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Workplace Isolation Occurring in Remote Workers

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Adam Hickman

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Walden University

2019

Abstract

Workplace Isolation Occurring in Remote Workers

by

Adam Hickman

MBA, Walden University, 2015

BA, Hiram College, 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

May 2019

Abstract

Organizational leaders and managers may not have the management acumen, organizational awareness, or leadership expertise to construct and implement effective strategies, policies, and procedures to help reduce the frequency of the phenomenon of workplace isolation. The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to gain a common understanding about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States.

Emerson's social exchange theory was used as the conceptual framework. A series of semistructured interviews with 21 remote workers that consisted of 4 different divisions at the same organization was conducted to yield thematic results. Data analysis included holistic and pattern coding. The most common understandings that emerged into themes were the need of social interaction, manager communication, and peer-to-peer interactions that had an influence on job performance. The knowledge acquired in this study can affect social change by providing insights for leaders, managers, and practitioners to create policies and strategies to improve the engagement, performance, and well-being of remote workers who may experience workplace isolation.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my work to my children, Elliana, Benjamin, and Nina. No matter what anyone will say to you, if you want something in this life, wait for no one and go get it. Always hold yourself to the highest standard of what you can contribute, and do what you do best every day. To my wife, Alecia, thank you for your endless hours given for me to finish this dissertation and your support along the way.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background of the Study	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Research Question.....	6
Conceptual Framework	6
Nature of the Study	7
Definitions	8
Assumptions.....	9
Limitations of the Study	10
Scope and Delimitations.....	11
Significance of the Study.....	13
Significance to Practice	13
Significance to Theory.....	14
Significance to Social Change	14
Summary and Transition	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	17
Introduction.....	17

Literature Search Strategy	18
Conceptual Framework	22
Literature Review	23
Historical Overview	24
Remote Worker Isolation.....	26
Social Exchange Theory	27
Remote Worker Well-Being	28
Employer Benefits and Drawbacks	30
Remote Worker Benefits and Drawbacks.....	33
Profit and Engagement	34
Remote Worker Performance	36
Job Demands of a Remote Worker.....	37
Theory of Planned Behavior	39
The Big Five Personality Traits	42
Workplace Isolation	45
The Construct of Workplace Isolation.....	45
Workplace Isolation Impacts Health	46
Workplace Isolation in the Workplace	48
Gap in the Literature.....	50
Summary and Conclusions	51
Chapter 3: Research Method	53
Introduction.....	53

Research Question.....	53
Research Method and Rationale	54
Research Design and Rationale.....	55
Role of the Researcher.....	56
Professional Relationships and Power Dynamics	57
Participant Selection Logic.....	58
Instrumentation.....	60
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	62
Sources of data	62
Data collection.....	63
Frequency of Data Collection Events.....	63
Duration of Data Collection Events	63
How Data Was Recorded.....	64
Data Analysis Plan	64
Connection of Data to a Specific Research Question.....	64
Type of and Procedure for Coding.....	65
Software Used for Analysis0	66
Manner of Treatment of Discrepant Cases	67
Issues of Trustworthiness	67
Credibility	67
Obtaining Saturation.....	68
Transferability.....	68

Dependability	69
Confirmability	69
Ethical Procedures	70
Summary	71
Chapter 4: Results	72
Introduction	72
Research Setting	72
Demographics	73
Data Collection	74
Data Analysis	76
Organizing	77
Immersion of the Data	77
Themes and Patterns	78
Data Analysis Summary	79
Evidence of Trustworthiness	79
Credibility	80
Transferability	81
Dependability	81
Confirmability	82
Study Results	82
Research Question	83
Major Themes	83

Emergent Theme 1: Clear Expectations About What Was Being Asked of Their Role.....	83
Emergent Theme 2: Being Remote Did Not Impact Peer-to-Peer Relationship.....	85
Emergent Theme 3: Times of the Day Experiencing Isolation.....	87
Emergent Theme 5: Events That Cause Workplace Isolation	88
Emergent Theme 4: Events Taken Place to Experiencing Isolation	90
Emergent Theme 6: Influenced Performance	91
Emergent Theme 7: Discussing Workplace Isolation with Manager	93
Emergent Theme 8: Training Materials.....	94
Summary.....	95
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	97
Introduction.....	97
Interpretation of Findings	98
Research Question	98
Emergent Theme 1: Events Taken Place to Experiencing Isolation	98
Emergent Theme 2: Being Remote did not Impact Peer-to-Peer Relationships	99
Emergent Theme 3: Times of the Day Experiencing Isolation.....	100
Emergent Theme 4: Clear Expectations About What was Being Asked of Their Role.....	102
Emergent Theme 5: Workplace Isolation Influencing Performance.....	103

Emergent Theme 6: Events That Cause Workplace Isolation	104
Emergent Theme 7: Discussing with manager.....	105
Emergent Theme 8: Training Materials.....	105
Limitations of the Study	106
Recommendations	107
Recommendation 1: Increase Communication	108
Recommendation 2: Connection to Remote Teams	108
Recommendation 3: Develop and Enforce Policy	109
Recommendation 4: Promote Awareness	109
Recommendation 5: Improve Training Materials and Delivery	110
Implications	111
Implications for Social Change.....	111
Implications for Theory	112
Implication for Practice	112
Conclusions.....	113
References	114
Appendix	125

List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review Databases and Key Terms.....	21
Table 2. Participants Gender	72
Table 3. Interview Question 1 Data	83
Table 4. Interview Question 2 Data	85
Table 5. Interview Question 4 Data	86
Table 6. Interview Question 5 Data	87
Table 7. Interview Question 6 Data	89
Table 8. Interview Question 7 Data	90
Table 9. Interview Question 9 Data	91
Table 10. Review of Training Materials Provided to all Four Divisions	92

List of Figures

Figure 1. Concept map of multiple concepts included in this literature review.....	18
Figure 2. Construct of individual differences.....	26
Figure 3. The big five personality traits.....	43

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Remote working is a strategy whereby an organization's employees work off-site. When working remotely, the employees can experience workplace isolation that could disengage them from their work and ultimately disrupt their performance and well-being (Collins, Hislop, & Cartwright, 2016; Marshall et al., 2007). Environmental surroundings, such as office space and other aesthetics in an office, can influence the performance of a remote worker, and physical and mental aspects of working remotely may help or hinder a remote employee's performance (Choi, 2017).

In this qualitative, exploratory, case study, I focused on remote employee workplace isolation. The purpose of this study was to gain a common understanding about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. The insights gained through this study may influence strategies and policies that could provide managers and leaders with information on how a remote employee who has experienced workplace isolation is impacted both mentally and physically. With certain changes made by managers and leaders, the social aspect of a remote worker's experience could change, which may benefit their career as well as their health while in this remote position.

Background of the Study

Employees can experience workplace isolation when working remotely (Marshall et al., 2007). Current academic literature about remote working has been published about how manager and employee personality differences, working conditions, the influence of

well-being when working remotely, and autonomy can impact performance (Orhan, Rijsman, & Van Dijk, 2016). Previous research has provided findings about the implications of workplace isolation on remote workers' performance (Dolan, 2011).

In this study, the performance of a remote worker was considered the measurement of three dimensions: (a) individual tasks behaviors, (b) team member behaviors, and (c) the behavior of the remote employee as perceived individuals in the organization. Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) explained that the theory of planned behavior aspects known as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control are contributors to the intention of behavior change. Applying this theory to the topic at hand, this means that if a remote worker fails to have a progressive mindset and has an environment that does not allow them to thrive and perceive that they can excel, the remote employee will have a decline in their performance. In their study on remote working performance among salespeople and supervisors, Mulki and Jaramillo (2011) found that as remote workers became more isolated from their peers and manager, their performance and satisfaction about their job decreased.

Another aspect of how workplace isolation can influence a remote worker's performance is through the well-being of the employee. When exploring factors of well-being as a remote worker, the notion of emotional experiences may be considered. Furthermore, scholars have investigated the emotional dimension of positive behaviors and found that remote workers report a more positive affective well-being than a negative affective well-being on the days of working remotely (Anderson et al., 2014). Health indicators, such as obesity, depression, stress, tobacco use, alcohol abuse, poor nutrition,

and physical inactivity, may be experienced by workers when working remotely (Henke et al., 2015). These indicators have been observed through a longitudinal study of remote workers determined that working remotely can yield health risks, and one indicator was the intensity of working remotely (Henke et al., 2015). In sum, the more an employee works remotely, the higher the risk of the discussed symptoms (Henke et al., 2015). Henke et al. (2015) found that employees who worked greater than 8 hours per month were significantly less likely than those who worked in an office to experience depression. In contrast, Solis (2017) reported that employees who did not work remotely were at greater risk for obesity, alcohol abuse, tobacco abuse, and physical inactivity.

The results of these types of studies provide context to managers and leaders as to what the impact can be on remote workers when working remotely. In this study, I explored literature related to remote employees who have experienced workplace isolation or are currently experiencing workplace isolation and how this may impact their performance. With findings from this type of qualitative research, managers and leaders may begin to gain new insights into remote working and start implementing changes to improve their employees' working conditions and well-being.

Problem Statement

The general problem was that corporate managers who lead teams with remote employees may not have the management acumen, organizational awareness, or leadership expertise to construct and implement strategies, policies, and procedures to help reduce workplace isolation (see Day & Burbach, 2015). Workplace isolation is a situation when a remote worker experiences the belief of being ignored, which could

influence their performance and overall well-being, increase loneliness, and may lead to social and emotional deficiencies (see Marshall et al., 2007). Basile and Beauregard (2016) studied ways to create successful remote working boundaries between work and home and found an implication between setting boundaries between the remote worker's autonomy and control over experiencing isolation. Boundaries such as strategies to stay connected to peers and their manager. Studies like Basile and Beauregard's continue to provide literature for managers, leaders, and practitioners that may only produce insights into workplace isolation and not the affect it has on a remote worker's job performance.

The specific problem of workplace isolation was that when this situation occurs, remote workers may experience a decrease in their performance on the job. In the United States, 43% of employees work remotely (Gallup, 2017). Literature about remote working has associated isolation with the volume of work the employee has as their level of responsibility will influence the risk of employee isolating themselves to get their work completed. Duxbury and Halinski (2014) hypothesized that the relationship between hours per week required to meet their job demands and stress would be moderated by the number of hours the remote worker would spend in an isolated state. The survey data these researchers collected from 1,806 male and female professionals provided evidence that autonomy to get their work done was more critical to the employee than being able to work from home in an isolated location.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to gain a common understanding about how workplace isolation may influence a remote

employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. In semistructured interviews, I asked open-ended questions of a sample of 21 remote workers, that worked in four different divisions in the company, who were in customer service roles to gain an in-depth understanding of the influence workplace isolation had on their performance. The four divisions within the organization each provided more than four employees from the sectors of business development, software engineer, talent development, and product management. To achieve a multiple case study perspective, each of the four groups of remote workers was considered as its own case study. Then I combined the aggregate data for reporting the common understandings and themes generated from all of the interviews.

Qualitative data from the interviews provided me with the situations and lived experiences of the participants to be synthesized and discussed as results to adequately describe their thoughts and beliefs of being isolated and how workplace isolation can diminish job performance. I also sought other sources of data from the organization's recorded artifacts (see Marshall & Rossman, 2016). These recorded artifacts were policies, procedures, and other documentation that represented two specific items related to a remote workers performance: (a) any documentation that pertained to how the performance of a remote worker was evaluated and (b) any workplace policies or strategies for managing a remote worker.

Research Question

What are the common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this case study was grounded in the social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976). Social exchange theory is dependent on a two-sided, mutually dependent, and mutually gratifying exchange involving communication of some sort or simply a conversation (Emerson, 1976). According to Emerson's (1976) theory, a social exchange would need to occur between remote workers and their employing organization to preserve a remote employee from experiencing workplace isolation. This conceptual framework allowed me to link the qualities of social exchange between a remote worker and in-office worker that is absent in workplace isolation. Emerson's social exchange theory also supports the missing human needs of an individual who is experiencing workplace isolation. Researchers have applied adaptations of Emerson's social exchange theory in studies related to workplace isolation that helped managers learn successful management strategies to work with remote workers (Greer & Payne, 2014; Shankar et al., 2017). Greer and Payne (2014) explained that the more technology is used, the more supervisors are accessible, and the more employees communicate, the more the risk of overcoming remote working challenges will be avoided. Emerson's theory provided the context for grounding this study with the idea of the missing elements of human interaction, known as the social aspect of remote working.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I employed a qualitative research method. According to Yin (2018), qualitative studies focus on an individual as the sample of interest. In this study, the sample included multiple interviews of individuals in groups in which each individual served a different function in the same organization and had experienced workplace isolation as a remote employee. The qualitative research method was appropriate for studying workplace isolation occurring among remote employees based on the need for their thoughts, beliefs, and meanings for improving remote working and overall consistency in remote working performance to address the research question.

A quantitative research method would have been able to provide a conclusion that the problem of workplace isolation exists and determine what variables are objective when studying this situation (see Patton, 2016). I did not choose this method because quantitative research does not allow flexibility within the interview process. In a mixed-method study, the focus is on the lived phenomenon as a quantitative measurement and understanding the perspective of the phenomenon as a qualitative measurement (Patton, 2016). I did not choose a mixed method design because of the discrepancies between each data type.

Keeping the focus on how remote workers are missing the elements of social exchange theory may provide context to epistemological expectations of human needs as a remote worker (see Emerson, 1976). According to Englander (2018), case studies cannot be used to develop or refine a theory; instead, a multiple-case study experiment can give rise to research that provides new insights and potentially applies to new cases

studies in the future. A case study design was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to focus on workplace isolation within the framework of social exchange theory. The results of this qualitative analysis will build on the literature related to workplace isolation and advance the thinking in the practice of management.

Grounded theory research provides context from data by the participants involved in the study (Johnson, 2014). A grounded theory was not the appropriate design for this study because I was not attempting to ground the method with the results of this study. Phenomenological researchers seek to provide the experiences of an event or concept through the study of multiple participants (Englander, 2018). A phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because I wanted to arrive at a common understanding amongst participants and artifacts in the study to be able to contest the results.

Definitions

Flexible working: An option provided by the organization to allow the employee to determine their schedule and place of getting work completed (Bentley et al., 2016).

In-office worker: An employee with a dedicated workstation at a company location where he or she completes the demands of their job (Groen, Triest, Coers, & Wtenweerde, 2018).

Performance: A process that contributes to individuals and teams to achieve tasks associated with the job description (Solis, 2017).

Remote worker: An employee who works at home or somewhere other than a permanent desk in an office provided by the company (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015).

Remote working: Work that is completed outside the employee's organizational office and using various technologies to communicate with colleagues and customers. Remote working is also known as telework, telecommuting, anywhere work, and virtual work (Collins et al., 2016).

Remote office: A location where an employee completes their job responsibilities (Allen et al., 2015).

Social exchange theory: A two-sided, mutually dependent, and mutually gratifying social exchange between two individuals (Emerson, 1976).

Well-being: The universal factors that contribute to the thriving status of an individual. Included are aspects of career, social, financial, physical, and community well-being (Rath & Harter, 2014).

Workplace isolation: The physical, mental, and emotion absence of an employee in an organization (Marshall et al., 2007; Orhan et al., 2016).

Assumptions

To ensure an argument of relevance and value, I made four assumptions. The first assumption was that every employee who works remotely being interviewed had experienced workplace isolation. This assumption of workplace isolation was critical to the study because the remote employees that were interviewed answered questions that helped describe their belief of workplace isolation and the influence it may have on their performance.

The second assumption was that the sample group of remote employees will have, had in the past, or were currently working remotely, providing validity to the qualitative

data when summarizing the responses in the analysis discussion. The third assumption was that the participants being interviewed had a level of cognition and memory recall about their beliefs about workplace isolation and would be able to answer questions related to their performance. The fourth assumption was that the participants of this study answered the questions with honesty and clarity.

Concerns of legitimacy, human bias and error, and accurate documentation of the data and beliefs led me to put particular strategies into place to limit any issues caused by these assumptions. To address any ethical concerns from the participants, in the interviews I told them of the responsibility I had to ensure their anonymity. To further respect ethics, scholarly documentation to maintain the confidentiality of information from the sample organization was obtained and completed. I assumed the reasonability to provide objectivity and truthfulness as a fundamental in this qualitative study. In this study, I assumed the participants' perceptions and beliefs given in the interviews were accurate and truthful. To limit my bias and perception variance, I ensured the participants met the needs of this study through the objectives described when soliciting participants from the sampling organization.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are considered to be the procedural weaknesses of the study (Englander, 2018). One limitation of this study was the sample size for an exploratory case study. Case studies will typically focus on an individual person as the case (Yin, 2018). Due to the nature of workplace isolation, I used multiple individuals as the case to ensure saturation was achieved in the analysis. Authentic and thoughtful descriptions in

the participants' answers to the interview questions helped me achieve the point of saturation. The process of theme analysis across all the participant answers about experiencing workplace isolation helped the transferability of possible new knowledge.

