REMOTE LEADERSHIP: ASSESSING PRODUCTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS IN A

POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE

by

Kimberly Snodgrass

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Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Liberty University, School of Business

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

Leaders of organizations have faced many challenges with respect to remote work during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The purpose of this research was to examine the most productive work environment for employees post-pandemic, the role leadership plays in the success of remote work, and how employees view remote work. This research was limited to one small community bank that had experience with employees working in a traditional office setting then working remotely to adhere to COVID-19 protocols. This study focused on middle management and below, excluding senior management from the research. The conclusion of this research was that most employees want to work remotely opposed to a traditional office setting, which can achieve higher job satisfaction and lower employee turnover. Current employees of the small community bank were surveyed and interviewed to explore their experiences, organizational culture, thoughts on leadership's decision, and the impact of remote work due to the pandemic. Organizations that have leaders who listen to what their employees want when it comes to remote work will result in greater work performance. This research demonstrated the importance of evaluating employees post-pandemic to analyze their most productive work setting.

Keywords: remote leadership, traditional office setting, hybrid model, employee retention, work-life balance

Dedication

I want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. My relationship with God strengthened and grew tremendously over the last 3 years during this academic journey. I am beyond grateful to have found a Christian University like Liberty that connects God's work to the real world. This journey has brought more purpose in my everyday work and when researching and writing for this doctorate degree. God's unconditional love for me has got me this far in my academic career. Trusting God, the entire doctorate process had led me to the success of completing this degree.

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I could not have completed this doctorate degree without the love and support from my husband. He told me that if it was something I wanted, to just go for it, and he would always be there to support me. My husband's encouragement throughout the entire process has pushed me to complete my degree. My husband jumped all in with helping me pay for my education when we got engaged. He is such a selfless person, and I could not have done this without his support and love. We were just dating at the time I started this doctorate degree, and now finishing the program, we have gotten married, bought a house, added a puppy to our family, and have a baby on the way.

My parents have always supported everything that I have done in my life. They always cheered me on and have been my loudest fans. Their support has given me the ability to dream big and achieve success. They always made me feel like I could achieve any goal I set out to accomplish. They always asked how my program was going and were very understanding if I had to bring my laptop on a family vacation or a holiday to work on my classes. I could not have accomplished this doctorate degree without the constant love and encouragement my parents have given me my entire life.

I am so thankful for my siblings. My sister let me vent and complain when times were tough during this doctorate journey. She let me practice my Defense Proposal on her, and my brothers let me practice my interviews on them. My family truly showed that they cared about seeing me finish my degree the entire 3 years.

I would lastly like to thank Dr. Harrison. She has been the kindest soul I have ever had the honor to work with. She has been such an amazing support system throughout this entire process, and I would not have been able to finish this without her.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Remote working environments have been on the rise since the global pandemic, COVID-19, which required stay-at-home orders for many workers (Kong et al., 2022). To continue doing business as usual, organizations allowed remote work options. Employers who did not offer work-from-home options had to figure out how to adapt to remote work environments. Leadership found that communication was critical when working in different work environments. Since fewer mandates are in place now, organizations must identify the benefits of offering remote work options to their employees and the consequences of remaining in a traditional workplace. Remote working plays a direct role in employees' attitudes, job satisfaction, motivation, and employee retention (Kong et al., 2022). Leaders need to understand the benefits and consequences of allowing flexible work environments to combat employee retention issues. As leaders are strategizing return to work programs, communication shows the potential to be critical for employees to be successful. Understanding the role leadership plays in executing a thriving remote work environment for their employees may provide insight into how employees perceived the success of the implementation (Kong et al., 2022).

Background of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many businesses to force their employees into remote work environments to stop the spread of the virus. Now, business leaders are deciding whether to have their employees continue remote work or to bring their employees back into traditional office settings (Lippert et al., 2021). Organizations with good e-leadership viewed remote working as a benefit and opportunity for their employees (Contreras et al., 2020). It is imperative that leadership teams thoroughly analyze and research the benefits that remote environments provide to their employees. Most employees may experience increased job satisfaction, more

vital relationships with management, improved work-life balance, and less work-related stress (Contreras et al., 2020). Business leaders may want to evaluate the options they can offer to employees. Since remote work is on the rise, evaluating healthy balances between physical office settings and virtual work environments may allow the employee the choice of their most successful work environment (de Klerk et al., 2021). Leadership may need to adapt to their employees' chosen work environment to ensure organizational stability. The inability to adapt to a virtual work setting can lead to dissatisfaction among their employees. Business leaders need to understand the population of employees that were not successful in a remote environment and work to resolve the issues they were experiencing (Kolbergytė & Dromantaitė, 2022). Employees with poor Wi-Fi connections, lack of technical support and experience, and no dedicated workspace at home experienced higher levels of technostress (Gabr et al., 2021). All employees need to have access to support in remote environments to succeed. Business leaders need to understand that remote working is not going away. To be competitive with other businesses in their industry, evaluating their decision to continue remote work or bring all employees back into a traditional office may be critical for organizational sustainability.

Problem Statement

The general problem addressed was the failure of leaders to gain employee support for different work environments, resulting in the inability of the organization to satisfy employees. Contreras et al. (2020) explained that when teleworking, employees are at risk for social isolation and feeling disconnected from work, leading to lower performance and gradual demotivation. de Klerk et al. (2021) explained the challenges employees encounter with extensive telework, such as reducing collaboration, work-life blurring, lack of meaningful connection, being overworked, distractions, loneliness, worry, guilt, increased stress, and decreased life satisfaction. Gabr et al.

(2021) unraveled that the technostress levels of remote employees caused by insufficient workspace, poor Wi-Fi connections, lack of technical support and experience, and superior workload levels may result in higher cortisol blood levels. Likewise, Yarberry and Sims (2021) explained that employees who have experienced a mandatory remote work environment have suffered from a lack of human interaction and virtual mentoring. The specific problem to be addressed in this study was the challenges leaders face within the small community banking industry in Western Pennsylvania to gain executive-level support for remote work environments, resulting in the possible inability of the organization to retain and recruit critical employees.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

RQ1. What is the role of leadership in the success of either traditional or virtual work settings?

RQ2. How does offering a choice to employees with remote work options impact the loss of potential and current employees?

RQ3. What is the impact of remote work environments on employee job satisfaction regarding employee retention?

Physical distance can influence leaders' communication effectiveness with their employees. Leadership performance depends on the style, distance, and ability to communicate between leader and follower (Neufeld et al., 2010). Effective communication can be difficult with leaders working in remote environments. Communication throughout organizations is critical for the success of their employees' performance. Leaders must assume more responsibility for collaborating with their followers in virtual work arrangements (Neufeld et al.,

2010). This first research question provided a qualitative approach to studying communication effectiveness in remote working environments.

When employees feel appreciated and valued in their workplace, this can impact their desire to stay or leave the organization (Efimov et al., 2020). Virtual work environments create a sense of trust in employees from their managers to do their job from home. Remote work creates challenges for leadership to understand the differences in appreciation between their face-to-face and virtual employees (Efimov et al., 2020). Remote employees prefer staying connected with their team through video conferencing and staying included in meetings (White, 2018). Remote employees should have access to non-work-related discussions that arise during face-to-face meetings. Virtual small talk creates a challenge since office workers have time when they are in break rooms getting coffee or before a meeting starts in a conference room to connect with colleagues (White, 2018). While remote employees may feel appreciated by their company for working from home, leaders must still pay attention to lowering turnover. Hence, they respect their work as they would with a face-to-face employee. The second research question provided a qualitative approach to studying the impact of remote work options on potential new hires and current employees' willingness to stay.

Specific personality traits, job skills, and employment properties can impact employees' satisfaction with their job. Employees working from home are happier than those commuting to the office (Bellmann & Hübler, 2021). Employees that work from home experience more flexibility with their time and less stress. Overall, employees are all different and have preferences to where they are most productive to get their work done and achieve work-life balance. To avoid burnout, organizations should limit the number of hours remote workers can work (Bellmann & Hübler, 2021). Employees may not be satisfied when working in a remote

environment if they have longer hours and more responsibilities than if they were to commute to work. To answer the third research question, having conducted a study on remote work environments showed the potential to help better explain how employees' level of job satisfaction when given the option to work virtually impacted employee retention.

Each research question addressed every aspect of the problem statement. The research questions provided insight into the role of communication in a virtual work environment, how providing options to the employees impacted current and potential employees, and the influence remote work settings had on an employee's job satisfaction regarding employee retention. Due to technological advances, remote work has become possible. Employees can now do their job wherever and whenever fits their schedule (Bellmann & Hübler, 2021). This small community bank had struggled with implementing technology into their employees' daily work tasks. One example was that most meetings still had paper copies of agendas and handouts. Therefore, an employee still needed to be onsite to print out materials and pass them to the appropriate staff. There was still a physical component to many tasks at the bank, preventing the ability to work remotely. A study of leadership decision-making provided insight into making the employee successful at home. The study focused on each employee's preferred work environment. Leadership making the decision for all employees resulted in some employees not being happy with the outcome.

Purpose Statement

This study explored the lack of support for remote work environments at a small community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania. The small community bank had seen employees unsuccessfully perform their job in remote work environments, causing the entire organization to work in traditional office settings. The ineffective remote work environments had also caused

employees to leave and find organizations that offered this as a benefit. The mandatory remote work environment and then transition back to a traditional office setting had left this small community bank with the potential loss of new employees because this benefit was not available. This study aimed to understand better how the lack of support from leadership can impact employee job satisfaction and perspective on virtual work settings.

Nature of the Study

Using a paradigm guides the research process (Park et al., 2020). Research paradigms guide the study through assumptions. The researcher must understand the primary research paradigms, positivism, post-positivism, pragmatism, and constructivism, to support the study's findings (Park et al., 2020). In the quest to gain knowledge through scientific research, research paradigms provide different assumptions about how the world operates (Park et al., 2020). The goal of a positivism research paradigm is to discover laws that facilitate explanation and prediction. Positivism provides historical information, components, and assumptions (Park et al., 2020). There is potential to focus on verifying theories throughout this research.

Discussion of Research Paradigms

The selected research paradigm for this study was positivism. This research focused on a study of a Butler, Pennsylvania, small community bank's decision to bring employees back to a traditional office setting post-pandemic. Leadership must understand that there is no going back to a pre-pandemic workplace (Kane et al., 2021). This study showed the stress and frustration caused to the employees by going back to a pre-pandemic workplace. Organizations and their employees had no choice but to discover a new way of working (Kane et al., 2021). As a result of requiring employees to work from home, work environments have changed forever. It is now time for managers to envision the work environments for returning office employees. Positivism

guided the research project because successful remote work environments were a reality that the researcher sought to understand better.

Like positivism, post-positivism maintains a dependence on observation and measurement to develop solid causal understandings of the world (Young & Ryan, 2019). This type of paradigm approximates the truth but never fully understands it. Post-positivists infer through observation, and theories function as organizing structures to link relevant concepts that explain how the world works (Young & Ryan). Arranging theories support what is already known. A post-positivism approach is primarily objective but often values subjectivity and multiple stakeholder perspectives (Young & Ryan, 2019). In this research study, positivism was a better paradigm because it can advance by uncovering the truth of reality.

The pragmatism approach emphasizes interrogating the value and meaning of research data by examining its practical consequences (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). Using this paradigm benefits the settings in which knowledge and practice intersect. This pragmatism moves beyond objectivity since it explores and understands the connections between knowledge and action (Kelly & Cordeiro). Pragmatism also emphasizes acting on problems that occur in the real world. Pragmatist thinking in research helps use actionable knowledge (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). Since this study examined the effects of remote working through qualitative analysis, the positivist paradigm fit best for this research.

The goal of constructivism is to understand how human beings create, negotiate, manage, reform, exchange, regulate, and organize social objects to comprehend what is happening around them (Bogna et al., 2020). Research projects that associate social perspectives with meanings can lead to using constructivism as the primary paradigm. Constructivist paradigms collect data using observational interviews and focus groups (Bogna et al.). This approach helps make sense

of the social world of the research participants. This approach can seek casualties associated with narratives and observations derived from the research (Bogna et al., 2020). Positivism fit best for this study because the research focused on verifying theories.

Discussion of Design

The study employed a flexible design and qualitative methods, specifically a case study. The research questions aligned with a qualitative method since they sought to understand the role of leadership in remote work, employee work environment options, and the impacts on turnover, satisfaction, and retention. Qualitative research prioritizes ethics to establish the value of the research (Anderson, 2017). By conducting a case study of employees forced to work remotely during the pandemic, a flexible qualitative approach aligned with the general and the specific problem. Organizations are increasingly embracing virtual work environments due to the increased benefits, such as cost savings and improved employee production and morale (Asatiani et al., 2021). Employees proved to their managers that they could perform their job in nontraditional environments. Organizational culture changes in virtual settings because communication is more complicated (Asatiani et al.). The organization wants to ensure that the employees feel part of the enterprise. Adequate socialization presupposes sharing one's own experience through mentorship, training, bonding exercises, and daily interactions with colleagues (Asatiani et al., 2021). Qualitative research is an emerging field. An essential characteristic of qualitative research is its emphasis on interpretive, naturalistic, and holistic inquiry (Anderson, 2017). Positivist and post-positivist assumptions guide most qualitative research. Qualitative research includes a range of critical theory, interpretivism, feminism, constructivism, and critical realism (Anderson, 2017).

Quantitative research employs numbers and accuracy, while qualitative research focuses on lived experiences and human perceptions (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Different keywords, such as measure and perception, can help explain the difference between quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative is associated with measure, and qualitative is related to perception (Rutberg & Bouikidis). Quantitative research can range from clinical trials for new treatments and medications to surveying nursing staff and patients (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Using open-ended questions and interviews addressed the social aspect of the research to uncover the problem, which made a qualitative study most appropriate.

Using both quantitative and qualitative methodology in a single study is a mixed-methods study (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Mixed methods allow the researcher to collect two sets of data. One method to collect data would limit the study. Mixed methods use words and numbers, which complement each other in research validity (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). A qualitative study remained the most appropriate design because of the lived experiences the researcher was trying to better understand during the pandemic's working environments.

Discussion of Method

Remote work environments are becoming increasingly popular among employees since the pandemic. Work settings can directly correlate with employee retention, turnover, and job satisfaction. Without effective communication from leadership, employees may work in a work setting that does not fit their needs to be most productive and successful. The local community bank needed to understand its employees' perspectives on work settings to make a sound business decision to bring back all employees to a traditional office setting. A case study provided insight into the employee experiences in traditional office settings, during remote work

amid the global pandemic, and after the transition back into the office to better understand job dissatisfaction and turnover issues.

At the small community bank, COVID-19 required all back-office employees to work remotely to help stop the spread of the virus. A case study is a complex method used to understand a real-life phenomenon considering relevant contextual conditions (Smith, 2018). The real-life phenomenon to understand is that COVID-19 changed the world of work settings. A case study explains the answer to questions about current events beyond the researcher's control (Smith). As employees, they had to adapt to an unfamiliar working environment, and now without proper evaluation, they had to return to their previous environment. Understanding their experience during the unprecedented times showed potential for the researchers to realize whether remote work environment options promote higher job satisfaction and lower employee turnover. Case studies provide an in-depth understanding of the case under investigation and give a holistic description of the examination of the case (Smith, 2018). Studying employees that have experiences in both traditional office and virtual work settings provided insight into how the organization provided practical support and appropriate tools to do their job remotely. There is no one-size-fits-all work environment, and lack of communication can create employee dissatisfaction issues that impact retention. The organization had previously seen a rise in employee retention rates, and the pandemic had caused this to increase even more. The study focused on the current employees of this organization that worked remotely during the pandemic and explored the issues they experienced. A single case study methodology allows the researcher to investigate management effects on a case-by-case basis (Sepers et al., 2020). Single case studies help with unifying research questions. They are excellent opportunities to collaborate

between the researcher and the bank's leadership team to evaluate the research questions on a single-employee level (Sepers et al., 2020).

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that investigates human experience and behaviors (Wertz, 2005). The lived experiences may be critical to understanding the employees' perspective on remote work environments. The phenomenological method requires critical thinking, creativity, and reflective decision-making, leading to many procedural variations and innovations (Wertz). The subjectivity of human experiences supports choosing a phenomenological research method (Wertz, 2005). This research studied the impacts of remote work during the pandemic. A pandemic is an event; therefore, a case study was more appropriate than a phenomenological study.

Grounded theory is a form of research that is hypothesis-generated instead of the accepted norm and the practice of hypothesis-driven theory verification research (Ratnapalan, 2019). The grounded theory method aims to discover a theory. Further research can verify this theory (Ratnapalan). Grounded theory is a theoretical framework used in qualitative research. One of the fundamental aspects of this theory is the insistence on simultaneous data gathering and analysis (Ratnapalan, 2019). As remote working had been around for some time before the pandemic, case studies were appropriate when little information was available.

Discussion of Triangulation

Multiple methods help to assess the validity of a qualitative research study. In qualitative research, triangulation is using multiple methods to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014). There are four types of triangulations: method, investigator, theory, and data source (Carter et al.). This research study used method triangulation, which consisted of multiple data collection methods about the same phenomenon. This type of

triangulation frequently uses qualitative studies, including interviews, surveys, observations, and field notes (Carter et al., 2014).

The role of leadership in remote settings is critical for the success of the worker's ability to work in a different setting (Streeton et al., 2021). Leadership may also play a role in the employees' attitude toward remote work options. Employees who support leadership decisions show the potential to work in both traditional and remote work settings (Streeton et al., 2021). Through a study of a local community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania, insight on employees provided the impact of bringing their employees back to a traditional office setting. The impacts included employees that were eager to transition back to a traditional office setting and dissatisfied employees that wanted to continue working virtually. This study explored how offering remote work options impacted recruitment and talent retention. The small community bank consisted of 200 employees, and 100 of those employees were branch associates. Since branch associates cannot work remotely, they were not eligible for participation in the study. Developing research based on the benefits of remote work provided how leadership could improve employee retention and job satisfaction (Streeton et al., 2021). The expectation was that deciding to bring all employees back to a traditional office setting and no remote work options would develop poor employee attitudes and job dissatisfaction. Effectively communicating with employees and understanding their preferred method could have improved employee retention issues and positively impacted employees' motivation and job performance (Streeton et al., 2021). Interviewing and surveying the back-office employees that had experience in both onsite and remote work settings showed the potential to gain knowledge of leadership's role in the transition of work environments.

Summary of the Nature of the Study

Discovering the role of leadership in remote work settings impacted job satisfaction and employee performance and provided insight into how the transition of work environments impacted employees (Yang & Gao, 2023). Additionally, studying the impacts of employee options developed insight into how employees may leave an organization that does not offer remote work options. New hires may ask about remote working during interviews to ensure the organization offers that option (Yang & Gao, 2023). Developing research-based remote work environments may provide insight into how this impacts organizational culture, job satisfaction, motivation, and communication. The expectation is that organizations may need to adapt to a remote work environment to retain critical employees and recruit new hires. At the same time, there is not a one-size-fits-all work environment for all employees. Providing employees with the option and having the appropriate tools to ensure all employees are successful in either work setting shows the potential to benefit the organization (Yang & Gao, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

Remote work settings can face unique challenges with how support from management plays a critical role in the success of employees working virtually (Franken et al., 2021). Figure 1 shows that the flow of information processed by remote work environments impacts employees. Theories relating to this concept explain how employees have different motivations for satisfaction (Franken et al., 2021). Since the COVID-19 pandemic showed many employees their ability to do their job at home, employees now have more choices in their work setting. Organizations that neglect to offer virtual work settings risk losing employees to employers that provide those opportunities (Franken et al., 2021).
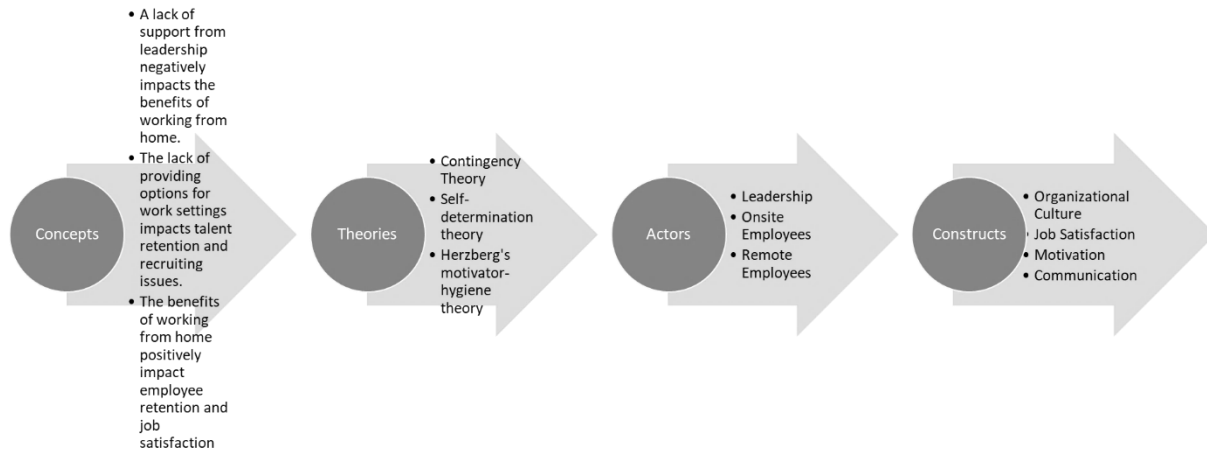
Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Concepts

A concept for this research was that a lack of support from leadership negatively impacts the benefits of working from home. Businesses have challenges with reducing costs, competing globally, increasing quality and productivity, and accelerating product development, and most achieve this with virtual work settings as a solution (Akkirman & Harris, 2005). Virtual work settings can benefit the employee and the organization if implemented correctly. Communication is one of the most critical concerns of managers in virtual work settings (Akkirman & Harris). The lack of support from leadership directly correlates with the success of remote work environments and the employees' attitudes. Research showed that employees in a virtual workplace experienced lower levels of job satisfaction correlated with low-quality communication (Akkirman & Harris, 2005).

Another concept for this research was that the lack of providing options for work settings impacts talent retention and recruiting issues. Technology has provided the ability for employees to work at locations extending beyond traditional office locations (Spivack & Milosevic, 2018). When providing an employee with a choice for remote working, the manager should be highly involved in the decision. It can be challenging for managers since direct visual surveillance has

been a long-held managerial practice to ensure worker compliance and productivity (Spivack &

Milosevic). Perceptions of which location is most appropriate for performance may vary for all

employees (Spivack & Milosevic, 2018). Work-from-home arrangements, in general, positively

impact the employees' attitude toward work. Since many organizations are now offering remote

work to employees, retaining talent and recruiting may be a problem for organizations that do not

offer this option. Employees' attitudes affect their beliefs when they think another employer can

provide their desired work arrangements (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017).

When organizations implement telework correctly, many studies have shown that it

lowers employee turnover by improving employee welfare and attitudes (Choi, 2020). An

additional concept for this research was that the benefits of working from home positively impact

employee retention and job satisfaction. There are many benefits that the employee gains with

remote working, such as a shorter commute, more time with family, comfortable work attire, and

no office distractions (Thompson et al., 2022). Organizations can offer greater flexibility and

autonomy in time management and place of work when providing remote options to their

employees (Choi, 2020).

Theories

Contingency theory is the philosophy that leaders thrive in their role during a specific

context by measuring their orientation to relationship building (Waters, 2013). The contingency

theory of leadership tries to match individuals to appropriate situations based on the individual's

leadership style (Waters, 2013). This theory assesses leadership styles based on where people

work and how effective they are. At the bank, this signified that not all leaders are influential in a

remote environment and can best lead their team virtually.

Leadership is critical for achieving the goals and objectives of the organization. Good leadership can result in the success or failure of organizations to meet their strategic plans. The contingency theories of leadership express the need for the leader to adjust the behavior based on a rational understanding of the situation and assume a leadership style appropriate for the occasion (Vidal et al., 2017). There are different leadership styles for different occasions. There is no "one size fits all" approach to leadership; it depends on the situation and varies the way of leaders' behaviors (Vidal et al.). There is much ambiguity with this theory, which may lead to a contradiction. Contingency theory in leadership can be confusing and contradictory with diverse approaches to explain it (Vidal et al., 2017). The situations that arise for a leader to alter their approach require specific personality and behavioral traits. An effective leader may have all these required traits to adjust, but leaders often have more robust qualities for specific occasions. During this study, the interview respondents were asked questions about the leadership style in traditional office settings and virtual work environments. The contingency theory of leadership emphasizes that a leader's behavioral patterns must adjust to current circumstances (Gürlek & Çemberci, 2020). The interview questions showed the potential to reveal how leaders adapted to the current circumstance of COVID-19. Leaders' behaviors must be adjustable (Gürlek & Çemberci). There may be different leadership styles when in the office versus working from home. Researchers have suggested that leaders should develop a mixture of behaviors based on the demands of every unique case to increase the organization's performance (Gürlek & Çemberci, 2020). The interview questions sought to understand better how employees saw a change in behavior from leadership during the pandemic.

Motivation is different for every employee. Self-determination theory is a meta-theory on human motivation that explains the distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation

(Oostlander et al., 2014). Self-determination theory is the philosophy that proposes a social environment as a primary antecedent of motivation, making it possible to have a closer look at the relationship between management practices and volunteer motivation (Oostlander et al., 2014). Within the bank, this provided insight into how managers determine the motivation of their employees and how to implement it to achieve organizational sustainability properly. Self-determination theory is a helpful framework for understanding work motivation. The theory is concerned with the motivation behind work choices, focusing on the degree to which an individual's behavior is self-determined (Goldfarb et al., 2021). Employee motivation is critical when researching work-related topics, such as the sudden shift in virtual settings. Motivation can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. The self-determination theory goes beyond this dichotomous view and suggests a further discussion between autonomous and controlled motivation (Goldfarb et al.). This theory can be contradictory because employees can have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors when working. Employees do not have to have one or the other; they can have both. According to the self-determination theory, employees participating in the study answered qualitative interview questions about their work experiences that identified motivational themes (Goldfarb et al., 2021).

This study's interview questions focused on employee motivation. The questions sought to understand better if remote work options present an extrinsic motivation to employees. It was also essential to know what drives leadership's motivational behavior in the first place (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020). Understanding both the employee and the leaders' motivation may better understand their interactions. Work motivation throughout the leadership process starts with supervisors' work motivations as potential antecedents of leadership styles and proceeds to how leadership styles associate with subordinates' work motivation (Kanat-Maymon et al.). Self-

determination theory is a multidimensional conceptualization of motivation differentiating into three broad motivational orientations: autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020). Specific interview questions to employees and leaders explained how motivation impacted remote work environments.

Incentives motivate employees to do work. Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory of motivation is a philosophy that explains the motivation of employees to prevent discomfort and advance psychologically (Lazaroiu, 2015). This theory explains that salary and work setting are incentives that motivate employees (Lazaroiu, 2015). Within the bank, performance reviews of employees consisted of annual salary. The workplace setting was an additional incentive that provided insight into the motivation of their employees. This study of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of employees provided an understanding of work factors and equipped managers with the knowledge to improve motivation and engagement.

Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory argues that satisfaction and dissatisfaction do not belong to the same dimension (Hur, 2018). Dissatisfaction is not the same as no satisfaction. Herberg's theory instead states that satisfaction and no satisfaction are on opposite sides. The motivators are the feelings of satisfaction, while the hygiene factors are related to the feeling of dissatisfaction. Herzberg explained that motivators connect to work itself, such as recognition, responsibility, achievement, and self-development opportunities, while hygiene factors are related to working conditions and environments, such as salary, benefits, interpersonal relationships, and company policies (Hur). There are some contradictions with this theory surrounding the emphasis on satisfaction over productivity. Herzberg's theory suggests that productivity increases when employees experience feelings of satisfaction rather than high pay and job security (Hur, 2018).

Herzberg's two-factor theory was successfully applied to study job satisfaction (Singh & Bhattacharjee, 2020). Job satisfaction-focused questions asked to the respondents showed specific work-related motivating factors. The respondents responded to the open-ended interview questions to better explain their satisfaction levels at the organizations before, during, and after the pandemic. Herzberg's theory measures the significance of motivator and hygiene factors that link to job satisfaction (Singh & Bhattacharjee). The researcher had to determine the motivator and hygiene factors for each employee and leader during the interview. Since there was no significant difference in satisfaction level with growth and opportunity, salary and job security, and corporate policies, the researcher had to evaluate the significance of remote work environments as other hygiene factors (Singh & Bhattacharjee, 2020).

Actors

The actors within this study were those working for the small community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania. The actors showed potential to comprise the senior leadership team at the small community bank and employees with experience in traditional office settings and remote work environments. The bank forced their employees to work remotely because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. After phasing in employees to the office during the summer of 2020, the leadership team opted to have them work remotely again to prevent the spread of the virus. Then in early 2021, the leadership team brought back-office employees into the office with no remote options. As a result of the remote working process, some bank employees left, as those who worked remotely enjoyed the setting and appreciated the benefits. Employees did not find out why they had to go back into the office, despite proving they could do their jobs remotely for several months. As more virus cases rose, the organization put mask mandates into their office policy but still did not allow remote work as an option. The bank had a culture of teamwork and

collaboration, and leadership felt this type of work fit best in person. The organization had seen increased employee retention and a decrease in job satisfaction. Individuals working at the bank provided experiences for data analysis to provide insight into how the employees' experiences differed depending on their work environments and which setting they felt they were most productive in.

