

EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERSHIP IN A
MANDATORY REMOTE WORK ENVIRONMENT

by

Sara J. Valdez Hoffer

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Public Administration

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Gerald Regier, Committee Chair

Dr. Stacy Peerbolte, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study research was to identify effective public sector leadership skills when operating in a mandatory remote work environment. The research topic was driven by the adjustments many public sector organizations were mandated to make due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to attract and retain a talented workforce in the future, many government agencies have been faced with implementing reconstitution efforts that include more flexible schedule options for employees following the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, these organizations began exploring offering additional remote opportunities that were previously not available. Thus, identifying effective leadership skills in remote environments has become increasingly necessary for the future of the public sector. While much literature exists regarding e-leadership, there is limited research regarding e-leadership in the public sector based on mandatory remote work (Philip, 2021), and the literature fails to consider the impact of organizational culture on the success of e-leadership. A literature review identified effective e-leadership skills and the relationship between culture and successful public sector leadership. Qualitative research methods, including interviews, surveys, and observations, were used in one public organization to obtain the perspectives of persons working within the organization about the organization's transition to a mandatory remote work environment in the pandemic. This study is based on traditional public administration leadership theory and the emerging e-leadership subfield. The findings of this study revealed important leadership qualities that drive successful public sector outcomes in a remote environment and can be utilized in the 21st century in consideration of the rapid technological advancements currently occurring in government.

Keywords: mandatory remote work, e-leadership, public sector leadership, organizational culture

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my family members who have completely supported me in achieving all of my dreams. My husband, Brett, has been an inspiration to me and an amazing source of love and support since our very beginning. My two children, John and Miah, my loves, gave me the motivation to work hard and overcome obstacles so I could set an example for you. My mom, Fran, has always made me feel like I was her favorite child and could achieve anything in life with her love. My dad, Richard, has always been a stable source of love and support in my life. Finally, my siblings, Susie, Mike, Jake, and Fran, and my many nieces and nephews, whom I love dearly, I hope that you all know that with God, you can achieve anything too.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
Copyright Page (Optional)	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgments	6
List of Tables	14
List of Abbreviations	15
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	16
Overview	16
Situation to Self	17
Background	19
Historical	20
Social	22
Theoretical	23
Problem Statement	24
Purpose Statement	24
Nature of the Study	26
Significance of the Study	27
Research Questions	28
Definitions	30
Summary	31
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	33
Overview	33

Theoretical Framework.....	34
Traditional Public Sector Leadership Theory.....	35
Transformational Leadership.....	35
Servant Leadership.....	36
Transactional Leadership.....	37
Emerging Public Leadership Theory.....	38
Related Literature.....	39
Leadership.....	40
Public Sector Leadership.....	41
Leadership Skills.....	42
Remote Leadership.....	43
Remote Work Environment.....	46
Remote Work in the American Government.....	47
Mandatory Remote Work vs. Traditional Remote Work.....	49
E-Leadership in a Mandatory Remote Work Environment.....	50
E-Leadership Skills.....	51
Effective E-Leadership Skills in a Voluntary Remote Environment.....	52
Effective E-Leadership Skills in the Public Sector Virtual Environment.....	53
Leadership Training.....	57
Remote Organizational Structure and Culture.....	58
The Impact of Culture on Organizations.....	60
Culture and Virtual Work.....	61
Future Remote Work and Organizational Culture.....	62

Summary	64
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	65
Overview	65
Design	65
Qualitative	66
Nonexperimental	67
Case Study	68
Research Questions	68
Setting	69
Participants	71
Procedures	73
The Researcher's Role	75
Data Collection	76
Instruments	77
Surveys/Questionnaires	77
Interviews	78
Observations	81
Data Analysis	83
Analysis Systems	84
Analysis Procedures	84
Surveys	85
Interviews	86
Observations	86

	10
Data Integrity	87
Trustworthiness.....	87
Credibility	87
Dependability and Confirmability	88
Transferability.....	88
Ethical Considerations	89
Summary.....	90
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	91
Overview.....	91
Participants.....	92
Terry.....	93
Fran	93
Lisa.....	93
Sandy.....	94
Ana.....	94
Emma	95
Liz	95
Shannon.....	95
Susan.....	96
Mary	96
Alex.....	96
Results.....	97
Theme Development.....	97

First Cycle Coding	98
Quantitative Survey Questions	102
Synthesis	104
Effective Communication Is More Important than other Leadership Skills.....	104
Communication Is Important in Any Work Setting.....	105
Need For Information	106
Technology Facilitates Communication	107
E-Trustworthiness Is Important in the Mandatory Remote Work Environment	108
Trust Is Perceived by the Leaders' Actions	109
Trust Is Proven by Government Employees	110
Organizational Culture Facilitated Effective Leadership	110
Organizational Culture Remained Unchanged Throughout the Pandemic.....	111
Independent Administrative Culture.....	112
<i>Effective Leadership throughout the Pandemic</i>	<i>114</i>
Research Question Responses.....	114
Research Question One.....	114
Research Question Two	116
Research Question Three	116
Summary.....	117
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	119
Overview.....	119
Summary of Findings.....	119
Research Question 1	120

Research Question 2	121
Research Question 3	121
Discussion.....	121
Theoretical Literature.....	122
Empirical Literature	124
Implications.....	125
Theoretical Implications	126
Empirical Implications.....	127
Practical Implications.....	128
Delimitations and Limitations.....	129
Recommendations for Future Research	131
Summary	134
REFERENCES	136
APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter	147
APPENDIX B: Permission Request Letters	148
APPENDIX C: Example Permission Response Letters.....	149
APPENDIX D: Recruitment Flyer.....	150
APPENDIX E: Recruitment Letter.....	151
APPENDIX F: Consent Document.....	152
APPENDIX G: Survey Document.....	155
APPENDIX H: Recruitment Follow-Up Letter	159
APPENDIX I: Interview Questions	160
APPENDIX J: Observation Protocol.....	161

APPENDIX K: Chart of Themes and Sub-Themes	162
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List of Tables

Table 1. The Evolution of Telework in the American Federal Government	21
Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Total Government Service.....	72
Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Service with USMS	73
Table 4. Initial Analysis of Survey Responses	99
Table 5. Initial Analysis of Interview Transcripts	100
Table 6. Emerging Themes from Each Data Set.....	102
Table 7. Survey Results of Mean Rank of Most Important e-Leadership Skills When Operating in a Mandated Remote Work Environment	103

List of Abbreviations

Advanced Information Technology (AIT)

Government Accountability Office (GAO)

Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

Fiscal Year (FY)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic mandated most American government agencies into a remote or hybrid working environment to the maximum extent possible to protect the safety and health of federal workers and the American people (Office of Personnel Management, 2021). According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) report concerning telework in the federal government, there was a "significant" increase in the percentage of eligible federal employees who participated in telework during FY2021 when compared to previous years (Office of Personnel Management, 2021, p. 2). Many public organizations had not previously adopted a remote work policy or had a very limited remote policy in place. Thus, the organization, including its leaders, did not have prior training or knowledge regarding leading public sector employees in a remote work environment (Philip, 2021). However, the experience surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that telework can help the federal government deliver on its mission when implemented correctly (Office of Personnel Management, 2021, p. 2).

As a result of the changes implemented to address the safety concerns associated with the pandemic, many government agencies are now being challenged to expand workplace flexibility, including allowing continued remote work opportunities for the public sector workforce that were not previously available. These opportunities will aid the government in attracting and retaining a talented workforce in the future (Office of Personnel Management, 2021) and thereby necessitate the clear identification of effective e-leadership skills. This chapter provides a background of the issue that was explored in this study. It includes the situation to self, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the significance of the study. Additionally, this

chapter presents the research questions and key term definitions.

Situation to Self

I currently serve as a supervisor in a public sector agency. I directly supervise a unit made up of five employees in addition to other agency-wide programs. I have been employed by the federal government for 15 years. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, my employer had a telework policy that allowed staff members to telework for up to two days per week.