The dependability of the results of this study were limited to the participants' willingness, authenticity, and ability to recall the belief of workplace isolation. Respondents may not have been able to recall, been willing to share, or had details that would relate to the research question. To limit the possibility of respondents not being willing to share explicit details, I provided them with the reassurance of anonymity and used objective interview questions.

The data collected from this study could provide managers, leaders, and practitioners with an understanding of how workplace isolation may impede a remote worker's performance in customer service positions. Furthermore, the findings should give future scholars insights from which to explore workplace isolation in other types of quantitative and qualitative research with the goal of developing assertions, constructs, and theories that positively impact remote workers globally.

Scope and Delimitations

When leaders and managers fail to implement policies and strategies to help mitigate remote worker workplace isolation, they risk decreased employee productivity. Workplace isolation was the scope of this study due to the potential impact it has on remote workers as a condition that impedes an employee's performance (see Anderson et al., 2014). The results of this study may provide analytical generalizable data that could

cross into different industries because workplace isolation is not limited to remote working.

In this study, the distinguishing factors that differentiated remote workers and in-office workers were those who work remotely and those with designated corporate location. For this reason, the population for this study was remote workers who predominantly worked remotely and had experienced workplace isolation. Meaning, these remote employees' responsibilities of the position were completed in a setting away from their organization's facilities, and they had a belief of being isolated that impacted their job performance. The remote employee participants in this study were employees, managers, or leaders because workplace isolation may impact any position within a hierarchy. Employees who work in-office or have a flexible working schedule were excluded from this study to help provide validity to the results. The purpose of this study was to gain a common understanding about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States.

According to Yin (2018), a researcher using a qualitative exploratory study should investigate up to 25 respondents to reach the point of saturation. I designed the semistructured interview questions to evoke participants' free expression and beliefs about workplace isolation as a remote worker. These types of qualitative exploratory questions helped facilitate authentic responses from the participants and may have increased the likelihood of transferability when analyzing their responses. These questions also assisted in the process of reducing my bias to inappropriately shaping the interpretation of participants' responses.

The delimitations of this study included the boundaries within the organization as a remote worker and the belief a remote worker has about workplace isolation. Patton (2016) suggested that the boundaries address how the study was narrowed in scope and discuss why certain aspects of the study were not the focus. By narrowing the scope and focus of the study, it allowed for further analysis that contributed to addressing the central research question.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study provide knowledge and information about workplace isolation for managers who manage remote employees, leaders, and practitioners who seek further knowledge. The purpose of this study was to explore the aspects of workplace isolation with a qualitative approach to gather the thoughts and beliefs of remote workers about their experiences with workplace isolation and the impact it has on their job performance. The results of this study may advance the discussion of workplace isolation in the field while contributing to the academic literature about remote management and managers who lead teams of remote workers.

Significance to Practice

The results of this exploratory case study may have immediate application to leaders and managers of their remote workforce. With 43% of the U.S. working population working remotely, leaders and managers may be able to use the results of this study when creating remote working policies and strategies (see Gallup, 2017). Remote working is a significant benefit to those employees who need the ability to flex their time to achieve a work and life balance while still contributing to the success of an

organization (Allen et al., 2015). With an understanding of how workplace isolation may impact a remote worker's job performance and the constraints it creates for remote workers, managers and leaders can begin to mitigate this issue.

Significance to Theory

With working remotely on the rise, of the results of this study of workplace isolation may contribute to other scholars' work and academic literature through an understanding of how it may impact a remote worker's performance, which could, in turn, influence organizational policies and procedures. From this exploration of the impact of workplace isolation and whether it impedes a remote worker's job performance, others could learn how to organize a remote worker's space and place of work in a way that would limit or reduce their belief of workplace isolation. Workplace isolation as a theory and metric does not delve into the thoughts and beliefs of those who are isolated (Luhmann, Schonbrodt, Hawkley, & Cacioppo, 2014).

Significance to Social Change

The boundaries of this case study were dependent on the time and place when a remote worker is isolated. At the time of this study, 33% of the U.S. working population is psychologically engaged in their work (Gallup, 2017). Among workers worldwide, this number drops to 15% (Gallup, 2018). With the results of this study, practitioners and scholars could provide management with information that could increase employee engagement levels (see Bartel, Wrzesniewski, & Wiesenfeld, 2012). As proven in academic literature, employee engagement has a direct correlation to job performance (Bartel et al., 2012). The positive social change implications of this study would be more

engaged employees, who perform at or above standards for their job and possesses a positive well-being.

Summary and Transition

In Chapter 1, I aligned the problem statement and purpose statement with the research question and conceptual framework of this study. The unit of analysis, as indicated in the problem statement, was customer service remote employees in the United States. The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to gain a common understanding about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. Exploration of workplace isolation may provide insights into remote worker performance, the construct of isolation, and the impact of how understanding more about workplace isolation could influence a positive social change in society. Workplace isolation may apply to all positions, leaders, and managers in organizations and industries where employees work remotely. One step in the development of potential policies and strategies I took was to explore the beliefs of remote workers who had experienced workplace isolation. While scholars have studied the role of a remote worker, leadership styles that fit remote workers, and even made correlations as to what personalities would fit best in a remote worker, a gap in research existed about remote workers beliefs of workplace isolation and how it may impact their performance.

Chapter 2 consists of a review of literature particular to this study, specifically on how the conceptual framework provides context for analyzing the data from the interviews with remote workers. In this chapter, I review and analyze the extant literature

about how workplace isolation may impact a remote worker's performance in a customer service role. I also identify the related gap in the literature that supports the need for this study and discuss current literature on remote working.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The specific problem that I addressed in this literature review was workplace isolation. Managers and organizations may not have the acumen, organizational awareness, or leadership expertise to construct and implement strategies, policies, and procedures that reduce the frequency of workplace isolation or that help remote workers who feel isolated (Day & Burbach, 2015). According to Dolan (2011), if a manager or leader does not intervene with the employee during a time of perceived isolation, the employee's motivation on the job may decrease and result in a lack of performance. The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to gain a common understanding about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States and discover the thematic results from interviews with remote workers and artifacts related to the organization's remote working strategy. With the results of this study, I aim to provide the groundwork for additional theory development about workplace isolation.

Chapter 2 consists of a review of the literature search strategy; a description of the conceptual framework of this study; and a thorough review of the existing literature, both qualitative and quantitative research, about the phenomenon of workplace isolation as a remote employee. The strategy used for my literature search was to obtain peer-reviewed articles, relevant books on the subject of remote working, and other scholarly articles that provided evidence specific to workplace isolation and remote working. In the section dedicated to the conceptual framework, I provide the rationale for this framework and

explain how this framework guided my logic when analyzing the data in this study. In this chapter, I also provide a review of the existing research, articles, and related scholarly work critical to providing context, insights, and knowledge related to remote working and workplace isolation.

Literature Search Strategy

To better understand workplace isolation and its influence on an employee's performance, I reviewed the extant literature in the field. I also reviewed current books, produced at higher education facilities, that were relevant to remote working. Reviewing this literature created the foundation of knowledge about remote working, workplace isolation, and job performance necessary to conduct this study. Therefore, the results from this exploratory, multiple case study may contribute to the existing literature about remote working and workplace isolation and bridge the gap as to how workplace isolation may influence a remote worker's performance.

The reviewed literature in this chapter relates to the research problem and phenomenon known as workplace isolation. The conceptual map in Figure 1 aids in understanding the logic of my search criteria. These concepts include *workplace isolation*, *performance*, *well-being*, and *remote working*. The keyword search terms included *telework*, *isolation*, *loneliness*, *remote work*, *virtual work*, and *experience of remote working*. The terms I searched when reviewing the conceptual framework were *qualitative studies isolation*, *social exchange theory*, *telework isolation*, *physical isolation*, *mental isolation*, and *social isolation*. For this study, I reviewed peer-reviewed articles, meta-analyses, and case studies that used a qualitative or quantitative method to

explore the experience of remote working or workplace isolation. Each article that was used underwent a review with specific criteria to meet applicability to the study.

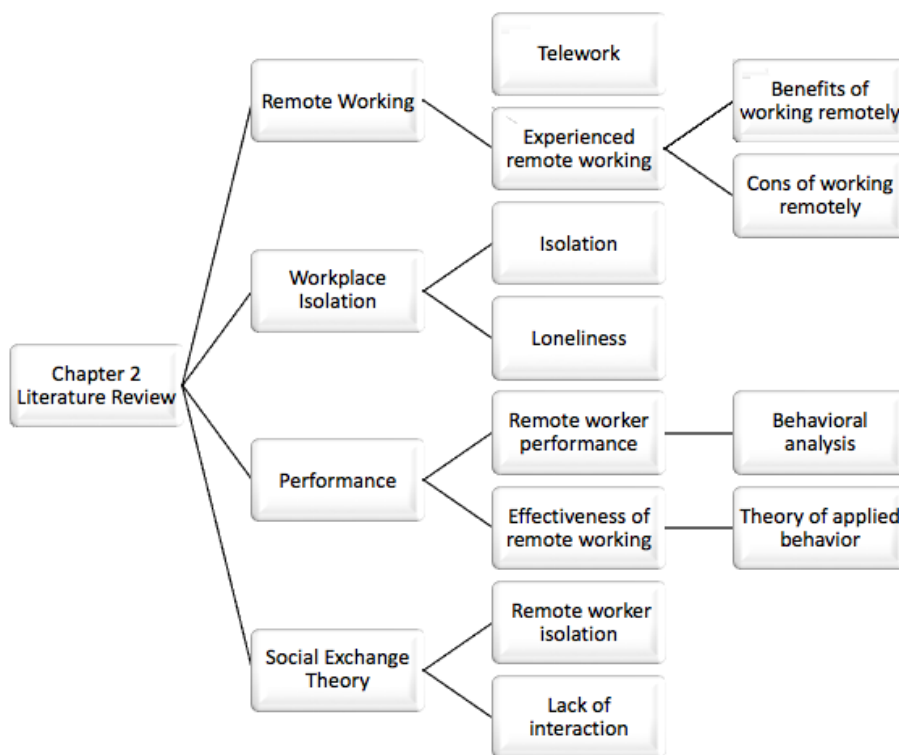


Figure 1. Concept map of multiple concepts included in this literature review.

I accessed the databases used in this literature review through the Walden University Library. EBSCO Host provided me with the ability to search in multiple databases, such as ABI/INFROM Collection for international articles, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, SAGE Journals, and ScienceDirect. A check against Ulrich's database in Walden University Library provided evidence of whether the journal was peer reviewed or not. Through this strategy, I eliminated articles that had not been peer reviewed, even if they had been identified as such through EBSCO Host. The scholarly books that were used in this study contributed to the development of background

information used as justification for this research as well as that of the conceptual framework, research method, design, and methodology.

Table 1

Summary of Literature Review Databases and Key Terms

Content	Category of literature	Database	Key terms
Remote worker	Peer-reviewed journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABI/INFROM Collection • Business Source Complete • Emerald Insight • SAGE Journals • ScienceDirect • Wiley 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote worker • Telework • Distant worker • Telecommuter • Remote employee
Well-being	Peer-reviewed journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABI/INFROM Collection • Business Source Complete • Emerald Insight • SAGE Journals • ScienceDirect • Wiley 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-being • Remote worker well-being • Social impact • Emotional impact • Qualitative research
Performance	Peer-reviewed journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABI/INFROM Collection • Business Source Complete • Emerald Insight • SAGE Journals • ScienceDirect • Wiley 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance • Human performance • Remote worker performance • Remote working performance management
Dissertation design, method, and methodology	Peer-reviewed journals and books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABI/INFROM Collection • Business Source Complete • Emerald Insight • SAGE Journals • ScienceDirect • Wiley • Amazon • Harvard Business Publishing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study • Phenomenological • Experience • Workplace isolation

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this case study was grounded in social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976). For the conceptual framework of this study, I relied on the definition of the framework and an understanding of how the framework applies to workplace isolation. Frameworks may have different meanings that are determined by the researcher. Some researchers see the conceptual framework as the key theoretical belief that is comprised of an exhaustive literature review, and others believe that this framework is equal to a theoretical framework (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Other scholars argue that the purpose of a conceptual framework is to provide alignment to the study and ensure that a structure is in place that others can relate to as the study is discussed (Bentley et al., 2016).

In this study, the primary concept was workplace isolation, which explores the belief of being absent when working remotely (Marshall et al., 2007). By first discussing the concept of workplace isolation, I can provide justification for why the conceptual framework of social exchange theory was used. This conceptual framework links the qualities of the social exchange theory that related specifically to this study, which are absent in workplace isolation and needed to benefit remote employees. Social exchange theory focuses on a two-sided, mutually dependent, and mutually gratifying exchange involving a communication of some sort, including something as seemingly simple as a conversation (Emerson, 1976). The social exchange theory provided context and insights for this study concerning the missing needs of an individual who is experiencing workplace isolation.

Literature Review

The concepts of remote working, job performance, and workplace isolation were the core constructs of this study. When exploring these three core constructs, I determined that researchers and those in the role of managing people are seeking knowledge as to what the right balance of working remotely would be for remote workers to be successful and engaged, even without being physically present in the organizational culture or with their manager and other employees. The right balance is an argument of fit between the employee's performance and how successful the organization is performing based on quantitative metrics (Peters, Ligthart, Bardoel, & Poutsma, 2016). The remote worker contributes to the success of the organization while not in a physical office location, and the results can be quantified. With an understanding and implementation of the right balance, remote workers contribute more extended hours than in-office workers and are more engaged than those who work in an office setting (Gallup, 2017). Organizational leaders and managers continue to struggle with determining what the right balance is and how organizations can craft policies and strategies to ensure their remote workforce is set up for success.

When determining the right balance of remote working is left up to the remote worker, the employee begins to view their new office surroundings as an in-office setting in which they create physical, behavioral, and communicative strategies to establish boundaries as found in a typical office building (Basile & Beauregard, 2016). While the aesthetics of an office surrounding may influence the thoughts and feelings of a remote worker (Basile & Beauregard, 2016), the right balance takes more the aesthetics of what

is physically around a remote worker, and with the right balance comes the benefits to both the employee and employer. What continues to be a research topic in remote working is how to evaluate and quantify the right balance for each employee and how it aligns with the job demands of the role.

Historical Overview

In 1973, Jack Nilles, an engineer and physicist developed a strategy of being able to work away from the office as he was designing space vehicles and communication systems for National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the U.S. Air Force (Belanger, 1999). Ever since, this idea of working away from the office has evolved into what is referred to as remote working. The common phrase of working from home has connotations, both positive and negative, and it may not always be accurate regarding the location of where people are working. Remote work, however, includes the assumption that the work is being completed in a different location than a centralized workspace for all employees; however, the stigma of a home office does not predict items such performance and engagement (CITE).

Researchers have tended to focus their studies on remote workers about how the remote workers interact with their team members and how they accomplish work. Evidence in one study pointed at the need for more face-to-face interactions to enhance the remote worker's performance as the employees work more remotely (Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008). Golden et al. (2008) explored pieces of evidence that link to why the exchange of human interaction is required in a remote worker's day-to-day employment.

What researchers have found that there are moments in a remote worker's career that that could be captured as their engagement in the work they do. This notion of engagement was examined further by Gerards, Grip, and Baudewijns (2018) who studied the effects of and strategies for sustaining employee engagement while working remotely. They found how organization's that use remote working can maximize the impact of performance along with their remote workers' performance. The authors also discussed that social interaction was a requirement of remote workers' daily routine to foster an environment of engagement, which may correlate with performance.

Another aspect of remote working that scholars have examined has been the notion of advancement in the role or career as a remote worker. Prior research has contributed to this notion but more specifically to salary and not growth in the remote worker's career (Golden, Eddleston, & Powell, 2017). In Golden et al.'s (2017) study of 461 employees over 6 years, it was determined the mix of remote workers and in-office workers had an inconsistency in pay, but not growth in the role. The only benefit was the ability to work remotely. According to Golden et al., discussed the findings which were the benefit or ability to work remotely, others such as He and Hu (2015) explored how working remotely has an impact on income and out-of-home activities. The authors analysis of their results, from approximately 7,500 workers from the 2007 Chicago Regional Household Travel Inventory, indicates that the behavioral difference between remote workers and non-remote workers was their time and money saved while working from home and not commuting to the office.