Constructs

Organizational culture is a construct in this research. The transition of a local bank from a traditional office work setting to a remote work setting and then back to a traditional work setting provided insight into the bank's culture. Organizational culture caused the leadership team to make decisions on work environments. Culture can be slow to change. Therefore, the transition from different work environments provided insight into how culture impacted remote work success for employees.

Another construct in this research was job satisfaction. Before the pandemic, the traditional office setting was the only work environment available, making job satisfaction easy to measure. Measuring job satisfaction showed the potential to be simple when employees worked remotely during the pandemic. In addition to measuring job satisfaction before and during the pandemic, job satisfaction was also measured after employees were back in the office. To determine the decision-making impacts of leadership, measuring job satisfaction in both work settings was significant.

Motivation was another construct for this study. Measuring employee motivation before, during, and after the employee transition from the traditional office environment to working from home to back to the office determined the effect of the work setting on the employee.

The final construct for this research was communication. Communication plays a critical role in ensuring that any work environment is successful for its employees. Communication efforts from leadership are different in traditional office settings than in remote work environments and can cause an employee to favor one environment over the other. Measuring several types of communication styles implemented while working from home explains the importance of adapting to different work environments. Evaluating employee job satisfaction and communication explains the impact on employees to be successful.

Relationships Between Concepts, Theories, Actors, and Constructs

This small community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania, had experience in leadership forcing all employees to work remotely to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Butler, Pennsylvania, is conveniently close to the city of Pittsburgh and provides its residents with metropolitan living and small-town convenience (City of Butler, 2018). Butler provides a sense of community that makes visitors and residents feel that they are part of the town (City of Butler, 2018). Organizations like this bank did not offer remote work environments to their employees before the pandemic. The culture was much of a traditional work setting with 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. work hours. The change that occurred through the pandemic was challenging to most staff members. The median age for Butler's residents is 38.4 years with a median income of $30,035, indicating that the younger population is not residing in this area but living closer to more modern cities (World Population Review, 2021). Both the median age and median income may impact the individuals in leadership roles at the organizations in Butler. Older management shows the potential to make it harder to adopt modern technology critical to offering remote work settings to their employees. Additionally, 39.04% of Butler's population has a maximum education of a high school diploma, indicating that the younger generation that does stay in the town does not

have higher education levels (World Population Review, 2021). Young talent may remain a problem for Butler-based organizations, especially when the younger generations are looking for remote options in their place of work. The bank needs to find a way to make remote options successful in attracting young talent and increasing current employees' job satisfaction, motivation, and retention.

Summary of the Research Framework

Focusing on a small community bank in Western Pennsylvania and their experience in both traditional and remote work environments provided insight into the role leadership plays to make both options successful at the organization. Since the pandemic opened the opportunities to work remotely, organizations have adopted the idea that employees can work wherever and whenever works for them. Studying the impacts of one small community bank provided insight into the different job duties of different employees and how they adapted to remote work settings during the pandemic. Additionally, various employees provided insight into job functions that are unable to be completed remotely, but that the success of the enterprise working remotely is dependent on leadership's implementation process.

Definition of Terms

Communication: Communication adopts the perspectives of several disciplines to enhance its understanding (Mazzei, 2014).

Contingency Theory: Contingency theory is the philosophy that leaders thrive in their role during a specific context by measuring their orientation to relationship building (Waters, 2013).

E-leadership: E-leadership represents the emergence of leadership in the e-environment context where work mediates by information technologies, high complexity, and a changing

working environment, which makes it imperative for leaders to change their practices, attitude, and behavior for long-term organizational sustainability (Contreras et al., 2020).

Effective Teamwork: Effective teamwork is a group of people coming together to accomplish a goal and, when implemented effectively, can provide high returns on time, cost, quality, satisfaction, and commitment (Mercader et al., 2021).

Employee Engagement: Employee engagement represents a work-related state of mind characterized by feelings of vigor, fulfillment, enthusiasm, absorption, and dedication (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017).

Employee Job Satisfaction: Employee job satisfaction is the feeling of professional development and happiness in the work employees do at the organization (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020).

Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene: Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory of motivation is a philosophy that explains the motivation of employees to prevent discomfort and advance psychologically (Lazaroiu, 2015).

Motivation: Motivation is the psychological force that generates complex cycles of goal-directed thought and behavior (Tziner et al., 2020).

Organizational Culture: Organizational culture is the signs and symbols, shared practices, and underlying assumptions of an organization (Spicer, 2020).

Recruiting: Recruiting is the process of securing the organization's future state through human resources selecting, socializing, and promoting what it is like to work at the organization (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020).

Remote Work Environments: Remote work environment is a concept that covers any paid work performed from a distance in any place different from the physical presence in the

organization where employees meet organizational objectives through Information and Communication Technologies sometimes managing their own time under less direct supervision (Contreras et al., 2020).

Self-Determination Theory: Self-determination theory is the philosophy that proposes a social environment as a primary antecedent of motivation, making it possible to look at the relationship between management practices and volunteer motivation (Oostlander et al., 2014).

Servant Leadership: Servant leadership is a holistic leadership approach that engages followers in multiple dimensions through relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual practices (Eva et al., 2019).

Talent Retention: Talent retention consists of having faith in the organization, a sense of belonging, and day-to-day motivation (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020).

Traditional Work Settings: Traditional work settings refer to old organizational structures and job functions, consisting of office space settings and standard working hours, such as 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Imhanrenialena et al., 2021).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

Assumptions

The study assumed that employees who work from home could not communicate efficiently, showed problems with learning new skills, and faced challenges in establishing the organization's culture, and therefore, needing to be physically in the office (Nyberg et al., 2021). Remote work had been around well before the pandemic, but COVID-19 mandated many organizations to send their employees home to work. Remote work assumes employees appreciate the opportunity to work virtually and can increase productivity and satisfaction with increased work flexibility, reduced commute times, and fewer meeting distractions (Nyberg et

al.). This study assumed employees uncovered the downsides of remote working, including fatigue associated with heavy reliance on video conferencing (Nyberg et al., 2021). In a small town like Butler, Pennsylvania, working from home was never part of the culture. COVID-19 has proven that remote options are instrumental for organizations to remain in business when facing the challenges of a global pandemic. Organizations that fail to offer remote work options may impact their talent retention and recruitment from peers that offer the benefit.

Limitations

Limitations included the number of employees to interview since the small community bank had lost some critical employees throughout the pandemic because of the organization's lack of remote work options. To mitigate this, the researcher interviewed as many employees as possible that had experience working in both environments. The questions asked during the interview to the employees should not have led them to leave the organization. The senior management team reviewed the interview questions to ensure reliability and minimize the risk of misleading the respondents. The general counsel agreed to have their employees interviewed. However, since these employees had chosen to stay with the organization, the questions were not to spark their interest in leaving to find a remote position. The research was limited to employees that worked at the small community bank before, during, and after the pandemic. An attempt to interview other small community bank employees in the area may still have been valid, but some organizations did not choose to come back into the office, which may not have had the experience the researcher was looking for in the study. Additionally, there were only a few community banks in the area. The researcher could have found larger banks in the area to mitigate this risk, but larger banks had experience with remote work before the pandemic and, therefore, excluded them from this study.

Delimitations

Working during a global pandemic provided the curiosity to discover why organizations did not find remote work options beneficial to their employees. The study chose a small community bank because, much like other businesses, COVID-19 forced them to adapt to remote work environments. When virus cases started to rise, the bank was slow to implement work from home guidelines, and when cases started to decline, they were the first to bring back all employees into the office. Objectives included discovering the impact leadership had on the success of their employees in remote work environments and how it impacted their perspective on work environments. The research questions sought to answer the role of leadership in the success of either traditional or virtual work settings: How did offering a choice to employees with remote work options impact the loss of potential and current employees?

Furthermore, what was the impact of remote work environments on employee job satisfaction regarding employee retention? Theoretical objectives were contingency theory, self-determination theory, and Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory of motivation to provide insight into how employees' motivation was different depending on their work at an organization and how the actors impacted one another. Concepts included the role of leadership in remote settings, successful work environments, employee attitudes, remote work options, recruitment issues, talent retention, benefits of remote work, employee retention, and job satisfaction. The constructs included organizational culture, job satisfaction, motivation, and communication.

Significance of the Study

Reduction of Gaps in the Literature

Gaps in the literature exist in the impacts of remote work environments due to COVID-19 in small community banks. Focusing on a small community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania, with

employees who had work experience in both traditional office settings and remote environments provided insight into the impact of work settings on employees. Butler, Pennsylvania, is conveniently located near the city of Pittsburgh and provides its residents with metropolitan living and small-town convenience (City of Butler, 2018). Butler provides a sense of community that makes visitors and residents feel that they are part of the town (City of Butler, 2018). This small community bank in Butler had experience in leadership, forcing all employees to work remotely to help stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The bank also had experience with leadership deciding to bring employees back to a traditional work setting.

Studying this gap in literature may provide insight into how to make remote options successful, which shows potential to directly impact current employees' job satisfaction, motivation, and retention.

Implications for Biblical Integration

Conducting business research from a biblical perspective must consider that the researcher's work is for God. When Christian business professionals work or research, they conduct God's work on Earth. God left much of the Earth underdeveloped so that His people could do His work on Earth (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016). Ethics plays a critical role when conducting research. Ethical issues in research persuade people's behaviors, socio-economic relations, power relations between people and changes in the environment (Reijers et al., 2018). Christian business researchers understand that God created them in His image and should act like God in every aspect of their lives. The book of Genesis stated, "So God created man in His image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (New International Version Bible, 2011, Gen. 1:27). Researchers must have dignity that the work they are doing is ethical. Dealing with ethics in research is increasingly urgent because of the

transformative potential and complexity of advancements in technology (Reijers et al., 2018).

Conducting research is not to gain for oneself or the organization, but the research is to glorify

God. In the book of Colossians it states, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as for the Lord and

not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. For you

serve the Lord Christ" (New International Version Bible, 2011, Col. 3:23–24). Conducting

research should connect to God's work and provide fulfillment in conducting God's plan (Keller

& Alsdorf, 2016). All work done on Earth matters and should serve God's plan.

     In studying this topic, the researcher remained unbiased toward their preference of work

environment (Delboasc, 2023). The research may apply to any business employee that has

experience in either work setting. Therefore, the researcher needed to remain neutral (Delboasc,

2023). Based on the questions asked, the interviews remained unbiased. Senior management

reviewed all questions to ensure valuable research for the organization (Delboasc, 2023). The

research aimed not to benefit the bank, the university, or the researcher, but instead to serve God

Ethical research is critical for proper biblical research (Smith et al., 2022). This research fulfilled

the ethical behaviors required for biblical research by studying work settings and collecting data

on employees' perspectives on each work environment (Smith et al., 2022). A main biblical focus

is on Paul sending letters. Paul was able to reach many churches through his letters while in

prison to spread the word of God (Fredriksen, 2021). Paul writing letters is an example of how

physical presence does not need to take place to fulfill God's plan. Many biblical figures taught

face-to-face, such as Jesus Christ, Moses, and John the Baptist. The Bible provides examples of

carrying God's work out on Earth in different settings and environments (Fredriksen, 2021).

Ethical research was critical for the validity of the study. Apostle Paul was a biblical example of

historical remote work, but he had no choice since he was in prison (Fredriksen, 2021). The

researcher had to not lean on one work setting over the other during this study (Robert, 2020). This research focused on studying employees' choices in the work environment. A Christian perspective from the researcher ensured that conducting research brought glory and honor to God . Ethics holds Christian researchers to an even higher standard of ethics and integrity (Robert, 2020). During this research, the small community bank developed flaws in communication and decision-making regarding remote work environments. The researcher built a convincing argument for the importance of employee choice in a work environment with the success of ethical research. The research was not for man but God (Keller & Alsdorf, 2012). The connection between the research and God's work provided more meaning and purpose.

Benefit to Business Practice and Relationship to Cognate

COVID-19 has changed how and where employees work. By understanding the benefits and consequences of remote work settings, business leaders can determine how their employees can succeed in any work environment. All organizations are facing tough decisions on where their employees can work. Therefore, this study explored the understanding of how employees can thrive knowing they have the choice in where they can work. With the field of study being leadership, this showed the potential to provide better insight into leadership decision-making styles that impact the organization's employees. As the small community bank has decided to bring its employees back into a traditional office setting full-time with no remote work options, this study examined how decisions made by leadership influence employees' attitudes, satisfaction, and motivation.

Summary of the Significance of the Study

Remote working had been a way of functioning well before COVID-19. Since the pandemic mandated work environment, more companies are providing remote options. Now,

organizations have adapted to the idea that employees can work wherever and whenever. Since remote working is now an option for most companies, understanding how to make it successful at an organization may potentially impact their competitive advantage. Butler, Pennsylvania, is a small town with an older population, which can cause issues with resistance to technological changes. Studying the impacts of a small community bank provided insight into the different job duties of different employees and how they adapted to remote work settings during the pandemic. Additionally, the various employees provided insight into job functions that did not work remotely. However, the enterprise's success working from home depended on the leadership's implementation process.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Remote work environments can have negative implications when implemented incorrectly at businesses. Organizations may find employees suffering from isolation, burnout, and work-life balance issues in a remote environment not adequately introduced to the company. Leadership's understanding of the benefits that remote work environments can offer the employee may allow them to decide where their staff performs their job duties. Remote working can allow employees flexibility, cost savings, increased productivity, trust, and employee satisfaction. Leadership knows that this type of work environment comes with both benefits and consequences that result in implementation and the employee's choice. Some employees are more productive in the office and need the physical presence of their manager to hold them accountable for their tasks.

In contrast, other employees are very disciplined and independent. They prefer working from home with fewer distractions than are in the traditional office setting but can avoid the potential distractions at home. Leadership decision-making impacts employees' satisfaction with

both their job and the organization. Building an organization that considers the employees' work environment preferences may create trust with the senior executive team. No matter the work setting, open communication within the company may create trust and result in higher productivity and quality of work.

Business Practices

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many businesses to shut down or close their doors for some time. Consumers saw the increased curbside pickup and delivery options in the customer-facing retail space to help reduce the spread of the virus. Other businesses shifted to remote work settings to care for the safety of their employees. The only option for continual work during the pandemic and minimizing the risk of virus exposure was for employees to work from home (Luca et al., 2021). The pandemic was the first time many businesses were adopting telecommuting options. Most organization leaders showed potential to decide whether teleworking and digital conferencing continued after the pandemic. Recent estimates for the United States showed that remote workers have quadrupled to 50% of the U.S. workforce (Luca et al.). Remote working may become the future state of traditional workers. In recent studies on flexible work employees, data supports wage gaps. Studies have shown that teleworkers are paid less than traditional workers because of the flexibility provided and the availability to care for a child or elder. However, there is also data that supports teleworkers are paid higher because of the cost savings to the organization (Luca et al., 2021). Working from home may be a long-lasting solution for some organizations. This new-normal way of working may pose future challenges for organizations that choose to continue traditional office work settings.

Additionally, the potential for wage inequalities between traditional employees and teleworkers are more physiological issues the organizations need to consider (Ionescu et al.,

2022). Teleworking may not be successful in an organization with a culture against it. One of the first things businesses need to accomplish is establishing an organizational culture in technology. Understanding Zoom calls, collaborative spreadsheets, and virtual sticky notes may shift the organizational culture into accepting and adapting to technological advances (Ionescu et al., 2022). Another issue with longevity in working from home would be employee engagement. Organizations with hybrid approaches, both traditional and virtual employees, need to ensure that virtual employees receive the same level of engagement (Ionescu et al., 2022). The engagement may look different due to physical distance but still needs to be executed. Effective teamwork shows the potential also to look different in future working conditions. Teams may no longer schedule war rooms or huddles in a conference room to write out strategies or goals for a project but instead schedule time virtually to go over objectives by sharing screens (Ionescu et al., 2022). Leaders' decision-making on continuing working from home or reverting to a traditional work setting can potentially impact their workforce indefinitely. Employees now know both work settings and want the ability to choose where they work (Ionescu et al., 2022).

Organizational Culture

Organizational cultures are the signs and symbols, shared practices, and underlying assumptions of an organization (Spicer, 2020). Many employees stay with a company for long periods due to the organization's culture. Some organizational cultures express teamwork, and their employees feel as though they get to collaborate and work together on projects and tasks (Spicer, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic presented some significant challenges for managers that disrupted everyday organizational culture. The challenges for managers were simply managing their team during a global pandemic and remotely (Spicer, 2020). Both the pandemic and remote work were first-time challenges for several managers. Many employees feared and

were anxious even if they were safely working from their homes (Spicer, 2020). The uncertainty

of the pandemic added higher stress levels to employees—especially employees with young

children who had to attend school virtually while trying to work remotely. The second challenge

was the first time the employees worked remotely. Remote work was not part of many routine

organizational corporate cultures (Spicer, 2020). Zoom calls were replacing water cooler

conversations, shifting organizations' culture, and creating a challenge to adapt to the new

normal of work environments (Spicer, 2020). Leaders are building a culture where employees

can work from home. Leaders need to keep their core values, such as creativity and exploration,

at the forefront of their employees' minds but alter ideas to fit in remote settings. The challenge

to build cultures and shared practices for the organization while employees are all working from

home requires the organization to readjust its culture to fit the new working environment (Spicer,

2020). The local small community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania, relied on creating a family-

oriented, collaborative, and teamwork experience in their organizational culture to retain

employees. The bank needed to realign its culture to adapt to remote settings. Team-oriented

culture made sure one-on-one and team meetings occurred virtually, required employees to have

their video turned on, and scheduled virtual happy hours that still allowed for non-work-related

conversations.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a critical component for ensuring employees have a voice in

their work. Organizations endorse employee engagement because of superior performance and

organizational behavior (Chandni & Rahman, 2020). There are many benefits organizations

consider for increasing employee engagement. Positive consequences include financial and

operational performance, higher affective organizational commitment, less burnout, and reduced

turnover (Chandni & Rahman). Leadership needs to understand the behaviors that their employees express when engaged and strategize how to maintain their engagement. Engagement levels are a direct result of an employee's performance, and if the employee is a customer-facing employee, it may have a direct impact on customer engagement. Leadership must embrace employee engagement to gain and retain a complete advantage (Chandni & Rahman, 2020). Employee engagement at the small community bank was critical for employees to ensure they were managing the bank's operations. The bank could not efficiently operate and serve its customers professionally with disengaged employees.

The unique aspect of COVID-19 making working from home the new way of working for millions of employees is that it was a quick switch with no preparation for first-time virtual workers. Employees were less engaged with their work because of partners and children in their workspace (Galanti et al., 2021). The remote workers had to contribute to household chores, prepare meals for their family, assist children with their online education, assist with homework in the afternoon, and spend quality time with their family once homework was completed, which negatively affected the employees' job productivity (Galanti et al.). The pandemic forcing all family members to be at home simultaneously caused an increase in stress related to family-work conflicts. It was hard for a remote worker with a partner and/or children to be fully engaged in their work during the pandemic. These workers were reluctant to get back into the traditional office setting. However, employees without family-work conflicts had a higher engagement in their work through independence and discretion while performing their professional tasks. The remote worker left to work from home alone was shown to have higher productivity, performance, satisfaction, and engagement levels, but it negatively impacted their stress (Galanti et al., 2021). Furthermore, isolation from coworkers negatively impacted the stress levels of

employees (Galanti et al., 2021). Work-from-home employee engagement looks different during a pandemic when all other household members work from home, too. However, leadership continuing to keep engagement levels high may lessen stress related to remote work environments (Galanti et al., 2021).

Effective Teamwork

Teamwork is a group of people coming together to accomplish a goal and, when implemented effectively, can provide high returns on time, cost, quality, satisfaction, and commitment (Mercader et al., 2021). New teamwork methods have emerged with the advances in technology and different work environments, which challenge collaboration with behavior, interruptions, and perceptions of productivity (Mercader et al., 2021). In traditional office settings, working together was more accessible than in a remote work environment. Teamwork in a virtual setting requires excellent and effective communication among the group (Mercader et al., 2021). Specific projects require multiple lines of businesses within the organization to be involved in order to complete. In the past, teams would gather in conference rooms, write ideas on whiteboards, and assign work appropriately (Mercader et al., 2021). In remote work environments, the gathering is replaced with video conferencing, collaborative spreadsheets on shared drives replace whiteboards, and assigning work may be communicated via instant messaging or email rather than in person while passing in the hallways (Mercader et al., 2021). The spirit of innovation decreases in team members just as it generates a negative impact on organizations (Mercader et al., 2021). Organizations did not prepare to shift their teams to a virtual setting during the pandemic (Kilcullen et al., 2022). Particular challenges within virtual conferencing include connection issues, bandwidth, and simply talking over one another. Team performance is dependent on the team's ability to learn and develop (Kilcullen et al., 2022).

Organizations that already established working from home and virtual conferencing pre-pandemic did not have much of a challenge. Organizations that were learning the technology for the first time—working from home and collaborating within teams for organizations while doing it for the first time during a global pandemic—negatively impacted most employees' and senior management's perspectives on remote work environments (Kilcullen et al., 2022). Establishing effective virtual teams at the bank allowed the employees to provide more efficient processes, products, and services to their customers. Teams increase productivity, but teams learning and developing how to work together virtually delay promptly completing their tasks (Kilcullen et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic taught leadership and project managers to prepare teams to work in different environments. The learning and development should have occurred before the project or task was assigned (Kilcullen et al., 2022). Leadership showed the potential to reevaluate training their employees on virtual conferencing, instant messaging, and collaborative spreadsheets to prepare team members to work on projects that are not in person. Teams that knew and understood technology were more productive than in traditional office settings (Kilcullen et al., 2022).

Top Management Support

With advancements in technology and increased development in communication technology, the concept of working from home has rapidly increased. With the support of top management, remote working can provide flexibility to employees. An employee that can work away from the customarily-allocated place of work can do so by utilizing digital technology (Chatterjee et al., 2022). Top management needs to adapt to flexible work policies to allow employees to perform their work duties in their homes or outside their traditional office environment. Top management supporting this flexibility may allow employees to observe

remote work when traveling to their office is not feasible. Conditions, such as poor weather or

caring for a sick child, may allow them to remain safe but still do their job that day. In a recent

study, 77% of executives expected remote work to continue after the pandemic (Chatterjee et

al.). Flexibility is a catchword for employers, and it is related to work, productivity, and

creativity, but organizations' and employees' viewpoints on the meaning can differ (Chatterjee et

al.). The idea to enhance the workers' efficiency is providing flexibility to do their things while

working from home where the organization gets the best work from their employment because

their employee is more satisfied and feels trusted (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020). The best

results from employees under a remote-work flexibility policy is when top management supports

the system (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020). Leadership has considerable influence on what

motivates their employees and engages commitment toward achieving the company's strategic

goals. Top management can support their employees by embracing change, establishing trust,

and continually improving processes at the organization (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020).

Change Management

Change management constantly challenges organizations. Organizational change

communication is arguably the best approach to change at a company. Studies have shown that

communication is the most effective strategy to improve employee adjustment to change.

However, leaders also need to understand how to alleviate reactions from employees when

changes occur (Petrou et al., 2018). When the leaders of an organization initiate the change,

communication helps employees understand and embrace the change. However, when the

employees initiate the change, the change is accepted. Quality of organizational change refers to

how an organization provides practical, timely, and sufficient information on the change and

explains the change process to the employees (Petrou et al., 2018). Leaders know that not all

employees may react the same way. Therefore, they need to have a strategy for the employees who are resistant to the change. COVID-19 was unique because it was an organizational change not initiated by the leaders or the employees.

Therefore, organizations could have both leaders and employees resistant to the change (Haesevoets et al., 2022). It was essential to express that. In-state governments mandated the change in the work environment to lessen the spread of the virus and keep businesses afloat (Haesevoets et al., 2021). This change was necessary. Adapting to organizational change means that the employees perform their new tasks adequately and remain engaged at work (Petrou et al., 2018). The change in the work environment caused the pandemic to result in satisfied and dissatisfied employees (Fisktjønmo & Næss, 2022). Some employees did remain engaged and performed their tasks perfectly fine at home, while others struggled to set aside a defined workspace, needed paper copies of their work, and had too many distractions. Organizations are left with additional change management when deciding to keep with a traditional work setting or remain virtual (Fisktjønmo & Næss, 2022).

The impact of COVID-19 made sudden impacts on organizational change management (Sarkar & Clegg, 2021). Many leaders were able to see the pandemic as a business opportunity rather than a disaster. The business opportunity around remote working can lead to having employees from all different locations across the country. Employees that can work from anywhere show the potential to allow organizations to increase their talent pool when recruiting. Leadership changes are contingent upon the resilience of their employees (Sarkar & Clegg). However, some employees felt that this change in the work environment made them less productive, have a lower quality of work, and not like their experience overall. The organization did not have to shut its doors. Employees need to understand their resiliency in this change

management that they were working from home under extreme events, such as a global pandemic (Sarkar & Clegg, 2021). Before leadership decides on returning to a full-time office setting, they need to evaluate if their employees could work remotely, outside of uncertain and unprecedented times.

Trustworthy Relationships

One of the most critical components of successful remote work environments is trust in the workplace. Trust is essential in human society, unifying families, communities, groups, and countries (Hungerford & Cleary, 2021). Establishing trust between employees, leadership, management, and the entire organization is a crucial factor in stress levels in workers. Studies have shown cynicism felt by employees toward their managers, disengagement, sick leave, and higher levels of stress for employees who do not trust their workplace (Hungerford & Cleary). Low levels of trust in the workplace negatively impact employees, whereas higher levels of trust positively impact the workers' overall experience at an organization. Trust provides meaning and helps organizations overcome challenges (Hungerford & Cleary, 2021). During the mandatory stay-at-home orders throughout the pandemic, organizations were able to experience trust in the workplace. The transition from the office to home was chaotic, frantic, and stressful for all employees.

When employees finally got the hang of their everyday routine of working fully remotely, they could see the trust in their managers. Some managers would require their camera to be on and micromanage their status on Teams or Skype for Business. Other managers simply did not have the time to manage how their employees were getting their work done but oversaw that they were getting tasks completed. The employees constantly being watched virtually with every move they made did not like working remotely as much as they liked being in the office.

Micromanaging in virtual work settings continues to challenge employees. However, the employees knew their managers would continue their behavior in remote settings. It was just a different type of lack of trust that the employee was experiencing for the first time. Managers knew that their employees would occasionally take breaks to go to the restroom, get coffee, and chat with colleagues. However, at home, the breaks were throwing in a load of laundry, preparing dinner, or helping their kids with school. The breaks looked different, and the trust levels decreased because of it.

Employees have higher life satisfaction when there is trust in the workplace. An increase of trust in management is approximately one-tenth of the value of life satisfaction to a 30% monetary increase in income (Helliwell & Huang, 2011). Managers that focus on increasing their relationships with their employees have more benefits than giving them raises at the end of the year. When values of trust in the workplace are high and remain high, the organization can overcome more challenges and accomplish its goals and objectives (Helliwell & Huang). Employees want to have trust in their workplace. Establishing trust increases the employee's work satisfaction and encourages them to continue to work harder for their employer. Non-financial job characteristics, such as feeling trusted, increase productivity and save the company money on annual raises and bonuses (Helliwell & Huang, 2011).

Continuous Improvement

Leaders of organizations are constantly looking to improve processes to increase productivity and efficiency. The increase in virtual work settings showed top management how to utilize technology continually by improving their organization's procedures. As technology advances, maximizing the benefits is up to the organization. Technology continuously improves, which has led to greater flexibility in how people work, influencing remote work (Gashi et al.,

2022). Most organizations utilized video conferencing, instant messaging, shared drives, and virtual collaboration but did not allow employees to work remotely. Once the pandemic hit and employers chose to allow this type of flexibility, they realized the continuous improvement of utilizing technology to allow employees to work wherever they please. As a result of changes in the work environment related to technology, employees are no longer bound by a set schedule or associated with a specific location to work (Gashi et al., 2022). Moreover, technology has dramatically impacted the speed of working. For example, many organizations use physical signatures on legal documents, such as contracts (Gashi et al., 2022). Older processes consisted of signing a contract, scanning the signed document, saving that document to a folder, and emailing or uploading the signed copy to the appropriate party. Next, that party would print out the signed document, sign it physically on their end, scan it, and send it back. With technology, people can have their signatures saved electronically and sign documents much quicker (Gashi et al., 2022).. Many organizations were using similar processes before the pandemic; however, for the organizations that were not, it forced them to learn and use the technology, since no one was meeting in person to sign documents (Gashi et al., 2022).

Organizations find home-based employment attractive by increasing productivity and reducing traditional office costs (Gashi et al., 2022). Continually improving the organization consists of reducing unnecessary costs. Larger organizations looking at adding a new building to their assets as their firms grow in size might look at work-from-home options (Thomas & Douglas, 2021). Working from home can save on all office expenses, such as desks, chairs, coffee, snacks, and utility bills that keep the building up and running. Employees that can share cubicles and work remotely on alternating days save the organization the cost of buying a new building (Thomas & Douglas, 2021).