Management team members were prohibited from engaging in remote work, and leadership training for managers did not include information concerning the unique components of leadership associated with remote leadership. Further, existing policies and procedures do not identify the implications of existing policies on remote work. During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work became the predominant work environment for the agency.

Several factors piqued my interest and motivation to pursue this study. First, I recognize the immeasurable value of quality leadership in any organization and the significant importance of quality leadership in public sector organizations (Van Wart, 2003; Campbell, 2016; Van Wart, 2017a; Blair & Blight, 2018; Solomon et al., 2016). Leaders are invaluable to organizations in guaranteeing that the organization's mission is achieved and, in the public sector, that the mission concerns service to the citizens of the country (Van Wart, 2003). However, my experience as a supervisor has also revealed many challenges associated with public sector management and leadership. I have an ongoing interest in clearly identifying leadership qualities and practices that are most effective in the public sector. Next, I experienced the challenges associated with transitioning to a mandatory remote environment with little to no preparation. I have interacted with numerous other government employees from various organizations with similar experiences. It is clear that even three years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic,

there are many unanswered questions regarding leading in the mandatory remote environment (for example, there are contradicting interpretations of how to apply in-person policy requirements to a remote work environment). Through my study, I am interested in providing clear guidance to public sector leaders on leadership and navigating unnecessary scenarios of uncertainty.

My approach to this research can be classified as positivist. I believe in following a series of logically related steps in conducting research and gathering various methods of data from participants. Thus, I took a scientific approach to this research (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Additionally, the philosophical assumptions I brought to this study were ontological, epistemological, and axiological. My ontological assumption is characterized by the concept that a phenomenon has multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a researcher, I have my views of reality but recognize that the participants of the study and the readers of this study also have their realities. Under the epistemological assumption, knowledge is gained from the subjective experiences of people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I sought to get as close to the participants being studied as possible to understand their experiences. I used my professional experience as a public sector employee to minimize separateness between myself and those being researched (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, my axiological assumption is characterized by the values I bring to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, I recognize that I have values and biases based on my knowledge and experience, specifically those experiences of myself and my colleagues and friends during the COVID-19 pandemic and our transition to remote work. As a result, I recognize that this study represents an interpretation of the situation by myself and by the study's subjects (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Background

The concept of e-leadership in both the public and the private sector has existed for several years and has resulted in a large body of academic research that has shown there are additional styles, understandings, and skills necessary for successful e-leadership in addition to those leadership practices that yielded successful outcomes in traditional in-person work settings (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b). However, a distinguishing characteristic of the COVID-19-driven e-leadership was that, unlike previous e-leadership that was implemented as the result of organizational choice, the COVID-19-driven e-leadership was mandated in response to the safety risks posed to public sector employees and the American people during the pandemic (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

Leaders are seen as the primary driver for innovation and change in organizations (Blair & Blight, 2018). Leaders in public administration generally have an even greater set of responsibilities higher than ordinary civil servants or other government officials (Solomon et al., 2016). However, the success of leadership is not solely based on the individual leader; it is impacted by other important factors, including general factors, the leader's personal factors, and specific factors in the organization (Solomon et al., 2016). Organizational culture is about shared meaning and interaction, and it can severely limit the success of leadership in any setting (Fischer, 2010, p. 66). As a result, analyses of successful leadership skills must consider the organizational culture.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a unique circumstance in which many organizations were mandated into remote work platforms (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Philip, 2021), eliminating the ability to make organizational preparations such as ensuring appropriate training for leaders and managers and ensuring the presence of effective e-leadership skills. Many leaders operating

in virtual work conditions have no prior experience or training in operating in a digitalized environment (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Richter, 2020). Further, the need for successful e-leadership skills has continued to grow as public agencies implemented viable reconstitution efforts for the future following the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing public administration literature documents the need for leaders to possess a digital skillset (Van Wart, 2017a) and analyze successful e-leadership practices and styles in virtual work environments (Avolio et al., 2014). This literature also explores the impact of organizational culture on the success or failure of traditional leadership (Meng & Berger, 2019). However, current research is deficient in analyzing successful e-leadership practices in a mandatory public sector remote environment. It also fails to adequately analyze the impact of organizational culture on leadership in a mandatory public sector remote environment. The research provided in this paper fills this gap by analyzing existing literature and gathering the perspectives of government workers on mandatory remote work environments to identify successful e-leadership skills, considering the significance of the organizational culture.

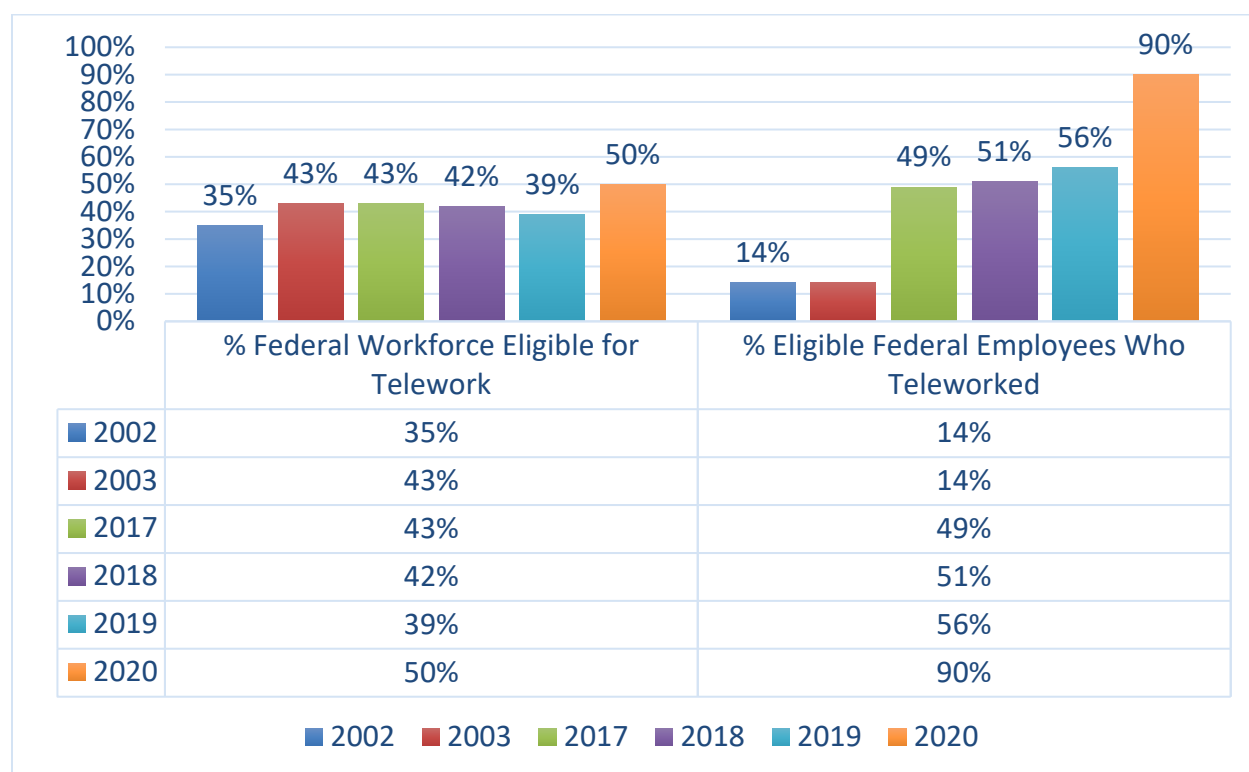
Historical

The concept of e-leadership emerged around the year 2000 to incorporate advanced information technology (AIT) into the study of leadership (Avolio et al., 2014; Avolio et al., 2001). Following the rapid advancement of technology deployed in the mid-1990s, the importance of examining how technology impacts the way people work together became apparent (Avolio et al., 2014). In the American federal government, the OPM provides an annual report on telework for Congress that highlights how federal government agencies have made progress in utilizing telework to deliver mission outcomes, act as efficient stewards of government resources, and continue to provide excellent customer service (Office of Personnel

Management, 2021). The OPM began a survey of federal agencies to develop this report in 2000, and the first published report was released in 2002 (Office of Personnel Management, 2022a). According to this report, in 2003, 43 percent of the federal workforce was eligible for telework (compared to 35 percent in 2002), which represented an increase of 93 percent between 2001 and 2003 in the federal workforce eligible for telework, despite actual participation by only 14% of federal employees (Office of Personnel Management, 2004). The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 through 2022 resulted in lockdowns in many countries, including the United States, which made digital work no longer an option but, instead, a new norm for office workers (Richter, 2020). As a result, in 2020, 90 percent of eligible federal employees participated in telework (Office of Personnel Management, 2021), which represented a significant increase compared to prior years (See Figure 1).