While the role of a remote worker has been explored by scholars, the well-being of a remote employee is just as critical for review in understanding all literature related to remote working. Other aspects of remote workers in this literature review are topics such as well-being, benefits and draw backs, and the on the job performance as a remote worker. Each one of these topics are critical to understanding all components of literature in this review and how these topics relate to this qualitative research study.

Remote Worker Isolation

The search for a conceptual framework in this study began with the concept of workplace isolation as a concept which can be explored, identified, and influence leaders and managers to be able to create policies and strategies within their organization to help mitigate the effects with their remote employees. An exhaustive review of workplace isolation yielded the results that workplace isolation is comprised of two different sectors which are comprised of the absence of emotional and physical presence (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015). Scholars have researched that workplace isolation first should be viewed as an affect of loneliness (Gozukara, Mercanlı, Çapuk, & Yıldırım, 2017). In 1978 at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the UCLA Loneliness Scale was developed to measure if a person was experiencing loneliness. The creation of the UCLA Loneliness Scale provided an instrument to help measure and quantify the phenomenon of loneliness.

Adaptations of the UCLA Loneliness Scale progressed as scholars sought after more knowledge and further gaps in literature widened with varied opinions in qualitative and quantitative research (Shankar, Mcmunn, Demakakos, Hamer, & Steptoe, 2017).

Such scholars were seeking knowledge as to the affect's loneliness has on an individual. In 2007, scholars then advanced the knowledge about loneliness and directed their attention to the role of remote workers by creating a way to measure and evaluate when an employee is feeling isolated both from their company and colleagues (Marshall et al., 2007). At this time in 2007, workplace isolation was considered a construct and metric being introduced into academics to further the investigation of how workplace isolation impacts all facets of employees. Workplace isolation provided the primary concept for this study and further offered an opportunity to explore the belief with remote employees who have experienced the phenomenon of workplace isolation.

Social Exchange Theory

The physical absence of the employee limits the ability to connect with other employees and presents the challenge of staying connected, and the feeling of their job provides importance to the organization (Onken-Menke, Nuesch, & Kroll, 2017). Leaders and managers need to consider the physical distance of their employees may impede their remote worker's performance and engagement.

The exchange between two employees must be mutually contingent and rewarding and a process whereby an exchange or a transaction takes place. In this study, the exchange would be considered to occur between remote workers and their colleagues or organization (Emerson, 1976). Social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) provides the linkage between workplace isolation and the belief of an isolated remote worker. The main factor to social exchange theory is the principle of reciprocity. Meaning, that one party may benefit from another, and then the receiving party returns the favor. Social

exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) may provide a theory for managers, leaders, and organizations to utilize in building policies and strategies that would provide a social change for remote workers and better their working experience. This experience would, in turn, provide an opportunity for better performance and engagement.

Remote Worker Well-Being

The well-being of an employee underpins the importance of their career, social life, financial, physical, and how their sense of engagement is within their community (Rath & Harter, 2014). These five elements of well-being have been studied in various ways throughout the current academic research about remote workers. Anderson, Kaplan, and Vega (2014) explored the impact to a remote workers well-being when studying the emotional experience of a remote employee. The sample in the study was 102 employees from a U.S. government agency which provided enough data to saturate their hypothesis of understanding the emotional experience of a remote worker. In the pursuit of exploring the emotional experience of a remote worker was a construct of individual differences was determined.

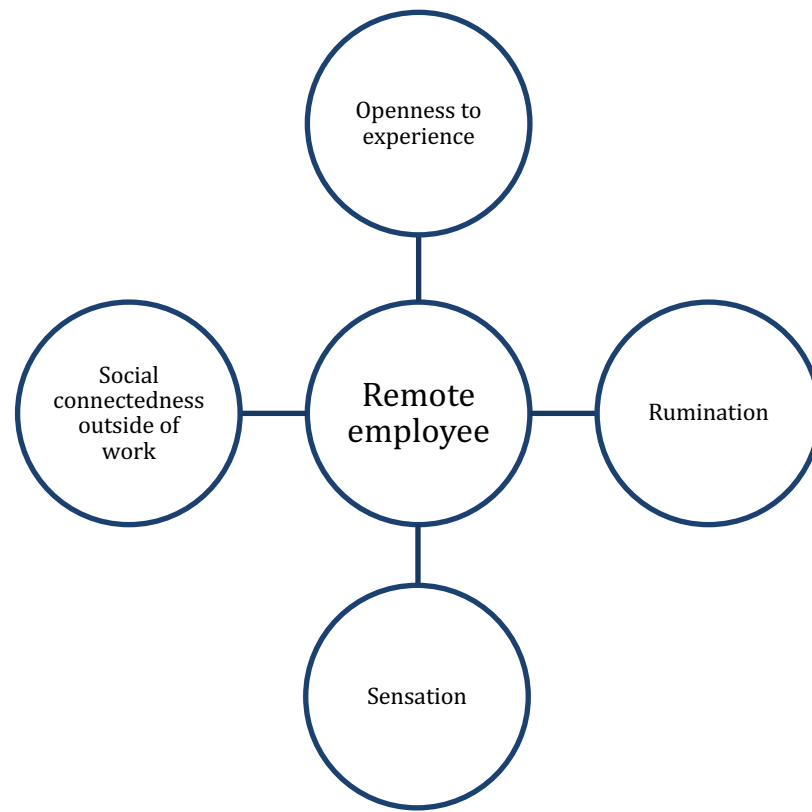


Figure 2. Construct of individual differences. Adapted from “The Impact of Telework on Emotional Experience: When, and For Whom, Does Telework Improve Daily Affective Well-Being?” by A. J. Anderson, S. A. Kaplan, & R. P. Vega, 2014, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 24(6), 882-897.

These four differences are explained in the study as cross-level moderators when examining the well-being of a remote employee. The four outer aspects in Figure 2 are the social connectedness outside of work. The social aspect can be contributed to the conceptual framework of this study as the missing attribute to being less or non-isolated when working remotely. In another study of 804 remote workers in New Zealand, scholars examined the organization’s responsibility to support their remote workers as a way to influence their well-being (Bentley et al., 2016). In this study (Bentley et al., 2016) a survey was conducted to explore perceptions of psychological strain, job

satisfaction, and social isolation, and what was determined is all these factors are a contributor to a remote worker's well-being. What is consistent amongst these studies is the factor of how social presence is a requirement to influence the remote worker's well-being. The social aspect is pertinent to this study as the central construct of workplace isolation includes the facets of when a remote worker does not have a social presence.

Apart from a remote worker's well-being is what is considered to be a benefit to both the employee and employer. Remote working literature often defends either the ability to work remotely or the deficiencies as to why organizational leaders should not allow remote working (Belanger, 1999). In the following paragraphs, a thorough review of literature related to employee and employer benefits and drawbacks is explored.

Employer Benefits and Drawbacks

Organizations have made dramatic changes to the balance of remote workers by implanting and change policies and procedures to their flexible working environment. First, an in-depth examination of those organizations that have decided to recall their remote workforce companies such as a Yahoo, Reddit, Bank of America, Aetna, and most recently in 2017 IBM. These organizations contribute their reasoning to recall their remote workers with contrast to collaboration or another aspect of performance related to the employee being located in a physical office. What is discussed further is the evidence by scholars that examined these reasonings.

Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer discussed her reasoning and explained in an interview her point of view that "People are more productive when they're alone...but they're more collaborative and innovative when they're together. Some of the best ideas

come from pulling two different ideas together” (Tkaczyk, 2013, p. 1). While Meyer has a compelling argument based on the psychological absence, scholars such as Karia and Asaari (2016) developed a framework that argues innovation can still exist with remote workers, and what separates the organizations who are successful and those who are not links to the firm’s technology resources. This argument of how technology could aid collaboration was examined further in research that explored both positive and negative in regards to remote workers. What was determined is platforms such as Twitter, Skype, Facebook, and LinkedIn are all becoming factors that limit the feeling of isolation and are allowing for collaboration to take place (Holland & Bardoel, 2016). With findings such as Holland and Bardoel (2016), the rhetoric of remote workers not being able to collaborate has disrupted this logic.

In the case of IBM recalling 386,000 remote workers, 40% of their workforce, the leaders of the company decided that after 20 quarters of losses to create more serendipitous ideas employees needed to be in the same building. The concept of ideas and collaboration among workers comes at a time when open workspace concepts are growing and being used as the solution to collaboration. Leaders, who often have an office door, assume with an open workspace concept that employee collaboration will take place (Bernstein & Turban, 2018). In the example of Yahoo and IBM, the leaders hoped employees would have a causal collision in these workspaces which would create the next widget that yields revenue.

What scholars have begun to study and understand is the effects of what happens when putting employees in the same location with no walls to create collaboration and

innovative ideas, it is creating the opposite effect. In one quasi-field experiment conducted at a global headquarters with open office workstations, the study determined approximately 70% less of face-to-face meetings, and the employees were socially withdrawn from peers and other partners within the business (Bernstein & Turban, 2018). In a second study by the same company, Bernstein and Turban (2018) uncovered a decrease in emails, up to 50%, took place when an open workplace was used. Meaning, face-to-face and email communications were in a decline and the new workspace was not conducive to a collaboration workplace. Both IBM and Yahoo are examples of when leaders decide to alter the current remote working policy to create collaboration, but what is yet to be discussed are the benefits to the employer which may have persuaded the leaders who are making the decisions.

Bank of America executives publicly stated their work from home program called My Work, which allowed employees to work remotely and flex their work schedule, would be dissolving due to bringing employees together in the same place to allow collaboration. Although the notion of collaboration is assumed to be most effective in-person, the evidence of other scholars suggests in the banking industry lack in the ability to collaborate because they are too focused on the competition (Nienaber, 2016). Aetna, an American managed health care industry, also joined other leaders in the claim of collaboration as the reason to recall their remote workers (Lee, 2016). Reddit executives did not claim collaboration as the reason, but rather a pseudo version of the term collaboration when former Reddit CEO Yishan Wong stated in an interview there were too many times employees needed to be able to walk across the hallway to discuss

something with them (Anders, 2014). These five companies all claimed factors of the lack of collaboration as the reason remote working was no longer useful in their organizations; further, the thought of seeing individuals face-to-face would create the environment of collaboration and contribute to the success of the organization. While there are many benefits and drawbacks to the employee and employer, another metric which is evaluated is called the triple bottom line as well as employee engagement. In the current study, the triple bottom line is discussed as aspects of people, profit, and planet. In the following paragraph a further review in literature about this metric as it relates to remote working is presented.

Remote Worker Benefits and Drawbacks

At a time when the millennial generation is the predominant workforce of today's organizations the need of a culture which is unconstrained of previous work styles is what this generation seeks (Gallup, 2017; Vega, Anderson, & Kaplan, 2014). As discussed in the section related to the employer's benefits and drawbacks the same items align with what is attractive to employees. The ability to have autonomy, flexibility, and collaborate all factor virtually into job satisfaction or engagement which influences job performance. Evidence of this assertion was determined by a quantitative study of 180 remote workers in a large U.S. government organization combine of supervisors and nonsupervisors (Vega et al., 2014). The results yield the findings of when working remotely the employees felt a greater sense of job satisfaction in addition to doing better work when working on a creative task; thus, providing empirical evidence a benefit of working remotely.

The one outlier being researched continuously is directed at the well-being of the individual, which is an employee benefit. Well-being is meaning the employees social, psychological, and emotional conditions while working remotely. Drawbacks such as workplace isolation (Marshall et al., 2007) have begun to be a point of the study. One study of a group consisting of sales employees who were experienced workplace isolation determined workplace isolation can affect up to 21% of a decrease in job performance (Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011).

The social aspect of a remote worker's well-being contributes to how well the employee is connected to their peers and how this social aspect affects an employee's home life as well. Recent studies suggest the longer the remote employee works, the more the support of managers needs to take place in ensuring they feel connected socially at work and home (Bentley et al., 2016). Psychological health literature aims at understanding how working from home is either helping or hindering a remote worker's health. Scholars are contributing items such as a decrease in stress from eliminating a daily commute, having greater schedule flexibility, and life control is a benefit to the remote worker's physical health (Tavares, 2017). Even less sickness and impairments have been contributed to being able to work remotely (Tavares, 2017). While factors such as social isolation and lack of interaction with coworkers as begun to be researched as an item which could harm a remote worker's physical health and well-being.

Profit and Engagement

While these leaders planned for the behavior of their remote workers to create collaboration when working in the office, they missed some of the most important

benefits of allowing their employees to work remotely. Starting with the most common benefits for an organization being discussed are items such as a lower carbon footprint, improved productivity, employee engagement, and a balance which allows employees to feel less stressed which deducts cost incurred to companies paying employee healthcare. Even a more significant contributing factor to employers allowing their employees to work from a remote location gives them the ability to reduce the need for real estate and consolidate their office locations.

While some leaders and managers may feel the stress of their employees not being in an office and the impact, this may have on their remote worker, but scholars have studied this impact and the results. Kelliher and Anderson (2009) completed a quantitative study which studied professional workers that worked remotely and found these remote workers had a higher statistical significance to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This study (Kelliher & Anderson, 2009) adds to the literature which remote workers can be in a remote office and still have a commitment to the organization as if they were in an in-office.

Another argument which discusses why organizations may consider remote working is remote employees that work remotely 100% of the time have the same percentage of engagement as those who work none of the time remotely (Gallup, 2017). Engagement has been linked as a contributor to metrics such as customer loyalty, profitability, and has reported responsible for up to 20% of employee's productivity (Harter, Schmidt, Agrawal, & Plowman, 2016). The literature which discusses the benefits and drawbacks link both to items such as collaboration, social interaction, carbon

footprint, and employee engagement. This discussion has described the benefits and drawbacks of remote working in today's workforce, but at the individual level, there are even more.

Other scholars have studied how remote working relates to not only engagement (Gallup, 2017) but also job satisfaction. In another study, scholar Zhang (2016) provided a critical review of changes in employee's work life when shifting to a remote working environment. This study (Zhang, 2016) was reviewed by four perspectives: (a) communication, (b) social relation, (c) achievement recognition, and (d) work-life balance. These four perspectives were what Zhang asserted as a method to evaluate job satisfaction. In their conclusion, Zhang argued that the lack of face-to-face communication, change in social relations, achievement recognition, and work-life balance would significantly predict employee's job satisfaction. As discussed, engagement and job satisfaction contribute to the overall performance of the employee, and in the following paragraph this notion is expanded upon.

Remote Worker Performance

As defined in this study, a remote workers performance is described as a process that contributes to the individual and team which achieves the task associated with a job description (Solis, 2017). The role of a remote worker's performance has many aspects that have been studied by scholars, and particularly as it relates to the volume of work they can complete. Lembrechts, Zanoni, and Verbruggen (2016) completed a mixed-method study that examined the characteristics related to the supervisor's attitude and the impact their attitudes had on the performance of remote workers. This study was

paramount in the discussion about the performance of a remote worker and how the manager's role and attitude contribute to the overall impact of a remote workers performance on the job. This study also presents one of the gaps in academic literature about how quantitative research depicts the problem of remote workers performance, and yet the without a qualitative portion of the study the results would not have yielded the conceptualization of how interdependence, team heterogeneity, and lack of team effort contribute to lowering the performance of a remote worker (Lembrechts et al., 2016).

In another study about workplace isolation and job, performance researchers Ozcelik and Barsade (2018) completed a time-lagged field study of 672 employees and their 114 supervisors in two organizations. The results of this study represent the findings of when a remote employee has the belief of being isolated the greater the impact on the employee's job performance. Further, Ozcelik and Barsade shared in their research that variables such as emotion cultures, companionate love, and anger in the workplace are also items which can influence an employee's belief of isolation as well. This study provides supportive evidence for the importance of recognizing the destructive influence of workplace isolation over both employee and the employee's commitment to their organization.

Job Demands of a Remote Worker

Researchers who are interested in industrial and organizational psychology explain the performance of an employee can be evaluated by way of the employee's job demands (Wingerden, Derks, & Bakker, 2015). Yet, when the job demands of the employee are not clarified with the employee or there is a misalignment as to what the

employee is expected to do the performance evaluation could be considered biased or unfair. When considering the job demands of a remote employee, the demands are often not different than employees who are working an in-office position. The apparent difference is the ability to meet the demands of the job while being to meet face to face with stakeholders and others on the project. This ability to be able to have a social exchange grants access to in-office workers that is different for remote workers, which introduces the complexity of working remotely with the same demands of the job as in-office workers.