Job Satisfaction

Employees' positive, good, robust mental health helps them thrive in today's business world. Mental health in the workplace was affected by COVID-19 and started changing work environments, which impacted job satisfaction (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021). Since the pandemic forced much of the workforce to remote environments, the employees that suffered trust issues with their managers also experienced job dissatisfaction. Relationships at work play a critical role in the employee's mental health. Job satisfaction is a subjective comparison by the employee of the actual work situation with the expected result of their coworkers, roles and responsibilities, and interactions in the workplace (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska). Commitment to the organization directly correlates to the employee's satisfaction with their work. Employees are experiencing fear of illness and anxiety through social isolation; therefore, maintaining healthy relationships in a remote work environment is extremely important. Employee relationships play a critical role in building intense job satisfaction and can be an indicator of providing social interactions with employees, even if they are working remotely. Managers who increase their employees' trust show the potential to strengthen their social relationships, directly increasing job satisfaction. Job satisfaction and non-work-related satisfaction are two different concepts that explain work-life balance (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021).

Work-life Balance

Work-life balance is daily concern employees face. Work-life balance has been linked to anxiety and depression but can positively impact job and life satisfaction (Haar & Mowat, 2022). Employees with families struggle with getting their kids to school, off the bus, helping with homework, and attending sporting events. Much work occurs in the afternoon when most of

these after-school programs occur. Not all employers can be flexible and have their employees work 7:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m., not take a lunch, get their 8-hour workday in and leave. When there is a good work-life balance in the employee's life, they have a more extraordinary job, life satisfaction, and better mental health amongst different cultures (Haar & Mowat, 2022).). Employers want their employees to balance their work and life roles to better their physical and mental health. Healthy employees may be able to perform their job better than unhealthy employees. Recent studies have shown that work-life balance is better understood in individualistic cultures since they have a more substantial influence on the overall quality of their work and life experiences (Haar & Mowat, 2022). Human resources can offer flexible work schedules, remote work, and more paid time off to help the employees achieve healthy balances between work and life.

Organizations that offer remote work environments to achieve healthy work-life balance for their employees need to be aware of the implications that come with it. Employees lose the informality of work-life balance because instead of informal communication and collaboration, employees now have to book meetings and schedule time to discuss issues (Waight et al., 2022). The impacts of working where one lives can create blurred lines for employees. It is a privilege to work in pajamas and eliminate commute times, but that also comes with a price. Employees felt the need to be available all day and all night instead of their typical 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. allotted time for work. Communication was now continuous with the sudden shift to online platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, and email (Waight et al.). Before the pandemic, with the rise in remote working, simple conversations would be brief water cooler conversations or across a coworker's desk in a calm, relaxed manner. Now employees have to adjust to scheduling time with colleagues before having a conversation. However, a remote

workforce has a planned time mentality, which adds more stress and frustration to an employee

to organize meetings and appointments and has lost the informality of simple conversations with

coworkers (Waight et al., 2022). Calendars are getting booked faster with more formal meetings,

so most remote employees work around the clock. The blurred lines between work and home are

apparent when there is a mix of traditional office employees and remote employees because the

remote employees know the need to prove they are working since they are not physically in the

office. Fuzzy work boundaries lead to more extended workdays for remote employees and are

counterproductive to why they are remote.

Workload and Stress Level

Familiar daily routines have radically changed since the outbreak of COVID-19. Workers

change their habits and lifestyles because of work-from-home mandates. Work overload and

technostress significantly affect stress levels in employees (Ingusci et al., 2021). There has been

much confusion and misunderstanding due to working from home. Remote employees face

several difficulties in organizing their work schedules, workspaces, devices, internet connection,

coffee breaks, and family time, making boundaries between work and private life challenging

(Ingusci et al.). Additionally, organizations that did not know how to use the technology at home

created workload and technostress. The workload increases, which causes anxiety and stress to

the demands of their job. According to the Technology Acceptance Model, depending on most

individual dispositions toward information and communication technology, the long-term

interaction with technologies could contribute to developing new proactive behaviors (Ingusci et

al., 2021). Learning technology for the first time at home where direct managers are not

physically present stresses workers out. Working from home requires a great deal of self-

discipline (Adekoya et al., 2022).Before learning self-discipline to avoid distractions at home,

the employee must know how to use the technological equipment for their job. Many workers from organizations that had not adopted new technology advances had manual paper-oriented processes that did not include the computer (Adekoya et al., 2022). Stress from learning how to do their job differently becomes more of a technological challenge for employees than an improvement. Leaders need to evaluate why working from home may not have worked for employees, such as technostress and workload. Before deciding as an organization if remote work can be an option for employees in the future, leaders may need to evaluate whether their employees were thoroughly prepared to perform their jobs at home (Adekoya et al., 2022)..

Workers' stress levels during the COVID-19 pandemic were increasingly higher than average. The uncertainty of what life would become during the pandemic contributed to increased stress among employees (van Zoonen et al., 2021). Typical change management at organizations takes time. Therefore, the abrupt nature of the pandemic caused more harm mentally to employees with the sudden change at work. Typical job stressors, especially during a global health crisis, may include high workload, increased responsibility, unclear job instructions, and job insecurity (van Zoonen et al.). The pandemic added job stressors to the employees' already-existing stresses after work shifted to a remote environment. Communication technology mitigates the negative impacts of the geographical dispersion of workers on pro-social behaviors, such as helping others (van Zoonen et al., 2021). The use of technology to communicate better helps employees that may suffer from isolation when working remotely (Gashi et al., 2022). The problem with communication technology is the instant gratification that employees want. Communication caused more stress on employees needing to answer emails, instant messaging, social media, and collaboration tools as soon as possible in remote working environments (Gashi et al., 2022).

Motivation

Employees all have different motivating factors in the workplace. Some may be motivated by compensation, while others are motivated by paid time off. Some employees are addicted to working and are called workaholics. The motivation and addiction processes in workaholism focus on motivation in the workplace (Kim, 2019). Workaholics typically overwork, drive by their work as an addiction, and have an obsessive and compulsive work motivation (Kim). Virtual work environments allow employees that suffer from workaholism to have easier access to their work. It is now easier for them to get to work earlier and stay later, eliminating any kind of commute. Although motivational and routine characteristics are still important, internal motivation plays a crucial role in habitual behaviors (Kim, 2019). Leaders need to identify those types of employees and set boundaries on when they should be working. Healthy work hours can lead to remote work environments becoming successful (Kortsch et al., 2022). Other motivations can negatively impact working from home, such as household distractions. If the employee is motivated to work from home to do laundry, dishes, fix meals, and clean, then that employee may not have the privilege to work from home (Kortsch et al., 2022). Those types of motivations do not reflect the benefit the organization is trying to provide. Eliminating a commute for their employees allows them to start their private home life earlier than in traditional office settings (Kortsch et al., 2022). Therefore, the worker may be able to stay up later with their spouse or kids or be home for dinner. Spending more time with their family is a motivating factor that supports remote work environments (Kortsch et al., 2022). The manager should know what motivates their employees and work with them accordingly. Remote work environments are not favorable for every employee, just as traditional office settings are not the most desirable for all workers (Kortsch et al., 2022).

Non-monetary Incentives

Much of what motivates employees to work hard at their job is their compensation. There are different ways to incentivize employees other than through bonuses and annual raises. Recent studies on monetary and non-monetary rewards and punishments found that rewards in both have more prolonged effects than punishments (Lefebvre & Stenger, 2020). Rewards had more impact on employees than punishments. Studies showed that the incentives, such as a policy toward non-monetary rewards, have the same impact on contributions as monetary policies (Lefebvre & Stenger). Different types of non-monetary incentives can include catered meetings, food in the office, holiday work parties, additional vacation days, casual work attire, gym memberships, educational reimbursement, or offering remote work environments. Monetary incentives can be costlier for institutions asking for individual contributions to a public good since they are difficult to quantify and often insufficient (Lefebvre & Stenger, 2020). Therefore, direct managers knowing what motivates their employees outside of monetary compensation may be critical for saving money and achieving motivating factors for their employees.

Employee Recognition

Employees work hard at their day-to-day tasks and, in return, are compensated through both monetary and non-monetary benefits from the company. Some motivating factors for employees include recognition for their efforts by executive management. Organizations view employee recognition as a non-monetary strategy for effective incentive behavior at work (Montani et al., 2020). Non-monetary incentives, such as recognition, provide the employee reinforcement that the organization desires their behavior. Employees may be more motivated to invest their efforts in accomplishing task requirements and improving their job if they receive genuine appreciation for such efforts (Montani et al., 2020).

Recognition was challenging during the pandemic with employees working remotely. Typical recognition from a manager could be stopping by employees' cubicles or offices and thanking them for a job well done. With the stressful uncertain times working from home, recognition got pushed away. When work finally started to settle and employees were adjusting to their remote work environments, managers realized their burnt-out employees had not received their deserved recognition. Organizations need to emphasize the worth of relying on a non-monetary reward to directly mobilize in-role and extra-role behaviors at work (Montani et al., 2020). This action taken by managers reinforces the behavior, and employees realize their efforts are recognized. Organizations may have also recognized employees during town hall meetings conducted in large auditoriums in front of their peers (Müller & Wittmer, 2023). Now, video conferencing services support townhalls. As long as the organization continues to recognize its employees in a virtual setting, it shows the potential to have highly motivated employees (Müller & Wittmer, 2023). Not only do managers play a role in recognition, but coworkers have involvement in how employees receive recognition. Managers need to know their employees' unique motivating factors and personalities because some employees would not prefer recognition in front of peers (Müller & Wittmer, 2023).

In contrast, other employees would thrive off of the attention. Employee recognition is a critical component that needs to continue to occur no matter the employees' workplace environment and needs to be implemented based on the individual employee. Recognition is not a one-size-fits-all approach for workers.

Communication

Communication has drastically changed with technology advancements and remote work settings. Employees have changed from walking down the hall to ask a question to a coworker in

their office to messaging them on Microsoft teams. The digitalization of communication improved work efficiency, facilitated a faster exchange of information, and increased work flexibility for employees (Stadin et al., 2021). This impact has played a negative role on employees' psychosocial perspectives. Communication technology demands a high quantity of incoming emails, disturbances from different notifications, and technical difficulties that might cause increased technostress (Stadin et al., 2021). Virtual communication explains why advancements in technology can be proven to influence employees negatively. Communication in the workplace is now considered the top work-related stress for workers due to the pandemic (Marrone et al., 2023). The high demands involved in communicating at work have negative impacts on the health and well-being of the employee. The daily stress of work assigned to employees constantly challenges managers (Marrone et al., 2023). Managers who understand the overlap between the demands of a role at the organization and the communication technology-related stress and evenly distribute assignments accordingly may find their employees have healthier balances. Digital communication has played a role in changing ethical behavior and creativity in employees' work because of the shift in how employees work (Marrone et al., 2023).

Ethical Behavior

Employees transitioning from a traditional work environment to working from home must learn to continue ethical behavior in different settings (Argus & Pääsuke, 2021). One key element of ethical behavior for employees is effective communication. Instead of simply having face-to-face conversations, employees must learn to communicate through instant messaging, emails, video conferencing, and setting up appointments (Argus & Pääsuke, 2021). Another ethical behavior that needs to be considered by remote employees as they are now communicating solely digitally is remaining respectful to other employees (Argus & Pääsuke,

2021). Leaders now must establish guidelines for employees crafting respectful emails to avoid

not showing consideration for their colleagues. Misinterpretation of words occurs often.

Therefore, establishing procedures for digital communication among coworkers may help

understand what is acceptable (Argus & Pääsuke, 2021). Ethical leadership demonstrates

normative behavior through personal actions and promotes such conduct for followers through

two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (De Roeck & Farooq, 2018).

During the pandemic, ethical leaders and followers learned to overcome digital challenges. The

leaders need to focus on consistency to avoid negative bias toward the organizational work

context (De Roeck & Farooq). As leaders were adapting to digital communication to do their job

at home, they had to be consistent with the message they were trying to articulate to the

employees so they could learn from them. Conversations from managers to employees could be

the number of emails sent daily. Communication is why the establishment of trust between

manager and employee is crucial. Employees that feel their manager does not trust them may

send email updates throughout their day since they are not physically present to know they are

keeping up with their projects. Managers establish that the ethical behavior done at home is on

mutual trust that the employee is following the company's rules. Ethical leaders care more about

the greater good of their employees, organization, and society rather than their self-interests (De

Roeck & Farooq, 2018). COVID-19 shaped a different set of views on ethical behavior since the

leaders could not physically see if the employee was following their moral responsibility as an

employee.

Employee Creativity

Creativity refers to employees' behavioral and cognitive processes of business ideas and

concepts (Gumula, 2020). Ethical leadership impacted employee creativity during the COVID-19

pandemic from employees' perceptions of the work situation (Li et al., 2021). There were some

practical enhancements to employee creativity. Faced with the pandemic, organizations should

do an excellent job in outbreak prevention and increase their employees' ability to be creative (Li

et al.). Most organizations increased creativity when work shifted to remote settings through

virtual happy hours. Happy hours were ways that employees could socialize outside of the office

and connect with their colleagues. Not only did organizations choose to have their employees

work from home to prevent the spread of this virus, but restaurants and bars were also either

shutting their doors to customers or doing carry-out only. Through creativity came the

development of virtual happy hours. Video conferencing allows virtual happy hours for

employees to see their coworkers and have a cocktail in their home. This type of congregation of

employees provides a way to connect with their coworkers during unprecedented times while

remaining safe. Employees' perceptions of social and contextual factors play essential roles in

the ethical leadership-employee creativity relationship (Li et al., 2021). The new remote work

environment now challenges employees to be more creative as they learn to navigate the

challenges of working from home and maintaining the organization's pre-pandemic status quo.

Effective E-Leadership

E-leadership is a social influence process mediated by advanced information technology

to produce a change in attitude, feelings, thinking, behavior, and performance from employees at

an organization (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). E-leadership often refers to virtual or online

leadership. Effective leadership plays a critical role in employees' performance and perspective

of the company. When the pandemic forced many institutions to work remotely, e-leadership

was required to survive. Leaders needed to learn how to interact virtually from remote locations,

using media such as intranet portals, emails, video conferencing, and social media (Meghana &

Vijaya). There are three primary skills needed for leaders to thrive in remote environments. They need strategic leadership, digital savviness, and an understanding of their business (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). E-leaders must know how to develop a strategy that works for their team in remote environments. This type of leader solves problems, is independent, has strong communication skills, and is highly creative. E-leaders must also understand big data analytics, cloud computing, mobile apps, complex business, and social media. It may seem like a lot of information to know for a leader that does not work within information technology. However, with growth and development, an effective e-leader needs to understand at least IT infrastructure at a high level. The third skill an effective e-leader must have is understanding business. They must have strong customer relationships, organizational change management, market analysis, and financial skills. The leader must show their ability to be collaborative on an online platform. Trust is another characteristic that an effective e-leader must possess. This leader must trust their team to get their jobs done because micromanaging in a remote work setting may take away from what the leader should be doing. An effective e-leader knows how to optimize teleworking opportunities, understands the risks of teleworking, and knows how to implement virtual teams in their organization.

Optimizes Teleworking Opportunities

Organizations understand that finding the benefits of teleworking may incentivize their employees to work from home when they know they have something to gain. There are benefits for both the employee and the employer. Teleworking can offer employees stress relief, flexibility, and savings with transportation and clothing. Teleworking can also benefit the employer in many ways, such as savings on rent, office maintenance, and buying modern equipment (Georgescu et al., 2021). Employees who have dedicated workspaces to experience

healthy work and personal life balance may reduce stress, while employees working at their dining room table with their children and spouses do not experience stress relief. Teleworking reduces stress on the employee by shortening a morning routine, eliminating a commute, allowing healthier lunch options, providing the ability to perform household tasks during breaks, getting home to their families quicker, and enjoying a relaxing environment in their home. Additional benefits for the organization are that teleworking improves productivity and increases organizational commitment (Georgescu et al., 2021). Employees must have sound information technologies in place to work remotely. Employees of companies with high-level IT systems have better productivity and can work independently of the location (Georgescu et al., 2021). Employees benefit from the increase in efficiency from the advancement of technology and can complete daily tasks faster than usual. Productivity increases because of fewer social interactions in the office (Martin et al., 2022). However, employers should be aware if an employee is becoming isolated at home because then it would not be a benefit to the employee. Office settings can have many social distractions that would not be at home for the telecommuting employees (Martin et al., 2022). Organizations believe the benefits of teleworking outweigh the benefits of working in a traditional office. Therefore, the continuation of COVID-19 work environments may stay permanently at many companies. Employees who view teleworking as a benefit are more satisfied and have more happiness and higher-level quality of life overall (Martin et al., 2022).

Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction is different from job satisfaction. Employees have already proven that they have higher job satisfaction with remote work, which is dependent on the job (Gashi et al., 2022). Some jobs perform better in office settings; therefore, the job satisfaction would be

lower for those particular jobs. On the other hand, employee satisfaction focuses on the engagement of the employee (Gashi et al., 2022). Remote employees are more satisfied with their work environment because they have reduced work-life conflict, work stress, and stress from commuting by avoiding peak travel times (Wheatley, 2017). Telecommuting creates higher engagement and commitment levels for the employee because of its flexibility. Employees may need to get their children off the school bus, care for an elderly parent, or do personal errands during work time, allowing them to log online to accomplish their tasks at different times. Offering flexibility with a greater degree of choice has significant benefits for employee satisfaction (Wheatley). The consequences of flexibility may seem like the employee is working longer hours, but this flexibility provides choices in the employee's life, which results in greater satisfaction. Employers need to continue facilitating choices for employees, as it directly correlates with the employee's satisfaction at work (Wheatley, 2017). Organizations need to be aware of the workload and hours worked by remote employees since flexibility can create satisfaction (Wheatley, 2017). However, if it creates conflict in the employees' personal lives, it is no longer advantageous. Touchpoints from management are critical to understanding if their employee is burning out (Wheatley, 2017).

Employees' Overall Happiness

Employees often spend more time at their place of work than they do with their own families. People gain more happiness from experiences than material objects (Bastos & Barsade, 2020). Therefore, employers must understand that the experience their employees have at work plays a role in their overall happiness. Greater involvement with the customer's or client's experiences with the organizations can impact their perceptions, increase job meaningfulness, and lead to greater job-related happiness (Bastos & Barsade). Meaningful jobs make the

employee feel that their work makes a difference in a person's life. Sometimes, connecting the job's meaningfulness is up to the employee. However, employers that can help their employees see the bigger picture of their work may see happier employees. Managers that oversee employees that do not have direct consumer experiences need to focus on explaining to employees how their work is meaningful. Employees who offer consumers positive experiences gain greater happiness from their jobs (Bastos & Barsade, 2020). During the pandemic, customer interactions and experiences abruptly changed. Working from home to help stop the spread of COVID-19 has increased the work engagement that impacts the employee's happiness (Mehta, 2021). Working from home provides greater flexibility to the employee. The benefits that remote work environments provide to employees include lowered work-to-home conflicts, reduced commute time, decreased frequency of work breaks, fewer sick days, and the convenience of a quieter work environment (Mehta, 2021). Moreover, psychological transitions relate to the employees' happiness with the work-from-home arrangement. Employees feel more engaged with their work because working from home affords them autonomy, safety, and convenience during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this work engagement leads to happiness (Mehta, 2021). Leaders of organizations need to understand a correlation between employee happiness and work-from-home arrangements in future workplace settings.

Quality of Life

Quality of life for employees is essential so that their work does not suffer. The quality of an employee's work-life directly impacts their productivity, job satisfaction, and quality of work completed on the job. The challenges with remote working during the pandemic were new leadership styles and organizational issues with the structured use of software (Palumbo et al., 2021). Working from home has proven to be an adequate backup plan for organizations to

continue business while practicing social distance policies. There can be negative side effects of telecommuting relating to the employees' quality of life. The quality of work-life in a traditional office setting consists of standard start and end times each day for the employees. Home-based telecommuting can trigger work-life conflicts due to the blurring of boundaries between work and everyday life (Palumbo et al.). Some employees log on first thing in the morning when they get up instead of doing a morning routine of making coffee, eating breakfast, going to the gym, or whatever their routine was before they would commute to work. These employees also rarely ever log off when the workday is complete. With the advancement in technology, the employee could have all work communication on their cell phone. Many employees in a traditional setting would leave work, commute home, eat dinner, and spend time with their families. Now, employees are glued to their phones more than ever to check to ensure their work does not need them. Organizations need to address the adverse effects of home-based telecommuting on employees' ability to manage work-life conflicts (Palumbo et al., 2021). It is the responsibility of the remote employee to understand their work obligations and set boundaries if another coworker and employee is crossing them (Tánczos et al., 2022). The quality of life in the workplace of a remote worker can be highly flexible and bring the employee happiness; however, if work and family are in constant conflict, the employee may suffer the consequences (Tánczos et al., 2022).

Understands the Risks of Teleworking

To remain afloat during the pandemic, most organizations forced employees to work from home. Now, employers are wondering if this should be the future of their company's work environment (Nayal et al., 2022). Telecommuting is a practical way to improve productivity, eliminate commutes, integrate workers with disabilities, and reduce environmental pollution (Nayal et al., 2022). Telecommuting began in the 1970s to alleviate traffic problems and reduce

energy consumption, but it spread more quickly when technological advances enabled mobile connections at increasingly affordable rates (Magnavita et al., 2021). Telecommuting has many benefits, such as job satisfaction, productivity, performance, and stress reduction. However, mental health is of concern when it comes to telecommuting. Stressors related to working from home eventually can lead to exhaustion and burnout (Magnavita et al.). Organizations should fully understand the risks of social isolation, increased work pressure, and decreased job performance before deciding if remote work is a feasible option for their employees. However, this type of work environment requires the right leadership style and respect for the privacy and needs of workers (Magnavita et al., 2021).

Social Isolation

Isolation can occur for teleworkers because they are not experiencing work with peers physically present (Hu & Subramony, 2022). Telecommuting may be associated with adverse effects, such as psychological and physical isolation. Psychological isolation is the feeling that one is disconnected from others, lacking desired social and influential network connections (Hu & Subramony, 2022). Fulfilling the need for support, understanding, and other social and emotional aspects of interactions must occur (Wang et al., 2020). When an employee feels isolated, this leads to undesirable outcomes, such as dissatisfaction with their job, high turnover, and poor health decisions. Physical isolation is when the employee has physical separation from their colleagues. These employees feel less respected in their organization and have fewer career advantages than employees in the same building (Wang et al.). When there is physical separation from employees, by having some in the same office and others working from home, the remote employees feel undermined by their peers because they can have more flexibility in their work and life schedules. The remote employee tends to feel frustrated and untrusted, prone to

loneliness, and has poorer organizational identification and an inability to maintain meaningful relationships with coworkers (Wang et al., 2020). Moreover, isolation from telecommuters impacts their organizational commitment. The pandemic has led to physical and psychological isolation from employees who are now all working remotely (Hu & Subramony, 2022). As the spread of COVID-19 has dramatically slowed down, organizations can think to solve isolation problems by reopening their traditional office settings and providing a place to work to unite their staff. If not all of their remote staff are experiencing isolation, they may see this as a negative impact on their work environment rather than a positive one (Hu & Subramony, 2022). Leaders need to be very careful in their decision-making concerning the work environment because not every employee may agree with remaining virtual or coming back to the office. Communication with employees is one way to solve the psychological isolation of feeling disconnected (Hu & Subramony, 2022). One-on-one meetings with managers are critical to check in on employees to see how they are doing and give them a space to ask questions. Social isolation may occur during teleworking because it requires more effort to socialize virtually than in person. Organizations can ensure minimal social isolation for their employees by establishing formal guidelines and procedures (Hu & Subramony, 2022).

Increased Work Pressure

Employers understand that they are providing their employees with the benefit of working from home (Ryde et al., 2020). There is an added pressure when working from home to prove to the organization that one is working and not binging Netflix during the day (Ryde et al, 2020). Research has shown that employees are under societal pressure to adapt to their employment practices in remote work environments and need to make up the time saved at home to put back into the company (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). The benefits of working from home

come at a cost to the employee. The work intensifies, and there is a more remarkable inability to switch off. Social exchange theory explains the cost of working remotely by suggesting that in exchange for the opportunity to alter where they work, workers show the potential to sacrifice doing unpaid work, working harder to get noticed, or putting in extra effort out of obligation (Felstead & Henseke). Unpaid work can be things like helping other coworkers adjust to a remote work environment if they are unfamiliar with how to access the intranet, navigate shared drives, or use virtual conferencing. Outside of the pandemic, this would have been part of training, but the remote employees who know how to do their jobs at home and want to remain able to do so may help other coworkers thrive. Suppose there is a hybrid approach at an organization, meaning that some employees work remotely and some work in the office or all employees have some days in the office and other days at home working. In that case, this can create higher volumes of work pressure for telecommuting employees. Peers could view remote employees as lazy employees that would rather sleep in to save time and money on a commute to work. Thus, the subjective opinions of coworkers could make the remote employee want to work harder to get noticed by the traditional office setting employee and senior management. The telecommuting worker could feel obligated to put in extra hours when their coworkers would be typically commuting to and from the office. This unwritten obligation could be anywhere from 1 to 2 extra hours they are working solely because of pressure from office-bound colleagues. The social exchange theory suggests the remote employee gets to save on a commute, work comfortably from home, and have flexibility when it comes to work and family but pays the price of overworking, social isolation, pressure always to be online, and more intense work (Felstead & Henseke). In an office setting, upper management can physically see the employees staying past 5:00 p.m. on a Friday. Remote employees could have to put in extra effort by

sending an email past a particular time or making sure their Skype is green in the late hours. Therefore, working from home could increase the work intensity and lengthen the hours worked, triggered by the detachment of work from a place (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). The increase in remote work settings shows the employers' greater willingness to prioritize their employees' mental health with flexible work times and environments (Barath & Schmidt, 2022). It takes a change in company culture to accept remote work and fully understand that remote employees are working just as hard as the traditional office setting employees and should not have pressure to burn out just to prove they are working (Barath & Schmidt, 2022).

Decreased Job Performance

When implemented poorly, remote work environments can decrease employees' job performance (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). At the beginning of COVID-19, organizations transitioned rapidly to remote working, which was not an ideal change management process for many organizations (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). The employees' outcomes were self-reported performance issues, loss of engagement, job dissatisfaction, burnout, and intentions to quit (Evans et al., 2022). Organizations that had flexible work arrangements before the pandemic did not experience as high of a negative impact on their workforce as organizations that were strictly office settings. Extroverted and conscientious employees became less productive, less engaged, and less satisfied with their jobs, and introverted employees reported increasing burnout (Evans et al.). The extroverted employees were used to the conversations held in person throughout the day—the transition from an office setting to working at home affected their employee performance. Recent studies showed that, on average, levels of self-reported performance decreased over 3 months, while well-being and turnover intentions remained stable (Evans et al., 2022). Personalities play a role in the level of performance decreasing or increasing as

extroverted individuals typically strive to increase their performance daily. The pandemic showed employers that their employees could do their jobs remotely. However, there are risks associated with telecommuting without proper implementation, such as decreased performance. When employees feel psychological and physical isolation and pressure to work longer and more complex hours, they burn out and decrease their performance. Employees may feel that the organization does not care about their overall well-being and become less engaged in their work. The less engaged an employee is, the more their performance suffers.

Implementation of Virtual Teams

The lack of formal policies and uniform treatment of on-site and off-site workers can lead to unintended consequences in telecommuting. These consequences can include jealousy and resentment by those who do not telecommute (Kelly & Shoemaker, 2021). Abruptly telling a workforce they can no longer come to the office and must work at home to help lessen the spread of a highly contagious disease is not the way organizations want to implement remote work. Flexible work arrangements need to have a formal policy so employees understand expectations. The policy may serve as a potential solution to reduce the perceived disparity in fairness between remote and on-site workers (Kelly & Shoemaker). To implement virtual teams in an organization appropriately and fairly, the organization's leaders need to address all concerns in work-from-home policies. There can be disparities with sick leave, paid time off, and hours worked. Suppose senior leaders decide to make the entire organization remote or the entire organization have traditional office settings. In that case, the disparities lessen because the entire organization is working in the same setting. When organizations decide to offer hybrid approaches, it is critical to be treating the remote and on-site employees the same. One disparity that leaders need to get ahead of is paid time off. A telecommuter could simply take their laptop computer to the

beach, perform job tasks, and not use their official vacation time (Kelly & Shoemaker, 2021).

The work-from-home policy needs to be clear if the employee is to be at their home working,

which can be monitored by their Wi-Fi use, or if the company allows a work-from-anywhere

policy (Fahmi et al., 2022). Addressing potential conflicts like this example may help with the

issues of jealousy and resentment when incorrect implementation occurs. Telecommuting can

have tremendous benefits for the organization and the employee, but only if the implementation

uses a formal policy and outlines employees' expectations when they are not in the office (Fahmi

et al., 2022).