Figure 1.

The Evolution of Telework in the American Federal Government



Thus, successful e-leadership skills have become vital for leaders at all levels, and the need for leaders to possess technological skills has become critical (Van Wart, 2017a). It has further been recognized that the leadership skills needed in traditional environments and virtual environments are not the same (Van Wart et al., 2017b; Orazi et al., 2013).

Social

A leader determines the direction and meaning of a group and then motivates the group to achieve the desired results (Solomon et al., 2016). Effective leadership yields a higher-quality work product, more efficiency, higher job satisfaction, and successful collaborative initiatives (Van Wart, 2003; Campbell, 2018). In the public sector, leaders range from frontline supervisors to the nonpolitical heads of the organization (Van Wart, 2003), and have an even higher degree of responsibility (Solomon et al., 2016) than leaders in the private sector. As a result, the need for leaders, especially public sector leaders, to have clear direction is extremely important, and therefore training investments are necessary and wise in the public sector (Seidle et al., 2016). Because modern leaders must be able to adopt and implement new technology, those who are poor at adopting technology are considered less effective (Van Wart, 2017a).

E-leadership is the leadership approach when AIT is implemented, resulting in the physical distance between leaders and followers (Avolio et al., 2000; Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). Despite the well-documented need for leaders to operate effectively (Solomon et al., 2016; Van Wart, 2003; Campbell, 2018), the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled a need for public sector employees to be adequately trained in skills needed to successfully lead in a mandatory remote work environment. While e-government and e-administration have been popular topics of discussion for many years, discussion of e-leadership in a government context has been almost nonexistent (Van Wart et al., 2017b), including discussion of effective e-leadership in a

mandatory remote work environment (Philip, 2021). Consequently, many public sector leaders, potentially lacking the needed skills or training for e-leadership, remain at a high risk of not being able to effectively lead in a mandatory remote work environment.

Theoretical

This study explored the lived professional experiences of public sector employees who transitioned from a traditional in-person work setting to a mandatory remote work setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of great importance to this study was understanding public sector employees' perceptions of the leadership skills necessary for success in the mandatory remote work environment. The foundation for this study was traditional public administration leadership theory. Public sector leadership is overall a relatively new area of study (Van Wart, 2015). Traditional public administration leadership theory includes transformational leadership, transactional leadership, servant leadership, and other emerging theories regarding public administration. It explains how leadership theories have been applied to public administration and evolved over time (Van Wart, 2003). More recently, emerging public administration theory includes an analysis of the ongoing digital revolution and how technology impacts public sector leadership, resulting in a subfield of e-leadership (Van Wart et al., 2017a). Although the public sector has documented its efforts to support remote opportunities for federal employees (Office of Personnel Management, 2021), many organizations have failed to integrate necessary skills and understandings concerning AIT and mandatory remote work environments into existing leadership training (Chamakiotis et al., 2021); this then became visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Public administration theory emphasizes the need for effective leaders to adopt and implement technology (Van Wart, 2017a).

Problem Statement

Therefore, the problem is that public sector organizations have not considered, identified, or trained their personnel on necessary e-leadership skills for a remote work environment that was mandated or not intentionally organized.

Effective leadership is an essential component of organizational success (Van Wart, 2003), and in order for leadership to be effective moving forward, it must involve leaders possessing a digital skillset and successfully integrating technology (Van Wart et al., 2017a) into their work. Yet, discussions regarding effective e-leadership in the public sector to date have almost been nonexistent (Van Wart et al., 2017b). In the public sector, technological advancements such as the adoption of remote work environments have been steadily progressing for several years and very rapidly evolved during the COVID-19 pandemic (Office of Personnel Management, 2021). One key difference regarding remote work that became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic was the difference between traditional, planned remote work, where certain tasks, times, and personnel were singled out for that purpose, and mandatory remote work (Philip, 2021). These differences in pre- and post-pandemic remote work practices highlighted a deficit in research regarding e-leadership skills necessary to be successful in a mandatory remote environment. This study is necessary to address the deficit by exploring the experiences and perspectives of public sector employees who were mandated to transition to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and identify effective e-leadership skills from the perspective of managers and employees operating in a mandatory remote work environment. E-leadership skills are defined as those skills needed by leaders operating in a

virtual or online platform where leaders and followers interact virtually from separate remote locations (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). Identifying effective e-leadership skills following the COVID-19 pandemic will be imperative for public sector organizations moving forward. Leadership is a critical element of any public sector organization (Van Wart, 2003). However, in recent times and further accelerated following the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional leadership is undergoing drastic changes, including changes to the leader and follower relationship (Philip, 2021). These changes are primarily due to advances in technology that have prompted more remote work options for public sector employees than in the past (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

The changes resulting from the pandemic have presented additional challenges for managers and leaders, including the identification of effective skills and behaviors related to the practice of e-leadership in the public sector (Spicer, 2019). E-leadership encompasses leadership when leaders and followers work from separate remote locations in a virtual fashion (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). Further complicating e-leadership during the past three years was the mandatory nature of remote work that both the private and public sectors experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chamakiotis et al., 2021), which presented very little time for transition (Philip, 2021).

Contextual issues, including organizational culture, are widely understood to have an impact on the success of the organization and the effectiveness of leadership (Savard & Mizoguchi, 2019; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015). The organization's cultural values influence how leadership roles are enacted and received and how organizational changes are advanced (Spicer, 2019). Thus, leadership is mediated by organizational culture (Kargas & Varoutas, 2015). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on organizational cultures and interactions among peers (Spicer, 2019). This has emphasized the need to explore and identify

the significance of organizational culture in the effort to determine how the culture of the organization impacts the e-leadership skills that are identified and hence the effectiveness of leadership in a mandatory remote work environment.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative case study approach was selected for this study because it provides a systematic method to explain a phenomenon (Lune & Berg, 2017). The current study aimed to obtain the perspectives of public sector employees whose lived experiences included the government-wide transition to mandatory remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are no known studies that have explored the perspectives of public sector employees on this research topic. The case study design allowed a systematic method to investigate the transition of a public sector organization to a mandatory remote work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lune & Berg, 2017) in order to identify the leadership skills necessary for success in a mandatory remote work environment. A qualitative case study approach begins with the identification of a specific case that will be analyzed (such as an individual, a community, or an event), which can be defined within certain parameters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The U.S. Marshals Service is an organization that did not allow telework prior to the COVID-19 pandemic but was mandated to allow remote work during the pandemic. The U.S. Marshals Service, therefore, provided a real-life case that was in progress as the government worked to make transitions post-pandemic. The parameters for this study were defined by location, the judicial district where the U.S. Marshals Service operates (District of Kansas and the Western District of Missouri), and the timeframe in which the case was studied (the COVID-19 pandemic). By utilizing the case study design, I was able to gather deeper insights, such as details regarding the lived experiences of public sector employees, specifically employees of the U.S. Marshals

Service, in order to gather in-depth, accurate information through various forms of qualitative data, including surveys, interviews, and fieldwork (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data were then captured in detailed field notes and coded into themes that represent specific situations to study; the patterns or explanations were then summarized.