To further this discussion about how job demands are used in evaluating performance researchers have tested different frameworks and models to help managers evaluate performance. In one study, the characteristics of job complexity, problem solving, interdependence, and social support were used to help examine the performance of remote workers (Golden & Gajendran, 2018). With a sample of 273, Golden and Gajendran (2018) used data from remote workers and their supervisor to find out that those remote workers who had a low level of interdependence and for those in jobs with low levels of social support, the extent of telecommuting had a positive association with job performance. These results provide an opportunity for future research about how a remote workers job and their outcomes, such as job performance, is needed in academic literature.

Additional research yields the results that remote workers often spend more time working than they do with their family or other non-worker obligations. Duxbury and Halinski (2014) contested this notion in a quantitative study of 1,806 male and female

professional employees who spend at least 1 hour per week working from home during regular hours. Duxbury and Halinski study yield the results that the number of hours in a remote employees per week hours negatively moderates the relation between work demands and work strain. Further, their other hypothesis in this study (Duxbury & Halinski, 2014) resulted in the finding that the number of hours per week worked in a remote environment only partially mediated the relation between family demands and family overload. The results of this study may lead suggest a notion to managers that if the amount of work that a remote worker is involved with is not balanced with work and life that it is a generable consideration that the stress of a remote worker will overcome and impact their performance.

Researchers have begun to introduce scales that measure counterproductive work behavior when working remotely (Holland, Simpson, Dalal, & Vega, 2016). What Holland et al. (2016) discovered in their study is that misuse of time contributed to the counterproductive work behavior. This type of study contributes to the literature of remote workers which have a more flexible schedule are provided with more opportunities than traditional in-office workers to misuse their time and ultimately sacrifice their performance.

Theory of Planned Behavior

Another model which was reviewed in this study, as it relates to job performance, was the theory of planned behavior to review how this theory applies to perform on the job as a remote employee. In essence, the theory of planned behavior seeks to understand the action versus the intention of a person. The theory of planned behavior gives credence

to attempting to study the literature present to how an individual would be motivated to think, described as purposeful behavior, and perform better on the job to examine how these principles could be applied within this study. Purposeful behavior displayed within a social context results from one's attitude toward the behavior, their perception of subjective norms related to the behavior, their sense of control over forces that may hinder or facilitate performance of the behavior, and anticipation of expectancy-value of behavior. Ajzen and Sheikh (2016) examined this theory further their thinking about cognitive theories to be able to predict and understand the relationship between human behavior and motivation.

In the theory of planned behavior construct attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control are all primary aspects that lead to the intention and ultimately the planned behavior. In the current study the attitude that a remote employee has the ability to take control of and influence in a positive manner. As discussed in other scholarly research (Belanger, 1999; Montreuil & Lippel, 2003;) if the manager has not contributed to influencing these three aspects the intention or behavior of a high performing remote worker will not follow the results. A study that provides evidence of this theory in remote working was completed when scholars conducted a longitudinal survey amongst remote workers at three points in time: 1 to 3 weeks before, during, and 2 to 8 weeks after the period of time working remotely (Vesala & Tuomivaara, 2015). The analysis of this study provided evidence of when remote workers experienced time pressure, interruptions, negative feelings while working, exhaustiveness of work, and stress there was no correlation to a loss of performance; in addition, there were no

changes to the clarity of work goals or overall employee engagement. What was determined is that these items contributed to a remote worker's risk of staying in their role at the company they experienced these reactions.

A broader review of scholarly literature related to remote worker performance explores aspects of strategies of successful remote working, determining who is and is not fit for remote working, and studying the personality of remote workers with the goal of determining what personality traits can indicate if an employee is able to work remotely (Ajzen & Sheikh, 2016; Caillier, 2014). All of these studies provide a broad view of remote worker research, but not the depth of remote worker research in certain aspects of literature. The depth of empirical knowledge about personalities, talents required for remote working, and being able to hire a candidate as a remote worker with confidence is additional areas of research that remote working is lacking at the present time.

As scholars continue to study and attempt to understand what strategies could be created for remote workers the increase of remote working continues. Basile and Beauregard (2016) conducted a qualitative case study with 40 face-to-face interviews with remote workers to ask to explore strategies between these remote workers and determine if there were any themes that could be used and scale within other organizations. Basile and Beauregard discussed strategies of remote working based on their analysis, but the prominent finding was that remote workers had put boundaries within their home office to control the balance of times of work and time spent with their family. Basile and Beauregard's notion of boundaries is supported by a meta-analysis that

was completed in 2016, as the researcher's analysis reviewed the performance, incentives, and needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness for employees (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Nassrelrgawi, 2016). In this meta-analysis, scholars were able to determine that boundaries had a high correlation to performance and even more than if the employee competence towards the role was considered to be higher than others that one could predict their performance to be higher than others on the team.

The Big Five Personality Traits

The exploration of personality traits in remote working has provided scholars the chance to study if any patterns within remote workers could correlate to scientific measurement of personality. Psychological difference studies began in 1936 when Galton founded a quantitative study which exposed the importance of heredity, race differences, and dysgenic fertility. Today scholars refer to more prominent research in the field of personality psychology with a construct referred to as five primary factors.

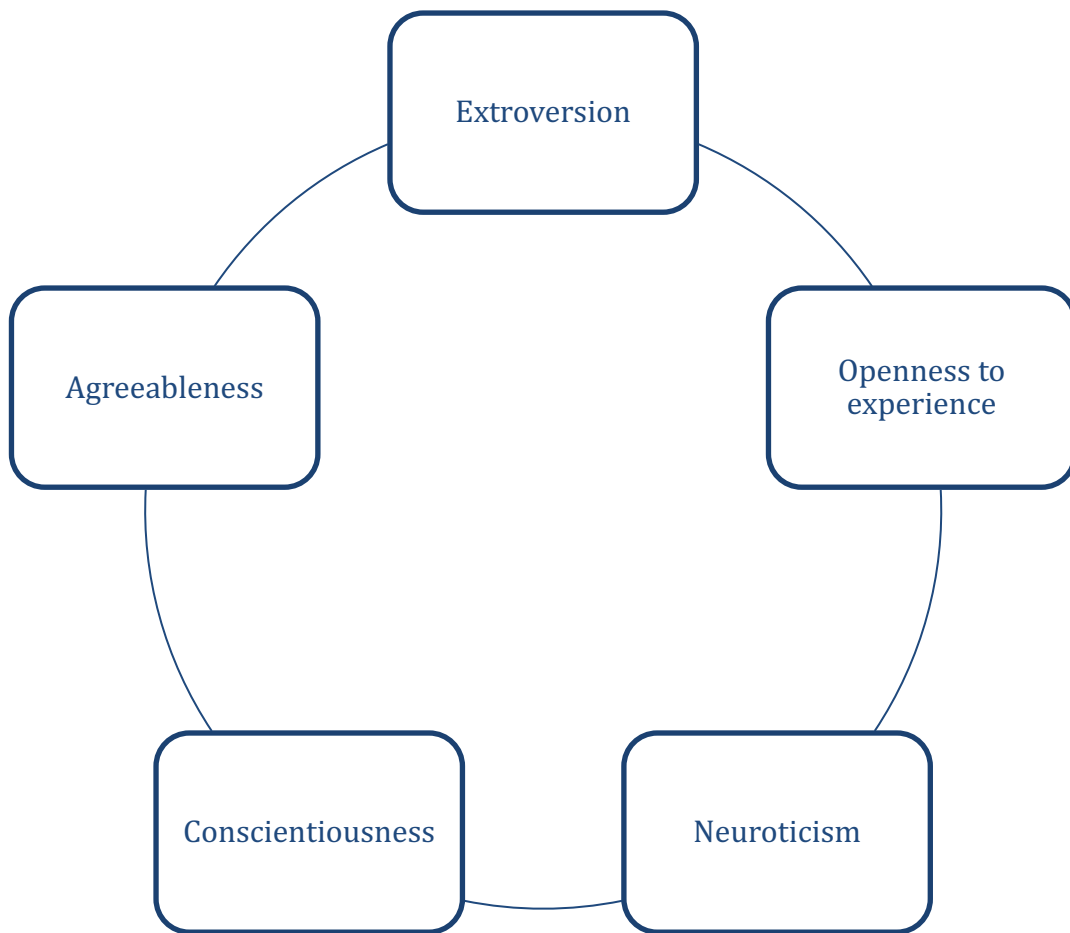


Figure 3. The big five personality traits. Adapted from “Big Five Personality Relationships With General Intelligence and Specific Cattell-Horn-Carroll Factors of Intelligence,” by D. C. Osmon, O. Santos, D. Kazakov, M. T. Kassel, R. Q. Mano, & A. Morth, 2018, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 131, 51-56.

These five personality traits are represented in the literature regarding the evaluation of personality traits within remote workers. In one study the aim was to explore predicting when remote workers would be considered cyberslacking (O’Neill, Hambley, & Bercovich, 2014). Cyberslacking was considered in this study the use of company time to do personal items involving the Internet. What has determined in this

study was there is a positive correlation to agreeableness and conscientiousness; in addition, the scholars added honesty and procrastination (O'Neill et al., 2014).

Other scholars have used the big five personality construct had successful results of their studies that concluded that not only did all five traits contribute to the success of a remote worker, but a significant moderating affect was found for the relationship between openness and phone and video communication, and agreeableness and phone communication on job satisfaction (Smith, Patmos, & Pitts, 2018). This knowledge provides an argument for reviewing how a remote workers personality contributes to there, and in doing so, other scholars have carried this notion forward with exploring the relationship between the personality of a remote worker and job satisfaction relates. Caillier (2014) studied how role clarity and job satisfaction worked as a relationship with remote workers. This study (Caillier, 2014) used a survey designed to assess human resource management systems, agencies' progress towards human capital initiatives, and the efforts of senior managers. The conclusion of this study depicted that role clarity and job satisfaction did not mediate the relationship between working remotely and work effort (Caillier, 2014); thus, synthesizing that a remote worker and be satisfied with their job and have clarity in their role with no impact to their performance. These findings support the importance of how remote working is different from in-office working and the performance of a remote worker must be managed in a different way than other workers.

Workplace Isolation

As described in this study workplace isolation is the belief of being absent by an employee in an organization. Researchers (Peters et al., 2015) have studied the belief, known as workplace isolation, as a metric and construct that may impact a remote worker's performance. Marshall, Michaels, and Mulki (2007) provided an instrument to as a way to measure workplace isolation that was discriminatingly validated with other types of scales that attempt to measure items such as loneliness, emotional attachment, lack of satisfying friendship, and lack of social networks.

The Construct of Workplace Isolation

Scholars often interexchange the terms isolation and loneliness in the literature. As studied in a virtual setting, scholars set out to use a two-dimensional browser game with 176 participants (Luhmann et al., 2014). Throughout the game, the spouse of the protagonist character leaves for an undisclosed amount of time. The time prior to the spouse leaving the participant ascribed the feeling of loneliness. Once the spouse returned, the spouse ascribed to the feeling of not being lonely. This study (Luhmann et al., 2014) provides substance to the conceptual framework as Emerson (1976) social exchange theory supports the notion of individuals need the exchange of humans.

Pinquart and Sorensen (2001) completed a meta-analysis to explore the correlation between old age and social isolation and loneliness. In the conclusion of the meta-analysis, Pinquart and Sorensen discussed that the quality of a social network with friends and neighbors had a stronger correlation with loneliness, compared with a quantity of networks or friends. Also, the more interactions with friends and neighbors

showed a stronger association with loneliness, compared with interactions with family members. This study (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001), amongst the others, discussed, lead to the exploration of literature about how workplace isolation may impact one's health.

According to Valtorta et al. (2016), loneliness, social isolation, and social relationships are classifications that are used in epidemiological studies to study how each of these aspects can be used to interpret the how to measure workplace isolation. These classifications are critical to the conceptual framework in this research because each one has a correlation to when a remote worker has experienced workplace isolation the employee has a belief of being alone and not seen. Different dimensions of social relationships are likely to have a different impact on remote workers health. In the following paragraph, a further review in current research is explored as to how as to how workplace isolation may impact your health.

Workplace Isolation Impacts Health

The study of workplace isolation is unpinned with the notion of loneliness and how feeling or being lonely can cause a disruption in an employee's daily routine, and ultimately have an impact on performance. Healthcare scholars have studied the effects of social isolation and loneliness together in older adults to explore the complexity of how isolation can affect ones' health. In one quantitative study, the analysis of a logistic regression mixed affects with over 5,000 participants yielded the results of when an individual is isolated or feeling isolated there is an effect on their cardiovascular system (Petersen et al., 2015).

Another study was completed to observe and compute the prospective association with functional status in older adults by way of a longitudinal study over a 6-year period (Shankar et al., 2017). This study aimed to determine how isolation and loneliness have on the daily living and gait speed within adults. The conclusion is that both isolation and loneliness contribute to difficulties with activities of daily living. Both of these studies are examples of the healthcare risks associated with isolation and further how this phenomenon can impact an adult.

Luhmann et al. (2014) expanded the literature about how loneliness and isolation in a remote working role by way of 176 participants in a two-dimensional browser game that rated the character's loneliness multiple times during the game. The results of this study support the theory of social exchange (Emerson, 1976) because as the individuals become isolated in the game, a higher ascribed loneliness number was associated with periods of time without the other person in the game. After the characters were back together, in the game, the change in loneliness and isolation decreased as a result. Thus, supporting how peer-to-peer interactions can influence workplace isolation.

Scholars have studied the health effects of workplace isolation with students as well. With the use of 72 undergraduate students participated in a study with use of an app that was developed to trigger e-mails with questions to answer throughout the day about their feelings and thoughts about their social and emotional status (Chow et al., 2017). This study lead scholars to insights of how emotional experiences in everyday life are associated with isolation and how interacting with people can influence depression or social anxiety symptoms.

Researchers have even explored how workplace isolation contributes to ones' mortality. A meta-analysis of studies compiled of articles from January 1980 until February 2014 within CINAHL, PsycINFO, Social Work Abstracts, and Google Scholar were used to determine that both objective and subjected isolation was a risk for mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). This meta-analysis included studies provided through quantitative data on mortality as affected by loneliness, social isolation, or living alone. As more employees work remotely, scholars from different disciplines continue to study not only the impact on performance the how this phenomenon affects ones' health.

The association of loneliness and isolation to mortality has also been the focus of scholars in the past as well. Rico-Urbe et al. (2018) completed a meta-analysis of 35 articles involving 77,220 participants in a systematic review of Pubmed, PsycINFO, and Scopus searched through June of 2016. In the analysis of this study Rico-Urbe et al. discussed that loneliness shows harmful effects for all-cause mortality and the impact of loneliness is slighter stronger in me more than women. What Rico-Urbe et al. found to be most interesting in the results was that loneliness was independent from the quality evaluation of each article and the effect of depression. This scholarly article, amongst others in this section, have described the current literature related to how workplace isolation and loneliness may impact one's health. What is left to be discussed is the aspects of workplace isolation in the workplace.

Workplace Isolation in the Workplace

According to Mulki and Jaramillo (2011) workplace isolation could have a 21% decrease in a remote worker's performance. This was discovered through a study of 346

sales reps within the United States at a pharmaceutical and physician sales role. What Mulki and Jaramillo also determined that when the supervisor of the remote employee engages in leadership actions, the remote employee is less likely to think they are isolated. Thus, concluding that more the manager spends time with their employee the less likely the employee will feel or become isolated. This study also confirmed that self-efficacious salespeople are less likely to view themselves as being isolated from their workplace, resulting in a decrease in turnover. What scholars have concluded from this study is that the long-term effect of isolation can predict turnover in the salesperson role, willingness to voluntarily perform actions that would be considered as above and beyond their job demands, and the importance of the manager role is within a remote workers career.

Further exploration in the literature of remote working uncovered literature related to public and private sector roles, as well as different industries. Cooper and Kurland (2002) explored how interpersonal networking, informal learning, and mentoring are items related to workplace isolation. These scholars interviewed 93 mixed of remote workers, in-office workers, and their supervisors. The results of this study (Cooper & Kurland, 2002) suggest that if a remote worker is not absent of these pieces in their career, they have a higher risk of becoming isolated in their role. In sum, remote workers should experience these professional development items for their development and ensure workplace isolation does not overcome the employee.