Leadership Decision-Making

Organizational leaders are facing the decision to bring all employees back to the office or

remain in a remote work environment (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). Companies have continued to

pay rent and utility bills on an empty building; therefore, some senior leaders may feel the need

to occupy the building that they are paying to use. Some organizations survey their remote

employees and ask if they want to come back into the office before deciding (De Vincenzi et al.,

2022). Leaders must consider that Generation Z's work environment may be looking for remote

capabilities in their job search (Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy, 2021). Most of their educational journey

shifted online because of the pandemic. Therefore, they would have seen their parents working

from home and doing schoolwork at home. Leaders may need to transform the work

environment for the post-COVID-19 era to attract and retain employees (Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy,

2021). Leadership's decision-making should not just be based on their current workforce, but

also on the future.

Generation Z employees may ask what the remote work policy is during their interviews.

If the company does not have one, it may be straightforward for that prospect to find another

institution that offers it. While organizations understand if remote work is the right fit for their current employees, they should not shut the door to opportunities for future work environments. Many members of Generation Z want to get a job that fits their healthy and balanced lifestyle and mainly provides flexibility in the work conditions (Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy, 2021). The new upcoming generation may be influenced in their place of work by the organization's decision to allow freedom and trust in their employees. Recent studies have shown that evaluating analytical and intuitive practices used in processing information may allow leaders to arrive at sound decisions by studying managers and other employees (Jarrahi, 2018). With the use of artificial intelligence, decision-making improves; the problem-solving ability of artificial intelligence is more helpful in supporting analytical rather than intuitive decision-making (Jarrahi). When organizations decide to send out surveys and collect data on their employees' preference of work environment, artificial intelligence may allow better evaluation of decision options. Employers should still acknowledge intuition about their employees, such as knowing which employees struggle with boundaries at home, over-socialize in the office, have other family members working from home, have a long commute length, and lack discipline. Much of cognition and human decision-making is not a direct result of deliberate information gathering and processing but instead arises from the subconscious in the realm of intuition (Jarrahi, 2018). These are factors that the survey might not reveal; thus, a manager should have good intuition about their employees before making decisions (Steen & Pollock, 2022). There are four main types of decision-making leaders can choose from: command and control, collaborative, consensus, and convenience (Steen & Pollock, 2022).

Command and Control Decision-Making

Command and control have been a critical military component to meet the increasing demand for rapid information gathering and real-time decision-making (Li et al., 2017). With rapidly changing environments due to the pandemic, the command and control decision-making model can be a solution for organizational leaders. The command and control process bases decisions on collecting and processing a current situation and command information, including information awareness, information processing, and action (Li et al.). This type of decision-making is for fast-paced environments. Integrating the latest information technology (IT) and artificial intelligence technology for behavior modeling can provide robust data analysis and processing ability, achieving a better decision supporting capability to improve decision-making quality and efficiency (Li et al., 2017). Conflict types that decision-makers are trying to solve need to be identified as rapid for command and control to be the best type of decision-making style.

Collaborative Decision-Making

Decision-making, such as returning to the office, should not be the sole responsibility of one employee but instead a collaborative effort by a team of individuals (Ristimäki et al., 2020). Shared decision-making helps create collaboration across multiple lines of business, which can engage more employees (Ristimäki et al., 2020). Collaboration is a critical component in the business industry. Sharing information and working together to reach a mutual understanding is the best course of action for decision-making in organizations (Ristimäki et al., 2020). Employees' involvement in the return-to-work arrangement may make the employees feel that they have a choice in their work environment. The collaboration between management and employees shows the potential to be critical in making the best decision for the organization. As

they share information, they should consider that each employee might have a different perspective on remote work. Collaborative decision-making with negotiations allowed could be considered an interactional process in managing the delicacy related to differing interests, opinions, and possibilities to steer the interactions (Ristimäki et al., 2020). Understanding the perspectives of the employees' preferred work environment in a collaborative, negotiable, interactive way may allow for conversations between management and employees to better understand what may optimize their success at the organization (Robelski et al., 2019). Establishing trust needs to occur to rely on the group consensus (Robelski et al., 2019).

Consensus Decision-Making

Decision-making problems involving collective individuals have piqued interest in mathematicians, psychologists, and sociologists because of the way they find a solution through the group agreeing on a decision (Ahlim et al., 2022). Often, groups may not all agree but come to a level of consensus. Consensus decision-making becomes challenging when the individuals in the group have different levels of knowledge, experience, and expertise (Ahlim et al.). Some employees may have experience working from home at prior organizations and know that teleworking is an optimal work environment without a global pandemic occurring. Other employees may only know remote working as a stressful, chaotic, and challenging work setting to accomplish their daily tasks. Trusting the experts' involved decision-making ability may be critical. Organizations show the potential to need to trust their employees that have experience remotely working outside of a pandemic since the future of work may be in a post-pandemic state. Since each employee has a different background and interests, the element of trust within the group is a critical component that makes the consensus-reaching process challenging to

interpret and understand (Ahlim et al., 2022). Integrating trust in the leaders and employees involved may support their decisions (Campagna et al., 2020).

Convenience Decision-Making

Often, decisions are made because they are convenient to the person making the decision (Efendic et al., 2021). A decision, such as bringing all employees back to the office full-time, may be convenient to a senior director that lives 2 miles down the street. However, this decision may not be convenient for the financial analyst that has an hour commute to and from work every day (Efendic et al., 2021). Today, individuals value convenience, spending less time and effort on a decision. The more convenient the decision, the better they perceive the decision (Klaus & Zaichkowsky, 2022). One way for senior leaders to do this would be to survey their employees and have artificial intelligence decide. With the humanization of technology, some people are now more comfortable with the ease of choice because of its convenience (Klaus & Zaichkowsky). Since leaders are relying more on artificial intelligence for decision-making, they may not bear the blame from unhappy employees for the outcome. The leaders can inform the employees that technology has decided to bring them back to a traditional office setting. The problem with convenience decision-making is that it manifests the lack of motivation from leaders when they do not see a decision as necessary but rather as a necessity for seamless activity (Klaus & Zaichkowsky, 2022). Changing a working environment that has worked for many employees for months and even some organizations for years during the pandemic is a decision that should take thought, intuition, collaboration, consensus, trust, and technology (Strang, 2022).

Servant Leadership in Remote Environments

Leaders that can serve their followers set positive examples in the corporate workforce (Alemayehu, 2021). Jesus was not the first servant leader, but one of the best examples of servant leadership in history today is Jesus Christ (Alemayehu, 2021). The servanthood of Jesus directly correlates to organizational citizenship behavior (Molano, 2019). Serving followers in servant leadership differentiates from all other types of leadership. The servant leader's focus is ethical and moral character, and their primary focus is on the satisfaction of followers' needs over personal interests (Molano). Jesus served his followers and showed them how God wants His people to live their life and spread the great news. Jesus died on the cross and surrendered to his Father's will (Molano, 2019). Leading up to the days before Jesus' death, Jesus washed his disciples' feet to show his love for them. He put their needs above his own (Alemayehu, 2021).

Servant leaders are critical for the success of organizations (Chughtai, 2019). Servant leaders first seek to develop their followers, which results in higher engagement and practical employee work and performance (Eva et al., 2019). Empowering employees may make them feel important and give meaning to their work. Followers' productivity increases when they know their well-being and growth are a top priority at the company (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leaders must show personal development in their employees and want them to grow professionally (Chughtai, 2019) . Remote work environments require servant leaders in the workforce more than in the traditional office setting, mainly due to the pandemic. Leaders that can put their staff's interests above their own may help them continue to work during unprecedented times (Chughtai, 2019). Additionally, research has shown that servant leadership positively impacts burnout and work-life balance challenges (Lamprinou et al., 2021). Teleworkers and non-teleworkers work under different circumstances. Leaders must understand how to serve their

employees no matter their work environment. Remote employees can become burnt out more effortlessly and not set clear boundaries between work and personal life. Servant leaders can respect their employees' work environment by encouraging them to continue working the same hours and ensuring their lives matter (Lamprinou et al.). Servant leaders are also navigating the abrupt shift to the remote working setting. Servant leaders may practice order to alleviate some of the burdens placed on their employees, such as long working hours, poor work-life balance, job insecurity, and high-stress levels (Lamprinou et al., 2021). In a work environment that can be isolating, servant leaders may find a way to engage with their telecommuting employees and know their needs are essential.

Work Expectations

A challenge that supervisors face is setting work expectations for their employees in a remote work setting (Memon et al., 2023). The work required from the employee may remain consistent, but the way the work is getting done may change. Availability expectations remain a top challenge for telecommuting employees (Memon et al., 2023). Hours working at home are cross-sectionally associated with higher demands, role ambiguity, role conflicts, decision control, empowering leadership, commitment, work-life conflict, and lower support from coworkers (Knardahl & Christensen, 2022). An employee should know their expectations regarding availability and the hours worked at home. Availability expectations are associated with higher levels of demands, role conflicts, neck pain, mental distress, sleep problems, and fair leadership (Knardahl & Christensen). Traditional office settings make it easier to be available during working hours and for coworkers and supervisors to drop in and out throughout the day. Remote working makes it difficult with the increased volume of meetings and the problem of finding time to ask questions and help each other during the day. Another challenge that supervisors face

in remote work environments is work breaks. In a traditional office setting, management knows that employees do not sit at their desks for 8 straight hours and never take a break. Office breaks consist of getting coffee, using the restroom, taking personal calls in the lobby, and talking with coworkers. Virtual work settings allow employees to take different breaks throughout the day, such as laundry, washing dishes, prepping dinner, or working out. These different types of breaks may not be well-received by non-telecommuting employees. Therefore, leadership must define acceptable breaks for traditional office and virtual employees. Empowering servant leaders to display healthy working hours, availability, and breaks for their employees may allow remote work settings to positively impact the workforce (Knardahl & Christensen, 2022).

Culture of Trust

Servant leaders create a culture of trust for their employees (Lee et al., 2020). Teleworking has created challenges with building trust at work without face-to-face communications (Yamamoto et al., 2022). Supervisors are not able to physically see their employees arrive to work on time. Therefore, they must build trust on availability expectations in remote work environments. Trust is the expectation that members may act according to organizational norms (Yamamoto et al.). Therefore, if the expectation is to start work at a particular time, there is trust that the employee will start at that time, even in a remote environment. Relationships at work are a critical component that must improve continuously for success in the workplace. There are different trusting relationships employees need to focus on in remote environments with their peers and their manager. An emotional trust may be displayed by peers whether they are following the organization's norms or not (Yamamoto et al., 2022). The positive benefit of most work converting to a digital space is that if a manager truly does not trust their employee, more data is available on visibility into web searches, login times, and activity

on their laptop (Vayre et al., 2022). Data can speak for itself if it shows an employee was logged into Facebook all day and their work is behind. The goal is to establish a trusting relationship in the organization's culture so the employee can work freely, knowing they are trusted to do their jobs from their homes (Vayre et al., 2022).

Unselfish Leader

Leaders in the workplace play a huge role in work satisfaction (Lee et al., 2020). Servant leaders think of their employees' needs and wants before thinking of their own. Servant leaders have an unselfish attitude toward the work they do (Lee et al., 2020). Positive attitudes are essential to explain employees' outcomes and happiness at work (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2018). Servant leadership may not reveal the effects of unselfish leaders as clearly as they should (Salas-Vallina & Alegre). Outstanding leaders have empathy toward their employees and participate in work-related activities. A charitable leader knows that their employee has many projects on their list and jumps in without asking to help lessen the workload. Unselfish leaders promote positive work environments, which impact the well-being of their employees. Leaders that promote generous behaviors are not only categorized as servants but also as transformational, transactional, and authentic (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2018).

There were easier ways for supervisors to pick up on social cues when their employees' workload was getting stressful with face-to-face interactions. It may be more challenging for a supervisor to notice their employee needs help in a virtual work setting (Shaik et al., 2021). If an organization is global, being sensitive to time zones is one way for leaders to be unselfish. The unselfish leader may have to take calls outside of their regular working hours, but their employees may not (Shaik et al., 2021). Suppose an organization just started working from home. In that case, an unselfish leader may take the time out of their day to set up meetings to

share their screen and troubleshoot any problems they may be experiencing with the new shift in the work environment (Shaik et al., 2021). Unselfish leadership may require the leader to work longer hours to help their team understand the change in work settings. Sacrifices are part of what makes charitable leaders extraordinary (Shaik et al., 2021). These types of leaders care more about their team than themselves. Unselfish leadership shows employees their life matters (Shaik et al., 2021). This type of leader may allow their employees to leave to go to their child's baseball game or come in late to care for an elderly parent. Unselfish leaders, much like servant leaders, understand the example they are setting for their team (Shaik et al., 2021). The pandemic took a mental toll on many employees; therefore, simple check-ins with their workers on non-work-related topics show that the leader cares about their employees' well-being. Leaders have played a considerable role in whether remote work was successful during the pandemic (Shaik et al., 2021).

Related Studies

There are different viewpoints from employees and managers when it comes to allowing remote work at an organization. One viewpoint is that remote work allows for more flexibility to the employee (Camp et al., 2022). It provides them with the ability to gain more time back into their personal life while cutting out on commute time. Another viewpoint on remote work is that it is a vacation day. There are employees that are sitting in their pajamas with their laptop next to them watching television all day and not really working (Camp et al., 2022). The literature supports that employees want to have the ability to work from home, but management may be hesitant as they no longer have a physical surveillance on their employees while working. Trust will become a huge factor when allowing remote work due to the different viewpoints on this topic, as well as the subjectivity of measuring work (Camp et al., 2022). Some job functions are

harder than others to use to truly measure an employee's productivity levels. The literature supports that a downfall to working from home is working longer hours, causing blurred lines with work and home life (Camp et al., 2022).

Anticipated and Discovered Themes

One theme that was anticipated from this study was employees wanting to work remotely more than they would like to receive a bonus. The study showed that money was a primary motivating factor for almost all of the participants, and when asked during the interview on receiving an annual bonus or having the ability to work remotely, answers were about 50% for each. There was a decent number of participants that thought for a long time about that question and wanted to learn more details. Employees are very motivated by money when it comes to work.

Another anticipated theme that was discovered was the hybrid work environment. Employees favor both the office and their homes as a place of work. This theme was discovered through the field study of participants. It was anticipated that employees were more aware of the work they could perform at home because of the pandemic, and therefore, they would want to have some policy with specific guidelines on what working from home would be like at the organization.

It was also anticipated that with higher productivity at home, the employees would work shorter days. The discovered theme was that the employees felt guilty about their coworkers in the office and managers so that they worked longer hours since they got time back from their commute. Additionally, it was anticipated that the employees would not like transitioning back and forth to the office and then working remotely when COVID-19 viruses spiked. This anticipated theme was discovered during the interviews. Lastly, it was anticipated that other

family members at home during the pandemic would be a distraction to employees, therefore, making them have a different perspective than they would have had if they were the only ones at home while they were working. It was discovered that family was not a distraction while working at home.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review supported that both the employee and leadership need to have trust to make remote work environments a success. An unselfish leader understands that if their employees want to work remotely, they might have to sacrifice to learn more about how they can be a valuable resource remotely to their employees. The literature review explained that communication is critical for remote work settings. Managers will want to focus on making remote work seem like their team is in the office with the use of virtual meetings and instant messaging to simulate in-office conversations. The literature discussed the risks of teleworking, such as isolation, and therefore, making sure employees continue with communication even while working at home, which will be critical to avoid some of the pitfalls of this type of work environment.

Summary of Section 1 and Transition

Leadership decisions can have a significant impact on the employees of the organization. Many business leaders may have to make the tough decisions on continuing remote work or bringing their employees back into the office. The local small community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania, from this research study has proven that bringing all employees back into the office with no remote capabilities impacts employee job satisfaction and motivation. This decision has caused frustrations with trust and support from employees since senior management did not include employee input. Involving employees in critical decision-making provides

employees with a sense of belonging that would provide organizational sustainability. The study of the role leadership plays in the success of work environments provides insight into how decisions can impact employee retention. Determining the appropriate course of action that business leaders need to take to identify the most appropriate work environment for each employee would provide insight into how the bank can remain sustainable post-pandemic.

Section 2: The Project

This researcher conducted a case study on employees at a small community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania. The government mandated this small community bank to have all employees that could work from home do so in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, a small subset of employees worked in the office. Some employees did not have Wi-Fi at home and therefore, had no choice but to continue to work in the office. Then, in June 2020, the bank decided to bring all back-office employees into the office in a phased approach to limit any virus spread. There were specific mask guidelines the employees needed to follow. If an employee worked in a cubicle, they had to wear a mask, but if they had an office, they could take the mask off once the door was closed. Employees wore masks in all conference rooms during this time. The employees in the first part of the phase were back in the office for 6 weeks, and in the last phase, employees were only in the office for 2 weeks before another mandate from the Pennsylvania governor was in effect. The employees returned to full-time remote work from June 2020 until January 2021. As cases went down and employees' comfort levels increased with vaccines, more came back to the office free willing, but no requirements to report to the office occurred until January 2021.

Purpose Statement

This study explored the lack of support for remote work environments at a small community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania. The study determined how lack of support from leadership could impact employee job satisfaction and perspective on virtual work settings. The small community bank had seen employees unsuccessfully perform their job in remote work environments, causing the entire organization to work in traditional office settings. The ineffective remote work environments had also caused employees to leave and find organizations

that offered this as a benefit. The results of remote work environments had left this small community bank with unhappy employees who could not work from home and the potential loss of new employees because this benefit was unavailable.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was to interview employees with this bank during the back-and-forth periods of remote work and in-person work. The interviews focused on how their experiences were with changing work environments. The questions asked sought to understand the employees' feelings on the decisions made by senior management. The interview process remained as an external researcher. The researcher did not want to become internal and influence the respondents' answers. The researcher previously worked for this small community bank and did not want to overlook basic questions in the interview process that she already knew. After conducting the interview, the researcher required follow-up questions based on the respondents' answers. The researcher needed to use software to transcribe the interviews for coding and themes. The researcher considered bracketing her preconceptions of work environments due to the pandemic. Bracketing refers to setting aside the prior understanding of any social reality and escaping one's preconceptions, theoretical commitments, and life experiences during the research (Gregory, 2019). Bracketing is challenging when the researcher is heavily wedded to a particular theoretical framework that has shaped their education (Gregory). There are ways that researchers can exercise bracketing, especially early on in their research project. The researcher ensured that the bank's senior management team reviewed all interview questions, findings reviewed by peers, and data from multiple sources (Gregory, 2019). Avoiding personal bias was critical for the research to be creditable (Ketokivi, 2019).

The researcher worked closely with the small community bank to develop the interview questions to ensure there was no personal bias in the questions. The senior management team agreed to review the questions to ensure the interviews did not influence the respondents' decision to start looking at other institutions that offered remote work. Ensuring that other individuals reviewed the research's findings, analysis, and interpretation was essential for the researcher. The researcher had good connections with the institutions but did not want the interviews to have a competitive advantage for the bank, the researcher, or the university.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this research project was qualitative. Specifically, the researcher used a flexible design with qualitative methods. The research paradigm was positive. The researcher used a case study during the change in work environments caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. All flexible designs must use triangulation, so this researcher used method triangulation.

Discussion of Flexible Design

Choosing the most appropriate method, design, and triangulation critically played a part in achieving accurate results. A flexible design fit this research most appropriately because the idea was to understand. The researcher wanted to understand why remote working was unsuccessful in some organizations. The goal for a fixed design would be to measure, and in this specific research study, it was more exploratory than comparative analysis. The qualitative method was most appropriate for this research study because of the emphasis on the interpretation of lived experiences.

Discussion of Qualitative Method

The researcher wanted to understand and interpret the lived experiences of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic and remote work. Therefore, the qualitative method was most appropriate. In contrast, the quantitative method focuses on measurements and the accuracy of numerical values. The researcher used method triangulation, which included multiple data collection, including interviews and surveys, which resulted in a comprehensive understanding.

Discussion of Methods for Triangulation

The researcher carefully chose the methodology before conducting the study. Flexible and fixed designs follow different guidelines; therefore, the researcher did not want to change the design after starting the research. Establishing qualitative and quantitative methods early in the research process was essential for the researcher. Qualitative research required particular types of analysis software, such as NVivo, for transcribing the interviews. The software then allowed the researcher to classify codes into themes. The researcher had to know which software to purchase before conducting the data collection. Triangulation helped increase creditability. Therefore, triangulation used more than one method to gather data. Face-to-face interviews were the primary qualitative method used to collect data, but surveying the same population obtained additional information.

Summary of Research Methodology

A qualitative research method was most appropriate for this type of research. The interviewees were able to explain to the researcher their opinions and experiences during the time they worked remotely during the global COVID-19 pandemic. This research specifically used a flexible design because of the freedom allowed during data gathering. During interviews, there were additional questions asked by the researcher to better understand the participant,

which allowed the researcher to adapt to the answers the respondents were providing.

Additionally, asking participants to answer survey questions along with the interview increased

the reliability and validity of this study.

Participants

The small community bank had approximately 200 employees, but almost 100 employees

were tellers. Tellers did not have the opportunity for remote work during the global pandemic of

COVID-19; therefore, they were not candidates for this study. The back-office employees, who

had experience in a traditional office setting and worked remotely, were eligible for this research.

These employees had firsthand experience with the pros and cons of remote work. They had

opinions on which work environment fit their personal and professional needs and how senior

management decided to bring all remote employees back to a traditional office setting full-time.

Population and Sampling

The employees at the small community bank had no choice but to adapt to different work

environments to keep their organization alive during the pandemic. Interviewing these

employees provided insight into their perspectives on work environments. Some employees

faced more difficulties with remote work during the pandemic as their spouses and children were

home. At the same time, there were other employees all alone at home while working. The

employees had different opinions and thoughts on how successful or unsuccessful working from

home was for them. This study used the convenience sampling method to focus only on the

group of employees who worked in the office, then remotely, then went back to the office.

Through the study of these interviews, the researcher better understood remote working

experiences during a global pandemic and the transition back to the office full-time. The data

gathered supported both a positive and negative view of remote work, according to the different employees' answers.

Discussion of Population

The interviewees had characteristics that included those at the bank during the mandatory work-from-home guidelines. Each employee had a different experience regarding their work-from-home situation. The employees were able to say what they liked and disliked about working from home and what they liked or disliked about working in the office. The employees participating in the interview provided insight into their reaction to leadership's decision-making about returning to the office.

The size of eligible population consisted of 30 current employees with various work experiences. The population's characteristics included employees involved in the transition from the traditional office setting to remote work environments during the pandemic. The individuals had different years of work experience, different roles at the bank, and different educational backgrounds, but they all worked at the same bank at the same time when leadership chose to send all the employees home to work and then decided to bring them all back to the office. These individuals were appropriate for this study because they provided different perspectives on working from home and working in an office. Additionally, they provided insight into the leadership's decision to bring all the employees back to the office. The group explained what was successful at home and in the office and what was unsuccessful in both settings.

Discussion of Sampling

When conducting research that targets populations, such as those living in a disaster after the impact has occurred, it is not often possible to collect data on the entire population (Stratton, 2021). One way to sample the population is for the researcher to announce the study and

participants self-select if they would like to participate, which is called convenience sampling (Stratton). Convenience sampling was most appropriate because the participants were available around the location, and qualitative research depends on the motivation of those who participate in research (Stratton, 2021). Specifically, studying individuals with experience with remote work during the pandemic was why convenience sampling was a valid method. The researcher worked through the general counsel to determine the 30 employees willing to participate in the study, which saved on costs and time. Interviewing all the employees at the bank would not have provided insight into their experience if they were tellers, did not have Wi-Fi at home, or were new employees who did not go through the same experience as the back-office employees. The employees who could not work from home had different backgrounds, such as coming to work with masks on, working behind plexiglass, doing daily temperature checks, and dealing with customers in masks. The sampling of this research, thus, was limited to only the employees forced to work from home during the pandemic.

The sample frame was the list of employees of the small community bank that were part of the company in March 2020 and worked at home during traditional and remote work transitional periods. Interviewing these employees provided insight into their experiences in both work settings. The sample frame was most appropriate because the list only had those employees with the direct knowledge of being forced to work at home, then come back to the office, then back home, and then back to the office again.

The sample included current employees of the small community bank in Butler, Pennsylvania. This sample was appropriate because it provided insight into their back-and-forth work environments and their reasoning for staying with the organization. Former employees

were not relevant because the work environment may not have been why they chose to leave the organization.

The sample size was 30 employees. The sample size was appropriate because of the small number of employees with the experience the researcher needed to accomplish this study. A sample of 30 employees provided enough data to saturate the results to gain insight into the COVID-19 mandatory work-from-home situation. The researcher had direct connections with the small community bank and had no problems gaining access to interview these employees.

Summary of Population and Sampling

The small community bank forced back-office employees to switch from a traditional office setting to working from their homes to minimize the spread of COVID-19. The sampling of current employees that experienced the back-and-forth shift in work environments provided accurate insight into the pros and cons of remote work. Utilizing the experiences and knowledge of the employees offered the ability to analyze which work environment fit which employees and how leadership's decisions to switch back to a traditional work setting played a critical role in the employees' overall satisfaction.

Data Collection and Organization

The study of the small community bank's decision to bring all the employees back to a traditional office setting provided insight into how the significance of remote work contributed to employees' satisfaction. The lack of options for employees with work settings may have led to employee retention and recruiting issues. The researcher interpreted the interviews to help determine emerging themes and codes. The themes and codes provided reliability, validity, and triangulation for the data. Using the interview testimonies, the researcher identified consistencies through data analysis. The researcher used the software, NVivo, to develop the emerging themes

and codes. The use of bracketing removed research bias. The interviewees were truthful and honest to provide reliability through data analysis.

Data Collection Plan

The data collection plan was through onsite interviews with the small community bank employees to gather information on remote work during COVID-19. The interviews collected data on the experiences the employees had with the back-and-forth work settings and their opinions on the leadership's decision to bring all employees back to a traditional office environment. Through the interview process, the researcher learned and gained insight about the motivation of each employee, their experience at home, their commute time, and, overall, if the employee had been in charge, would they have done anything differently. Interviewing was an appropriate data collection method for the study because it provided direct experience from employees who suddenly had to shift to working from home without previous experience. Interviews allowed employees to share with the researcher how they felt during their time at home, their opinions on how the pandemic was handled by leadership, and details and descriptions of their experiences.

Instruments

The researcher created an interview guide that outlined the questions that the current employees at the small community bank were asked. The questions were intended for the researcher to gain more understanding of the lived experiences of the employees while working remotely during the global pandemic. The researcher had developed 20 questions for the interview. Question 1 of the interview intended to learn about the employee's motivation for work. Question 2 allowed the researcher to understand the employee's motivating factors through intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Question 3 explored how the employee prepared to leave their

home to go into the office. Question 4 asked about the employee's commute time to the office. Question 5 sought to understand the experience of being sent home to work during the pandemic crisis of COVID-19. Questions 6 and 7 provided insight into how the employee felt when management decided to bring all the employees back to the office and explained what it was like to wear masks while working.

Question 8 explored the experience of being brought back into the office again in January 2021. Question 9 intended to learn how management adapted to their leadership styles during remote work. Question 10 explored the employee's preferred method of incentives. Question 11 asked about who was also home while the employee was working remotely. Questions 12, 13, 14, and 15 provided insight into what the employee liked and did not like about the traditional office setting and remote work environments. Question 16 sought to understand what the employee would include in a potential work-from-home policy. Question 17 asked the employee to describe whether their experience with working from home would have been different if it was not during a global pandemic. Question 18 provided insight into how the bank prepared its employees to work remotely. Question 19 sought to understand what current work settings were for the employee. The last question, Question 20, aimed to understand the employee's preferred work setting. The employees' experiences with a traditional office and remote work environment explained their preferences through their interview testimonies.

As an additional effort to ensure accurate results of the interviews, the participants answered a survey about remote working during the pandemic ahead of time. The questions were intended to gain a baseline understanding of each participant before the interview and if they had a positive or negative experience working in a remote setting. The researcher developed 10 survey questions. Questions 1 and 2 sought to understand if the participants liked working at

home or in the office. Question 3 explained if the participant agreed with the leadership's

decision to bring employees back in the office. Question 4 explored the respondent's preferred

work environment. Question 5 investigated the number of days a week the participant would

have liked to work from home. Questions 6 and 7 sought to understand the level of preparedness

the employee felt for shifting to a remote work setting, especially regarding the equipment

provided by the company. Question 8 studied the difference in concentration to get work done at

home or in the office. Question 9 sought to understand the optimal place where meetings should

have been held. Question 10 investigated the number of hours worked at home. The researcher

knew the survey results before the interview to understand if the respondent would require

additional questions to study their experience further.

Data Organization Plan

The data organization plan included gathering individual responses to the interview

questions. The employees' answers remained anonymous, but those participating in the survey

knew the list. The interviews were conducted onsite at the small community bank; therefore,

while one individual left the interview room, they could have seen another participant. The

participant list approval from the general legal counsel agreed that the employees could

participate in the study as emerging themes arising from the respondents' data analysis would

show employee satisfaction with their choice of work setting. The different themes allowed the

researcher to understand what may have led to employee retention, performance, happiness, and

motivation during the pandemic—this qualitative case study's interpretations were through

descriptions and interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Undoubtedly, conducting interviews is

taxing, especially for inexperienced researchers engaged in studies that require extensive

interviewing, such as phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, the researcher stayed organized and asked appropriate questions.