Significance of the Study

This study sought to contribute to the empirical literature on effective e-leadership skills in the public sector. Specifically, this study explored the e-leadership skills necessary to be effective in a mandatory remote work environment, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is a body of research that analyzes virtual work and e-leadership in the public sector (Elyousfi et al., 2021; Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017a; Van Wart et al., 2017b), the vast majority of this literature examines those scenarios that involve planned virtual work environments that were intentionally implemented. A few relatively recent studies explored the advancements of digital work during the COVID-19 pandemic and captured the mandatory remote work dynamic (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Obenauf, 2021; Driscoll, 2020; Philip, 2021; Steude, 2021). However, these studies fail to focus specifically on the public sector, which has a unique set of requirements for leaders (Solomon et al., 2016). For instance, discussions are outlined in the research literature differentiating between mandated digital transformations and planned remote work (Philip, 2021), and the idea that the pandemic made digital work a new norm is established (Richter, 2020).

This study was theoretically significant because it aimed to contribute to emerging public administration theory and, more specifically, contribute to the subfield that is focused on e-leadership or leadership that operates in a virtual setting. As research has documented, leaders of the future must possess a specialized digital skillset (Van Wart et al., 2017a). Yet, until now, e-

leadership resulting from mandated digital transformations has been excluded from research and discussions about virtual work transformations (Philip, 2021).

This study's practical significance relates to the future of public sector leadership following the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides an increased understanding of the skills needed for public sector leaders to effectively lead in the future. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many public sector employees were eligible for remote work opportunities (Office of Personnel Management, 2021), but the dynamics of how those remote work opportunities were presented to employees and were managed was altered during the pandemic (Richter, 2020). As public sector organizations implement their reconstitution efforts, they recognize the value of utilizing remote work opportunities to attract and retain a talented workforce in the future (Office of Personnel Management, 2021). This information will assist in decision-making concerning the training of leaders and managers to ensure that effective leadership is available in any public sector virtual work environment.

Research Questions

Public sector leaders are not only responsible for the group they lead but also for the citizens affected by their decisions (Solomon et al., 2016); they therefore have a critical need for effective leadership skills in any environment (Van Wart, 2015). However, there is minimal literature that analyzes exactly what skills are effective for public sector leaders in a mandatory remote work environment. Existing research primarily addresses remote work resulting from a planned organizational initiative or mandatory remote work in environments other than the public sector. Three research questions guided this study to understand the perspectives of those public sector employees who were employed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the

government-wide mandate to transition to a remote work environment on the leadership skills that are most effective in a mandatory remote work environment.

RQ1: What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective e-leadership skills in a public sector mandatory remote work environment?

A literature review indicated that research exploring public sector employees' experiences of working in a mandatory remote work environment was limited or non-existent (Elyousfi et al., 2021). The first research question was relevant to conducting research into the lived experiences of government employees who experienced work transitions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Social worlds are constructed, made, and remade by human activity, and social science research can help to identify key factors in them (Lune & Berg, 2019). Therefore, it is important to gather the perspectives of subjects in order to gain their in-depth insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid changes employees and leaders faced drastically impacted adaptation to the new work environment, and, as such, exploring their perspectives is necessary (Richter, 2020).

RQ2: What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective leadership skills in a traditional work environment that remain important in a mandatory remote work environment?

The research literature has established the skills needed in traditional in-person work environments and virtual environments are not exactly the same (Van Wart et al., 2017b; Orazi et al., 2013), though some leadership skills may be applicable to both environments (Dennis, 2021). Further, Spagnoli et al. (2021) have also suggested that the actions of leaders can mitigate the risks of negative consequences associated with remote work; it is consequently important to identify which skills are transferable from an in-person environment to a virtual environment.

Thus, the second research question is relevant to obtaining the perspectives of public sector employees on those transferrable leadership skills that may promote success in a mandatory virtual environment.

RQ3: What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to the impact of organizational culture on effective e-leadership skills?

Research has shown that leadership styles vary based on contextual factors such as the cultural environment (Orazi et al., 2013), and that organizational culture can limit the success of leadership in the organization (Fischer, 2010; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015). During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizational cultures were transformed (Spicer, 2020; Keiser, 2021; Driscoll, 2020). E-leaders of the future have a need to identify the organizational conditions that make e-leadership most effective (Torre & Sarti, 2020). Thus, the third research question is relevant to obtaining the perspectives of public sector employees who experienced a mandatory transition during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the impact of their organizational culture on effective e-leadership skills in a mandatory remote work environment.

Definitions

1. *E-leadership* – A social influence process embedded in both proximal and distal contexts, mediated by AIT [Advanced Information Technology] that can produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and performance (Avolio et al., 2014, p. 107). E-leadership is often referred to as virtual or online leadership, where leaders and followers interact from remote locations virtually (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019).
2. *Public Sector leadership* – Van Wart (2003) refers to “administrative leadership” as “leadership from the frontline supervisor (or even lead worker) to the nonpolitical head of the organization” (page 216).

3. *Remote leadership* – also known as e-leadership, is a specific type of leadership that involves utilizing technology to manage and lead employees while they work at a distance from the company (Steude, 2019).
4. *Mandatory remote work* – Also known as forced remote work. A transition of large parts of global working populations to virtual, home-based working modes that is not the result of choice but, instead, a matter of organizational continuity (Chamakiotis et al., 2021, Richter, 2020). Remote work is also referred to as telework by public sector employees.

Summary

This study explored effective public sector leadership in a mandatory remote work environment. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, mandatory remote work was not included in discussions on e-leadership (Philip, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 to 2022 provided a unique circumstance where mandatory remote work was implemented or expanded in many government organizations (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Office of Personnel Management, 2021). As a result of the pandemic, research has proposed that virtual work will be a new norm for office workers (Richter, 2021). The problem is that public sector organizations have not considered, identified, or trained their personnel on necessary e-leadership skills for a remote work environment that was mandated or not intentionally organized. This qualitative study sought to explore and identify e-leadership practices from the perspectives of public sector employees who operated in a mandatory remote work environment. Further, the study analyzed the impact of organizational culture on the success of the identified e-leadership skills. This chapter outlined an academic need to identify and explore the e-leadership skills needed to effectively operate in a mandatory public sector remote work environment. Specifically, in

addition to presenting the problem and purpose statements, it outlined the empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Research outlining the importance of leadership in any organization, and specifically in public sector organizations, is extensive (Van Wart, 2003; Campbell, 2016; Van Wart, 2017a; Blair & Blight, 2018; Solomon et al., 2016; Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019; Torre & Sarti, 2020). Leadership is complex and involves various skills, characteristics, and behavioral competencies by the leader in a particular setting (Van Wart, 2015; Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). The most important measurement of leadership is its effectiveness (Torre & Sarti, 2020). In the public sector, leadership is usually summarized as a process of influencing, motivating, and directing a group of individuals toward a common goal (Solomon et al., 2016) in an environment with certain structural and practical limitations (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). Remote leadership, also known as e-leadership, is a specific type of leadership that involves managing and leading employees utilizing technology while they work at a distance from the company (Steude, 2019).

A remote work environment can be the result of a planned organizational change, or it can result from a mandatory transformation, with the significant distinguishing characteristic of each being the level of voluntariness involved in the transition from an in-person setting to a remote work setting (Philip, 2021). While research on effective e-leadership in a voluntary remote environment is extensive, there is limited research exploring e-leadership in a mandatory remote environment, and the academic research that exists regarding e-leadership in a mandatory public sector environment is minimal. Further, research exploring specific external factors that may significantly affect e-leadership is also very limited. An exception is research documenting

that organizational culture can limit the success of leadership (Fischer, 2010; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015).