In another study about workplace isolation in the workplace, scholars explored the role of self-efficacy on the relationship of interpersonal trust and leadership style as it

relates to workplace isolation (Munir et al., 2015). This study (Munir et al., 2015) was conducted within the industry of a pharmaceutical sales company. A total of 227 questionnaires were analyzed with a response rate of 87% and yielded the results that interpersonal trust and transformational leadership styles have the greatest impact to reduce the perception of isolation in the sales role. Evidence from this study (Munir et al., 2015) also suggests that there is a negative impact on workplace isolation when self-efficacy is higher in a salesperson. This study (Munir et al., 2015) is a direct link to the conceptual framework, social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) in this study with the results being that individuals are experiencing workplace isolation need other individuals or the exchange of human interaction to eliminate the perception of feeling isolated.

Gap in the Literature

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study is to gain common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. The majority of qualitative studies in this literature review consists of data and results which concentrate on if a remote worker is or is not isolated in their role, how organizations benefit or do not benefit from remote working, and the history of remote working. Very little data exists on how workplace isolation affects the performance of a remote worker.

A review of supplementary literature in this current study revealed a gap in the literature that leads to the use of Emerson's (1976) social exchange theory framework where the benefit of social exchange between an isolated remote worker and colleagues may exclude the influence on performance. This framework has been researched and

tested by scholars and practitioners with by use of qualitative and quantitative methods. For example, loneliness and isolation are aspects of workplace isolation that social exchange theory has been an integral factor in exploring the belief of isolation (Munir et al., 2015). Studies as Munir et al. (2015) are indications, but not a correlation to social exchange theory as an answer to the belief of workplace isolation because the method of the study relates to the variables in quantitative studies to explain workplace isolation. In this study, the aim of the study was meant to continue the literature about workplace isolation occurring in remote workers with a qualitative method.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to gain common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. In this chapter, I reviewed the historical trends in remote working, workplace isolation, and job performance which reiterated the problems of workplace isolation and the potential problems it could cause a remote worker. The absence of literature regarding workplace isolation and how this may influence the employee's performance is outlined along with a summary of current research that has been completed about this situation. The lack of research on the belief of workplace isolation occurring in remote workers is noticeably missing, creating a need for research and an opportunity to provide knowledge. To begin researching this gap in workplace isolation and remote workers is a qualitative exploratory case study which explored the belief of remote workers who have experienced workplace isolation. The following chapter includes the design and

methodology of a research project that sought to understand the belief of workplace isolation as a remote employee.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

When reviewing the literature, I recognized that there was as a research gap regarding the investigation of the performance of a remote worker who had experienced workplace isolation. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to gain a common understanding of how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. I also wanted to gain further comprehension as to how understanding workplace isolation occurring in remote workers may help managers in leading remote employees.

In this chapter, I outline the research methodology used to address the research question in this study and provide additional knowledge to address the gap in related literature about remote working and workplace isolation. Chapter 3 also includes a discussion of the research method and rationale for this study, my strategy for selecting the research participants, a description of the data collection and data analysis plan, a discussion of issues trustworthiness, and the procedures that were taken to ensure all relevant ethical standards were met. Starting first with the research question of the study.

Research Question

The researcher has a primary goal to design a question or set of questions that guides them throughout the data collection process and gives them enough context to reach the point of saturation (Patton, 2016). The central research question for this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was: What are the common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a

customer service organization in the United States? This central question guided the study and addressing it contributed to the current literature gap regarding workplace isolation and the possible relationship performance deficiencies when a remote worker encounters this issue.

Research Method and Rationale

In this study, I utilized a qualitative research method with a case study design. According to Patton (2016), a successful qualitative inquiry method involves bringing meaning and identifying patterns and themes to individuals across a shared experience. Qualitative researchers utilize techniques to illuminate, study, capture, understand, and identify the meaning of experiences in an individual's life (CITE). Qualitative research does not include the frequency in which the experience occurs, but rather the analysis of a given belief (CITE). A qualitative research method was appropriate for studying workplace isolation occurring in remote workers because of the need for human interaction, obtaining meaning to the belief of isolation, and the process to analyze knowledge about this problem.

A quantitative research method is more appropriate for a study with a dependent and independent set of variables that is decisive, portrays a problem, and determines if there is any correlation between the variables in the study (Yin, 2018). I did not choose a quantitative method for this study because of its lack of agility and flexibility in the interview process. Mixed method studies emphasize a real-life circumstantial understanding of a problem using both quantitative and qualitative perspectives (Yin,

2018). I decided not to use a mixed method design based on possible divergences between each type of data for this study.

Research Design and Rationale

Researchers use a case study design to gain a common understanding between participants through a detailed contextual analysis of an occurrence or circumstance (Saldana, 2016). According to Yin (2018), multiple case studies are more robust in data analysis and, as a result, provide increased credibility to the research. Yin suggested that an exploratory case study design can provide an explanation as to *how*, *what*, and *why* a problem has taken place. A case study was appropriate to use for this study because it allowed for the investigation of workplace isolation within the social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) conceptual framework. Furthermore, each participant of the study was considered as an individual case.

Grounded theory research is situated in the data from the participants in a particular study (Saldana, 2016). Grounded theory was not appropriate for this study because grounded theory looks to advance the description of the problem and provide the best method to mitigate the problem going forward (Yin, 2018). Phenomenological research is the process of attempting to uncover a perception or assumption about a specific event or concept through the study of multiple participants (Yin, 2018). A phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because I was focused on gathering the common understandings amongst four divisions of an organization along with the review of organizational artifacts as sources of data for this study.

Role of the Researcher

According to Patton (2016), the role of the researcher is to transform data into findings. My role as the researcher in this study was an observer, as opposed to a participant or observer-participant. Being the observer in a study refers to someone that is a witness to a participant's experiences through the stories and narratives discussed in the interview. I conducted 21 semistructured, Zoom audio recorded interviews with remote workers who had experienced workplace isolation. Saldana (2016) suggested that a qualitative researcher should be organized, exercise perseverance, and deal with ambiguity when coding the data from interviews. Therefore, the interviews in this study provided an effective way to listen to the expression of the belief of workplace isolation from a remote worker's perspective that I was able to transform into qualitative data by coding the responses into findings.

The triangulation method is the process of using multiple data sources to investigate a problem and ensure validation of robust and comprehensive research (Renz, Carrington, & Badger, 2018). Researchers may enhance the credibility of their research through triangulation by tracking the documents of a researcher's decisions, field notes during the interviews, and transcriptions of the interviews with participants of the study (Yin, 2018). I reviewed secondary data in the form of organization artifacts about remote working against the firsthand data from the Zoom-recorded interviews to satisfy the methodical obligation for data triangulation.

Professional Relationships and Power Dynamics

The sample in this study was remote workers who opted into participating and had no relationship to me in their profession or outside of their work. Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested that the power a researcher has is created through a relationship construct that is believed to be defined just by the nature of the roles within the participant and researcher. To mitigate any power dimensions, I shared the raw interviews and data with participants, after the transcription of the interview, to ensure validation of answers and logging the process of experiencing workplace isolation (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Researcher biases. My potential biases that may affected this study were derived from being a remote worker; as a leader of remote employees; and writing interventions for remote employees on topics such as engagement, performance, and strengths-based leadership. Biases may have presented challenges in the one-on-one interviews because the experiences participants described to me were relatable to my experience. A constant awareness, an objective set of open-ended interview questions, and the integrity of achieving a successful study were all elements that contributed to minimizing bias throughout this study.

Ethical issues. One ethical issue in this study was the transparency and trust between me and the participants with regard to their answers in the one-on-one interviews. The sense of vulnerability displayed by the participants reflected the confidence in their anonymity and how well the remote worker shared the depth of experience with workplace isolation. The process in which the Walden University

Institutional Review Board was involved also ensured that Walden University procedures were followed while conducting qualitative research. Being transparent about the purpose of the study in different modalities, both written and verbal, provided the participants in the study and time dedicated within the interview to ask questions before it begins about transparency.

Participant Selection Logic

The population for this study consisted of remote workers who had experienced workplace isolation when working remotely. The participants self-selecting into the study provided me with confirmation that they had sufficient exposure to workplace isolation and be able to provide beliefs about the topic in the interviews. The justification for the sample was with exposure to workplace isolation as a remote employee, the participant provided credibility, relevance, and utility for the analysis with their answers.

Their credibility was that these remote workers could describe their thoughts, feelings, and reactions of experiencing workplace isolation and contribute authentic stories and answers to the questions in the interview (see Patton, 2016). The relevance of their answers was pertinent to this study because workplace isolation can occur with remote workers in any industry, role, or individual. In this study, I solely focused on remote workers, and the results are generalizable to other industries.

I recruited participants from a customer service industry organization whose field employees were considered to be remote every day. This strategy for participant selection ensured ample opportunities for diversity in participants and an objective way to ensure the I or the participants did not have any affiliation in the past. The solicited number of

participants was up to 25 based on the design methodology of Yin (2018) for a qualitative, exploratory, case study to ensure saturation. One qualitative study that was conducted with adjunct faculty members about workplace isolation discussed that 28 faculty members were interviewed and the point of saturation occurred after the 18th interview in the analysis (Dolan, 2011). Dolan (2011) determined that inadequate frequency and depth of communication, lack of recognition of instructors' value, and lack of opportunities for skill development were the major themes that isolation impacted for these online adjunct faculty members.

Strategy for sampling. The purpose of my strategy for sampling was to ensure that this study, by its nature and substance, examined the research question being investigated in this study. This strategy required the sample in the study to be remote workers who had experienced perceived workplace isolation. A statement of participation was sent to the organization for their remote workers to opt into the study with an explanation of what workplace isolation meant within the confines of this study. Throughout the letter to potential participants, I provided comments relating to the purpose of the study, requirements to participate, confidentiality, and a definition of workplace isolation. Using a sample of up to 25 participants aligned with the case study design of Yin's (2018) as a starting point to reach saturation. Further investigation on the sample size supported that when recording the emergent patterns and possible themes, that over 10 participants in a qualitative exploratory case study would provide an opportunity for saturation (see Patton, 2016). As described in academic literature,

saturation is met when the researcher can no longer learn anything new from the data set (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect data. The primary data collection instrument was open-ended interview questions, wherein the participants were given the opportunity to share their beliefs about workplace isolation as remote workers. Patton (2016) argued that open-ended interview questions seek to find out from the participants things that cannot be directly observed and to understand what the researcher observed and heard. The essence of this qualitative, exploratory, case study was to consider each division of the organization as a case and collect as much of the beliefs from remote workers to represent the case study. To capture the beliefs of the participants, I used a web-conference system to record the phone call and software to have the interview transcribed for validation.

I derived a critical aspect of the interviews from the conceptual framework of social exchange theory (see Emerson, 1976). Each question was situated in this theory based on how the questions were focused on the exchange of social aspects in the remote employee's role when experiencing workplace isolation. Patton (2016) suggested that for a standardized, open-ended interview to be successful, a researcher needs probes and transitions from question to question. Each one of the probes and transitions allowed the interviews to be fluid and authentic conversations.

Best source of data. While quantitative studies have been completed about workplace isolation, the aim of this study was not to validate if workplace isolation

exists, rather it was to explore the participants' beliefs of how workplace isolation influences a remote worker's performance. Therefore, each participant was asked a set of questions to explore their beliefs to increase the comparability and scalability from other participants. Patton (2016) also suggested that questions should be staged in the format of past, present, and future with a mix of feeling, opinion, and value; experience; and behavior questions. In this study, I focused on experience, and therefore, the questions were grounded in the past, present, and future of how workplace isolation occurs in remote working.

Basis for researcher-development instrument. As Yin (2018) describes, a qualitative exploratory case study is dependent on creating an atmosphere for the participant to relate their beliefs to the primary research question. To create this atmosphere of inclusion in qualitative interviews, Patton (2016) recommends that there be practical guidance when asking questions. According to Patton the timing of the questions, the type of questions, and flow of how the interview was structured created a safe and trusting environment for participants to be able to respond to the questions asked in the interview. The questions asked were ones that do not formulate the participants thinking or bias their answers. I have practiced being a nonbias research instrument on samples that were not included in this study; thus, providing validity to the skills and abilities of the interviewing skills. The questions asked are based on the conceptual framework, social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) and grounded in the in the theory and constructs of workplace isolation.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment of participants occurred after obtaining approval from the Walden University IRB to conduct the interviews. I adhered to the policies of the board and recruit participants once I obtain approval. The documentation that details the collection process for this study was turned in as required.

Sources of data

The source of data came from a U.S. customer service company whereby their employees work remotely in their roles. From the organization there was four divisions by which each group had more than four employees from sectors of business development, software engineer, talent development, and product management. The participants volunteered to be a part of the study and opted in based on their knowledge of workplace isolation and have relevant beliefs to share in the interview. A consent agreement was used with organization prior to the study. By doing so, I ensured I met all ethical standards and bringing awareness to the sampling organization. Also, a letter of cooperation was sent to the human resource department of the sampling organization to distribute to their remote workers. The letter outlined the intent to gain access to the organization and obtain permission to conduct the research along with a description of what workplace isolation means in this study for those remote workers to be able to agree they have experienced this problem. Therefore, the order of obtaining sources of data for this study was: (a) letter of consent obtained from the sample organization, (b) letter of cooperation from participants that are remote workers, and (c) consent form from each participant that was interviewed.

Data collection

As the researcher-as-instrument in this study, it was my responsibility to collect all the data in the one-on-one interviews. By being the one to collect the data, the strength in trustworthiness and consistency was seen as an increase to the integrity of the data, rather than a third party involved in these roles. The qualitative data should allow for a thematic analysis of what transpires when a remote worker has the belief they have experienced workplace isolation. At times, when participants deviated from the question asked, I provided context for the study and guided the participant back to the original question about their experience to ensure that purpose of the interview was met.

Frequency of Data Collection Events

The data collection was situated in the experience of workplace isolation while working remotely. The richness of the participants belief was brought forward by the questions presented in the interview, which could yield more descriptive answers rather than interpretive (Patton, 2016). The frequency of data collection was over a 1 week time period with interviews taking place throughout the work week. The risk associated with this frequency was that the time may have stretched past the point of recall for those participants in answering the questions related to workplace isolation in their remote setting.

Duration of Data Collection Events

The interviews were set to be no longer than an hour depending on the depth of answers and what the participant was willing to share about their experience. The participants were given the option to exit the interview as needed. A follow-up interview

was not be offered because a copy of the transcribed e-mail was sent to further clarify any gaps in information from the interview.

How Data Was Recorded

The interviews were audio only and recorded over a voice over protocol platform known as Zoom. This software allowed me to save the Zoom interview in a cloud database, and then save the interview to the hard drive of the laptop. Consent forms were sent to the software company that owns the cloud database to ensure that the interviews are not reviewed or used in any way other than for the use of this study while I am in the process of downloading the interview. Once the interview was completed and downloaded, then the interview was deleted the Zoom database.

Data Analysis Plan

To complete a qualitative exploratory case study, according to Yin (2018) the interviews must have two components: the researcher follows their line of inquiry and verbalizing the researchers own line of inquiry in an unbiased manner that serves the purpose of the study. The data collected from the participants must provide enough evidence of the belief of workplace isolation as opposed to theoretical reflections.

Connection of Data to a Specific Research Question

The analysis of the beliefs experienced by remote workers was specific to the belief of workplace isolation and how it may impede their performance. The parameters are established to extract data from the interviews to the research question of how workplace isolation was connected to the lives of remote workers and explore the effects

of this phenomenon. While other aspects may come up in the interviews, only questions that were asked that are specific to the exploratory of workplace isolation.

Type of and Procedure for Coding

Saldana (2016) offered a method of qualitative coding that employs understanding a unit of data, phrases or sentences, as to what it means or was about in this study. This notion implies there was a theme per node (Saldana, 2016) or as in this study theme analysis. Theme analysis requires a higher level of critical thinking that applies to the answers given in a qualitative interview. According to Saldana, a theme may be identified at the manifest level or at the latent level when coding qualitative research.

In the first cycle of coding, the data was reviewed at a holistic overview. In the holistic overview, I was looking for items related to emergent themes and themes that may be comparable across all interviews. Saldana (2016) suggested that in the first cycle of coding codes such as descriptive, versus, dramaturgical, process, and narrative codes provide a deeper and complex analysis initially. These codes then provide triggers for reflection when memo writing after the interviews. The goal of the first cycle of coding was holistically review the codes as a way analyze first impressions with the understanding that analytic memo writing. In sum, the first cycle of coding was a way to initiate the segments of data into a summary. Holistic coding was appropriate for this study as the data collected in the interview needed to put into preliminary topics for more detailed analysis. The second cycle of coding helped synthesize codes into a more unified common understanding between the samples.