Summary of Data Collection and Organization

Personal experiences and testimonies from current employees who work for the small community bank provided insight into employees' preferred work environment and the impacts of forcing an employee into a work setting that is not optimal for the employee. The employees were able to testify to the impact leadership's decision-making on remote work had on their communication, motivation, satisfaction, and organizational culture. The researcher collected data through interviews that emerged into different themes and codes. The other themes and codes provided the ability to analyze the impact COVID-19 had on an organization's ability to work anywhere. The case study with interviewing employees was an appropriate method because of the employees' ability to provide direct experience from switching to different work environments during the pandemic. The employees had lived experiences with traditional and remote work that uncovered opportunities for leadership to understand an employee's most optimal work environment.

Data Analysis

The sensation of remote work increased with the outbreak of COVID-19. Organizations forced employees to work from home to stop the spread of the virus. The interviews conducted with the current employees explained the difficulties and challenges experienced during the work-from-home mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews provided emergent themes that determined leadership's role in the success of remote working environments— developing codes to interpret the data through the interview process. Triangulation of the data developed through the themes and codes. The use of the NVivo software assisted the researcher

in identifying the themes and developing the codes. With consistent responses from the interviewees, the data provided the researcher with reliable data to analyze.

Emergent Ideas

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary-bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research study was conducted using a case study methodology. The researcher analyzed the similarities of the respondents. The researcher conveyed the narrative stories the participants told through thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth). Reading the transcripts was critical for the researcher. Following the data organization, reading the transcript multiple times allowed the researcher to immerse into the details and make sense of the interview (Creswell & Poth). Memos also served as necessary to the researcher. Scanning the text of the memos in the margins allowed the researcher to build a sense of the data without getting caught up in the details of the emerging themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). NVivo analyzes themes and codes, but the researcher also needed to read the transcript, take notes, and scan the memos to understand the information provided by the participants.

Coding Themes

After reading and creating memos of the data, the next step was to form codes representing the core focus of qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding is a critical factor in qualitative research. Coding makes sense of the text collected from interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell & Poth). Codes and categories are interchangeable words used in research. The researcher maintained a codebook that listed all the category names, descriptions, and examples. The codebook articulated the distinct boundaries for each code

(Creswell & Poth). The researcher also highlighted memorable quotes as she was developing codes and identified a description of why the quote was noteworthy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). NVivo assisted the researcher in analyzing the codes during the interviewing process. Coding provided insight into the emerging themes through the testimonies of the participants. Additionally, the codes provided insight into similar feelings toward working from home, common opinions on leadership's decision-making, and how the employees viewed how the organization handled the pandemic.

Interpretations

Interpreting the responses from the participants plays a vital role in qualitative research (Ivey, 2022). Researchers interpret the data to develop lessons learned and make sense of the information gathered through the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using the software, NVivo, the themes and codes were developed. The process of interpretation involves abstracting beyond the codes and themes to the more significant meaning of the data (Creswell & Poth). Intuition must also include such interpretations of the interviews. The interpretation might also be within a social science construct or idea or a combination of personal views constructed with a social science construct or idea (Creswell & Poth). The researcher must challenge their interpretations. Interpretations of data are formed through comparison with existing data, relevant literature, or initial hypotheses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Representation

The final phase was for the researcher to represent the data. The data representation is displaying the evidence found in the text, tabular, or figure form (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on different themes, the researcher could also use comparison tables for display. The researcher may also consider the text, not numbers, depending on the content (Creswell & Poth). The

researcher must choose the correct data representation that best fits the study. The researcher may consider strategies for functional data displays before determining the right visual image. The researcher needs to develop the emerging themes and codes before providing the appropriate data representation. In a case study, if the case presents a chronology of events, the recommendation is to analyze the multiple data sources to determine evidence for each phase in the case (Creswell & Poth). Once there are established patterns, a possible table may show the relationship between the categories. A word table can display the data from individual cases, according to some uniform framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Analysis for Triangulation

The researcher uses multiple and different sources, methods, investigations, and theories to provide corroborating evidence through triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation is critical for a qualitative researcher to understand the phenomenon comprehensively. Triangulation increases the reliability and quality of the study. The researcher chose to use the method of triangulation. Method triangulation uses qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data through interviews and surveys. When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different methods, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the surveys ensured that the qualitative data matched the quantitative data. While the respondents' answers could match what they said in the interview, the unknown factor in the survey provided strong validity to the study.

Summary of Data Analysis

A case study on employees working in a traditional office and remotely during the global COVID-19 pandemic interviewed their experiences. The testimonies of the current employees provided insight into the experience of shifting work environments throughout a pandemic. It

also provided information on their experiences with work settings before the pandemic, during

the pandemic, and after vaccines increased and virus cases decreased. The interviews explained

how the employees felt about management's decision-making during the pandemic. The NVivo

software assisted the researcher with developing emerging themes and codes. The researcher also

took notes, made memos, read the transcript, and obtained a codebook. Data was represented

visually after the themes and codes were determined so that the researcher chose the best-fitting

visual image for the results. Triangulation occurred with the addition of a quantitative survey to

ensure the reliability, validity, and quality of the respondents' qualitative interview responses.

Reliability and Validity

The researcher needed to know that the responses to the interview questions were reliable

and valid for their own ability to interpret the data. Reliability and validity allowed the researcher

to remove any bias from the study. The current employees of the small community bank trusted

the researcher with honest answers. The employees may have disagreed with management's

decision not to allow remote work options, but they still decided to stay with the company;

therefore, they were reliable employees to the organization. The researcher removed personal

experiences with traditional office settings and remote work environments from the data

collection process. Through studying employees' experiences with work settings during the

pandemic, the researcher was able to support the themes and codes developed by the interviews.

The similarities in the interview responses supported the shared and lived experiences many

employees had during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability often refers to the stability of responses to multiple

coders of data sets (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher ensured that the participant list

consisted of credible sources to interview. The researcher ensured reliability by asking respondents to answer all questions honestly before the interview. The data collected was dependable because they could not change due to the experience the employees had during the pandemic. The transferability of this study explained how the small community bank employees knew that they were not the only organization struggling with appropriate work environments post-pandemic. There are many organizations where leadership teams have decided to bring back all employees, similar to this bank, and others that have allowed their staff to remain remote full-time. Some organizations have allowed flexibility with working from home since the employees proved they could do it during the pandemic. The study had confirmability since other researchers could achieve the findings.

Trustworthiness is a critical aspect in ensuring that the research conducted is credible (Ivey, 2022). Trustworthiness means the degree to which the reader can assess whether the researchers have been honest in how the research has been carried out (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). Case study research needs data to support its conclusions. Data inventories can increase reliability by documenting the case database, which is necessary to ensure transparency and trustworthiness in qualitative work (Cloutier & Ravasi). This researcher's role required providing information in appropriate tables to the reader with sufficient detail. Additionally, data source tables increase the trustworthiness of a study and help readers assess essential sources of the credibility of data and data collection procedures (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). The researcher's data tables presented information in honest and transparent ways that provided trust in the conclusions and findings of the study.

Validity

Validity relates to terms of trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Getting approval from the small community bank's general counsel assured the employees' acceptance of the study. These employees knew that the study results did not have senior management change their perspectives on remote work environments and what was best for their organization. Establishing trust between the interviewees allowed for valid responses during the interview. There can be multiple ways to increase validity (Creswell & Poth). One way to gain validity is through triangulation, rather than depending on only one method of collecting data. The researcher used interviews and surveys to accomplish this triangulation method for validity. Another strategy for increased validity is saturation. The researcher interviewed until data saturation was achieved (Creswell & Poth). Bracketing is another strategy used for validation. Bracketing is when the researcher does not let past experiences and knowledge be engaged while determining the respondents' experiences (Creswell & Poth). Since participants played vital role in validating credibility, the researcher member checked. Member checking is seeking participant feedback (Creswell & Poth). Next, the researcher took the data analysis, findings, and conclusions back to the participants to judge accuracy (Creswell & Poth). After seeking the participants' feedback, the researcher needed to conduct follow-up interviews. A follow-up interview asks participants to explain their improvisation and, thus, assess their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher addressed her perception of remote work settings to help set aside her own experiences.

Bracketing

Bracketing personal experiences could have been difficult for the researcher to implement because interpretations of the data always incorporate the researcher's assumption

about the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher wanted to document and note her preconception on the topic. The researcher shared these notes in a memo to the respondents so that they knew the researcher was putting aside her experiences. Documenting her past experiences and sharing them with the respondents accomplished bracketing for the study. Bracketing was critical for the researcher to have a fresh perspective on the phenomenon under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was challenging for the researcher to remove all personal experiences from the interpretation, understanding that the interviewees could have embraced new ideas about the phenomenon to the researcher from different points of view.

Summary of Reliability and Validity

The interview questions explained the respondents' understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher provided reliability and validity for the data gathered to show credibility to the study. The reliability came from trust in the participant list and asking participants to provide truthful and honest answers. The validity came from the researcher using triangulation, bracketing, and saturation. The current employees of the small community bank had shared experiences with shifting their work environment to home to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Their experiences also included going back into the office after working remotely for long periods. The employees were able to share their experiences with the different work settings and describe what worked and what did not. Not only did the researcher take notes, provide memos, read transcripts, and maintain a codebook, but she also used the analytical software, NVivo, to develop themes and codes. The researcher remained unbiased and removed personal experiences from the data interpretation.

Summary of Section 2 and Transition

This study explored the lack of support from leadership leading to negative perspectives on virtual work environments. Interviewing current employees at a small community bank with experience transitioning work environments during the COVID-19 pandemic provided insight into how remote work settings impacted the employees. The interviews explored how the employees felt during the work-from-home mandates. Emergent themes and codes from the interviews helped understand commonalities with the respondents' lived experiences. The researcher used the software, NVivo, to assist with discovering themes and codes. This study was reliable and valid because of the truthful and honest answers gathered in the interviews and the use of bracketing, triangulation, and saturation.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The goal of this research study was to examine current employees of a small community bank that had experience working remotely during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The study focused on determining the employees' most productive work environment post-pandemic. The research approach included a preliminary survey for the researcher to understand the participants' initial thoughts and opinions on remote work and traditional office settings. Then, the respondents were required to participate in an interview exploring more detail and insight into their experiences in both work environments. The themes discovered played a critical role in explaining the findings of this study. This section is a presentation of the findings that resulted in the research conducted and provides an explanation of work environments after the pandemic.

Overview of the Study

The research approach included a survey and interview. The survey consisted of 10 questions to understand the participant's view on remote work and the impact of leadership decision-making post-pandemic. Then, the respondent participated in a 15-minute interview with 20 questions. This interview helped to better understand their experience with the back-and-forth work setting during the pandemic. The 30 study participants were all current employees of the small community bank with hire dates before the start of the pandemic in March 2020. The participants ranged from analysts to middle management, but tellers and branch associates were excluded from the study because they did not have the same experience during the pandemic that the back-office employees experienced with remote work. Tellers were required to enter the branch, wear a mask, check their temperature daily, and have plexiglass installed in their station to maintain physical distance from customers. Senior management and the CEO were excluded from this study as well. It was necessary to exclude senior management from the study since they

had to come into the office daily throughout the pandemic. The C-suite executives were very much against remote work and only provided it as an option to keep their employees safe during the unprecedented times and comply with the governor's mandate.

Presentation of the Findings

After a respondent agreed to participate in the study, the researcher sent the consent form via email for their signature. Then, once the participant signed the consent form, the researcher sent the survey via SurveyMonkey to analyze the results. Each participant was identified in the study with a unique code so the researcher could align their survey to their interview. The researcher conducted the interviews in person at the bank in a conference room, except for three interviews. Three participants had conflicts with the days and times designated to sign up, so the researcher accommodated them by doing phone interviews. The Voice Memo application recorded all the interviews on the researcher's iPhone. NVivo 12 software transcribed all the interviews.

Using NVivo 12, the researcher was able to import data from SurveyMonkey, create transcriptions, and code interviews according to motivation and time spent getting ready and driving to work, remote-to-office transition time, work-from-home pros and cons, family at home, office pros and cons, remote leadership, and benefits of working from home. The software was able to auto-code the interviews, but to ensure accuracy, the researcher coded the results by hand throughout all 30 interview transcripts. The auto coding produced around 600 codes because, unfortunately, the software did not allow to rescript on only Speaker 2 in the transcriptions since that was the participant speaking. There was no use for having codes on the questions asked during the interview as opposed to only the answers. Therefore, the researcher

coded by hand. As a result of the coding, each attribute was color-coded to produce the data representation.

Almost 5.5 hours of recorded information from 30 individual interviews were analyzed. The interview transcripts were more than 1.12 MB of recorded information that evaluated the participants' work-from-home experiences during the pandemic. The data provided through the interviews analyzed each of the research questions examined in this study. The researcher analyzed the data through NVivo 12 using keywords to find similar quotes from participants. Participants said similar quotes throughout their interviews that the researcher used to develop conclusions.

The researcher thoroughly examined the 30 questions asked to the participants, surveys, and interviews. The researcher took the codes that were auto-coded and manually created in NVivo 12 and exported the results into Microsoft Excel. The survey results in SurveyMonkey and the interview transcripts in NVivo 12 created pivot tables in Microsoft Excel. Organizing the data in tables to show all questions summarized the research findings.

Themes Discovered

After collecting data from the 30 current employees of the small community bank that agreed to participate in the study, themes were discovered. The employees that participated were with the bank before the pandemic and were currently employed there at the time of the interviews. During the global pandemic, they had a time of transitioning between working from home and the office. Some employees had experience with prior employers with working from home, but most employees participating in the study had no idea they could do their job from their homes. The small community bank's leadership decided to have all employees report back to the office in early January 2021. Their decision-making may have suggested that they did not

trust employees to work at home. Participant 4 stated in their interview, "It took just one employee to ruin it for all" (personal communication, September 7, 2022). Participant 15 explained that another coworker asked the CEO if they could have their vacation time back since they would be working from home. The new era of remote work made some employees think that they could not do their job, and management struggled with how to monitor working patterns at home versus the visual presence they had in the office. The bank also recently purchased its new headquarters building before the pandemic. Management may not have wanted to spend money for a building to sit empty. This study did not focus on why leadership decided to go back to the office but on understanding the employees' perspectives of remote work now that they have experience doing it. The researcher first coded the data and then categorized it by each question asked; their responses were analyzed to identify emergent themes. There were eight significant themes developed from the research study:

- Theme 1: Motivation: Money is the primary motivating factor for employees to work.

- Theme 2: Time: There are wasted hours in the day preparing for work and driving that could benefit an employee's personal life.

- Theme 3: Transition Period: The transition period between remote and office settings was well-received by the employee when it was in favor of their preferred work environment.

- Theme 4: Work from Home: Working from home has fewer distractions than the office but too much isolation.

- Theme 5: Family at Home: Family members that were home due to the pandemic did not distract the employees' work productivity.

- Theme 6: Traditional Office Setting: Employees like the office because of the organization's people but find it distracting to get their work done.

- Theme 7: Remote Leadership: Leadership not adapting to a remote workforce may cause issues with making that work environment successful.

- Theme 8: Work from Home Policy: Employees want a choice in their preferred work environment and are willing to have that at the cost of a bonus.

Interpretation of the Themes

Each theme discovered through the survey and interviews explained the employees' experiences during the pandemic. The first theme focused on the motivation behind work, including pre- and post-pandemic. The second theme explained the time employees used to get ready and drive to work. The transition period for the employees during the pandemic proved to many that they could do their job remotely, but the theme of understanding why the decision to bring all employees back was critical. There were also themes with remote and office settings that employees now have experienced during the pandemic. Another theme explained was family at home during the work-from-home time during the pandemic. Remote leadership was a theme that participants learned did not take place during the transition periods when they were working from home. The last theme explained was a policy on working from home to be consistent and fair to all employees who can do so.

Motivation

There were two different questions asked during the interview that addressed motivation. The theme developed from these two questions was that employees are motivated to work for money and praise. Participant 12 explained during their interview that money is essential to survive, which was their primary motivation. Likewise, Participant 10 expressed that money was the main reason to work. The way most participants expressed their motivation from money almost came back as an obvious answer. The first question on motivation answered money at

43.33%, self-motivation at 40%, family at 6.67%, customer satisfaction at 6.67%, and praise at 3.33% (see Figure 2). When asked to explain what the participant felt self-motivation was, they commonly answered to make them feel good and feel a part of something bigger. They explained that they took pride in their work and that the motivation behind their name being tied to a project or program was wanting to represent their hard work. When asked more about the family, they stated to support their family. Therefore, that can tie into money to financially support their family, but it could also be the other benefits provided by the organization, such as paid time off, health insurance, family and medical leave, vacation time, and sick time. Next, 6.67% said customer satisfaction was their main reason for motivation to work. The participants wanted to have the satisfaction that they helped their customers, and they kept them going to ensure their work was meeting and exceeding clients' expectations. Participant 9 was the only participant to choose praise as their primary motivation to work, but 43.33% chose it as their second motivating factor (see Figure 3). Mentioning money was an answer to either motivation question for 73.33% of the participants (see Figure 4).
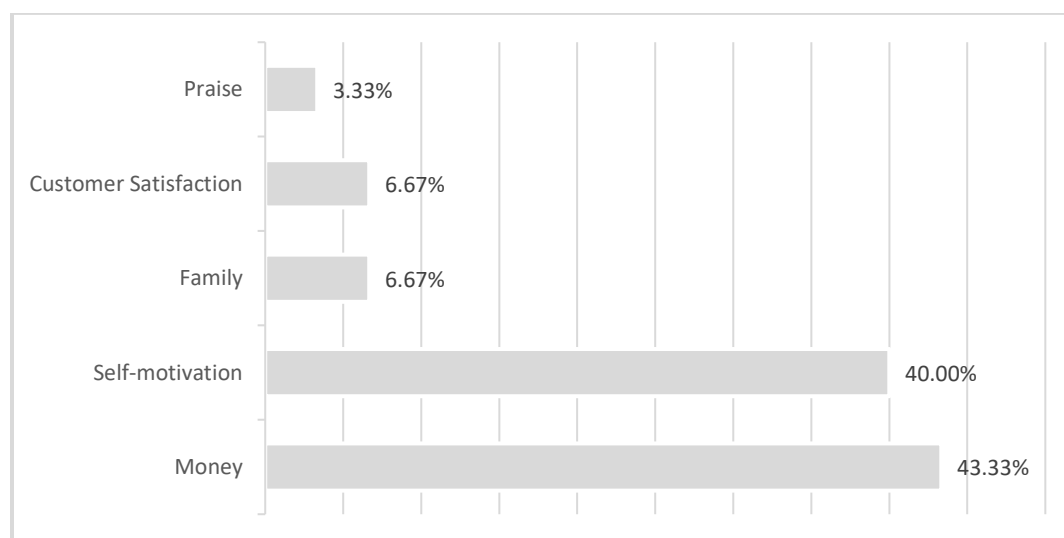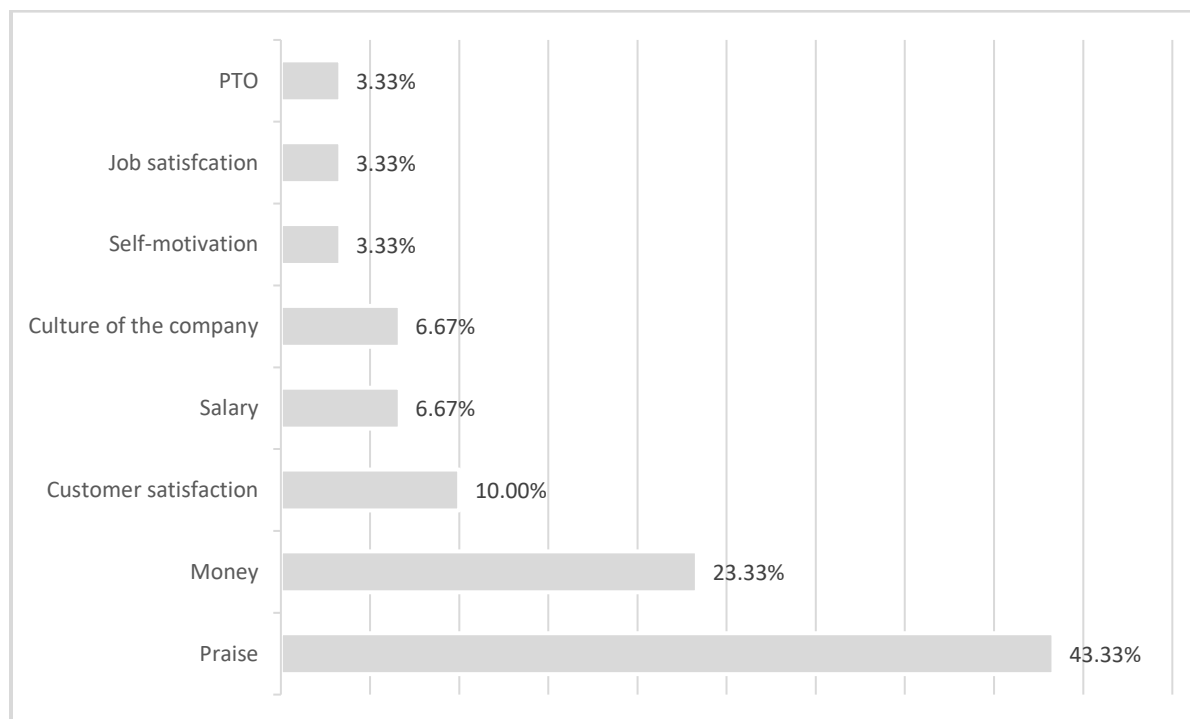

Figure 2. Primary motivation to work.

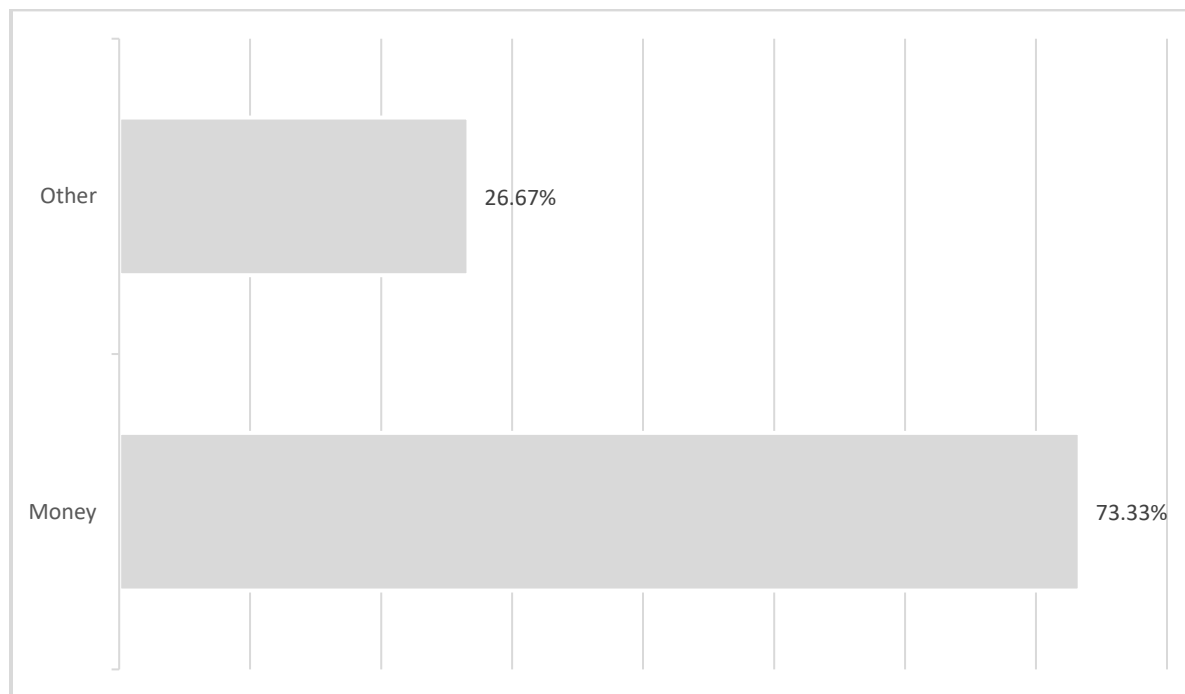*Figure 3. Secondary motivation to work.*

Figure 4. Top motivation to work.

Secondary motivating factors included customer satisfaction, the company's culture, self-motivation, job satisfaction, salary, and paid time off. Motivation was critical in employees' work ethic, retention, and overall well-being. A key theme was that money was a top priority to motivate employees to work. Therefore, if management continues to give annual raises and bonuses, employees will have something to motivate them to work. If management could not increase salaries, they could find ways to save employees money, such as working from home. Monetary motivation agreed with Lefebvre and Stenger's (2020) findings that much of what motivated employees to work was their compensation plans. The findings from the literature also explained that monetary incentives were expensive to the organization; therefore, showing the secondary motivating factors and other mentions of motivation was critical for this study to agree that money was not the only factor that motivated employees.

Time

Time will always be something that is important to employees. Time is something that no one can retrieve. One of the questions asked during the interview was to understand how long it took employees to wake up in the morning, get ready, drive to work, and finally sit at their desks or cubicle. The average answer to that response was 1.56 hours (see Figure 5). The longest time was 2.5 hours, and the shortest was 45 minutes. Many participants felt they wasted time going to work, especially when they could work from home. To focus more on the drive time, participants drove 29 minutes one way on average, which would be, on average, 58 minutes daily in the car commuting to work (see Figure 6). The longest drive time was 1 hour and 10 minutes, and the shortest was 2.5 minutes. The researcher combined two questions during the analysis to better understand how much time an employee spent getting ready to go to work and driving to and from work. On average, the participants spent 2.04 hours getting ready and commuting to and

from work (see Figure 7). The researcher did not ask them what they did once they were home, as some participants probably had to tend to children or start making dinner. Many participants noted that their commute was within seconds when they worked from home. Participant 20 explained during the interview that their drive was only 2.5 minutes long, but they still preferred working from home rather than going into the office. Participant 22 had the longest commute time, driving an hour to work every morning and mentioned how nice it was when working from home was an option. Not much daily preparation was involved when working from home. Participants noted that they would change into comfortable clothes instead of business casual clothes, log on to their computers immediately, and make their lunch when it was time to take lunch. Many participants said they could start their workday earlier because of the time saved on getting ready and commuting. A key theme on time was that by eliminating hours wasted preparing for work and driving, an employee's personal life may benefit, resulting in employee happiness and satisfaction. This theme supported the literature with the findings of Georgescu (2021), stating that the benefit of teleworking was reduced stress by shortening a morning routine and eliminating a commute. The answers provided by participants helped support the literature. Likewise, Mehta (2021) stated that teleworking reduced stress in employees' lives by reducing commute times.

Average Entire Morning Commute Time	
Row Labels	**Count of Participant Code**
Entire Morning Routine/Commute (in hours)	1.56
Entire Morning Routine/Commute (in hours)	**1.56**

Figure 5. Morning routine/commute time.

Average Driving Time	
Row Labels	**Count of Participant Code**
Morning Drive (in Minutes)	29
Evening Drive (in minutes)	29
Grand Total	**58**

Figure 6. Drive time to work.

Time Wasted Commuting/Getting Ready for Work	
Entire Morning Routine (in hours)	1.56
Evening Drive (in hours)	0.48
Grand Total	**2.04**

Figure 7. Time wasted preparing to arrive at work.

Remote to Office Transition

In early March 2020, when the pandemic hit, the governor made a mandate in Pennsylvania that if working from home was an option, an organization must do it (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2020). The small community bank had different transitional periods between employees working remotely and employees working in the office. Some employees went home the next day after the stay-at-home mandate was issued. Other participants had to take a day to pack up their office, scan documents, and wait to be issued a laptop. This initial work-from-home period was 60% a positive experience (see Figure 8).
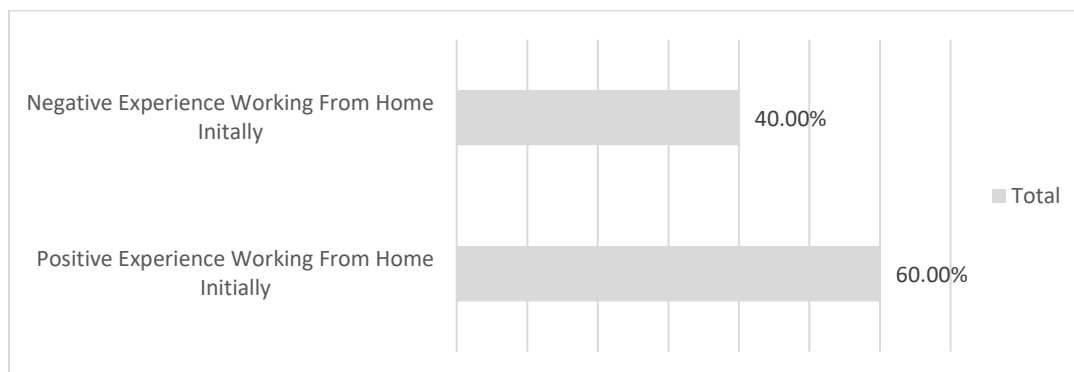

Figure 8. Initial work from home transition.