An exhaustive literature search was conducted primarily using the Liberty University Jerry Falwell Library. The keywords used to perform this search included *public sector leadership skills; forced remote work; e-leadership; public sector e-leadership; virtual teams; COVID-19 pandemic leadership; virtual work; public sector culture; and public sector leadership theory*. Additionally, similar searches were conducted using Google and Google Scholar to locate other publications, including government studies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was built around traditional public sector leadership theory and the emerging e-leadership subfield. Traditional public sector leadership theories focus on the significant constraints and the unique working environment of public sector leaders and are generally determined by the nature of the interaction between leaders and their subordinates (Van Wart, 2003; Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). Dating back to the 1800s, these theories recognize that public sector leaders must consider the traits, skills, and behaviors of traditional leaders but within a unique environment and a unique mission (Van Wart, 2003).

Public organizations of the 21st-century face even more complex problems, including limited resources; advances in information technology; better-informed stakeholders; and a unique system of information flow (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). E-leadership theory is built upon traditional leadership theories but then integrates the changes and impacts that technology generates in modern leadership experiences (Avolio et al., 2000). The following will explain these two theoretical approaches.

Traditional Public Sector Leadership Theory

Public sector literature on leadership theory and research has historically focused on six primary eras of leadership theory: great man, trait, contingency, transformational, transactional, and servant (Van Wart, 2003). Great man theories propose that leaders “are essentially born, probably allowing for some significant early training” (Van Wart, 2015, p. 25). Trait theories explore long lists of personal traits associated with leaders, and contingency theories place an emphasis on the situational variables that leaders face (Van Wart, 2003). Transformational and transactional leadership theories have been considered central concepts in public administration and thus are prominent in public administration research (Nielsen et al., 2018). They provide a framework for research related to leadership in the public sector, with transformational theories focusing on purpose within work and transactional theories focusing on rewards and sanctions; research has suggested they can and should be used in combination so that the public sector may experience the benefits of both (Nielsen et al., 2018). Finally, servant leadership is a theory that builds on a leader’s efforts to focus on the needs of their followers (Sharpp et al., 2019), and it is also significant in the study of e-leadership skills. Combined, these six eras of leadership theory have strengthened the literature on public sector leadership by generating discussions about the proper role of administrators in a democratic system (Van Wart, 2003). I will focus on three of these traditional leadership approaches.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a key concept in public sector leadership. It has been identified as a set of behaviors that target a follower’s sense of purpose and inspire work by activating higher-order needs (Campbell, 2018; Nielsen et al., 2018). It often receives attention for the role of positive emotions and the impact of vision and organizational change involved in

this form of leadership (Van Wart, 2015; Van Wart, 2003). More specifically, according to transformational leadership theories, leaders are more concerned with the beliefs, values, and needs of followers (Said, 2020). A central concept is to develop a shared understanding between leaders and followers of organizational goals and the desired outcomes of the agency (Nielsen et al., 2018). Transformational settings assume that change is inevitable and healthy, and transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to affect change in organizations by recognizing the need for revitalization, creating a new vision, and then institutionalizing change (Van Wart, 2015). This leadership style has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes, including positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace, integrated thinking, and organizational innovation (Campbell, 2018; Nielsen et al., 2018). In generic leadership literature, transformational leadership is identified as one of the most influential paradigms and has become dominant in the literature on public management (Nielsen et al., 2018). Prominent theorists in traditional public sector transformational leadership theory include Bernard Bass and James Macgregor Burns (Van Wart, 2003).

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership theory emphasizes the ethical responsibilities of leaders to followers, society, and stakeholders (Van Wart, 2003). It is anchored in the belief surrounding a human drive to contribute to the betterment of society and emphasizes service motivation and support of followers through empowerment, participation, and the development of people with empathy and humility in leadership or setting aside the leader's self-interest for the betterment of followers (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012; Van Wart, 2015). Servant leaders take a special interest in the personal growth of followers (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). They are concerned with healing, equality, listening, acceptance, and inclusion and utilize quiet persuasion to achieve end goals

(Van Wart, 2015). The prominent theorist of this style of leadership is Robert Greenleaf (Van Wart, 2003). However, Mittal and Dorfman (2012) point out that servant leadership is actually rooted in religion and philosophy. Specifically, the Bible notes, “But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister; And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life for ransom for many” (King James Version, 1769/2016, Mark 10:43-45).

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership theories refer to a system of leadership where managers view and utilize their role as leaders in a transactional way (Van Wart, 2013). These theories emphasize the importance of worker needs and motivations and describe a system that links rewards and sanctions to employee behaviors, efforts, and results (Van Wart, 2015; Nielsen et al., 2018). According to transactional leadership theories, leaders establish an exchange process with followers regarding performance and rewards (Said, 2020), with the rewards being oriented toward the employee’s self-interest (Nielsen et al., 2018). This reward system includes, for example, verbal rewards such as positive feedback, which can enhance intrinsic motivation by satisfying employee needs for competence (Nielsen et al., 2018). Thus, in transactional leadership, employees have the expectation that efforts to enhance performance will be rewarded (Nielsen et al., 2018). Transactional settings are assumed to be stable, and transactional leaders rely heavily on power and authority to have the ability to administer and adjust incentives to employees; they must also have the right to appeal in order to be able to sell ideas and be trusted by workers (Van Wart, 2015). Prominent theorists in this school of leadership theory include Bernard Bass (Van Wart, 2003).

Emerging Public Leadership Theory

E-leadership is an emerging context in the public sector to examine leadership that involves a social influence process to produce “attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and/or performance with individuals, groups, and/or organizations” mediated by advanced information technology (Avolio et al., 2000, p. 617). E-leadership is often referred to as virtual or online leadership, where leaders and followers interact from remote locations virtually (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). The quality of relationships and exchanges between leaders and followers plays an important role in the effectiveness of e-leadership (Avolio et al., 2000). The digital revolution has changed the interactions between leaders and followers through the use of information and communication technologies (Van Wart et al., 2017b). Such changed interactions have resulted in a call for more extensive definitions of leadership in the public sector that include integration of decision-making related to information and communication technology (Van Wart et al., 2017a).

Van Wart et al. (2017a) noted the virtual nonexistence of theory building in organizational studies and public administration on how the digital revolution has changed interactions between leaders and followers. In fact, the study of public sector leadership theory has historically lagged behind the study of mainstream leadership (Van Wart, 2015; Torre & Sarti, 2020). In the latter, a body of research has shown that transactional and transformational leadership strategies remain as relevant in the virtual work environment as they were in the in-person work environment. For example, recent studies have shown that remote transformational leadership can have many of the same positive effects on attitudes and performance in a virtual environment as this type of leadership does in the traditional in-person setting (Kelloway et al., 2003; Jones & Schoning, 2021). Specifically, transformational leadership requires an

understanding that leaders care for those they supervise; it involves concepts such as influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized considerations, and inspirational motivation; and it has been shown to have similar effects in a remote environment as in a traditional work environment (Sinclair et al., 2021; Kelloway et al., 2003; Jones & Schoning, 2021). E-leadership has been documented as being derived from the servant leadership and transformational leadership schools of theory (Sharpp et al., 2019). Thus, the servant, transformational, and transactional theories of leadership provided a framework for effective leadership in a remote work environment that this study then built upon to further contribute to public sector leadership theory associated with the emerging subfield of e-leadership.

Related Literature

While it is believed that no prior studies exist exploring e-leadership through the qualitative research methodologies outlined for this study, literature has documented research concerning many of the relevant concepts of this study. To begin, it is well-documented that leadership in the public sector is extremely important (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019; Fischer, 2010) and that leadership skills substantially contribute to leader effectiveness (Van Wart, 2015). For example, research has established that leaders must have a digital skillset, which has led to the development of the leadership subfield referred to as e-leadership (Van Wart, 2017a). In addition, it is widely understood that the effectiveness of leadership is also impacted by contextual issues (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). The leader's work environment establishes requirements for a specific skillset for success in that environment (Van Wart et al., 2017b; Orazi et al., 2013). Organizational culture has also been shown to significantly affect the success of leadership (Savard & Mizoguchi, 2019; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015).