In the second cycle of coding, a tactic of pattern coding was applied (Saldana, 2016). The patterns from the interviews helped interpret or explain the codes from the first cycle of coding. The process of gathering data from the first cycle coding into the second cycle of coding allows more meaningful and parsimonious points of analysis. Using the first cycle of data, from the interviews, the patterns codes aided in validating the commonality by assigning the common aspects of a pattern code. Pattern coding was appropriate for this study because the patterns identified, through the interviews were used for the development of major themes from data (Saldana, 2016). The patterns that emerge from the answers of the participants within the coding process may provide assertions, content development, and decision modeling that may translate into strategies and policies for managers to help mitigate workplace isolation with their remote workers.

Software Used for Analysis

The analysis for coding was completed by myself and not by any software. The only software used in this study was the recording software in the interviews and the software that transcribed the interviews for analysis. NVivo Version 11 was reviewed as software to utilize, yet Patton (2016) suggested that the value of human coding provides a richer context in the analysis of data. Another reason why I coded the data myself was the time investment in learning the NVivo and initial cost. Due to the low volume of interviews, hand coding the data ensured that I stayed in control of the data and furthered my thinking in the analysis portion of the study.

Manner of Treatment of Discrepant Cases

The answers given in the interviews that are extraneous with the research questions may be filtered out in the first coding cycle or in the second coding cycle. Saldana (2016) suggested subjective response identified as extraneous to the research question will be removed from consideration. Responses that are off topic to the research question asked were removed from consideration in this study. Knowing when this was present in the data was when an outlier answer was noted as a code and not a theme. Those discrepant codes were documented and not used in any influence as a theme because there was not enough of them to be considered as a theme.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In quantitative research, the instruments used affects the outcome of the research and may affect the reliability of the analysis of the study (Renz et al., 2018). In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection, which provides the possibility of personal biases. By being the instrument in this study, my personal values and beliefs, experience as a remote worker, experience leading remote teams, and the ethnocentrism towards remote working are all elements that contribute to this research and the interpretation of the data. I take full responsibility for the quality of the study being the data collector, instrument, and interpreter of the data.

Credibility

Credibility or internal validity is the consideration in which the study must be considered credible to the readers of the research (Yin, 2018). Internal validity must answer the questions of those who are the investigators of the research, or readers, by

understanding the themes provided in the analysis phase. A strategy to ensure credibility to the readers was providing the readers with the transcripts and any verbiage given to participants in the interview. This provided transparency to what questions were asked and what the participants answers were in the interview. Triangulation is another method that was used with artifacts about how the sampling organization manages their remote working employees. Artifacts such as documents, policies, and existing documented best practices given to remote workers and managers of remote workers was reviewed as a part of the analysis portion of this study to ensure triangulation.

Obtaining Saturation

The goal of coding was to achieve saturation, which means that little new information seems to emerge throughout the coding process (Saldana, 2016). To achieve saturation in this qualitative study, the tactic of pattern matching was applied to the data sets (Yin, 2018). Saturation was achieved when no new themes emerge from the first and second round of coding of the common understandings amongst the four divisions. The patterns, from the analysis, are dependent on the research question in this study that may explain how or why workplace isolation may influence a remote worker's performance on the job. Once the first and second cycle of coding takes place and themes begin to emerge, then the precision of the coding provided the points of saturation and allow for a more objective analysis.

Transferability

To achieve the status of external validity or transferability is to ensure the study's findings to be generalizable beyond the purpose of the original study (Yin, 2018). the

results of the study can be reused in other studies as well as the research findings can be used in multiple industries that have a remote workforce. The primary research question directly influenced the strategy of ensuring transferability. The research question is not meant to limit transferability; rather, provide context to share across academic disciplines. I described the findings within this study and include the patterns, codes, and themes (Saldana, 2016). The variation in the participants in this study were personalities and their belief as it relates to workplace isolation. Each participant must have experienced in working remotely and experienced workplace isolation. Their stories and experience provided transferability in the analysis phase.

Dependability

Dependability is achieved when the research is presented in a way that enables other researchers to replicate the procedures described in this study (Yin, 2018). This study has an audit trail that describes the process followed that aided me in achieving the results of this study. As discussed in this and in other chapters, the materials, equipment, methodology, conceptual framework, and other elements that are critical to this study are presented and documented. I also kept a reflexive journal containing my own personal reflections and thoughts during the interview process of remote workers.

Confirmability

Confirmability is also called external reliability in qualitative research (Patton, 2016). According to Yin (2018), researchers have the potential and risk to be unknowingly influenced by the participants' responses which can distract them from their line of inquiry. To heighten awareness and sensitivity to confirmability following the

interview guide provided verbiage stating that the questions asked and no details can be given about the question. To minimize bias, I ensured the participants are asked questions from the interview guide that leads to the answers of their own point of view and belief, and not what is influenced by myself in the interview.

Ethical Procedures

The primary ethical consideration for this study was the confidentiality of the participants and the detailed description given of their belief of workplace isolation occurring as a remote worker in their organization. Having experience with keeping the anonymity of qualitative research in my role has established the baseline for ensuring I am following Walden University's IRB approval process. Due to this study having humans' subjects, it was critical to obtain IRB approval before beginning the study. This process included obtaining consent forms, full disclosure of the intent of the study, and process control for analysis and securing data was all included in my research plan. Following the IRB process, the first step was to obtain IRB approval to ensure this study is consistent with the University's institutional ethical standards.

This study was on a volunteer basis, and the participants had the right to stop the interview at any time and exit the conversation. All responses to the interview questions were confidential, as well as the participants name, title, and organization. With use of a voice over Internet protocol platform being used to conduct and record the interview, the interviews were saved directly to my laptop that is stored and safely locked away from others. No other individuals have access to the data. Participants had the opportunity to

review the transcriptions of the interview for alignment and clarity, and then these transcriptions will be destroyed following the acceptance of my dissertation.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the research methodology for the proposed study that aided as the guide for the study. The research design presented in this study was intended to serve as the guide for the interview questions about workplace isolation occurring in remote workers. Other aspects of this chapter discuss my strategy that includes the awareness of trustworthiness through various methods including participants reviewing their transcriptions, participants for the study, reflexivity, and rich and descriptive data collection and analysis processes. In the following chapter, an outline of the results and implementation of the research plan is described along with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to gain a common understanding on how workplace isolation may influence remote employees' performance in a customer service organization in the United States. In alignment with the qualitative multiple case study research design, the data collection involved 21 semistructured interviews and a critical review of training documentation. The documentation reviewed consisted of general training given to managers or remote employees throughout the time of onboarding and ongoing development. The artifacts were pertinent to the study because these trainings provided context as to what expectations are established with new employees in training. I used purposeful sampling with participants being recruited from four different divisions of the same organization. The central research question was: What are the common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States? Chapter 4 includes discussions of the research setting, data collection, and data analysis as well as a conclusion.

Research Setting

This qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study involved participants from four separate divisions within a single organization. Participants' roles within those divisions were business development managers, software engineers, talent development specialists, and product managers. Interviewing was the primary source of qualitative data collection I used to gather evidence of their experiences with workplace isolation. The interviews

were conducted and recorded as audio only with both the participant and I remaining in our home offices. Twenty (95%) participants were distant from their headquarters, and one (5%) chose to come to their office, on site at the organization, for the interview. Once I obtained IRB approval, I sent an e-mail (see Appendix B) to potential participants with information about the study and the first point of reference to grant consent prior to the consent form being sent. Once consent was received and documented, I then e-mailed the participant potential interview dates and times. After agreeing on a time and date, an invite went out by way of my Walden University student e-mail address with the details to dial into a conference call.

Demographics

The inclusion criteria for this study required participants to have worked remotely at the time of the interview. Purposive sampling was the most suitable sampling approach for this study because each participant needed to be a remote worker. Ensuring each participant was a remote worker allowed for their responses to accurately describe the experiences of workplace isolation. There were 21 participants from four separate divisions within the organization, which consisted of business development managers, software engineers, talent development specialists, and product managers. While demographics were not a main focus of the study, I noted the number of participants by gender, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Gender

Group	Men	Women
Business development managers	4	1
Software engineers	7	2
Talent development specialists	1	2
Product managers	3	1
Total	15	6

Note. $N = 21$.

Data Collection

Before beginning the data collection process, Walden University granted me with IRB approval (02-20-19-0417167) to conduct this study. In preparation to collect data, I communicated with the CEO of the company to obtain a letter of cooperation. Once the letter of cooperation was obtained, I e-mailed possible participants with an attached copy of the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and consent form. Once I received an e-mail back stating that the participant granted their consent for the study, I sent another e-mail with available time slots to connect over the phone to be interviewed. No follow-up questions were asked in the process of scheduling from anyone that was contacted for this study. All participants were made aware of the scope of this study and identified risks and benefits; I also reiterated that they could terminate the interview at any time without consequence. Each participant of the study acknowledged their rights and the importance of their confidentiality as described in the consent form.

At the start of each interview, before the recording began, I asked the participant if there were any clarifying questions or concerns that needed to be discussed. The only questions asked were about what I hoped to achieve with this study. Once all general questions were asked and answered, I asked if the participant was willing to be recorded, audio only. I then asked this same question once the recording started to ensure that I was asking twice for confirmation of the recording. The audio recordings were vital in the coding process for accuracy.

Each interview consisted of open-ended, semistructured questions with a duration of 30 minutes or less. The average time of completion for the 21 interviews was 27 minutes. One interview ended early because of the participant's lack of experience working remotely at the company, but they were able to draw upon their experience from a previous remote working role in the last six months. Each interview ended with me reading a script (see Appendix A) describing the process of reviewing the transcription of the interview and returning their edits within 3 days. Of the 21 interviews, 18 (85%) of the transcriptions were returned the same day with the participant's approval, two (9%) were returned 3 days later, and one (4%) was returned on the third day. After verifying the accuracy of the 21 interviews by way of each participant reviewing their transcription, I then organized the data by each question asked in the interview and also by each division of the organization. This process of organization allowed for an exploratory review of the central research question by searching for emerging themes, known as common understandings amongst the groups.

The research method I employed in this study was a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study, which involved a secondary method of data collection. Throughout the week of completing interviews, I also collected training materials that were used during onboarding and throughout their career as a manager or employee of the organization. The training material corroborated with participants' answers about their experiences working remotely. I included annotations of these documents on the coding spreadsheet when reviewing answers for both the holistic and pattern themes. To conclude the data collection process, I provided each participant with the documentation leading up to the interview; a copy of their interview transcript; and our discussion within the interview, protecting their anonymity and confidentiality. The training files reviewed were given back to the training manager and not stored anywhere digitally. I will secure an encrypted digital copy of the transcripts from each participant for 5 years, at which time I will destroy the transcripts.

Data Analysis

I used a holistic and pattern data analysis in the analysis phase of this study (see Saldana, 2016). This type of analysis allowed me to gain a common understanding amongst the four different divisions at the organization. As instructed in the procedures of holistic and pattern data analysis by Saldana (2016), analytical process tasks included gathering data, immersion, holistically coding themes, interpretation of patterns, seeking common understandings, and creating conclusions.

Organizing

Organizing the data collected in the interviews included verbatim responses from the transcripts and verbiage from the training documents. As I was conducting the interviews, I hand-coded initial impressions and wrote my initial thoughts in a reflective journal. This journal was also used during my review of the training materials. In addition to the reflective journal, I used Microsoft Excel to create a spreadsheet for each question and transcribed answer. This strategy helped me manually code the results of the themes and patterns.

Immersion of the Data

As I immersed myself in the data, I classified both the interview transcripts and training documents by holistic themes, then for commonality amongst the four divisions as patterns. The process of classifying the data required me to identify nodes of patterns to be able to classify themes and label each theme and pattern of data. Once themes and patterns were identified, the next step was to determine the common understanding amongst the four divisions within the organization. I completed this process by identifying the themes and patterns of words and word phrases. If a different word was used in the participants' answers but had the same meaning as another, I labeled that word in the same category for consistency. For example, one participant referred to "working from home," while another referred to "working remotely." These notions were categorized together under one name.

Themes and Patterns

The method of case study analysis requires a procedure of identifying emerging themes as the data relates to the central research question. As a researcher explores the validity of the data, the emerging themes provide a systematic way to synthesize and culminate the study results (Yin, 2018). For this exploratory case study, the alignment between the central research question and data was clear from the participants and supporting documents. Further, the themes and patterns helped create the validity of the study as a point of value to those who would benefit from the results of this study.

I set up the interview questions in a manner that would provide context and potential evidence regarding how workplace isolation occurs in remote workers that then may impede their job performance. Additional questions were designed to elicit context about peer-to-peer relationships, discussions with their manager about workplace isolation, and set up future scholars to explore how a manager can help identify and mitigate the experience. To begin the first cycle of coding, I hand coded the data obtained from each interview using Microsoft Excel as a way to record my thoughts and observations. Interview Questions one, two, three, and nine addressed the basics about the participant's job and relationship with their peers and manager. The cluster of Questions 4 through 8 were particular to workplace isolation. The hand-coding process involved reviewing the transcripts to identify initial themes. The initial themes were then placed into a common theme to review for holistic themes. Any code that appeared less than three times or related to another code did not advance in the theme. An example was

when a participant would make a comment towards the weather or something that was not pertaining to the study.

In the second cycle of hand coding, I took the common themes and grouped them into patterns. The patterns that emerged from each division were categories such as: (a) performance, (b) lack of social interaction, and (c) materials and equipment needed to complete their demands of the job. Each pattern received a rating grade, with A being the highest and C being the lowest, as a way to prioritize each pattern per division. This process allowed for a clear, common understanding amongst the divisions in the organization and a narrative that could be synthesized in Chapter 5.

Data Analysis Summary

The data collected for this study related to the central research question and the interview questions and applied to conceptual framework. I interviewed 21 participants and transcribed their responses. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was used to ensure the proper guidelines and execution of a quality qualitative study. The process of holistic and pattern data analysis was used as a way to gain a common understanding amongst the four divisions at the sampling organization (see Saldana, 2016). I conducted data analysis, using Microsoft Excel, by coding the reflection of the data collected in the interviews, the data from the documents provided, and removing any outlying responses that did not pertain to the study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

One aspect of qualitative research is that the researcher is considered the primary instrument of data collection (Yin, 2018). When a researcher accepts this responsibility,

the process of trustworthiness is at risk (Yin, 2018). Items such as personal bias, missed connections within the data, experience, unconscious bias, and even the method chosen for the study are also at risk (Yin, 2018). In the following paragraphs, I explain the methodological steps I took to ensure trustworthiness in this study.

Credibility

According to Patton (2016), when conducting qualitative research, questions about validity, reliability, and quality are all factors that must be carefully examined when completing research. Patton suggested that the credibility of qualitative research may suffer due to the researcher's unconscious bias, culture, and experiences. To build and establish credibility with the sampling organization and with participants of the study it started with the first communication. Following the documented steps by way of Walden University IRB process provided the guidance about how to ensure participants' answers were protected, and what avenues they had available to them if they felt further clarification was needed. In addition, at the start of each interview, I provided an opportunity to ask any questions particular to the study. One participant asked what this study would equate to for myself, in which I answered meeting the requirements of a completed dissertation.

In addition to building the rapport with participants of the study, the review of training documents provided credibility as a resource that aided in understanding the common understandings between each division. These documents were items such as: (a) training material; (b) established best practices; and (c) onboarding documents that discuss sexual harassment, sensitivity, and workplace bullying. These documents

provided evidence as a possible rationale behind why some of the answers were given in the interview with participants. Further, in the recommendations of Chapter 5, how new elements and objectives can be added to existing resources will help mitigate workplace isolation.

Transferability

To achieve the status of external validity or transferability is to test the study's findings to be generalizable beyond the purpose of the original study. In this study, the transferability was dependent on the analysis and synthesized data of the results. The conceptual framework illustrates how social exchanges is a requirement amongst individuals to avoid isolation. To ensure the highest level of transferability, I have described my findings in this study that includes all developed themes, patterns, and common understandings (Saldana, 2016). Patterns were first coded from the participants answers from the interviews a holistic theme. The emergent themes derived from patterns as ones that continuously were coded as a theme. The recommendations from this study could be utilized in other industries with remote workers as those industries can apply the application of what is described in Chapter 5 as possible strategies to mitigate workplace isolation occurring with their remote workers.