Participants 1–6, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19–22, 24, 27, and 30 used descriptions like being appreciative, enjoyed, excited, happy, loved it, got more work done, unbothered, and worked out perfectly. Many employees knew what working from home meant, especially during a global pandemic, and they had more peace of mind that they were keeping their distance and lessening the spread of the virus. The participants said they felt isolation in stressful times, had heightened uncertainty, and did not like being at home. Additionally, 40% said it was a negative experience for them. A few said their managers did not say they had to go home; therefore, they remained in the office.

Then, it was in early June 2020, just 3 months after the initial work-from-home transition, that the senior management team decided to bring all the employees back to the office. At this time, the number of cases in the area had decreased, and the executives felt it was safe to return to the office with appropriate protocols. There was a phased approach where a certain number of employees came back to the office, then 2 weeks later another set of employees came back, and then after another 2 weeks, the final set of back-office employees came in. The majority, 83.33%, of participants disagreed with this decision to return to the office (see Figure 9). Of that 83%, 50% stated it was premature and too soon to be coming back with the unknowns of the virus.
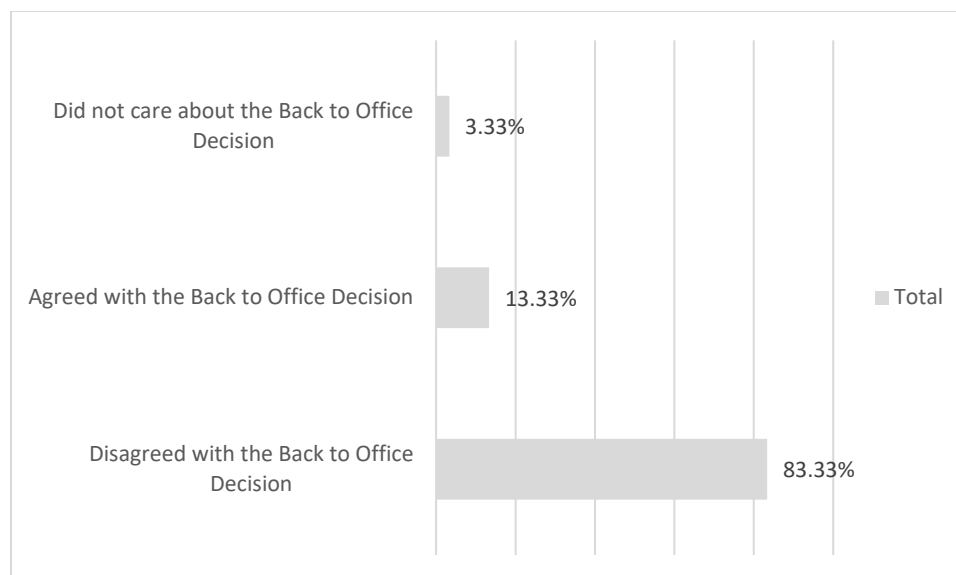
Figure 9. Initial back to the office transition.

Other participants said they asked to still work at home or at a branch closer to their home. Some were unbothered, as they could still work from home under a hybrid approach, and many were worried about COVID-19. Participant 20 did not have to return to the office and could work out of a branch closer to their home. There, 13% of participants agreed with the decision to come back in and said they were happy and hated working from home. Others said they understood why the leadership team made this decision. There was one participant that was unbothered by the change.

Shortly after the last wave of employees came in, another state mandate was issued. Wave 1 had been in the office for 6 weeks, Wave 2 for 4 weeks, and Wave 3 was in the office for 2 weeks before being sent to work from home again. Of the participants, 46.67% stated they were confused on the back and forth and that this transition caused unnecessary stress in their personal and professional lives. There was 40% that had a positive impact, as they were excited, happy, and relieved to go back home (see Figure 10). However, 13.33% disagreed with the

decision to return home, and wanted to stay in the office and risk their chances of getting sick because they hated working from home.
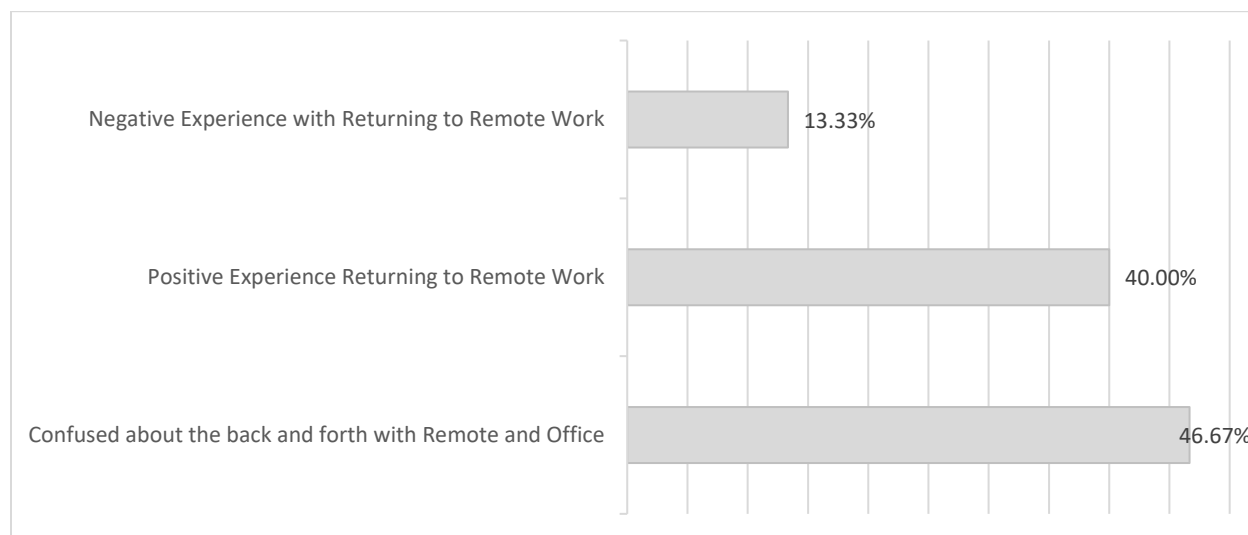

Figure 10. Back to working at home.

Then, after five more months of working from home, the senior leadership team decided to bring all the employees back to the office in January 2021. Leadership's decision established no work-from-home plans at that time. As a result, 40% of participants stated they had a negative experience with this and were angry, disappointed, hoping for a hybrid model, and upset (see Figure 11). Participant 13 was able to get their date pushed back until April 2021 to accommodate their schedule.
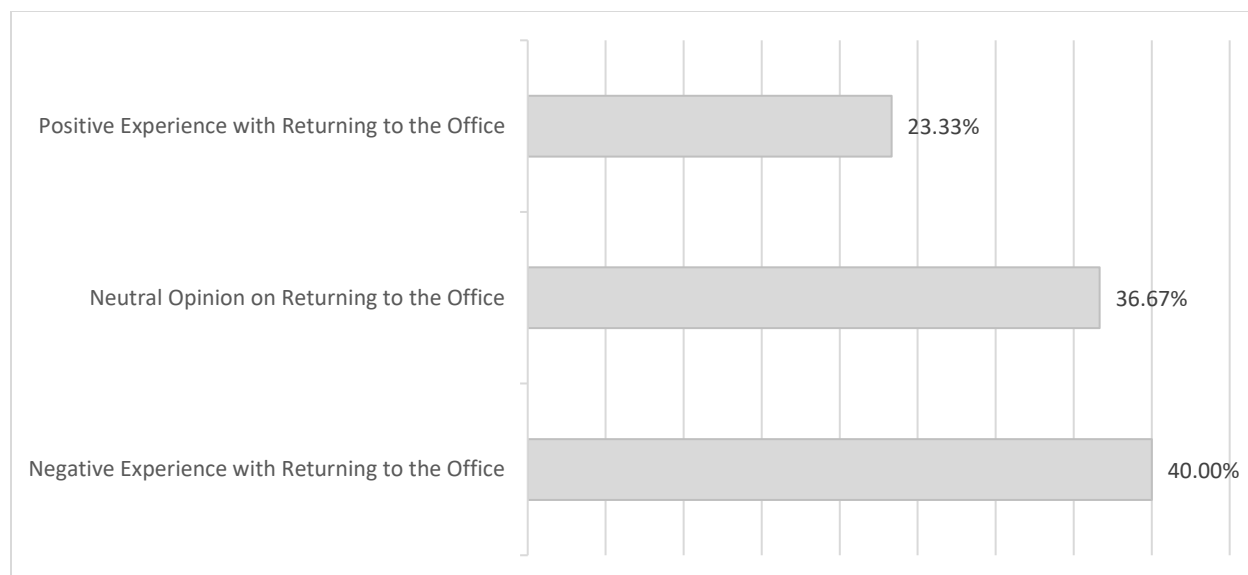
Figure 11. Back to the office.

Another 36.67% stated that they were indifferent to the decision. The employees were

appreciative to have the opportunity to have worked from home for the majority of 2020, and

some were fine to be back in the office, while others were relieved to have more consistency

back into their lives. Participant 13 explained during the interview that they worked out a

different return to the office schedule due to their personal life and not being ready to return.

They eventually went back to the office, but not until April 2021. There was another 23.33% that

had a positive experience with this last back-to-office transition. Many said they were okay with

the decision, some said they were happy to be back, others felt it was appropriate, and a few said

that the systems they used did not work as well at home as in the office.

Overall, many employees learned that they could do their jobs at home. Some employees

had always done their jobs in an office and had difficulty adjusting. When those adjusting got

used to it, the bank decided to switch and come back in to the office. It was hard for some

employees to get into a proper rhythm while at home. Those with negative experiences either had

face-to-face jobs that required talking to other coworkers or vendors that could be done quickly

in person or had tasks that were unable to complete on a computer. Some other negative feedback came from employees who could tell other coworkers were slacking off at home, which was holding up a process they needed. Many bank processes required different departments' approval and review before moving on to the next process step. Suppose an employee working from home was not answering their phone, was present on Skype for business, but was not responding to emails. Another coworker would have a negative experience working from home, not knowing why there was a lag in response time.

It is a challenge for any employer to monitor every move of their employees, but those that worked from home that had a positive experience stated that they felt trusted by both their manager and employer to do their job remotely. A key theme was that the transition period was well-received by the employee when it went in favor of their preferred work environment, but there was lots of confusion about the decision-making behind productivity at home. Employees' back-and-forth transition between working in the office and at home supported Jarrahi's (2018) findings that decision-making should include analytical and intuitive practices of processing information by studying employees. The employees were confused with the decisions because the majority of employees liked and enjoyed working from home.

Work from Home Pros and Cons

Working from home had both benefits and consequences for the employee. Employees were comfortable in their homes and explained that they got more done due to fewer distractions. Of the participants interviewed, 53.33% said they liked working from home because there were fewer distractions than in the office, and they were more productive (see Figure 12). Some said that quieter environments made it easier to concentrate on their work. Others noted that being in a relaxed environment made it easier to be more productive at home. Of the participants, 33.33%

noted that they enjoyed working from home because of the flexibility it provided to them. They

expressed that dressing in comfortable clothes took away additional stress from their regular

office work routine, making it easier for them to get tasks done without worrying about what

they wore instead of feeling comfortable while working. The data in Figure 12 supported the

literature through Mehta's (2021) findings, which stated that working from home offered the

convenience of quieter work environments with high productivity. It also supported Mehta's

(2021) findings that flexibility provided more happiness with work-from-home arrangements.
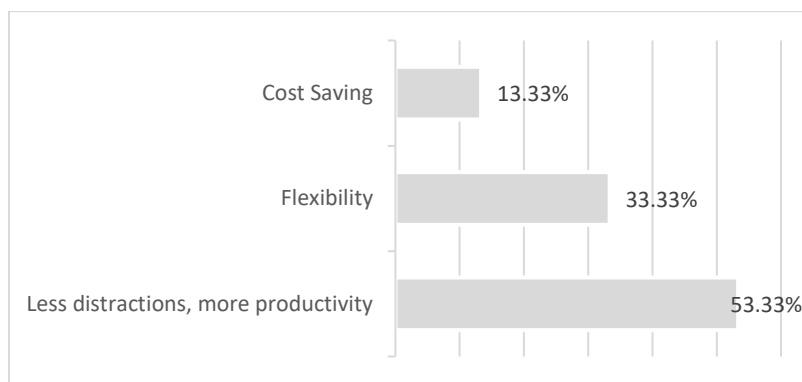

Figure 12. Benefits of working from home.

Employees explained the convenience it offered to them, such as commuting within

seconds, making a healthy lunch at home in their kitchen, working out over their lunch break,

taking their dog on a walk, having more meaningful breaks, and working better hours.

Participant 1 explained that they could start working at 6:30 a.m. and end their day at 3:00 p.m.,

which allowed them to help their parents out down the street. Participant 21 enjoyed having

lunch with their children while working at home. As stated in previous questions, interviewees

reiterated that they had little to no commute time, which meant they slept in, worked out in the

morning, or started their workday earlier. Those who started their workday earlier could end

earlier, providing more work-life balance. For example, an employee that typically got up at 6:30

a.m., worked 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. with a 1-hour lunch, and got home at 5:30 p.m. could get up at

the same time and work 7:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m. and already be home. They were able to prepare dinner during their lunch hour or squeeze in a quick workout. They were now home an hour and a half earlier than they would have been in the office. The flexibility also allowed them to use that time to work out in the morning or eat breakfast with their family before starting their workday.

It also allowed them to take a more extended lunch break and maybe work longer because they were already home. Even if employees worked the same hours, they eliminated their drive home. The flexible hours were what the employees liked because they got their job done and still enjoyed their life. After coming home from a long day at work and preparing dinner, employees quickly felt like they got up, went to work, went home, went to sleep, and repeated the routine because of exhaustion. The flexible hours allowed an employee to get a lot more time with their family back. Also, 13.33% of participants stated that working from home was enjoyable because of the cost savings. This theme supported Asatiani et al.'s (2021) findings that organizations embrace virtual work environments because of the increased benefits of cost savings. Employees saved on gas, wear and tear on their cars, makeup expenses, lunch meals, wardrobes, and time. Time was the most significant saving because that was something they could not make up elsewhere in their life. The survey results also showed that 93.33% of participants enjoyed when they worked from home (see Figure 13).
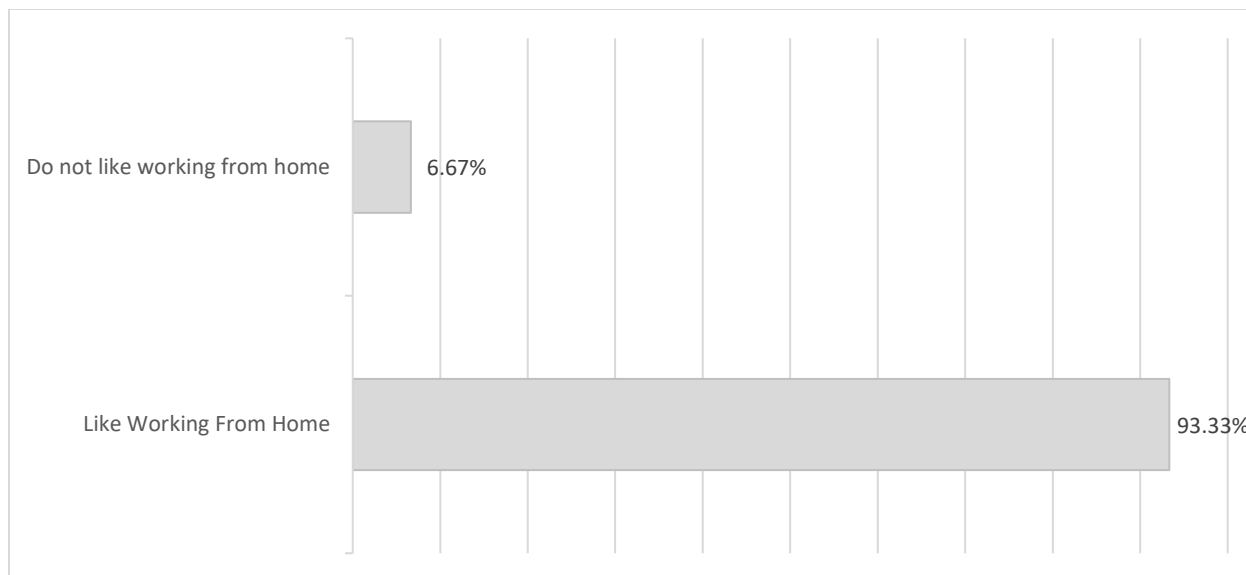
Figure 13. Employees' remote office opinion.

Employees explained what they did not like about working from home, and 46.67% said

it was socialization (see Figure 14). At home, there were no water-cooler conversations, and if

the employee did not have other family members to eat lunch with or have small conversations

with between tasks, it was very isolating to a person. This theme supported the findings of Wang

(2020) that remote workers felt prone to loneliness and struggled to maintain meaningful

relationships. Colleagues can form friendships at work, which are harder to maintain if you do

not physically see the person. There are ways to talk to coworkers, such as picking up the phone,

emailing one another, or messaging on Skype, but the employees stated that it was not the same.

However, 20% of interviewees said there were no consequences to working from home and

loved it. Of the participants, 13.33% said they missed the structure that going into the office
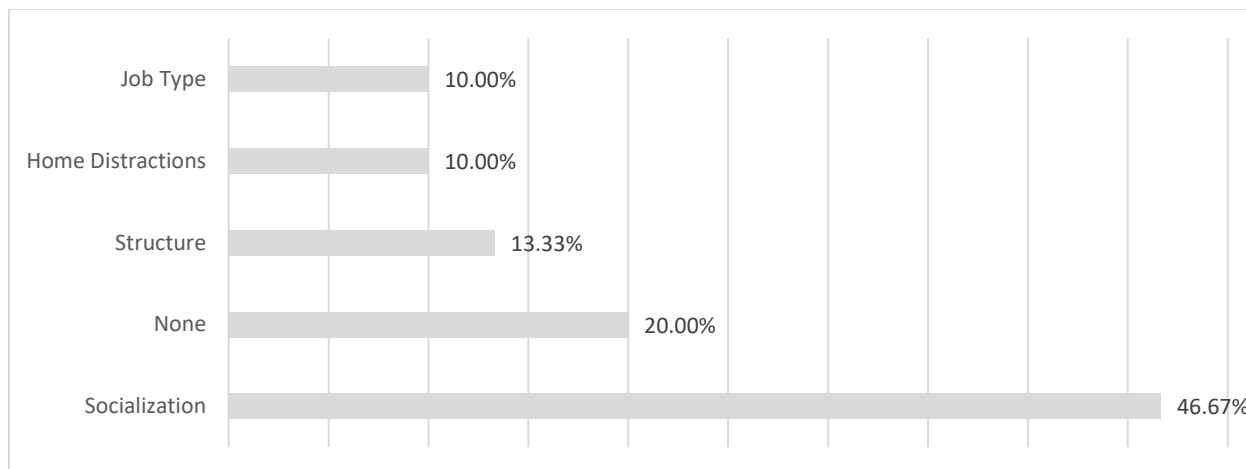
provided.

Category	Percentage
Job Type	10.00%
Home Distractions	10.00%
Structure	13.33%
None	20.00%
Socialization	46.67%

Figure 14. Working from home consequences.

Employees noted that the days felt more extended, taking fewer breaks than in the office, and they did not have a good routine. Many employees noted that they appreciated the bank allowing them to work from home, so they did not take as many work breaks as they would have in the office, stayed logged on later, and felt the need to prove they were working to their managers. Some said they would leave the bed and start working in their pajamas. They were working but did not feel structured or routine in their life. There was 10% that said distractions at home, such as the dog, TV, and household chores, impacted their work (see Figure 14). There was also 10% that said their job duties were more effortless in the office. Some employees stated that the systems they used daily were remarkably slower at home on their Wi-Fi than in the office connected to the network. There were obvious pros and cons for working from home for employees, and they were not all the same depending on the employee's personality and job description. An essential theme with working from home was that there were fewer distractions to get tasks done more efficiently and effectively, but too much time at home became isolating. The survey results showed that employees that worked from home experienced longer days than they would have in a traditional office setting. In fact, 90% of participants stated in their survey that they worked longer days remotely than when they went into the office to work. This theme

contradicted the literature findings of Knardahl and Christensen (2022), which stated that there were healthier work breaks, such as laundry, washing dishes, and working out, but the participants stated they did not take breaks while working at home.
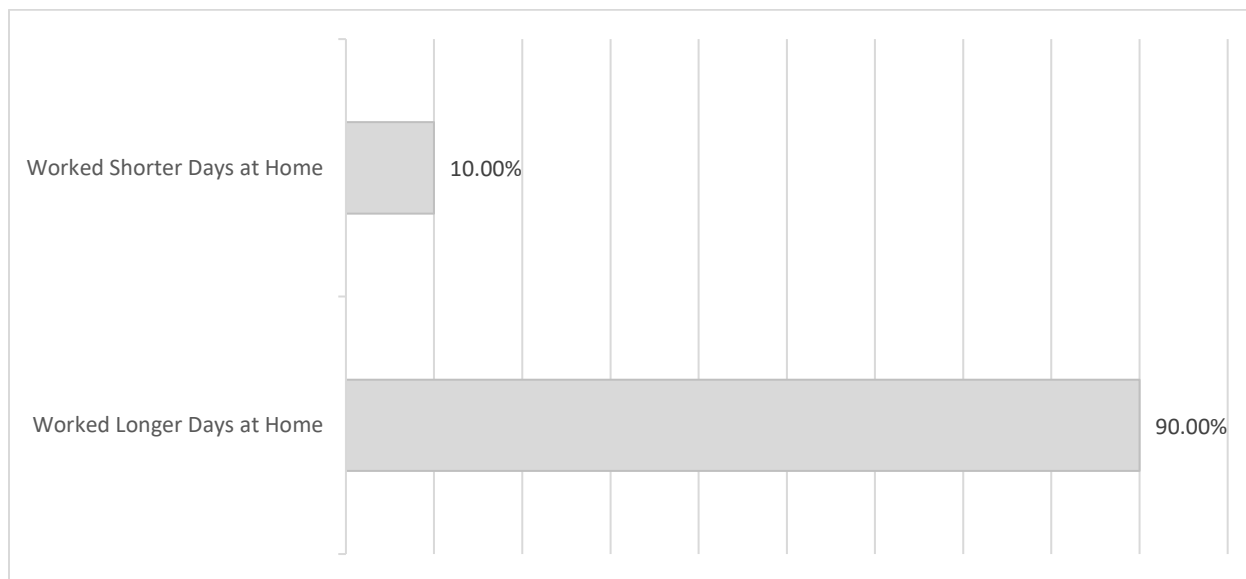

Figure 15. Length of remote days.

Family at Home

Another critical question was if employees were distracted by family members being home due to the pandemic. Many organizations required their workforce to work remotely, and schools shifted to virtual learning. Some employees had their spouses and children all at home, trying to work and learn. In fact, 13.33% of employees stated they had family members at home and found it distracting (see Figure 16). There was 10% that did not have any other family members at home, but the other 90% had someone else at home while they were trying to work. Additionally, 76.67% had a family but noted that they were not a distraction. Participant 21 stated that they loved having a family home because they could have lunch together. They noted that during their kids' younger years, they missed so much while they were away at work, and working at home allowed them to spend more time with them at lunch. This theme supported the

findings of Haar and Mowat (2022), which showed work-life balance with virtual work allowing employees to work different hours to tend to their family needs, which improved their mental health.
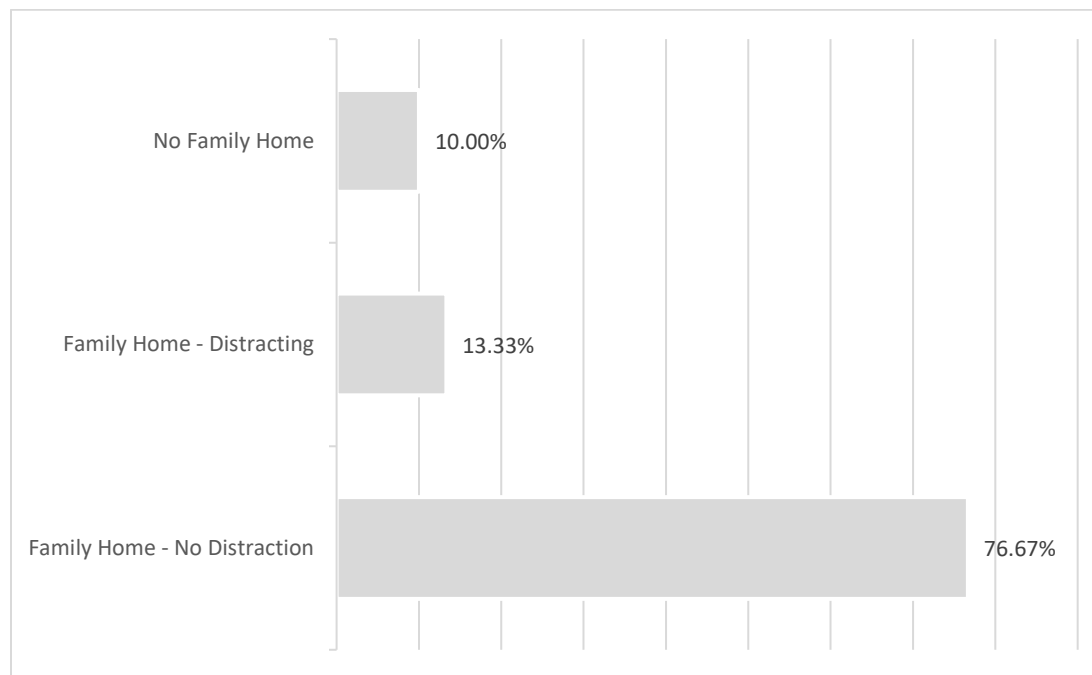

Figure 16. Family at home.

Employees said that their children's' age was stressful because of the attention required from their kids, but they had no choice since there were no daycares available. Other employees noted that their dogs were distracting to them. These employees felt that additional stress added to their unpredictable times because they were trying to juggle their work and help their kids with schoolwork. Most kids had never used a laptop before, especially for school. Parents had to teach their children how to join Zoom meetings and submit homework online. Most participants did not know that their family members were not a distraction while working at home. A key theme was that even with family members at home, they were not a distraction or impact on the employees' ability to get their job done remotely.

Office Pros and Cons

All the employees interviewed worked primarily in the office 5 days a week. After working at home and in the office, the employees determined what they liked and did not like about the office. Participants 3, 14, and 30 described in their interviews that they were on the road visiting with customers and were not always physically in the office, but the rest of the participants worked in a traditional 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. office environment. Participant 5 explained in their interview that the people they worked with were the main reason they enjoyed coming into the office. Participant 12 described that their friends were their coworkers, so being in the office was a way they communicated with their friends. Many did not know which environment they liked more due to their limited exposure to working from home. This theme supported the literature from Mercader's (2021) findings that teamwork directly impacts the satisfaction and commitment of the employees since the office allowed for better collaboration in person.

The majority of employees, 93.33% or 28 out of the 30 participants, said they liked the office because of the people (see Figure 17). It is good to have socialization and comradery. The structure provides benefits to employees with their socialization. They explained that dressing for work, sitting at their cubicle, and attending meetings in a conference room provided structure and routine. Participant 26 stated, "There is nothing I like about the office, and now that the pandemic has made me aware that I can do [my] remote job, I prefer working at home than the office" (personal communication, September 12, 2022). However, the survey results also showed that 86.67% of the participants enjoyed working in a traditional office setting (see Figure 18).
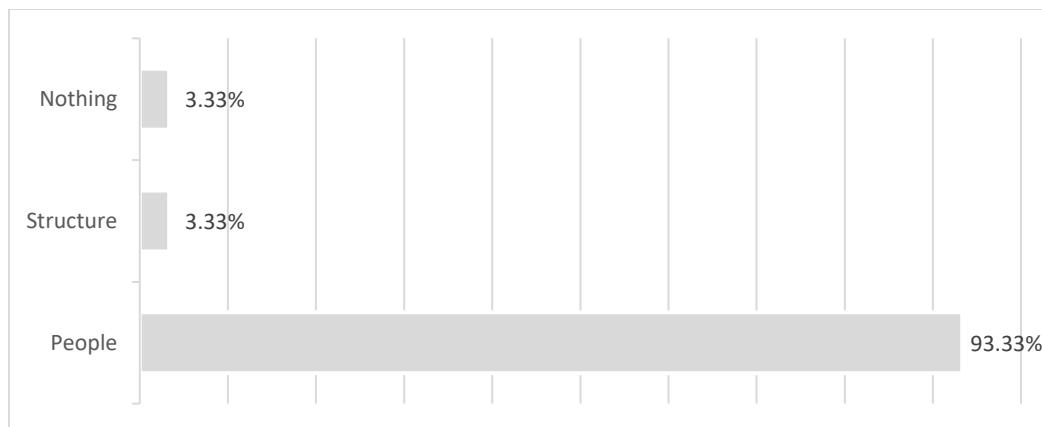
Figure 17. Benefits from the office.
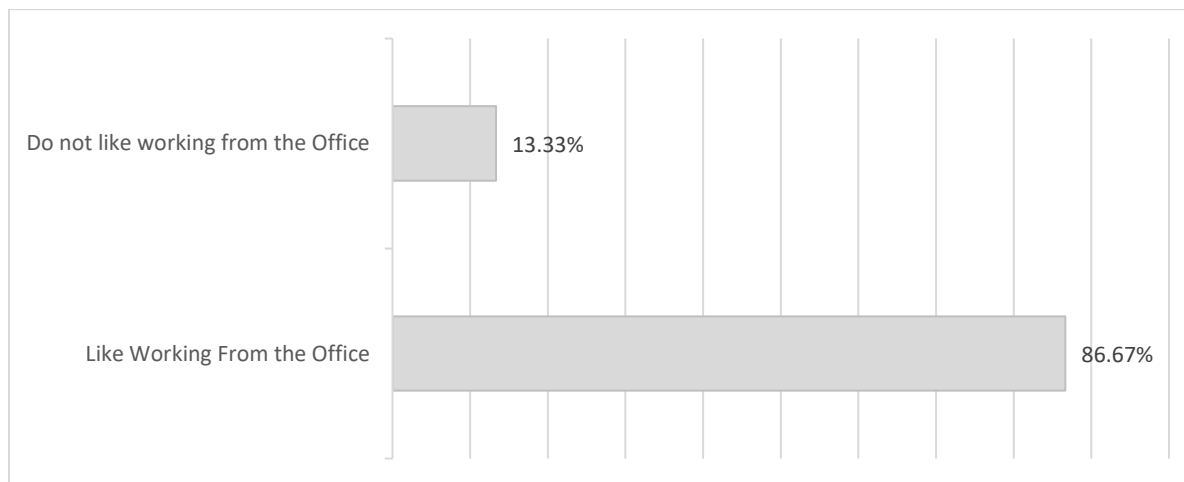
Figure 18. Employees' traditional office opinion.