Leadership

Leadership has been defined as a process that involves certain acts, including assessing the environment and the leader's constraints; developing traits and skills associated with leadership; modifying a leadership style based on different situations; achieving goals; and examining performance to develop the potential of the leader (Van Wart, 2015). Leadership is necessary for success in any organization (Fischer, 2010), and the leader of any organization is generally recognized as an individual or individuals who are credited with determining the direction of the group, obtaining group cohesion, managing people and processes, and motivating the group to achieve the desired results (Solomon et al., 2016). Leaders are expected to achieve goals, maintain efficiency, provide resources and training, and coordinate operations (Van Wart, 2015). One of the most important things leaders do in their role is to make decisions based on their judgment (Van Wart, 2015).

Leaders are often seen as the primary drivers for innovation and advancement in any organization (Blair & Blight, 2018); therefore, they have been referred to as the true agents of change (Solomon et al., 2016). Thus, leadership requires a keen ability to influence others (Solomon et al., 2016; Fischer, 2010; Torre & Sarti, 2020). Leaders "convince people to work for a common goal" (Goleman, 2002, p. 222, as cited by Solomon et al., 2016). Good leaders are able to constructively evaluate organizational strengths and weaknesses to identify areas for improvement (Fischer, 2010). Leadership has been linked to many successful organizational initiatives (Campbell, 2018). For example, leaders play a substantial role in the promotion of organizational change (Van Wart et al., 2017a). Researchers examining leadership have acknowledged the complexity of the subject, noting that it requires consideration of sophisticated models in order to gain practical insights (Van Wart, 2015; Van Wart, 2003).

Public Sector Leadership

Leadership in the field of public administration has evolved from the same principles of leadership associated with other fields, except that the public manager has an even more distinct set of responsibilities that include a degree of responsibility higher than ordinary civil servants or other government officials (Solomon et al., 2016); they face a distinct set of challenges (An et al., 2022; Seidle et al., 2016), and they operate in a unique environment (Van Wart, 2003). Like leadership in other organizational settings, governmental leadership involves strategically influencing, motivating, and directing members of the organization toward the organization's mission (Solomon et al., 2016); however, public sector leaders operate in an environment defined by certain structural constraints and limitations (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019) and also recognize that public sector leadership always strives to meet the needs of the public (Solomon et al., 2016). Public managers often simultaneously exercise a combination of different types of leadership to achieve organizational goals (Nielsen et al., 2018).

Formal leadership in the public sector is established through position and authority in the organization (Van Wart, 2015), but influence remains imperative in achieving successful leadership (Solomon et al., 2016; Fischer, 2010). However, the constraints associated with public sector leadership can neutralize and diminish its impact (Seidle et al., 2016). Goal ambiguity and conflict are more common in the public sector, which can hinder public leaders' ability to establish direction, and higher levels of formalization in government can limit public leaders' autonomy (Seidle et al., 2016). Public organizations also tend to have more stakeholders, which impacts agency objectives (An et al., 2022; Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). For example, public organizations tend to be made up of multiple departments with separate goals (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). Public sector leaders in the 21st century face a growing set of

demands primarily driven by limited resources, informed stakeholders, the media, and advances in information technology (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). Thus, traditional public sector research has placed a great emphasis on identifying the skills needed for effective public sector leadership (Van Wart, 2015).

Leadership Skills

Leadership skills are summarized as the learned characteristics of the performance of leaders, and they are highly impacted by training, education, and practical application (Van Wart, 2015). Leadership skills can actually be acquired and enhanced through self-disciplined study and practice. For example, many leaders began as introverted leaders but later developed highly effective leadership skills; therefore, it is important to clearly identify the skills necessary to lead effectively so that they can be actively cultivated by leaders (Van Wart, 2015). Research has identified several skills as important for leaders in the public sector.

The most effective leaders possess high professional and managerial competencies and a strong knowledge base, along with the skills that are needed to build appropriate relationships and facilitate collaboration among leadership, subordinates, and stakeholders (Solomon et al., 2016; Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). For example, leaders must be able to promote among staff a clearly defined set of expectations and desired outcomes in order to avoid the tendency to micromanage them, which can negatively impact productivity (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). Van Wart (2015) has identified the following as the most critical skills that contribute to leader effectiveness in the public sector:

- Communication skills, including oral, written, listening, and non-verbal communication, are fundamental in leadership;

- Social skills are a major pillar of the skillset needed to be an effective leader, since leadership is about dealing with people;
- Influence skills, “the actual use of sources of power through concrete behavioral strategies” (p. 300), are the methods by which leaders increase or diminish their power;
- Analytical skills are the skills leaders use to deal with complex and ambiguous situations; and
- Technical skills are needed even if leaders are not going to complete the technical work themselves, in order to obtain the loyalty and respect of employees.

According to Van Wart (2015, p. 318), “Leaders must be masters of language, interaction, influence, ideas, credibility, and change.” In the public sector, leaders must not only possess these traditional leadership skills: Good public sector leaders must also be able to incorporate into those skills certain characteristics such as honesty and devotion and always strive to meet the needs of the public, recognizing that the public sector leader is not only responsible for their specific work group but for all individuals affected by the decisions of the work group (Solomon et al., 2016).

Remote Leadership

Leaders depend on followers to perform the actual work of the organization (Van Wart, 2003). Most published research regarding leadership has been focused on contexts where leaders and followers are located proximally (Neufeld et al., 2010). Yet, in recent years, working from home has become widespread (Steude, 2021), which has resulted in equally widespread implementation of remote leadership (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). In fact, leadership in modern times has been documented as being as much virtual as it is face-to-face (Chamakiotis et al.,

2021). Remote leadership has been recognized as a critical prerequisite and contributor to successful virtual work environments (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

Leadership in traditional work environments and leadership in virtual work environments are distinct (Van Wart et al., 2017b; Orazi et al., 2013). In a virtual work platform, the already difficult task of leadership is further complicated by the physical distance that exists between the leaders and managers and their followers, which has raised concerns about the loss of interaction between managers and leaders (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). Greater distance lessens opportunities for shared experiences (Keiser, 2021). Further, scholars have noted that virtual workers tend to perform less efficiently than in-person employees (Shwartz-Asher and Ahituv, 2019; Gera et al., 2013 as cited by Elyousfi et al., 2021). Thus, managing virtually is unique and demands more coordination than traditional management (Elyousfi et al., 2021). For example, trust has been established as a well-documented element of effective leadership, and it is extremely crucial for virtual work (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019; Elyousfi et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2018). Trust is established through interactions and collaboration (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). Yet, online communication does not necessarily provide an effective means for leaders and followers to express feelings and intentions as they would in a face-to-face setting (Kulshreshtha & Sharma, 2021) in order to build trusting relationships. Instead, e-leaders are challenged to build trust through virtual communication (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). Electronic communication is beneficial in any setting in that it allows leaders to communicate faster and to a larger platform of employees and is generally viewed as equally important to traditional forms of communication (Liu et al., 2018). But there are still several concerns with online communication. For example, many managers operating in a remote environment are often engaged in other work while communicating with their staff through the use of technology,

which can lead to miscommunication and even inaccurate communication with employees (Kulshreshtha & Sharma, 2021). As a result, remote leaders may have greater difficulty than traditional in-person leaders in achieving high levels of effective communication and building trust (Neufeld et al., 2010). Overall, it appears the effectiveness of leaders' interactions with followers on remote platforms seems to greatly depend on how the leader facilitates those interactions (Avolio et al., 2014).