Dependability

Dependability is achieved when the research is presented in a way that enables other researchers to replicate the procedures described in this study (Yin, 2018). To ensure that the highest level of dependability of this study was met, I thoroughly inspected every step along the coding process to ensure alignment with what the method

of coding required. By doing so, this ensures that future scholars can replicate the study for analysis. Further, an audit trail was created to aid me in achieving the point of a common understanding amongst the four divisions. Throughout the interview process, at night, I would complete a reflective journal of what I experienced, heard, thought about, and initial reactions to the answers of the interview questions.

Confirmability

Confirmability is also called external reliability in qualitative research (Patton, 2016). According to Yin (2018), researchers have the potential and risk to be unknowingly influenced by the participants' responses which can distract them from their line of inquiry. To heighten awareness and sensitivity to confirmability, I followed the interview guide protocol verbiage stating that the questions asked and no elaboration of the question can be given about the question. Only one participant in the study asked me to repeat the question due to a poor network connection in the audio. To minimize bias, I ensured the participants were asked questions from the interview guide that leads to the answers of their point of view and belief, and not what I influenced by myself in the interview.

Study Results

This exploratory multiple case study involved interviews with 21 remote workers in four divisions within one company. In this section, I presented the common understandings amongst the four divisions that emerged from the semistructured interviews and document review. Each participant's interview was transcribed for accuracy and served as the data that aided in constructing the themes. I have presented

the common understandings of patterns by order of importance, aligned with the conceptual framework, by which the questions were asked by way of the interview protocol. Further, I have included the themes that emerged from the review of all documents provided by the sampling organization as a way to meet the need for triangulation.

Research Question

The central research question for the study was: What are the common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States?

Major Themes

Emergent Theme 1: Clear Expectations About What Was Being Asked of Their Role

Table 3

Interview Question 1 Data

Theme	Pattern amongst the four divisions	Total number of occurrences	Percentage of occurrences
Demands of job	Clear expectations about what was being asked of their role	19	90%
Role within the team	Maintaining peer-to-peer relationships while working	15	71%
Team responsibility in the company	Identity amongst which part of the company they work for and produce for the customer	12	57%

The first theme that emerged from the analysis of the common understandings of the data from the semistructured interview questions was clear expectations about what was being asked of within their role. The data stems from the data analysis of the semistructured interview question; what are the day to day demands of job? Overall, each participant from each division answered this question the same in a way that first described what they do in their job and then discussed how this what they did had an impact to a product for their customers. Participant 9 described clearly as to their role being, “my main goals are generating leads from our prospects and then retaining our current customers.” Participant 3 described their role as,

Well, I’m a salesperson. It’s the essentially all over the phone. Selling to existing and new customers. From prospecting clear through the pipeline and sales cycle to closing and then I keep an eye on them from an onboarding standpoint.

Participant 6 stated,

Communicating with my team to make sure that I’m working towards the right things. Another is actually sitting here at the computer coding things up and you know getting that all figured out and problem solved and piece together to make the product.

Participant 19 discussed from a manager’s perspective,

The first thing I did in the market is we have a stand up, which is when all the developers on our team take turns telling what they did the day before what they plan to do today. And it’s also their time to discuss anything that’s blocking their work that should be resolved, because we want to stay productive. You’re

something blocking you from continuing to work on and make sure that we talked about those things. And then as a remote employee. It's really important that I stay engaged and you have to have good communication in order to do that, and good tools to do that. We have, you know, we also have an instant messenger like audio, video, two of us called Microsoft Teams.

This answer was critical to the conceptual framework as this manager was linking individuals to another which aids in mitigating workplace isolation.

Emergent Theme 2: Being Remote Did Not Impact Peer-to-Peer Relationship

Table 4

Interview Question 2 Data

Theme	Pattern amongst the four divisions	Total number of occurrences	Percentage of occurrences
Did not impact	Knowing the role was a remote position before being hired resulted in knowing there would not be a consistent connection to peers	20	95%
Technology assisted	Use of Microsoft Teams aide in peer-to-peer connections	19	90%
Company events assisted	Yearly onsite events at the company assisted in peer to peer relationships	15	71%

The next emerging theme was that being remote did not have an impact on their peer-to-peer relationships. The theme emerged from the data analysis of the semistructured interview question; how has being remote influenced your peer-to-peer

relationships? Twenty of the 21 interviews (95%) discussed that when they were hired they knew the role was going to be in a remote working environment; thus, the notion of having a peer beside them throughout the work day was not factored. Participant 18 stated, “Not having my peers with me hasn’t changed anything. The use of technology is helping me to stay connected.” Participant 13 states, “I don’t think that it has, in all fairness. I’m used to it. I don’t feel. I mean, we have so many collaboration tools. It’s getting in touch with whom you need is fairly easy.” Participant 6 states, “Um, you know, I don’t know that it has influenced at any differently than being present in the same room with a with another one of my peers. I don’t think it’s really influenced it any differently.” These responses are given are clear indications that the impact of not having peers around the remote workers does not appear to have any impact between the remote workers and their building or enhancing their peer-to-peer relationships.

Emergent Theme 3: Times of the Day Experiencing Isolation

Table 5

Interview Question 4 Data

Theme	Pattern amongst the four divisions	Total number of occurrences	Percentage of occurrences
Time zones	Being online in different time zones when others are either not online or have left the office	20	95%
End of day	When employees leave the office in different time zones at the end of the day without notifying others	19	90%
Company events at headquarters	Yearly onsite events at the company assisted in peer to peer relationships	15	71%

The theme emerged from the data analysis of the semistructured interview question; what times of the day have you experienced isolation? This question was written with the notion of trying to understand if there were any common times of the day each division experienced isolation to be able to articulate why. What was determined in this interview was that time zones determined the reaction as to when employees felt isolated. Participant 9 stated the following,

I guess in the term isolation, I'm isolated all day long, because I'm at home by myself, almost hundred percent of the time throughout the workday. I guess in that term. I'm isolated, but, on the other hand, I'm so busy interacting with people on electronically rather be by phone or electronic messaging or calling customers.

When I notice it the most is when people are in different time zones and are done for the day. (Participant nine)

Participant 17 stated, “I would say, when I’m the only one at home you know then that it’s definitely more noticeable. The isolation. This is because no one is online yet and no one is home either.”

Emergent Theme 4: Events That Cause Workplace Isolation

Table 6

Interview Question 5 Data

Theme	Pattern amongst the four divisions	Total number of occurrences	Percentage of occurrences
Corporate events	Lack of awareness of recognition gatherings or celebrations at the headquarters	12	57%
End of day	Lack of awareness of in-office workers leaving early for the day	9	43%

The theme emerged from the data analysis of the semistructured interview question; what events have taken place to you experiencing isolation? This question in the interview generated answers from participants that discussed how being remote limits their abilities to know what is going on at headquarters. In addition, when employees leave early from headquarters, the remote working staff is not informed that other employees are leaving for the day. Participant 11 stated the following,

Things that might be happening internally events internally, like at the corporate office. That would be something that sometimes it’s not always conveyed to

remote workers until it's happening. Our company really does a great job most of the time. But there have been instances where there is some type of all-day event where remote workers have not been made aware of. I can honestly say there was only one this year that remote workers did not know about that was going on and whether it was a lack of communication or somebody didn't pass it along to our team, you know, I'm not sure where that miscommunication was an event that everybody should have known about that we heard about like the date was going on.

Participant 13 stated the following,

In the mornings. There's nobody on or if they are on you know they're getting their coffee, they're waking up, they're checking their mail. There's not a lot of conversation happening on those times. I think that's good. I'm all for that because they just need that a couple of hours where there's nobody around so that I can just really get a lot of work done in that in that space that space of time.

Emergent Theme 5: Events Taken Place to Experiencing Isolation

Table 7

Interview Question 6 Data

Theme	Pattern amongst the four divisions	Total number of occurrences	Percentage of occurrences
Complex problems	When working on independent items that take more than an hour, employees isolate themselves to focus	21	100%

The theme emerged from the data analysis of the semistructured interview question; what specific work tasks cause you to isolated yourself. Each participant of this study commented on the experience of isolation when they were working on a problem that I coded as complex. Complex items could be items such as time allotted to problem solving, coding that related to a product for a customer, or any work tasks that required time away from interactions with other peers. Participant 8 stated,

When our team has some sort of problem we do what we can to fix it and shut down between one another to get the job done, not literally shut down but majority of us put our heads down to get the problem fixed.

Participant 14 stated the following,

Complex ideas. In fact, right now I'm doing that, I'm kind of brainstorming and doing some research about our competitors and for a new product launch and really brainstorming what our competitors are doing now. It's kind of a new. It's a

new audience. I'm looking at all of that and you know also looking at resources that our product team has created. I know more about that product.

Participant 15 responded, "Typically, if I'm working on a problem that is has proven to be difficult for me to self. Attend to focus very deeply on that task."

Emergent Theme 6: Influenced Performance

Table 8

Interview Question 7 Data

Theme	Pattern amongst the four divisions	Total number of occurrences	Percentage of occurrences
Does not impact	Isolation in their role does not impact performance	15	71%
Focus	Isolation allows for time of focus and no distractions	9	38%

The theme emerged from the data analysis of the semistructured interview question; how has the experience of workplace isolation influenced your performance? Fifteen participants (71%) gravitated towards answering this question suggesting that there was not an impact to their performance. That the experience of isolation increased their performance because it allowed for less distraction and more focus. Nine participants (38%) discussed how isolation granted the ability to focus solely on the task at hand providing the benefit of not having any one stopping by to interrupt or break their concentration on the specific task. For example, participant 4 stated the following,

Honestly, I think it kind of elevates my production, a little bit when working from home. You know, my office is where I can see when people and people stop to

talk to me. When I'm on the phone I can get distracted in that way. When working from home. I mean, I can turn around and leave all distractions that look at, you know, my computer or anything like that. I'm really focused on the individual.

Participant 9 responded with the following answer.

When I am me, I am a very social person. When I'm in the office there's constantly people coming to my desk, asking for help or wanting to talk and it was to the point where is every 5 minutes and I can't focus on a task. When I am at home I can literally put your teams on mute, and just focus however long you want as long as you make your meetings. I've never had that focused time and then I added it in to my schedule. I'm able to do things now that I never thought that I could comprehend and it's really quite exciting.

Emergent Theme 7: Discussing Workplace Isolation with Manager

Table 9

Interview Question 9 Data

Theme	Pattern amongst the four divisions	Total number of occurrences	Percentage of occurrences
Does not discuss	Does not feel the need to discuss with their manager	13	62%
Does discuss sometimes	Shares with their manager their experience when questioned or it becomes a problem	5	24%

The theme emerged from the data analysis of the semistructured interview question; how often do you talk about your experience of workplace isolation with your manager? This question evoked a discussion about the comfortability of discussing their experience with their manager. The common understanding amongst the four divisions was 13 (62%) of employees does not discuss because the experience has never been a problem, while five (24%) of employees does discuss their experience but only after the fact of experiencing workplace isolation. This was a critical aspect to the study as the conceptual framework was situated in social exchange with another person to mitigate workplace isolation. The evidence from the interview data supports this notion as employees are using social exchange with their manager to overcome the experience. Participant 10 stated,

Me and my manager don't talk as much as I think we should about it. And he's got a lot of things going on. I've got a lot of things going on. Unless it's a problem, I don't need to bring it up.

Participant 21 answered the following,

I don't really necessarily see it as a negative, I don't feel like it's something that I normally bring up ask you know how are things going in relationship to working remotely and coming in and all of that stuff, mainly because of the drive that I'm doing coming here versus staying home. But no, I mean, I don't really see it as a negative. I haven't really needed to bring it up.

Emergent Theme 8: Training Materials

Table 10

Review of Training Materials Provided to all Four Divisions

Theme	Pattern amongst the four divisions
Emotional intelligence	Missing elements of social awareness
Managing remote teams	Missing training on how to manage remote teams
Managing remote employees	Missing training on how to manage remote employees

After review of all the materials, the theme of emotional intelligence was noted, and this pattern was evident within the answers given by the participants of the study. The emotional intelligence training explores aspects of self-awareness but not social awareness. Further, the training explores how to leverage emotional intelligence in times of conflict but does not discuss how to have conversations with your employees about their current experience of items like workplace isolation. The manager training presents has objectives such as managing productivity, problem-solving, accountability, and managing. What is missing from this material was how conversations inspire, equip, and improve employee performance, particularly in a remote working environment. Further, the manager training misses the element of engagement as discussed in Chapter 2 as a way to motivate employees.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to gain common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. Following the interview protocol discussed in Chapter 3, the remote working participants provided sufficient data, from the interviews, relating to the research question. The findings in Chapter 4 were disclosed by the data collection process, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and ultimately the results of the study.

An analysis of the data regarding the nine interview questions and training documentation brought forth the emergent themes in the four divisions within the organization. Participants responses were hand-coded based on their responses and put

into tables for analysis. Codes that appeared less than three times were not considered a pattern that would be considered as a theme. Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of the findings, limitations from this study, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The general problem under study was that corporate managers who lead teams with remote employees may not have the management acumen, organizational awareness, or leadership expertise to construct and implement strategies, policies, and procedures to help reduce workplace isolation (see Day & Burbach, 2015). The specific problem regarding workplace isolation was that remote workers may experience a decrease in their performance on the job. My review of the literature revealed a gap in qualitative research regarding remote working and workplace isolation, specifically on how workplace isolation may impede a remote employee's performance.

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to gain a common understanding of how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. The study included a sampling of 21 remote working participants from four different divisions in the organization. The data collection process involved over-the-telephone interviews guided by nine open-ended, semistructured, interview questions. The second method of data collection I employed was the review of management training documentation, policies, and other aspects of training that employees were given that pertain to remote working. I used this secondary method of collecting the data to achieve methodological triangulation. The data analysis process in this study included hand coding both the themes and patterns of answers provided by the participants and the review of management training documentation and policies. In this chapter, I present the

interpretations of findings, limitations of the study, implications, recommendations, and the implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of Findings

I used a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study method and design in this study to gain a common understanding of how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. According to Patton (2016), qualitative research provides the narrative to an experience rather than just variables. I gathered narrative of participants' experiences in interviews, with data emerging from the coding of interview transcripts based on patterns and emergent themes that were common amongst the four divisions in the organization. The emergent themes were shared in Chapter 4, and in this chapter, I provide a further analysis of the findings.

Research Question

What are the common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States?

Emergent Theme 1: Events Taken Place to Experiencing Isolation

The first theme emerged from my data analysis of the semistructured interview question: What events have taken place where you experienced isolation? All 21 participant's (100%) stated that when they are working on a complex problem in their job that the focus required to complete the task creates the experience of workplace isolation. The alignment between each remote worker amongst all the divisions correlated with the

conceptual framework. The conceptual framework was dependent on social exchanges between individuals, and when employees are intentionally isolating themselves the experience of isolation will be more prevalent. In their responses, the participants shared that the experience of workplace isolation happens when the event or task takes more than an hour to complete. According to Duxbury and Halinski (2014), when a remote employee is left isolated for long periods of time, their focus will cause them to burn out.

Emergent Theme 2: Being Remote did not Impact Peer-to-Peer Relationships

The second theme emerged from my data analysis of the semistructured interview question: How has being remote influenced your peer-to-peer relationships? Twenty (95%) of the 21 participants answered that being in a remote position did not impact their peer-to-peer relationships. This commonality across the four divisions was made clear by participants discussing how their working environment was remote when they accepted the job and that they were aware of the complexities of not being in an office where peers would work from the start of their career. According to Basile and Beauregard (2016), the more a remote worker knows they will have missing social connections with their peers, the more likely a remote worker was to succeed because the expectation is clear to them. Basile and Beauregard's notion aligned with the conceptual framework as well as what the remote workers discussed in this study in response to Question 2 of the interview protocol.

Use of Microsoft teams aids in peer-to-peer connections. A subtheme of Emergent Theme 2 was that the use of technology, specifically Microsoft teams, was an aid for remote workers to make peer-to-peer connections and stay connected to their

manager. According to Marshall et al. (2007), the experience of workplace isolation can be triggered at any time, and the experience may hinder different aspects of an employee, including their performance. By providing technology to employees to stay connected with their peers and managers, the ability to have social exchanges between individuals is symbolic of the conceptual framework because it can be used to mitigate workplace isolation.

Yearly onsite events at the company assisted in peer-to-peer relationships.