Additionally, the survey results showed that employees preferred to have meetings in the office more than at home. In fact, 33.33% of participants selected that they preferred meetings at home (see Figure 19); however, after interviewing them, the researcher discovered that these employees were not critical participants in the meetings and were only required to listen in for informational purposes. Others that had active involvement in the meetings stated that they would prefer meetings in the office, with 66.67% feeling that meetings in the office were more productive.

Figure 19. Meeting productivity.

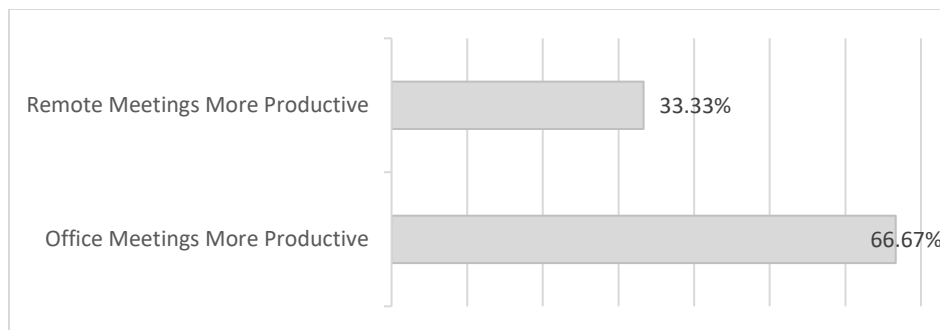After asking the employees what they did not like about the office, 83.33% said they did not like the distractions in the office (see Figure 20). The employees expressed distractions, such as the open floor plan, noise, climate control, lighting, excessive taking, small workspaces, office gossip, closed windows, wrong views, negative coworkers, and outside noises. Participant 17 explained that the worst distraction in the office was the temperature, as the cold temperatures made it hard for them to concentrate on their work. Additionally, Participant 23 clarified that the bathroom and kitchen were distractions with the level of noise and office gossip. Furthermore, Participant 29 described the distractions in the office as loud noises from other cubicles. This theme supported the findings of Georgescu (2021), which showed that office settings provide social distractions that would not be present while the employee is working from home.
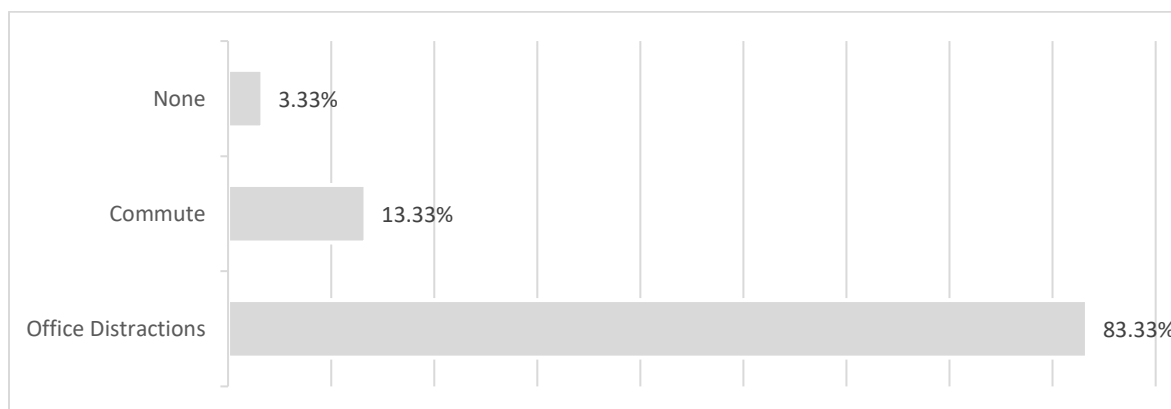

Figure 20. Traditional office consequences.

Although 93.33% of the participants said they liked the office because of the people, 83.33% said they did not like the office because of distractions; in those individuals' interviews, it was determined that people were part of the distraction. These employees liked the people, but they knew the people were a huge distraction to getting work done. Participant 5 noted that they had a coworker come up to their desk while they were in the middle of a task to talk to them, and then once left alone, another coworker came up to talk; an hour could have passed by, and they did not get their work task done. Moreover, another employee was trying to get their work done, but they heard the entire conversations occurring right next to them, and they were distracted by the noise, so they ended up listening to the conversation rather than doing their work tasks, too.

Additionally, employees made a note of the climate of the building. For example, it can be distracting to get work done while at home when it is too cold. Employees can just turn their heat up at home. Another distraction noted was the lighting in the building. At home, they could turn on and off a light depending on the glare they may be getting. Some employees work in a cubicle and have more space in their home office, which can be a distraction by having limited space to print things out or have private conversations throughout their workday. Other than distractions, 13.33% said they disliked the office because of their commute time and the flexible hours available at home (see Figure 21). Participant 18 said working in the office had no consequences, as they enjoyed the traditional office setting. Employees liked the organization's people but also found them distracting, suggesting that a hybrid approach is most appropriate to give them the socialization they need and quiet working environments to get their jobs done. The survey results showed that there were more concentration issues experienced in the office, as 86.67% of participants noted that it was harder for them to concentrate in the office than the 13.33% that found it harder to concentrate at home.
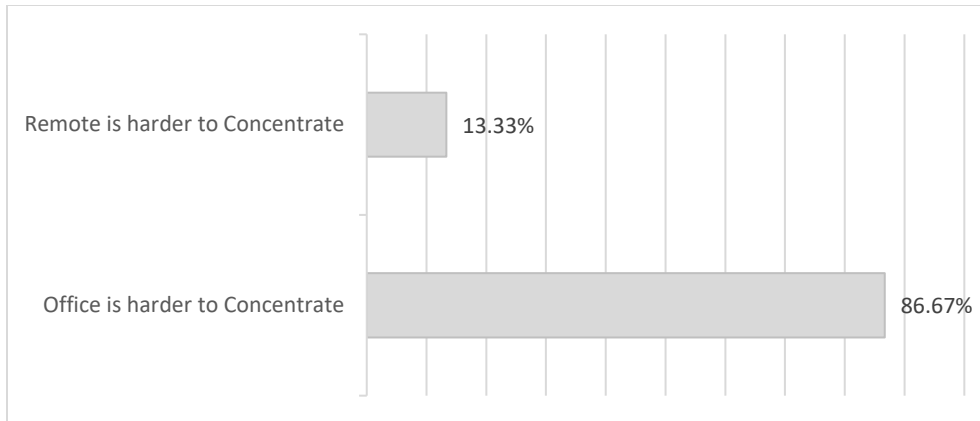
Figure 21. Concentration issues.

Remote Leadership

A critical interview question was about leadership's adaptation to remote work. For an organization to adapt to change in the work environment, leadership must set the tone at the top. Of the interviewees, 53.33% said leadership adapted to virtual meetings, but that was when it came to changing their style (see Figure 22). The other 46.67% said leaders remained the same. Participant 17 explained that their manager stopped holding one-on-one meetings because they could not figure out how to hold them online. The leaders at the bank did not adjust to the remote environment to help alleviate long working hours. This theme contradicts Lamprinou's (2021) findings that servant leaders in remote environments need to continue encouraging their employees to work the same hours to prevent burnout.

Figure 22. Remote leadership adaptation.

The employees said that the leadership team remained in the office even when all back-office employees were working from home, and it was obvious that they were not in favor of the work-from-home environment. Participant 18 thought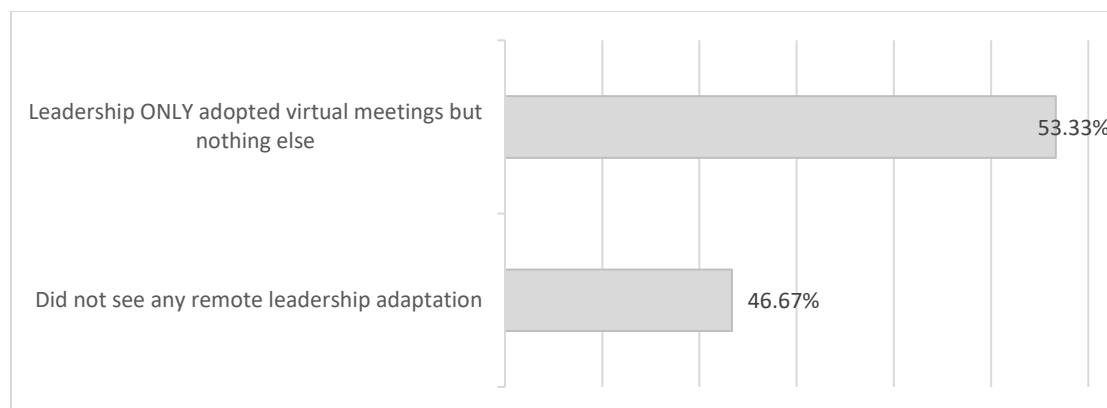 it must have been nice for their coworkers to be on such an extended vacation. There were apparent gaps in working from home as a vacation versus doing your job outside of the home. The unsuccessful virtual meetings had poor connections and many individuals talking over one another. Not requiring video to be on led to poor quality meetings. Video conferencing could have given the senior leadership team more trust in their employees based on their backgrounds and appearance during those calls. Participant 17 noted that their manager could not figure out how to meet virtually and canceled their team and one-on-one meetings while they were working remotely. A critical theme was that the lack of adaptation to remote leadership was why all employees were required to report back to the office.

Although the interviewees did not notice much of a change in remote leadership, their survey results showed that leadership prepared employees to work remotely and provided the right equipment. Of the respondents, 83.33% stated they felt prepared to work from home during the pandemic (see Figure 23). Furthermore, 96.67% of respondents said the company provided

them with the right equipment to work from home (see Figure 24). Leadership may not have

adapted to a remote environment, but they ensured their employees had the preparation required

for this change.
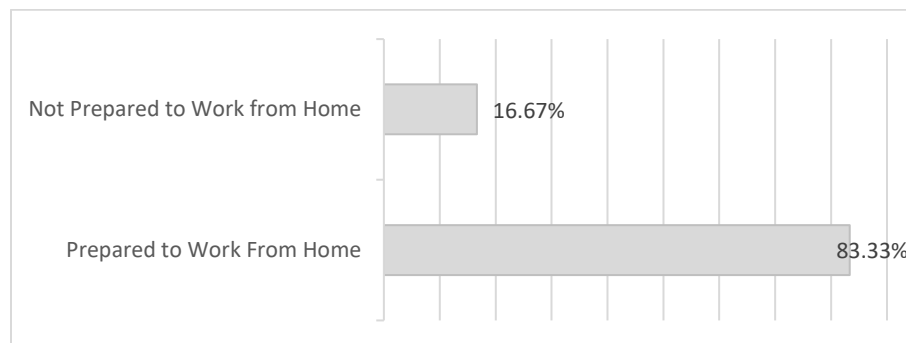
Figure 23. Preparedness for remote work.
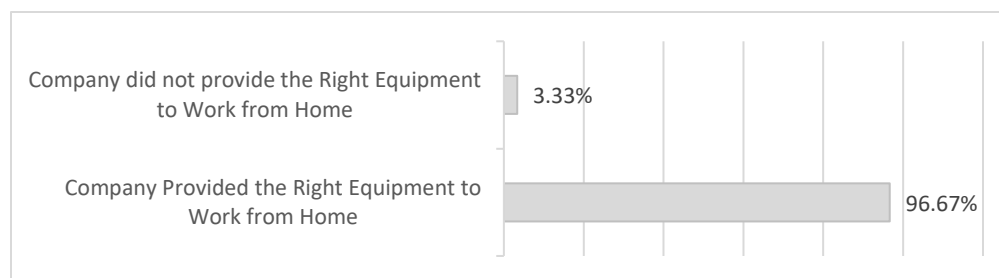
Figure 24. Equipment.

Work from Home Policy

Employees were asked during the survey how many remote days they would like to work

during the week; 43.33% said 3 days, and 36.67% said 2 days (see Figure 25). The average of all

the answers to the question regarding the opinion on the work-from-home policy on the survey

was 2.67 days remote per week.
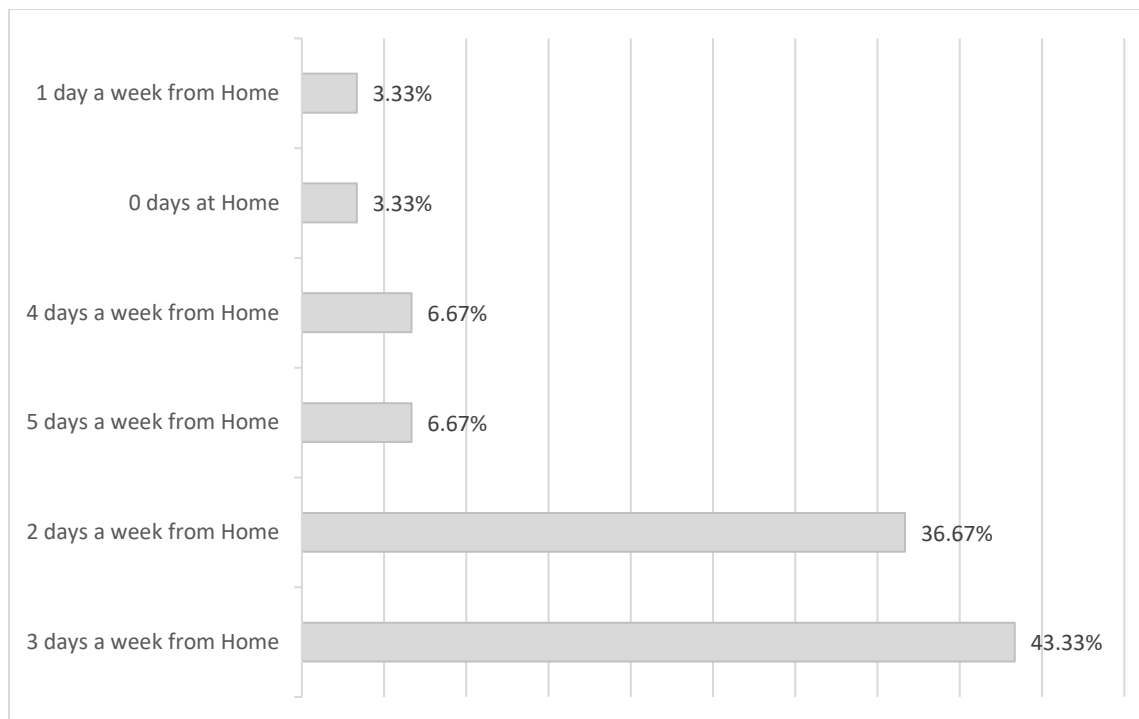
Figure 25. Work from home policy.

The survey and interview results on preferred work environments were slightly different.

The survey results showed that 86.67% wanted a hybrid approach, 10% preferred remote, and

3.33% liked the office setting (see Figure 26).
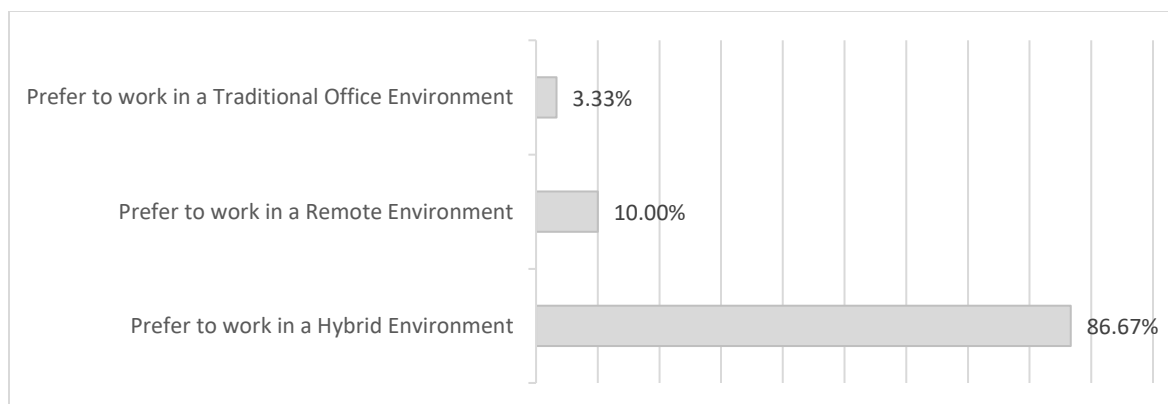
Figure 26. Preferred work environment survey.

The interview allowed the participants to explain more what they meant by hybrid. Some

explained that hybrid should be 1 week in the office, 2 weeks remote, 2-3 days a week at home,

based on commute time, on a case-by-case basis, for all employees, flexible throughout the entire

day, or allowed only with proper evaluation. However, the interview results showed that 96.67%

wanted a hybrid approach (see Figure 27).
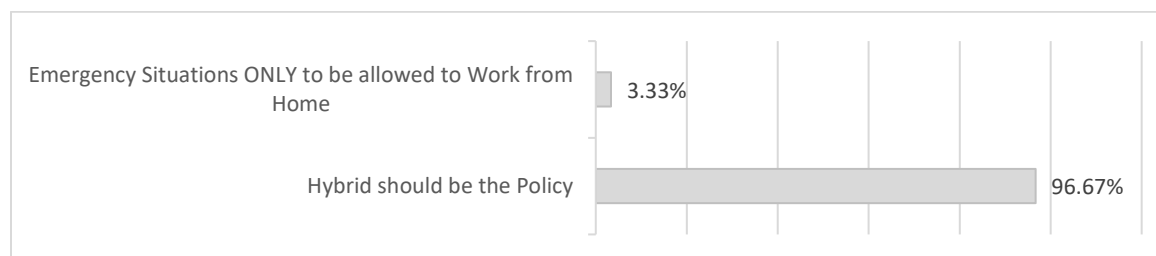
Figure 27. Preferred work environment interview.

Participant 18 was the only participant that said employees should only be allowed to

work remotely if an emergency came up, such as a sick child. Interviewees were asked what their

work-from-home schedule was like currently, and 53.33% said they were allowed 1 day a week,

with 6.67% including the words hush-hush when asked about this 1 remote day (see Figure 28).

The employees said they were not supposed to have any days at home from a leadership

perspective, but individual managers allowed it if they did not tell people they were at home. If

no one knew they were working from home and thought they were out of the office that day,

they did not have as high a workload as in the office. There were 26.67% that were not allowed

to work from home at all, 6.67% that had 5 days remote, 6.67% that had 2 days a week, 3.33%

that had 4 days a week, and 3.33% that had 1 day a month remote. The theme was that there was

not a consistent work-from-home policy implemented at the bank, and employees wanted to be

able to do so if they could.
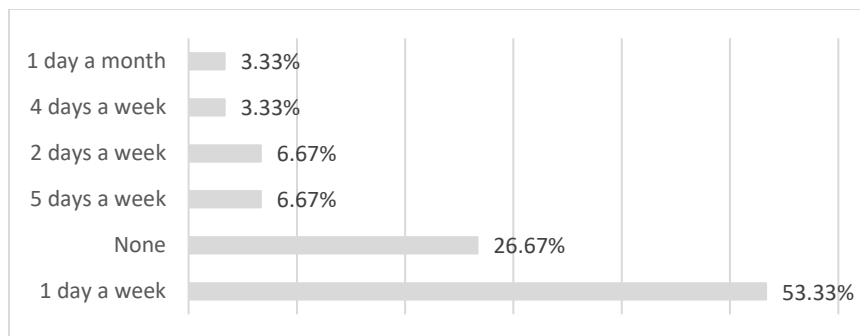
Figure 28. Current work from home schedule.

A follow-up question to employees was if they would rather have the ability to work from home whenever they wanted to, 0-5 days a week, but not receive an annual bonus. There were 43.33% that said yes, and 26.67% that said maybe (see Figure 29). The ones that said maybe wanted to run the numbers and fully understand which would be the best option for them, but they had to think about it. There were 20% that said no, but three of the participants said they should get both. Six participants wanted to make sure they got their bonus. Money motivates employees to work, and 80% were in favor of not receiving a bonus, wanted more time to think about it, or knew the company should allow work from home and still get a bonus. A theme was that even though money was a top motivating factor, the organization could still save money on bonuses by giving remote work options.
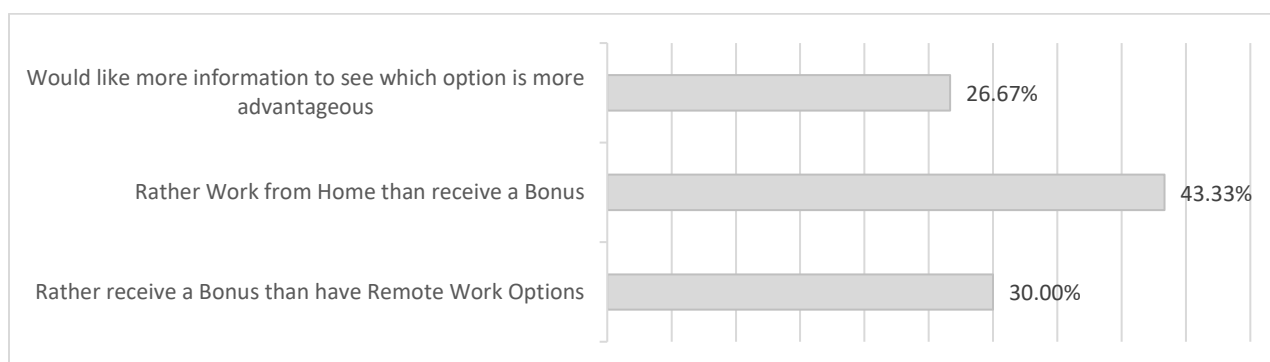
Figure 29. Bonus or work from home decision.

Representing the survey data with bar graphs showed the selection choices for each survey question. Visually seeing the answers selected by participants showed that they favored remote work. Where an employee works has changed due to the pandemic, and after studying a small community bank in Western Pennsylvania, the data collected proved that what the employees wanted when it came to where they worked was a disconnect to what they were receiving post-pandemic.

The interviews played a significant role in obtaining critical observations and interpretations of the ongoing data analysis. The data gathered from the interview helped support the survey results by validating the findings. A case study was conducted to better understand the lived experiences and stories the employees had during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The case study begins with a specific case that will be described and analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The specific case in this study was studying the decision process of leadership to bring all employees back to a traditional office setting after on-and-off working from home for a year. Typically, case study researchers study current, real-life cases that are in progress so that they can gather accurate information (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Relationship of the Findings

COVID-19 reshaped employees' ability to work from different locations than before this era. The findings observed in this research study showed that the traditional nine-to-five office-based environment was no longer the norm, but that the new normal was the hybrid approach. There was no clear definition of a hybrid approach, but it can be unique to an organization or even to each employee. The pandemic has shown that there is no return to the old normal way of working, and employees must adapt to the new shift in work environment by embracing the heavily invested technology. After proper data analysis, there were eight findings worth noting.

Overview of the Findings

Finding #1 – Understand employees' motivating factors. The top motivating factor for employees was money. Money is required to pay bills, afford food, and purchase necessary items. Employees can earn more money year-over-year with annual raises and bonuses. These are based on performance and will motivate an employee to work hard and go above and beyond expectations to meet their goals. There can be factors outside of a manager's control, such as an employee that does a great job and believes they have earned a significant raise, but senior management limits the highest percent increase. Employees could also meet their financial goals by working from home to save money. If a manager can only get a 3% raise but knows their employee deserves more, they can offer more remote days to the employee to save them money, which can still motivate the employee. If an employee is not motivated by working from home, then a manager would not want to offer this type of benefit to an employee as a reward.

Finding #2 – The future of work is hybrid. The employees studied expressed the value of being in the office and the benefits of working at home. The majority of the participants stated they would establish a hybrid approach for work environments. This type of structure is very different than before the pandemic when working from home was not an option for employees. Organizations will now compete with one another on where they allow their employees to do their job. The small community bank had seen turnover post-pandemic, with many employees going to other banks that offered remote work options.

Finding #3 – A clear plan and policy for hybrid work environments is critical. Hybrid work environments, such as the traditional office and full-time remote, are not a concrete answer. Hybrid can have different days at home or in the office. Hybrid can also split days where the morning is remote, and the afternoon is in the office. Organizations need to work with their

employees to understand what the most productive environment is for each employee. Employees who have long commute times may want more days remote than those who live closer to the office. Depending on the project, it might be advantageous to meet for team projects for a whole week in the office to complete the project. It may be better to work fully remote for independent projects until the project is complete. Employees must have a clear plan and policy to understand the new remote work culture.

Finding #4 – Working from home is a privilege. Employees who disagreed with remote work had unique stories of coworkers slacking at home. There is no physical visualization of employees at home, so it is critical to have an evaluation standard. There can be a policy that states an employee must work 6 months before being qualified for 1 day a week at home. Each day they work remotely, they have to earn it since they could lose this privilege. If there are issues with an employee not doing their job at home, it needs to be reported and addressed. Some interviewees stated that it only took one employee to ruin it for everyone.

Finding #5 – There are no one-size-fits-all schedules. Since hybrid can have much ambiguity in what it means to have a hybrid work environment, leadership needs to know that each employee will be on a different schedule. There will be times when it is critical to have an entire team in the office simultaneously, and there will be times when working from home is the best setting. Some employees do not like working from home and will choose to stay in the office, while others might choose the days they work from home based on their professional and personal schedules. Thus, making a schedule for everyone to work Fridays at home will not be successful at the organization, as every employee is different and has unique job responsibilities.

Finding #6 – Remote leaders need to adapt to a different environment. Employees need to know that their leadership team cares even if they are not physically in the building. Adapting to

remote work might be utilizing video conferencing for all meetings, including those at home and in the office. An important thing will be for managers not to push a meeting until they are back in the office. Leaders need to understand the technology and be able to hold meetings virtually. Leaders will help prove there are no lapses in work, no matter the environment. The use of shared drives and documents for collaboration will be critical. Leaders must also embrace the change and work from home occasionally. If an employee notices that their manager never works from home, it will not be easy to know that the manager understands remote work and supports it; they need to lead by example.

Finding #7 – Measuring productivity at home will be critical. Remote work is attractive because of the fewer distractions than in the office. A typical business task in the office might take 2 hours to complete, but maybe at home with little to no distractions takes only 30 minutes. This benefit attracts an employee because they could get their work accomplished in 6 hours as opposed to 8 hours. They may sign off early and spend time with their family or take longer lunch breaks. They get more of their time back. Leadership needs to establish a way to measure employees' productivity with the quality of work, not necessarily the number of hours they put in. If an employee is completing tasks faster and more efficiently at home, they may be able to take on more department responsibilities. Proving their workforce is more productive at home may push leadership to provide more work-from-home days to their employees.

Finding #8 – Providing choices to employees will establish trust. The hybrid approach is different for every employee as they might have different remote and office days than their coworkers. Employees can choose which days work best to be in the office and at home. Choices for the employee allow them to take ownership of their calendar. If they need to schedule a more extended lunch to go to the dentist and work from home on a Wednesday, but the following

week it makes more sense to work from home on Friday, they have the power to do so. The

employee-to-manager relationship will build trust because the manager knows they do not have

to physically see their employee sitting at their desk or cubicle working on their computer to

know they are doing their job. See Figure 30 for a summary of these findings.

F1	Understand employees' motivating factor.
F2	The future of work is hybrid.
F3	A clear plan and policy for hybrid work environments is critical.
F4	Working remotely is a privilege.
F5	There is no one-size fits all.
F6	Remote leaders need to adapt to different environment
F7	Measuring productivity at home will be critical.
F8	Providing choice to employees will establish trust.