In order to recruit a talented workforce in the future, organizations are challenged to offer work conditions that are attractive to potential employees, including telework or remote work opportunities (Steude, 2021; Office of Personnel Management, 2021), and leaders are expected to become effective in dealing with the unique challenges associated with leading in digital space (Van Wart et al., 2017a). Research has documented how leadership commitment to agency telework initiatives is critical to the effective management of teleworkers (Kwon & Jeon, 2018). Yet, the vast majority of leaders in the present day have received little training or education on the skills needed to effectively lead in the current remote environment; further, Roman et al. (2018) have argued that significant steps forward in advancing the concept of e-leadership have yet to be taken. There is a large body of research identifying the characteristics of a good leader who can lead a group in good and bad situations (Al Sawai 2013; George 2000 as cited by Said, 2020). For example, in the field of public administration, research has established that good leaders recognize they have additional responsibilities besides those of private-sector leaders, and they are aware that their decisions affect the citizens, resulting in an added need to take responsibility for actions (Solomon et al., 2016). But these studies do not focus on a virtual environment.

Research has shown that developing leaders with the needed skills to succeed in the

global, complex work environment is a critical challenge for organizations (Dennis et al., 2021) in the future. One great concern of this new work environment is the role technology has played in influencing jobs, operations, and organizational structures and processes (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). Further complicating this concern is the gap that continues to exist in digital-related skills, with that gap in skills by American federal employees being documented as significant (Van Wart, 2017a).

Remote Work Environment

While traditional leadership strategies provide the framework for effective e-leadership, the unique components of remote work environments have also been shown to impact leadership effectiveness (Savard & Mizoguchi, 2019; Van Wart et al., 2017b; Orazi et al., 2013). For example, casual encounters that facilitate effortless relationship building in an in-person environment most likely do not exist in virtual work environments, creating additional challenges for remote leaders, as relationships are critical to successful leadership (Gerke, 2006). Remote work environments (also known as virtual work environments) are distinctly characterized by the physical distance between leaders and followers (Steude, 2019; Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). Several advantages of remote work have been identified through research, including reducing mobility and traffic; creating greater job satisfaction and generating positive effects on work-life balance; reducing stress; increasing productivity and employee satisfaction; and increasing the likelihood of employee retention (Steude, 2021; Meghana & Vijaya, 2019; Elyousfi et al., 2021). Yet, remote work also poses a distinct set of challenges for organizations (Torre & Sarti, 2020). Still, the adoption of remote work environments in the American public sector has been progressing for several years (Office of Personnel Management, 2021).

Remote Work in the American Government

Telework has existed in the American federal government since before the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 became law (Office of Personnel Management, 2021a). The OPM began surveying federal agencies on the status of telework in 2000 (Office of Personnel Management, 2021a). The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 requires federal executive branch agencies to establish telework and offer it to their workforce, and since the law was signed, it has been seen as one of the most popular management innovations in the federal government, designed to attract and retain a talented workforce (Kwon & Jeon, 2018). In the American federal government, telework is defined as “an arrangement in which an employee, under written telework agreement, is scheduled to perform their work at an agency worksite on a regular and recurring basis,” while remote work is similarly defined by the exception that the employee is expected to work “at an alternative worksite and is not expected to perform work at an agency worksite on a regular and recurring basis” (Office of Personnel Management, 2021a).

A significant number of federal workers have teleworked for several years, due to such perceived benefits as enhanced flexibility and work-life balance (Lee & Kim, 2017). Recognizing this trend, the OPM has documented the public sector’s progress in utilizing telework to achieve government agency missions, effectively preserve government resources, and continue to provide excellent customer service annually since 2002 (Office of Personnel Management, 2021). Research has documented that employees who are determined to be telework-eligible report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction and intention to stay; however, among those participating in telework, the perception of fairness increases but there is no significant effect on job satisfaction or intention to stay (Lee & Kim, 2017).

However, government research findings concerning telework have disclosed many challenges as well (Kwon & Jeon, 2018). For example, the OPM collects data on telework in the federal government that is reported to Congress on an annual basis, but the GAO has identified longstanding data quality issues with that information (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022). As a result, a need has been identified in the federal government for more reliable data on how remote work was used during the COVID-19 pandemic to assist with future government telework initiatives (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022).

Like those in other business sectors, those employed in the public sector workplace experienced mandated changes during the pandemic (Office of Personnel Management, 2021a). When the COVID-19 pandemic appeared in the United States, many government offices variously allowed and mandated their employees to work from home to protect their health and safety; the capability to do so enabled those federal agencies to continue their missions and serve the public despite the ongoing crisis (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022; Office of Personnel Management, 2021). As a result, in 2020, 90 percent of federal employees participated in telework, and in 2021, the OPM reported a significant increase in employees who participated in telework (Office of Personnel Management, 2021). While challenges like decreased engagement and employee struggle to find a healthy work-life balance were experienced by public sector employees (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022), the COVID-19 pandemic still made it clear that telework can assist the federal government in delivering its mission and assist in future recruitment of a skilled workforce when it is implemented correctly (Office of Personnel Management, 2021). As a result, many government agencies have reported adopting workforce changes such as more flexible work arrangements, more remote work

policies, and reassessment of infrastructure and physical office space (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022).

Mandatory Remote Work vs. Traditional Remote Work

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021 presented a unique set of circumstances for organizations related to e-leadership. A distinct characteristic of the COVID-19 transition to remote work is that public sector e-leadership was implemented as the result of mandatory remote work rather than organizational choice (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Historically, remote work had been established based on an assessment of the positive organizational results that were related to remote work (Jones & Schoning, 2021). Organizing virtual work environments generally occurred based on organizational choice and resulted from various organizational efforts, including a desire to compete in a global economy and initiatives designed to provide a flexible work environment for employees (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Yet, during the pandemic many organizations were mandated to convert workers to remote platforms (Obenauf, 2021; Chamakiotis et al., 2021) for safety reasons related to the potential spread of the coronavirus.

Unlike prior planned organizational transitions to virtual work, in the mandatory transformation, the transition was radical (Chamakiotis et al., 2021), occurred quickly, and was done in an unorganized manner (Philip, 2021). Further, the unique virtual work environment established as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic involved a different makeup of employees than traditional transitions to remote work. The transition during the COVID-19 pandemic included employees who were previously not able to telework or who had elected not to telework prior to the pandemic (Chamakiotis et al., 2021), and so it included individuals who did not possess the technological tools or skills that traditional remote employees possessed. This also included leaders and managers who had not previously operated in a remote work environment

(Jones & Schoning, 2021). One result of this transition has been that working from home has become a widespread practice in many organizations (Steude, 2021), including significant advancements in the number of American federal employees who work remotely (Office of Personnel Management, 2021).

E-Leadership in a Mandatory Remote Work Environment

Although remote work had been common for more than two decades, the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated a massive transition to it (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Because of the unintentional nature of mandatory remote work, managers in all sectors have experienced uncertainty and business executives have expressed anxiety about the changes (Philip 2021) during the COVID-19 remote work transition. This has further highlighted the problem that public sector organizations had not adequately considered, identified, or trained their personnel on the e-leadership skills that are necessary to be successful in a remote work environment that was mandatory or not intentionally organized. It became clear that the need exists for a more comprehensive body of research on effective e-leadership in a mandatory virtual work environment. Research in this area will be crucial to public sector operations moving forward, as public sector leaders work to establish reconstitution efforts and consider needed operational and training changes in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research is also critical to expanding current research on e-leadership in a mandatory environment, specifically looking at mandatory e-leadership systems in the public sector and with the additional consideration of the impact of organizational culture in the mandatory remote work environment.

As Steude (2021) points out, in order for remote work to be successful, there must be structure, management skills, and management culture in place that are designed to support remote leadership. Research has suggested that the actions of leaders can mitigate the risks of

negative consequences associated with remote work (Spagnoli et al., 2021; Van Wart, 2017b). Organizations comprised of leaders who promote innovation and creativity are more successful in implementing new technologies (Philip, 2021), and research has suggested that when leaders are willing to utilize information technology for themselves and the organization, there is a stronger likelihood that the information technology will be adopted (Van Wart, 2017a).

