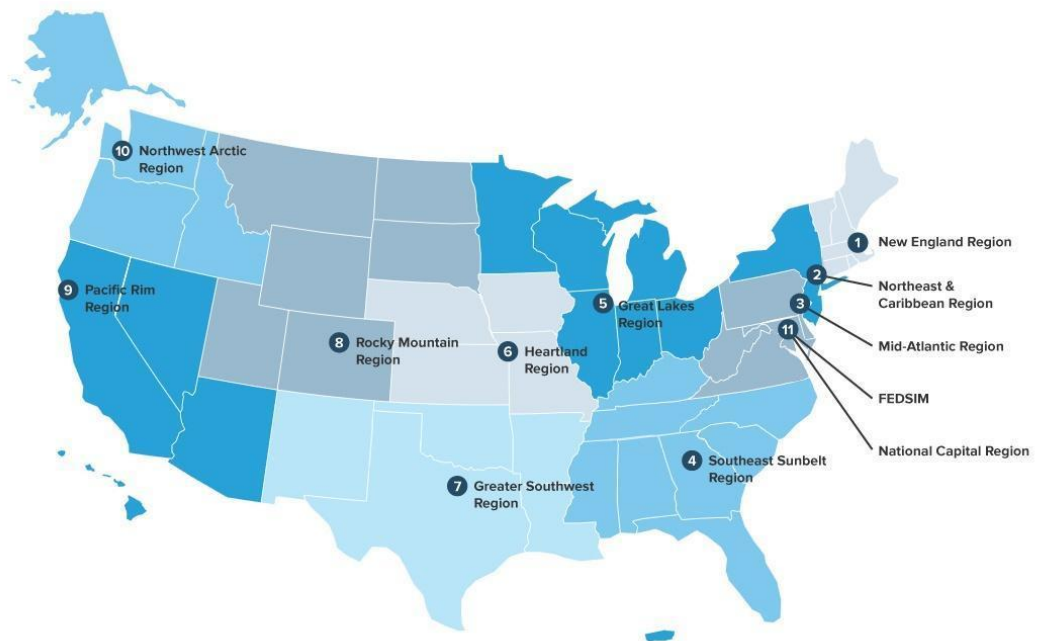
*Distribution of Permanent Employees, by Grade Level*

**FIGURE 2:** Distribution of Permanent Employees, by Grade Level <sup>4</sup>



**Figure B3**

*GSA Regions*



**Table B2***GSA Race/Ethnicity/Sex Groups and Respective Abbreviations*

Full Demographic Group Title	Abbrev.
Males	M
Females	F
Hispanic Males	HM
Hispanic Females	HF
White Males	WM
White Females	WF
Black or African American (Black) Males	BM
Black or African American (Black) Females	BF
Asian Males	AM
Asian Females	AF
American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) Males	IM
American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) Females	IF
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) Males	NM
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) Females	NF
Two or More Races Males	2M
Two or More Races Females	2F

**Table B3***FY21 Race/Ethnicity/Sex Demographic Group Statistics*

FY21	HM	HF	WM	WF	BM	BF	AM	AF	NM	NF	IM	IF	2M	2F
Population	438	388	4028	2656	1223	1859	472	382	20	15	58	40	85	74
Percentage	3.7%	3.3%	34.3%	22.6%	10.4%	15.8%	4.0%	3.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%	0.7%	0.6%

**Table B4**

*Nomination Rates to FY21 Competitive Development Programs vs. Participation Rates in Eligibility Pool*

	HM	HF	WM	WF	BM	BF	AM	AF	PWD	PWTD
GS13	57%	153%	103%	137%	75%	87%	25%	145%	43%	83%
GS14	75%	160%	98%	109%	124%	95%	22%	127%	52%	149%
GS15	89%	101%	95%	96%	129%	137%	14%	131%	53%	163%
SES	63%	0%	102%	78%	113%	189%	0%	189%	43%	170%
Supervisors	55%	168%	97%	137%	74%	95%	25%	148%	45%	88%
Managers	81%	174%	94%	106%	126%	102%	21%	130%	59%	155%
Executives	73%	0%	101%	79%	118%	188%	0%	182%	49%	197%

**Table B5**

*GSA FY18 Mission Critical Occupations*

2014-2018 OPM SERIES	OPM SERIES TITLE (December 2018)	WORK FORCE IN SERIES	% OF WORK FORCE	2014-2018 CENSUS CODE
1102	CONTRACTING	1902	16.2%	0530
1101	GENERAL BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY	1696	14.4%	0750
0343	MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAM ANALYSIS	1214	10.3%	0710
0301	MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATION AND PROGRAM	1153	9.8%	0750
2210	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT	745	6.35%	0110
1170	REALTY	556	4.74%	4920
0560	BUDGET ANALYSIS	242	2.06%	0820
0501	FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION AND PROGRAM	231	1.97%	0810
0201	HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT	197	1.68%	0136
0905	GENERAL ATTORNEY	166	1.41%	2100