Figure 30. Summary of findings.

Relationship of Findings to Research Questions. The first research question asked:

What is the role of leadership in the success of either traditional or virtual work settings? Finding

#1 provided a partial answer to RQ1 by disclosing motivating factors. For either environment to

be successful, leaders should know how to motivate their employees. Finding #3 provided

additional insight into RQ1, as it explained a clear plan and policy to be successful. The full

answer to RQ1 was with Finding #6, as leaders had to adapt their strategy in either work

environment. Leadership's role in making either work environment successful was understanding

employee motivating work factors, setting a policy, and adapting strategy in either setting.

The second research question asked: How does offering a choice to employees with

remote work options impact the loss of potential and current employees? Finding #2 supported

RQ2 because it proved that hybrid was the future of how employees wanted their work

environment. Offering both options to employees was critical when word-of-mouth travels of

other employers doing so post-pandemic. New employees would know about remote work because of the pandemic from a prior employer or finishing their schooling virtually. Finding #4 partially supported RQ2 with additional insight into the privilege and benefit of remote work given to employees. Employees that worked hard benefitted from remote work and wanted to impact their current retention. Finding #5 partially supported RQ2 by explaining that other employees might have had different work-from-home schedules. A work-from-home policy would show the current and potential employees that the organization treats this on a case-by-case basis to meet the employee's needs.

The third research question asked: What is the impact of remote work environments on employee job satisfaction regarding employee retention? Finding #7 supported RQ3 with productivity at home. Employees were more satisfied with their job knowing they got more done at home and potentially got more time back for themselves. Finding #8 supported RQ3 by explaining that establishing trust allowed for a successful flexible work arrangement. Trust is critical to an employee's overall satisfaction. Trust also plays a role in retention within the organization (Ozmen, 2018).

Relationship of Findings to Conceptual Framework. This flexible single case study aimed to explore the most productive work environments post-pandemic. The conceptual framework functioned as the master agenda and roadmap for the research by incorporating concepts, theories, actors, and constructs (Fu et al., 2021). The conceptual framework gives meaning to the data collected. The main focus of the framework is for the concepts, theories, and constructs to provide insight into the research project (Fu et al., 2021). There were three main concepts in this research study. The first concept was that lack of support from leadership negatively impacted the benefit of working from home. Finding #6 strongly supported this

because there was minimal change in leadership style when the environment was remote. Finding #1 supported that leadership needed to know and understand the motivation of their employees. If an employee was highly motivated to do their job, then the support from leadership was critical for the success of that employee. Finding #3 proved that leadership establishing a policy and plan for their employees showed their support for working from home, and employees did not feel guilty for doing so. Finding #4 set the tone for leadership that they took away remote work if it was not working for some employees. Finding #5 supported leadership supporting working from home by not treating it as a one-size-fits-all schedule but by knowing and understanding their employees' professional and personal lives. The second concept was that the lack of providing options for work settings impacted talent retention and recruiting issues. Finding #2 strongly supported this concept because remote work is the way of the future; without providing those options, the organization will fall behind in the competition. The third concept of this research project was that the benefits of working from home positively impacted employee retention and job satisfaction. Finding #7 strongly supported this concept because employees felt more productive at home and achieved more of a sense of accomplishment throughout their day, contributing more to their organization. Finding #8 supported this concept as well because providing the choice to let employees work remotely or come to the office for their job established trust. Trust in an immediate supervisor positively affected the employees' enterprising behavior, such as loyalty (Ozmen, 2018).

The first theory in this study was the contingency theory, which explains that leaders change their behavioral patterns to adjust to circumstances. This theory was supported by finding #6, as leaders must develop a mixture of behaviors to manage and lead their employees, whether they are physically near or virtually present. The second theory in this research study was the

self-determination theory, which explains that each employee's motivation is different. Findings #1, #5, and #8 strongly supported this theory because, for some employees, remote work did not motivate them. Therefore, the leader needs to understand what motivates them. Leaders knowing that they are more productive at home may uncover that they have more intrinsic motivations, such as self-motivation, praise, and accomplishment. Leaders know that motivation is not a one-size-fits-all mentality, which helps management when understanding their hybrid approach to work. The last theory in this research study was Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory, which explains the motivation to prevent discomfort. This theory was supported by findings #2, #3, #4, and #8 because of the idea that a hybrid work environment is a future. An established plan for the enterprise, while knowing each employee is unique, will avoid employee discomfort. Employees who know they can be more productive remotely and avoid distractions in the office will increase their overall job satisfaction.

The actors in this research study consisted of 30 employees at a small community bank in Western Pennsylvania. These were current employees that were part of the organization throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic and the back-and-forth between traditional office settings and remote work. The actors of this study developed the findings through their answers to the survey and interview questions. The findings revealed a high volume of dissatisfied employees that wanted to have the ability to work from home. They felt they proved they could do their job remotely for a year and that the flexibility should still be an option even as the pandemic has slowly tapered off. The findings exposed a lack of remote leadership and support from executive management for working at home. The researcher concluded that the priority to observe was the need for a work-from-home policy that could satisfy the employees with a better work-life balance.

The first construct in this research study was organizational culture. Findings #2, #4, #5, and #6 supported this construct because working from home changed the bank's traditional culture. Communication efforts heavily influenced the culture face-to-face. This change in the work environment caused a change in the culture of the organization. Change can be readily accepted by some but is a significant obstacle for others. Another construct for the research was job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was supported by findings #7 and #8 by allowing employees to accomplish more work at home and instilling trust by allowing them to decide when they can work remotely. Motivation was another construct in this study and was strongly supported by finding #1. Motivation was different for every employee and understanding what motivated employees was critical for their success in either work environment. The last construct of this study was communication. This construct was strongly supported by finding #3 because the precise plan and policy left little-to-no ambiguity regarding the expectations when working remotely and why it was essential to do some tasks in the office.

Relationship of Findings to Anticipated Themes. After reviewing the professional and academic literature, the researcher anticipated discovering two post-pandemic themes related to remote work. The researcher expected to observe employees wanting the ability to work remotely after their experience with the pandemic. Findings #3 and #4 strongly supported this anticipated theme. The researcher anticipated observing that hybrid would be the preferred work environment. Finding #2 and #5 supported this anticipated theme because hybrid is the way of future work, and there is not a one-size-fits-all model for the hybrid approach and how each employee should organize their work schedule. The difference between the researcher's anticipated themes and the outcome was that the hybrid approach was more than 2 to 3 days either in the office or home, while the researcher anticipated 4 days at home and 1 day in the

office. The last unanticipated theme was productivity. The researcher did not anticipate participants stating they worked longer days at home. The researcher thought they would have shorter remote days with increased productivity and fewer distractions but accomplish more than in the office. The participants worked longer days and took fewer breaks to prove to their management team all the work they could accomplish at home and felt guilty about taking breaks while at home. This unanticipated theme was supported partially by findings #6, #7, and #8. While remote leaders should trust their employees to provide the privilege of working from home and if the employee can accomplish their tasks in 6 hours versus 8 hours in the office, leaders should not punish the employee by working longer days but instead reward them for their productivity.

Relationship of Findings to the Literature. The literature showed that the findings supported business practices, top management support, motivation, communication, effective e-leadership, leadership decision-making, and servant leadership in remote work environments. In the literature review, the researcher collected data that supported remote work and its impacts from the pandemic related to each of the research questions. Finding #1 supported the research, as every employee had different motivating factors. Leadership taking into consideration different motivating factors will positively impact their employee's job satisfaction and help retain critical employees (Gilbert et al., 2016). Finding #2 strongly supported the literature based on effective e-leadership; the future of the workplace is a combination of both face-to-face interactions and virtual teamwork. Organizations understand that the pandemic allowed virtual work to become a reality. Now, without a pandemic, employees want to continue this type of work. Findings #3 and #5 supported the literature review through communication.

Developing a work-from-home policy and plan will be critical communication to understand how the organization supports remote work, and each employee has different productivity settings and needs for accomplishing their work tasks. Finding #4 supported the motivation as working from home is a privilege. Therefore, motivation with remote work is earned and can be taken away. Finding # 6 supported the literature through leadership decision-making. Command-and-Control was the decision-making style used during the pandemic to keep up with the fast and ever-changing environment, but timely decision-making brought all employees back. Senior leadership did not adapt to the remote work environment and wanted to bring all employees back for convenience in their preferred work environment. Success in the change of work environment depends on leadership's ability to adapt to either work setting. Finding #7 supported multiple areas of the literature, including employee engagement, job satisfaction, workload stress, work-life balance, employee satisfaction, overall employee happiness, and quality of life. Productivity can provide employees with a sense of accomplishment and better balance in their life (Gilbert et al., 2016). Leadership ability to measure the productivity at home for employees will provide a use-case for the importance of providing employees with the ability to work remotely. Finding #8 supported the literature through the culture of trust, ethical behavior, and the unselfish leader. A manager's most productive work environment can be in the office, while their direct reports might be remote. Understanding how to trust the employee to do their job while the manager is in the office will make the leader unselfish. Trust is a huge obstacle as to why the small community bank went back to working in the office.

Relationship of Findings to the Problem. The problem the researcher tried to solve is the failure of leaders to gain employee support for different work environments, resulting in the

inability of the organization to satisfy employees. The findings proved that employees understood that the future of work settings is a hybrid environment. Now organizations will be tasked with defining a hybrid work environment. The findings suggested that there was not one type of hybrid approach that would work for all employees. One major obstacle a small community bank will face with the different hybrid work schedules for different employees will be the organizational culture. During the interviews, some employees had no choice but to come into the office 5 days a week, while most received 1 day a week. The anger from the employees who knew others could receive a work-from-home day was evident. Organizations need employees to understand that to satisfy the employees, the future of work may look different for everyone, and they can always measure their productivity to earn additional days at home. The specific problem to be addressed was the challenges leaders faced within the small community banking industry in Western Pennsylvania to gain executive-level support for remote work environments, resulting in the possible inability of the organization to retain and recruit critical employees. The lack of leadership support justified the findings related to leadership's adaptation to remote work and trusting their employees.

Summary of the Findings

The findings suggested that leadership should reconsider returning all employees to the office. The findings showed that employees wanted to work in a hybrid model, which is the future of all organizations post-pandemic. It will be critical for the success of a hybrid work plan for employees not to get jealous or care if an employee has more work-at-home days than they have since it should all be task- and performance-based. The findings supported that it would not be the same for all employees. Job descriptions can also dictate the ability to work from home or in the office. The findings suggested that leadership needed to embrace the change and lead by

example to show the employees their support for remote work to make this transition successful. Communication will also play a role in the success of a hybrid work approach. Leadership's remote work support will let employees know that the organization accepts it. The findings supported the research study's purpose, which was that the lack of support for remote work environments negatively impacted the small community bank. The employees worked from home during the pandemic, but senior management remained in the office. Employers expect employees to learn how to perform their job with little to no support during the pandemic. The findings showed that support from leadership and employees for remote work environments will be critical to make them successful. The findings also supported all three of the research questions. Leadership plays a role in the success of either work setting. Providing employees with a choice in where they work will positively impact their trust within the organization, resulting in better retention and recruiting, and remote work settings will increase job satisfaction (Gilbert et al., 2016).

Application to Professional Practice

COVID-19 impacted businesses all around the world, developing a complex real-world problem. Some organizations introduced remote work, and employees now developed a preference for where they work (Bolisani et al., 2020). This study was relevant to many businesses that could offer remote work options during the pandemic to help lessen the spread of the virus. The real-world problem that organizations face is that as COVID-19 cases are declining, and it has become safer to return to in-person work, leadership needs to determine what is best for employee retention and recruiting. Before the pandemic, the number of organizations that offered remote work was much smaller (Bolisani et al., 2020). This study was helpful for senior leaders of the organization to decide whether to return to the office, remain

remote, or blend the two options for employees. The findings supported that employees want to have a hybrid work model post-pandemic.

Many organizations' senior leadership faces difficult decisions with returning to the office post-pandemic. Organizations like the small community bank that participated in this study lost critical employees to competition that offered remote options. Not only will leadership need to determine a plan for where current employees can work, but they also need to develop a formal policy to address future candidates. Recruiting new employees will be challenging without a clear policy defined during interviews. The younger workforce will be exposed to more technology than ever before, receive some online schooling in college or high school, and potentially watch their parents work from home during the pandemic. Employees know that particular jobs are done solely on a computer. Therefore, the location of where they work is up to the organization's leaders. This real-world business problem can present management challenges because of building costs, employee trust, and collaboration.

Improving General Business Practice

This case study with the small community bank in Western Pennsylvania showed that after having experience with remote work, employees wanted to incorporate working from home into their weekly routines. Employees experienced fewer distractions at home, where they could accomplish more work. The demands during COVID-19 resulted in the blurriness of work and family (Troll et al., 2022). The case study results showed that employees did not want to be full-time remote but wanted to have a hybrid model adopted in their organizations. Both the office and home provide benefits and disadvantages to the employee. Teleworking requires employees to have the self-control to perform their job (Troll et al., 2022). The office can be challenging to concentrate on and complete tasks with all the distractions.

Healthy balances between both work environments will prove to be beneficial for the employee and employer. This study helps leaders understand where their employees want to work post-pandemic. Leaders may struggle with decision-making, as there is no clear one-size-fits-all choice for all employees. There can be some employees that are not productive at home and prefer being in the office, while other employees have a strong preference to be at home. Working from home during the pandemic was a unique situation, as working from home was the only choice for employees as officials worked to contain the virus outbreak (Troll et al., 2022). Under stressful times, with family members at home and high levels of uncertainty, employees figured out a way to make remote work successful. Today, there are fewer cases of COVID-19, schools are open for kids to attend in person, and more vaccines are available to the public. The unprecedented times of COVID-19 are much different than in 2020, when it became a public health crisis concern (Troll et al., 2022). This case study showed it is critical for leaders of an organization impacted by working from home during COVID-19 to get it right to avoid losing critical employees. Employees felt they could do their job under high-stress situations, so now, with less stress, the confusion on why they cannot continue to perform their job at home is in question.

One way implementing remote work will improve businesses is that leaders understand and trust their employees. If the employees say they want to work from home, and leaders listen to them, that will speak volumes to the employees. If the employees feel trusted to work from home and not micromanaged, that will enable them to work harder for the organization. Most employees stated during the case study that they worked longer hours at home because they felt guilty. They did not have to get up early or get dressed for work and could start their days early. Remote work options could be a win for the organization as they could get more work hours

from their employees than while in the office. They would factor in their commute time and not feel as guilty. Many employees noted fewer breaks at home as well. Managers may want to focus on tracking productivity to ensure employees are still meeting their expectations, but if the employee works longer and harder while at home, the organization can also benefit from this opportunity.

Another way that working from home can improve business is cost savings. The main benefits of remote work were increased flexibility, autonomy, work-life balance, and performance (Babapour Chafi et al., 2022). The employee can save on costs, such as gas, wear-and-tear on their car, clothing expenses, costs of makeup, and overall time. The organization can benefit from cost savings as it grows and hires more employees. They can offer cubicle sharing or office sharing to maximize their current building. If fewer employees are physically in the office, the company can save on water and electricity bills. Other benefits could be spending more work time outdoors, such as a walk-and-talk meeting, more quality time with family and pets, and making their daily commute easier (Babapour Chafi et al.). Reducing commute time provides more time with their family. In addition to personal gains, remote work reduces carbon footprints and employees' commutes (Babapour Chafi et al., 2022).

Another improvement remote work will have for businesses is utilizing their technology. Some organizations purchased systems and software, such as Teams, Skype, Zoom, Webex, OneDrive, and OneNote for online communication and collaboration. When employees are in the office, they neglect to use systems that are beneficial when working at home. It might be easier to walk up to a coworker to ask a simple question than to message them on Teams. There might not be a need for a Zoom meeting link if everyone is in the office. Since organizations are paying for these subscriptions, remote work allows them to utilize their technology software to their

fullest potential. Employees may find that these tools are easier to use, and the speed of this software will work better than old fashion note-keeping, in-person communication, and collaboration on projects.

Potential Application Strategies

Organizations that are COVID-19-impacted should be well-aware of how to implement work-from-home strategies for their employees. Providing employees with the right equipment is critical for their success while working at home. This case study showed that the small community bank provided all employees with the right equipment to do their jobs at home. Managers will want to consider the oversight strategy for remote work to ensure employees are not taking advantage of this benefit. Employees could trade their long conversations with coworkers for putting laundry in or preparing dinner. The questions the managers need to focus on are whether they care about how their employees take breaks throughout the day and if they continue to get their work done. Managers do not want their employees slacking on their work and watching Netflix all day. Initially, employees could consider it a privilege or even a luxury to work from home, but now post-pandemic, it is a competitive tool that organizations can use to accomplish recruitment and competitive advantages (Pokojski et al., 2022). Managers will still want to monitor work performance no matter their employees' location. One tool for remote work supervision can include employees filling in timesheets, adding notes and comments in files, or generating reports to summarize their work (Pokojski et al.). Employees know it is a privilege to work from home, but there is still an expectation of being working and not taking that day as a vacation. Managers requiring employees to explain what they worked on during the day will allow the manager to check their work and start developing a trusting relationship with their employees on the work they perform off-site. Another way to supervise remote work would

be utilizing systems that detect a lack of activity on a given user on a computer, recording time spent on social networking sites or tracking a user's location during work (Pokojski et al., 2022). The employee may feel micromanaged when telecommuting, but unfortunately, some employees think they do not have to work since they are at home. Some employees will focus on moving their computer mouse every so often to remain available on their instant messaging platforms. The benefit of working from home is to save time and money on a commute to work but still perform job duties. It is challenging to supervise employees in a remote work environment, but it will be critical to have some monitoring in place, so employees know their expectations when choosing to work remotely.

Another implementation strategy for organizations that did not have remote work options pre-pandemic will be to form a policy. Such a policy will allow employees to perform their jobs from their homes or any place outside their office (Chatterjee et al., 2022). Employees need to know what their expectations are when it comes to remote work. The policy must clearly define how many days a week an employee can work from home and that the privilege is subject to management's review. Management's review can be the strategy of monitoring the employee because if some employees are not productive at home, their manager can require them to come into the office to work. The policy from senior management will ensure employees of their support for flexible work arrangements (Chatterjee et al.). Support from leadership will show employees that they want to provide flexibility to their employees. The responsibility of leadership is to extend appropriate support to their employees so they can work from home or any location during a situation (Chatterjee et al., 2022). This strategy can eliminate employees' guilt for working from home because their leadership team supports this initiative. Similar to policies such as maternity leave, working moms know that it is acceptable to take time off of

work to be with their newborn. Work-from-home standards in a policy will allow employees to know it is acceptable to work from home and not feel passed up on a promotion or not receive a raise because of their work location.

Summary of Application to Professional Practice

Working from home post-pandemic will be the expectation employees now have regarding where they work. Organizations will need to adopt some form of remote work at their institution to retain and competitively recruit new employees. Leaders must work together to determine the best policy for their organization. Trusting employees will perform their job at home as they would in the office will help managers determine the best-fit for monitoring and supervising tools for remote work. Implementing this type of flexible work arrangement will come with some employees trying to take advantage of this luxury benefit. Supervising employees, even at home, will be critical to remote work success. A work-from-home policy will ensure that the support needed from leadership addresses all employee concerns. Business understands that the future of work arrangements includes the ability to work from home. Leadership deciding the best way to incorporate this new work location into their practices will be critical for retaining key employees and recruiting future leaders.

Recommendations for Further Study

This single case study explored employees at a small community bank in Western Pennsylvania's experiences working from home during a global pandemic. The research findings contributed to the literature about remote work and addressed where employees want to work post-pandemic. One way to further this study is by extending the research to senior management. The findings showed that employees wanted a hybrid schedule, but leadership returned to the office full-time, and any days they worked from home were kept a secret from upper

management. After interviewing middle management and below, it was evident that their leadership team did not support remote work for their employees. Exploring why leadership wants their employees back in the office full-time will be critical for this research.

Another way to further develop this research is to focus on the age of the employees interviewed. Older generations may be used to and comfortable with their routines and work duties in the office. The younger generations may have more experience with technology and may find it easier to adapt to remote settings. Age may play a factor in studying remote and office work settings, and this research study did not limit the age of the participants. Another consideration for further study would be prior experience with remote work. Some organizations offered work-from-home options pre-pandemic, but in some organizations working from home was a new work environment for employees. The employees that had prior experience may have been more prepared than those that had no experience. The findings showed that most participants want a flexible hybrid work schedule. There were a few participants that preferred the traditional office setting. Therefore, furthering the research to focus on those employees that reject working from home would help understand how remote work can be improved to gain buy-in from all employees.

Reflections

The conclusion of this study provided an opportunity to reflect on the project. This research study contributed to the researcher's personal and professional growth. This research study topic of working from home during the pandemic has become a widely discussed topic in homes with families and at conference tables with the Board of Directors. More employees have experience with remote work than only one work setting. Traditional office environments are becoming less favorable for employees. Employees during the pandemic became aware they

could do their job from home and save money and time that the office does not offer. Discussing the researchers' personal and professional growth and how a biblical worldview informs remote work settings post-pandemic provides value and purpose to the study.

Personal and Professional Growth

The researcher decided to go forward with a doctorate after a year of graduating with an MBA. The back-and-forth decision came down to an online program being the only feasible option to achieve a doctorate and keep her full-time job. The researcher was hesitant at first about online learning. The researcher completed her first semester in 2019, right before the pandemic. The researcher was sent home by her employer to work, which made doing both school and work full-time easier than when she had been commuting into the office. This entire project unfolded as the researcher became impacted by this new way of working and attending school. Without online learning, a doctorate would not have been feasible for the researcher. She grew closer to the Lord throughout this doctoral program. There were stressful times when work, school, and family obligations would pile up, but trusting the Lord to help find time to make it all work was critical for the researcher's success. Understanding how to connect God's work with the researcher's work every day through research, writing, daily work tasks, and communicating with others helped the researcher better connect with the bigger picture of the world. The researcher's employer decided to bring all employees back to the office without providing clear reasoning why they all had to report back to the office. The researcher discussed this with her manager, and it was the decision of their senior management team. The researcher found that she could do much more at home without office distractions and save time by eliminating a commute. The researcher found a new job working full-time remotely, which helped with this research project to understand the psychology of remote work on an employee. To avoid social

isolation, the researcher had to make evident efforts to have friends and a social life outside work. The researcher could see firsthand how easy it was for a coworker to perceive slacking off in a virtual setting as it was in an office. The researcher's experience helped create the reason for the chosen research topic. The researcher collected meaningful data and gathered insightful information through current literature to learn and understand remote work post-pandemic.

Biblical Perspective

It can be motivating and encouraging to study and learn the word of God, but the most challenging part is applying biblical concepts to everyday life. Christian business professionals need to integrate biblical principles in the workplace no matter where they are working. God intended work to be a gift and privilege (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016). God intended for His people to work. Work is not a necessary evil or a result of the fall, but God worked for the sheer joy of it (Keller & Alsdorf). After understanding that we should work to carry out God's work and use our God-given gifts and talents, some Christians find themselves burnt out in their jobs. God will always provide for us. Therefore, we should not choose a career simply because it is high-paying but find a career where we can utilize the gifts and talents that God has blessed us with (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016). Employees should know it is a privilege to work from home. God intended for them to work. Employees need to integrate biblically with their work, no matter where they are working, whether in the office or at home. They know that God wants them to utilize their gifts to serve Him. In the book of Colossians it stated, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Col. 3:23–24). They are not working for their employer. They are working for God.

Arguably, the Apostle Paul was the most important person after Jesus in the history of Christianity (Fredriksen, 2018). Paul spread the teachings of Jesus in the first-century world. While Paul was teaching God's word, he became under arrest. Paul was an example of one of the first people to work from home, or instead work from prison (Fredriksen, 2018). In the book of Acts:

> When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred the crowd and seized him, shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place. (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Acts 21:27–28)

Perceptions about remote working inevitably cluster around embodiment, community, and unity, which the letters of the apostle Paul had a lot to say about these themes (Yuckman, 2022). While Paul was in prison, he wrote four letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul showed that he could be present even during his absence through letters. By attending closely to the apostle's understanding and application of the body of Christ and his relationship with the Christians sought to shape through his letters, Paul showed that some of the earliest distance ethological education reflected a solid commitment to embodied and incarnational learning (Yuckman). Paul proved the possibility that he could teach from afar. What Paul seemed to have assumed, and what remote work now confirmed, was that while shared physical space was vital to the formation, consideration had to be given to the myriad of relationships, networks, and influences that comprised the context in which Christians lived and moved (Yuckman, 2022). Remote communities and support will look different than when employees are physically together, but the strength of online relationships can be just as important when implemented

correctly. Paul taught through letters while in prison, which he would not have been able to do without perseverance and determination. Remote work is different from the traditional office, but because of remote options, people can attend universities or work for companies not in their area, recruit talent across the globe, and connect to more people.

Summary of Reflections

The research study's conclusion provided the opportunity for the researcher to reflect on the project. The researcher grew by understanding that remote and traditional office settings impact her everyday life. The researcher reflected that the doctoral program required biblical integration, which expanded her walk with Jesus. The researcher professionally developed research skills and a project that will impact many employees' and managers' opinions and thoughts about remote work. Apostle Paul showed employees that there is a possibility to work from anywhere with the right mindset and attitude.

Summary of Section 3

This section explained the key themes and findings discovered after analyzing the data. The findings supported the conceptual framework, the problem, the research questions, and the literature. The participants were critical in their answers to the survey and interview questions. The subjectivity of the interviews with body language and tonality provided the researcher with more justification than just the survey. The participants proved they wanted to work in both the office and at home. The future of work is hybrid, and organizations must embrace the change and show support to retain and recruit employees. This section also explained the application to professional practice. This case study explored improving general business practices by adopting a work-from-home policy. There are different strategies organizations should consider implementing for success at their institution. There are different areas based on the findings for

further research, such as focusing on senior leadership, age, and remote work experience.

Finally, this section explained the personal and professional growth developed by the research

and the biblical perspective while integrating a Christian worldview into remote work.

Summary and Study Conclusions

This research study revealed the importance of collecting feedback on employees post-

pandemic. Leadership plays a critical role in the success of having remote employees.

Leadership can make decisions to have employees work in any location, but their support,

communication, and overall opinions on virtual work settings will determine the success of their

employees in different work environments. Since the pandemic revealed working from home as a

possible work setup, to stay competitive and retain employees, organizations will need to focus

on what options they are making available to their employees when it comes to remote policy.

This study focused on what employees want post-pandemic from their employers, but employers

need to also explain to their employees what the expectation is for them when working in a

remote work environment. There are many opportunities for further research studies on this

topic, as the future of work will not be the traditional brick-and-mortar building that many

employees were used to pre-pandemic. This research study focused on lessons learned from the

pandemic and that providing the ability to work from home will be the new normal that

companies are continually needing to keep up with to satisfy new and existing employees.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview Question 1

What motivates you to work?

Interview Question 2

What are your intrinsic and extrinsic work motivating factors?

Interview Question 3

How long does it take you to get ready before leaving to go to work?

Interview Question 4

How long is your commute to work?

Interview Question 5

What was your experience like working from home during the pandemic in March 2020?

Interview Question 6

How did you feel when the decision was to bring you back to the office?

Interview Question 7

What was the experience like going back to the office and then back to remote work in

June 2020 after the phased approach?

Interview Question 8

How did you feel after the decision was made to go back to the office in January 2021?

Interview Question 9

Describe how management changed their leadership style to meet the needs of a virtual

work environment.

Interview Question 10

Would you prefer to have the ability to work from home and not receive an annual

bonus?

Interview Question 11

Did you have any family members at home while you were working? If so, how was that

experience?

Interview Question 12

What about working from home did you like?

Interview Question 13

What about working from home did you not like?

Interview Question 14

What about the office do you like?

Interview Question 15

What about the office do you not like?

Interview Question 16

If you got to choose right now what the work-from-home policy would be, what would it

say?

Interview Question 17

Did you feel you would have had a different perspective of remote work if there was not

a global pandemic?

Interview Question 18

Did you feel prepared to work from home? Laptop? Dedicated workspace?

Interview Question 19

What is your current work-from-home schedule?

Interview Question 20

What is your preferred work environment: traditional office setting, remote, or a hybrid

approach? Why?

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Survey Question 1

Did you like working from home?

- Yes

- No

Survey Question 2

Do you like working in the office?

- Yes

- No

Survey Question 3

Do you agree with leadership's decision to bring employees back in the office?

- Yes

- No

Survey Question 4

What is your preferred work environment?

- Traditional Office Setting

- Remote

- Hybrid Approach

Survey Question 5

How many days a week would you like to work from home?

- 0 days

- 1 day

- 2 days

- 3 days

- 4 days

- 5 days

Survey Question 6

Did you feel prepared to work from home?

- Yes

- No

Survey Question 7

Did your company provide you with the right equipment to work from home?

- Yes

- No

Survey Question 8

Is it harder to concentrate while working in the office or at home?

- Office

- Home

Survey Question 9

Are meetings more productive in the office or at home?

- Office

- Home

Survey Question 10

Do you feel you worked longer or shorter days at home?

- Longer

- Shorter