Another subtheme that stemmed from Emergent Theme 2 was that employees felt the time spent yearly at corporate events helped them build and maintain peer-to-peer relationships. Their appreciation for being able to come together was noted first in the interviews, then across the four divisions, participants responded that while there was time spent working on tasks and projects, the time they felt was most important was outside of work hours learning about their peers on a personal level of interest. Fifteen (71%) of the 21 participants suggested that these yearly events were critical to their ability to stay connected to the organization while building a cohesive team.

Emergent Theme 3: Times of the Day Experiencing Isolation

The third theme emerged from my data analysis of the semistructured interview question: What events have taken place where you experienced isolation? This theme was the times of the day that remote employees experienced workplace isolation. Twenty (95%) of the 21 participants answered that being isolated was most noticeable when the given time zones they work from caused an interruption to their work priorities. Amongst the four divisions, the three time zones noted were Eastern, Central, and Pacific. This

emergent theme was expressed in greater detail for those remote employees who worked outside of the Eastern time zone. The main headquarters of the study organization is located in the Eastern time zone.

In addition to the time zones, another aspect of times of the day remote workers experienced isolation was when employees on the East Coast would leave early from work and not alert the remote team members. The participants in the study shared the context that not everyone needs to know when each other leaves, but if the company was having a local event and employees in that area were leaving early, the remote workers were not informed. The notion of being informed indicates the need for social exchange and supported the conceptual framework in this study.

Company events. The company having events at headquarters causing the experience of isolation was a subtheme that emerged from the data analysis of the semistructured interview question: What times of the day have you experienced workplace isolation? Of the 21 participants in this study, 15 (71%) mentioned that when the company holds an event at headquarters and the remote working employees were not aware of the event and found out about it after the event, the experience of isolation ensued. Orhan et al. (2016) articulated this concept in their research about when an employee has the experience of not being seen, then they do not exist in the organization. Furthermore, this absenteeism aligned with what is described in the social exchange theory as the missing element of social interactions that creates the experience of workplace isolation.

Emergent Theme 4: Clear Expectations About What was Being Asked of Their Role

The fourth theme emerged from my data analysis of the semistructured interview question: What are the day-to-day demands of your job? Nineteen of the 21 (90%) participants answered that they were clear about their job expectations. The participants answering in this manner about clear job expectations insinuates that from the start of their career as a remote worker, they have had ongoing conversations with their manager and clarity in their job alignment as to what needed to be completed daily. The commonality of clear job expectations amongst the divisions was consistent with the conceptual framework as the employee was having a social exchange with their manager and not experiencing workplace isolation (see Emerson, 1976).

Maintaining peer-to-peer relationships. When study participants were asked about what the demands of their job consisted of, the commonality amongst divisions was that 15 (71%) of the respondents answered with the notion that staying connected with their peers and maintaining a relationship was a part of their job. This subtheme, from Question 1 of the interview protocol (see Appendix A), confirmed the importance of the conceptual framework and also suggested that employees are aware of how they need to stay connected to peers in a remote working environment. According to Anderson et al. (2014), the impact of the emotional experience can hinder a remote worker's wellbeing, and as discussed in Chapter 2, the wellbeing of remote employees is symptomatic of job performance.

Team responsibility in the company. Another subtheme that stemmed from Question 1 was that 12 (57%) of the 21 participants mentioned the responsibility of their

team to the company or customer. It became apparent during the interview process that if a participant would discuss their team's responsibility earlier in the interview that the questions related to the research question about job performance were answered more confidently. These participants' performance was not inhibited by workplace isolation; rather, it provided the experience to focus on their responsibilities amongst the other employees on their team and in the company. Each remote employee justified their answer when responding to Question 1 by explaining that they were hired knowing they would be working in a remote working environment, and this meant to them that they were holding themselves accountable to completing quality work being the company allowed them to work remotely.

Emergent Theme 5: Workplace Isolation Influencing Performance

The next emergent theme resulted from my data analysis of the semistructured interview question: How has the experience of workplace isolation influenced your performance? The response given by 15 (71%) participants was that workplace isolation does not have any impact on their performance. This theme was not consistent with previous literature discussed in Chapter 2 where workplace isolation was thought to impede performance. The common understanding amongst the four divisions was that their roles were consistent with experiencing isolation and that each employee understood using the experience of isolation as a tactic to complete their work. The literature about workplace isolation occurring with remote workers does support the notion about when the manager and employee are clear about expectations and their work priorities, the less likely it is that the employee will experience isolation (Collins et al., 2016). The

subtheme aligned with the findings of Collins et al. (2016) because nine (38%) participants discussed how the experience of isolation grants them the ability to focus on the task and not have any distractions. An outlier theme that did not have enough respondents to code as a common theme was that three participants, in separate divisions in the organization, commented about how they found it an increasingly difficult struggle to come back into the office to work because of the variations of distractions after working remotely.

Emergent Theme 6: Events That Cause Workplace Isolation

The sixth emergent theme emerged from my data analysis of the semistructured interview question: What events have taken place that led to you experiencing isolation? Of the 21 participants, 12 (57%) answered that the events that cause a remote worker to experience isolation were when there are corporate recognition and reward programs taking place at the various company sites and the remote workers are either not included or not made aware of the event taking place. This emergent theme was confirmed by Ozcelik and Barsade (2018) who found that when a remote worker is not included or left to experience isolation during corporate events, the exclusion may impede their performance.

A subtheme that emerged from this emergent theme was that nine (43%) participants mentioned that the lack of awareness leaving early for the day also was an event that caused them to experience isolation. This subtheme stems from the previous question in the interview protocol, which indicates the intensity a remote worker has towards being unaware of events taking place. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1977)

when an individual has the attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control the employee may be able to work through the experience of isolation by their own cognition. When employees are unable to be self-aware of the experience and have the right strategies to mitigate or overcome workplace isolation the consequence was a possible decline in their performance.

Emergent Theme 7: Discussing with manager

The seventh emergent theme resulted from the data analysis semistructured interview question: how often do you talk about your experience of workplace isolation with your manager? Only five (24%) participants responded that about they have shared their experience of workplace isolation with their manager. Stemming from their responses, each participant would add that this was only because the experience had caused a problem with their work or getting work accomplished. Participants shared that the systemic experience of workplace isolation was most noticeable after the issue was resolved and discussed with their manager. The other 16 of the 21 participants (76%) stated that they had not spoken with their manager about workplace isolation as it was not a problem or they did not feel as if it was something that needed to be discussed. These responses are aligned with the literature about when an employee is not overloaded with work or experiencing burnout that the remote employee will not discuss their experience of isolation (Duxbury & Halinski, 2014).

Emergent Theme 8: Training Materials

The eight emergent theme stems from a review of training documentation. The documents reviewed were items such as management courses, compliance training,

onboarding documents, and ongoing learning courses for employees at the company. A review of the documents yielded a result of three common understandings amongst the four divisions. In the training there is a section about emotional intelligence but the missing element is a defined objective about discussing social awareness. In the management training, the common understanding amongst all divisions from the remote workers of this study was that the training did not have any objectives that would educate managers on how to lead or manage a remote working employee or team.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this exploratory multiple case study aimed at the common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. There were numerous limitations to this study that I encountered. The first limitation was related to how many remote workers were representing a particular division within the organization. The intent of the study was to achieve a common understanding amongst all four divisions within the organization about how workplace isolation may impact the performance of a remote worker. The number of participants for this study did provide an adequate amount of data to gain common understandings between the division to be able to compute the results in Chapter 4.

The data collection process was through semistructured interview questions and internal training, policy, and compliance documentation. The responses given in the interview were based on experiencing workplace isolation. Another limitation of the study included remote workers providing answers to the questions based on what they

experienced and provide responses based on the goal of the study. There was no evidence regarding unethical answers or misleading information, and to further this notion the participants were provided with a copy of the transcripts to review for accuracy of data. I created an audit trail to ensure that all participants received their transcripts and I received them back within three days of receiving their transcripts. The last limitation of this study was in the review of the training documentation and the experience of my knowledge about the training and information provided. To ensure there was evidence of trustworthiness, a methodological triangulation eliminated any researcher bias, and the descriptions of interview data along with the conceptual framework increased transferability amongst all the data in this study.

Recommendations

Future studies may consider the following recommendations discussed in this chapter to the ongoing literature and empirical knowledge about remote working and workplace isolation. For this study, I exhausted every resource and opportunity available to obtain a common understanding amongst the four divisions within the organization within an exploratory qualitative case study. The research findings were a derivative of the nine semistructured interview questions and review of company documentation. The 21 participants (100%) offered various ideas, concepts, and recommendations as to what would enhance their performance. The following recommendations are based on the emergent themes that reflect the perspectives of the research participants, literature review, and conceptual framework. The order of these recommendations are in order of frequency answered from the questions asked in the interview and artifacts reviewed.

Recommendation 1: Increase Communication

The first recommendation is to increase and establish an agreed upon frequency of communication managers are having with their remote employees. According to the research findings, all 21 participants (100%) explained that communication with their manager provides ongoing support and eliminates the experience of workplace isolation. This notion is aligned with the conceptual framework by having a social exchange with another employee. Further, I would add that the conversations need to be individualized to each employee as to how they like to communicate and at the cadence in which each remote employee likes to communicate. Previous literature (Gallup, 2016) supports the notion that when managers individualize to their employee the engagement of that employee increases as well as their performance.

Recommendation 2: Connection to Remote Teams

The second recommendation is to systemize how remote teams connect, communicate, and check-in with each other. As answered by all 21 participants (100%), the teams that were more successful about staying in touch with one another had a process in which all remote workers were aware of and knew the agreed upon method to connect. According to Choi (2017), having a collective agreement amongst the remote teams enhances the communication because remote workers are clear as to their channels to be able to connect with one another. The common understanding amongst all four divisions was that there was not a standard practice, but rather different best practices that could be discussed between the management team to create principles for the entire company.

Recommendation 3: Develop and Enforce Policy

The third recommendation is to encourage leadership at the sampling organization to construct a remote working policy to provide clarity as to what is expected from leaders, managers, and remote employees. Emergent Theme 6, which included 12 (57%) participants, indicates that remote workers are not always aware of onsite corporate events but there is not a structure as to how to inform and include the remote working population into these events. In the meta-analysis discussed in Chapter 2 about remote working and performance, this recommendation of a remote working policy was made clear as to a missing element in an organization (see Lembrechts, Zanoni, & Verbruggen, 2016). While this document may not be considered as a compliance document, the concept would be to have an agreement about what success in each role of remote working requires, and then documentation of behaviors and performance metrics assigned to the role. By having this type of documentation, it would provide clarity amongst all divisions and also an agreement as what metrics translates to performance excellence on the job.

Recommendation 4: Promote Awareness

The fourth recommendation is to incorporate more social awareness of the remote workers wellbeing. According to Anderson, Kaplan, and Vega (2014) one area of remote working that remote workers lack the ability to manage was their wellbeing, and without awareness of their wellbeing can lead to health concerns. Two (10%) of the participants from the study discussed a program that the organization has about wellbeing, which indicates that there was an established program in place. The participants (90%) who did

not discuss the corporate wellbeing program did make mention of other ways they try and stay connected to their wellbeing and further their concerns from being at home all day for their day job. One participant even mentioned their office location in their home helped increase their wellbeing due to being able to move outside the home when the sun was out. The next step in the evolution of this program would be to have a conscious set of events to promote, discuss, and ensure that an executive can champion this effort for remote workers.

Recommendation 5: Improve Training Materials and Delivery

The fifth recommendation is to alter the learning materials and provide training for both the manager of remote employees and remote employees. Within the responses given by 15 participants (71%) about how workplace isolation impacts their performance the theory of social exchange is grounded in communicating and contacting individuals to keep them from the experience of isolation. The training materials should include when and how to connect with their remote employees. In essence, how to individualize the managers communication and follow up with their remote employees.

The management training provided was generalizable across all management roles, and the next step would be to incorporate strategies, policies, and best practices into the current management training. The training for remote employees could include aspects of this study, and other benchmark data from other research to construct individuals need to stay engaged in their role and achieve the highest level of performance throughout their workday. This type of training for both the remote managers and remote workers would assist in their conversation about their needs in their

role that include mitigating workplace isolation and any other tangible or intangible needs in their role.

Implications

The general problem is that corporate managers who lead teams with remote employees may not have the management acumen, organizational awareness, or leadership expertise to construct and implement strategies, policies, and procedures to help reduce workplace isolation. The gap in the literature was evidence of a need to further research about workplace isolation and how the experience may impede a remote workers performance. The research findings included information useful to stakeholders and future scholars that chose to research workplace isolation and remote working. In this section are the implications for social change, theory, and practice.

Implications for Social Change

Developing strategies, policies, and training about workplace isolation occurring in remote working have implications for social change with any organization that has a remote working workforce. The implications for positive social impact were possible by the data extracted from the experience of the remote workers in this study. This study may serve as inductive research adding to the knowledge of workplace isolation and remote working within leadership and management publishing journals and manuals. Further, the findings are generalizable across all industries that allow for remote working. One recommendation was to create learning that would apply for remote managers and remote employees which increase the social change of the remote working population in

any company. The results may conclude a more proficient leadership and management team to know how to ensure each employee is achieving high levels of performance.

Implications for Theory

The literature review revealed a gap in a common understanding of how workplace isolation may impede the performance of a remote worker (see Marshall, et al., 2007). While the results of this study provide an opportunity to bring awareness of workplace isolation in remote working, there remains a lack of literature on the once identifying if a remote worker is experiencing workplace isolation what other job performance metrics are at risk. Future implications of theory leads to more research about how to identify other job performance metrics and how to mitigate workplace isolation impeding those metrics. The information from the research findings may narrow the gap in the literature relating to workplace isolation and remote working.

Implication for Practice

The research findings may deem important for stakeholders, leaders, and managers who have a remote working population. According to Gozukara et al. (2017), the more leaders and managers become aware of best practices about remote working, the more likely they are to learn their own best practices to manage their workforce. Literature revealed that workplace isolation is a metric (Marshall, et al., 2007) that can be quantified and observed; also, an experience that can inhibit the performance a remote worker (Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011). Historically, remote workers have been managed like an in-office employee, and the research in this study has supported there are different needs of a remote worker based on their experience of workplace isolation and how their

performance may be at risk. Stakeholders, organizations, leaders, and managers may find this information useful when constructing remote working policies, strategies, and training for employees.

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to gain common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. To establish sufficient analytical generalizations, I purposefully sampled 21 remote workers in four different divisions in the same organization. To achieve a multiple case study perspective, I included data from the interviews, as well, the policies, training materials, and compliance documentation to determine the common understanding of the research question. The emergent themes from all interviews and review of materials were provided to achieve the design of a multiple case study.

While the findings of this study confirmed the need to generate more awareness and training for leaders and managers, the more that scholars can continue to study how workplace isolation may impede other job performance metrics for remote workers the high the possibility of social change. These research findings have potential implications for additional research and positive social change for remote workers. Implications for future research may seek knowledge of the other experiences and job performance metrics that could conclude areas for managers to establish policies, strategies, and best practices for mitigating workplace isolation occurring in remote workers.

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Appendix

Participant Code: _____

Location of Interview: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Start Time: _____

Finish Time: _____

Total Time: _____

Hello, thank you for agreeing to be part of my study. This interview will take about 45 minutes. I will be asking you question related to workplace isolation and working remotely. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study is to gain common understandings about how workplace isolation may influence a remote employee's performance in a customer service organization in the United States. Do I have your permission to tape-record the interview for me to get an inclusive record of your responses? The interview will involve taking as you respond to the questions. Are there any questions or clarifications you would like me to make before we begin? You may stop the interview at any time based on the consent agreement you signed. Are you ready to being?

Research question: What are the common understandings about workplace isolation that influences a remote employees' performance in a customer service organization in the United States?

Interview Questions:

1) What are the day-to-day demands of your job?

- 2) How has being remote influenced your peer-to-peer relationships?
- 3) What in your experience causes you to be most connected to your organization?
- 4) What times of the day have you experienced isolation?
- 5) What events have taken place to you experiencing isolation?
- 6) What specific work tasks cause you to isolate yourself?
- 7) How has the experience of workplace isolation influenced your performance?
- 8) How do you overcome the experience of workplace isolation?
- 9) How often do you talk about your experience of workplace isolation with your manager?

Thanks again for your participation in this study. After the transcription of this interview is complete, I will e-mail you a copy of the transcriptions for your review. If there are edits to the transcriptions, within 3 days of receiving, please reply to my e-mail with comments in the document. If I do not receive any edits back within 3 days, I will consider our interview complete. Thank you again for your time and comments during this interview.