Many of the same elements and responsibilities associated with leadership in a traditional environment are still present in the virtual leadership environment, including decision-making; mentoring; interpersonal skills; motivating; and challenging and supporting staff members (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). However, e-leaders are significantly affected by time, distance, and cultural considerations (Avolio et al., 2014). A mandatory remote work environment requires even more considerations, such as the need for understanding, sympathy, and open listening to employee concerns when sudden, unexpected structural changes are implemented, as well as devoting extra time and establishing employee trust in the post-transition environment (Philip, 2021).

E-Leadership Skills

Research has shown that traditional in-person public sector skills may not yield the same level of leader effectiveness in a virtual work environment (Van Wart et al., 2017a). From the academic perspective, discussions on how leadership has been impacted by rapid technological advancements have not been adequately developed, and contributions to the field remain limited (Torre & Sarti, 2020). Instead, research on e-leadership in digital government has documented that studies on effective e-leadership have continued to lag behind other areas of research (Roman et al., 2018). Remote work poses a very distinct set of challenges for leaders operating in a remote environment. One of the greatest known disadvantages to companies that allow for

regular remote work is the set of challenges that virtual work poses to management and leadership and the need for leading to be done appropriately in the remote work environment (Steude, 2021; Elyousfi et al., 2021). In the American federal government, research by Kwon and Jeon (2020) has found that telework programs were identified by American federal government managers and supervisors as the hardest programs to manage in the public sector. Thus, the need to further explore effective e-leadership skills is well-documented (Neufeld et al., 2010; Avolio et al., 2000).

Effective E-Leadership Skills in a Voluntary Remote Environment

Leadership varies depending on the context, and the skillset needed to lead well also varies based on the situation (Liu et al., 2018). Research has documented important skills that virtual leaders must possess to be successful (Van Wart, 2017a; Sinclair et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2018). Some studies have suggested that necessary leadership skills are essentially the same in a remote environment as in a traditional in-person work environment, though they must be executed differently due to the remote nature of virtual work (Dennis, 2021; Office of Personnel Management, 2022b). For example, communication skills are crucial for leaders in any context; however, in an in-person environment, they include non-verbal communication (Van Wart, 2015), while in a remote work environment, non-verbal cues may be lacking (Lune & Berg, 2017).

The academic literature has outlined a distinct skillset that is needed for successful e-leadership (Van Wart et al., 2017a; Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). To begin with, it is essential for e-leaders to possess a digital skillset in order to be effective in a remote work environment (Van Wart et al., 2017a). The European Commission identified three specific categories of skills needed for effective e-leadership: strategic leadership, digital savvy, and business savvy

(Meghana & Vijaya, 2019). Researchers have also outlined other skills for effective remote leadership, such as deliberate relationship building, identification of individual communication preferences, and using available communication tools appropriately while navigating stages of development (Gerke, 2020). According to the literature, effective e-leaders recognize that good e-communication skills in a virtual setting include the dedication of efforts to intentionally avoiding miscommunication (Liu et al., 2018). It has also been acknowledged in the literature that special consideration must be given by e-leaders to the likelihood that remote staff can feel disconnected even when they have the support of leadership, and therefore leaders must be able to engage employees to cultivate necessary connections (Sinclair et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2018). Finally, research has established that effective e-leaders must possess advanced change management skills that can be applied to a virtual context; in addition, analytical skills have also been determined to be extremely important in remote leadership (Liu et al., 2018).

Effective E-Leadership Skills in the Public Sector Virtual Environment

Public sector e-leaders must be trained in the leadership skills that are required to effectively lead in the public sector virtual work environment (Elyousfi et al., 2021). The unique circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have called attention to the need for a well-defined set of effective e-leadership skills to guide public sector leaders in their development. For example, in the federal government, the GAO highlighted in reports that many government supervisors are reluctant to embrace telework due to the lack of telework training for supervisors, decreased performance, and lack of resources and technical support (Kwon & Jeon, 2020). Research has documented the most reported issues associated with poor e-leadership skills as isolation and confusion among employees; miscommunication and overload of communication; lack of interpersonal trust; lack of motivation; and weakened accountability

(Van Wart et al., 2017a). While there is general consistency in the types of skills needed in traditional and virtual environments, they are not all the same (Van Wart et al., 2017b). Thus, certain skills have been identified for public sector leaders to possess in order to be effective e-leaders in government, including e-communication skills; e-social skills; e-change skills; e-team skills; e-tech skills; and e-trustworthiness (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b; Liu et al., 2018). While public leaders may not need to excel along all six dimensions to be successful, significant failures in any of the six dimensions could significantly impact overall leader effectiveness (Roman et al., 2018).

E-communication skills ensure that the leader has the ability to communicate, through information technology, in a manner that is “clear and organized, avoids errors and miscommunication, and is not excessive or detrimental to performance” (Roman et al., 2018, p. 10; Liu et al., 2018). High-quality communication skills are critical for effective public sector e-leadership, and they involve communication with followers, partners, and stakeholders utilizing various forms of communication technology (Roman et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018). The rise of teams, telework, and distributed leadership patterns owes much to expedited electronic communication, which leaders must master, manage, and coordinate (Van Wart et al., 2017b). Communication is the means by which almost all higher-level leadership functions are carried out (Roman et al., 2018). Yet, technological advancements in communication have led to constant contact and to employee burnout (Van Wart et al., 2017a). Thus, effective e-leaders in public sector virtual environments must develop different communication skills, generally required to be informal and convincing, that engage a blend of electronic and traditional methods of communication but are still just as effective, in order to influence their followers (Elyousfi et al., 2021).

E-leadership is a social influence process (Van Wart et al., 2017a), and the quality of relationships and exchanges between leaders and followers play an important role in its effectiveness (Avolio et al., 2000). Relationships are critical to successful leadership in general (Gerke, 2006). However, the digital revolution has changed the interactions between leaders and followers based on the use of information and communication technologies (Van Wart et al., 2017b). In addition to effective communication, collaboration is also a necessary skill for public sector e-leaders when operating in a virtual work environment (Elyousfi et al., 2021). E-social skills include the leader's ability to create a positive work environment, establish a sense of friendliness, and improve collaboration and communication through a variety of virtual communication methods (Roman et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018). Successful e-leaders build more cohesive teams by constructing a positive social climate (Elyousfi et al., 2021).

E-leadership is expected to facilitate change in attitudes, feelings, behavior, and performance (Van Wart et al., 2017a); therefore, the ability to manage change initiatives is another critical skill for e-leaders (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b). E-change management skills refer to the leader's ability to manage change initiatives effectively through information technology (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b). Effective e-leaders are expected to utilize their change management skills to ensure smooth transitions (Van Wart et al., 2017b). By effectively implementing e-change management skills like pre-planning transitions and monitoring success, e-leaders can expect positive outcomes such as higher individual productivity and higher employee satisfaction (Van Wart et al., 2017b). Weak e-change management can lead to underperformance and failure in implementation (Van Wart et al., 2017a).

E-team skills summarize the leader's ability to manage teams in the virtual work

environment, including building teams, motivating them, and holding them accountable (Roman et al., 2018). Team members of online teams have reported feeling less visible, making it more challenging to foster engagement in a virtual work environment than in a traditional work environment; therefore, effective e-leaders will strive to cultivate relationship development (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Liu et al. (2018) observe that team building ensures buy-in and accountability. Effective e-leaders engage in behaviors that help and support their subordinates by making them feel like they are part of the workgroup and comfortable with the work situation, but they should also recognize that fostering team empowerment in virtual work teams is more important than in traditional in-person teams (Elyousfi et al., 2021).

E-leaders must possess e-tech savvy skills, which include remaining current in information technology developments and security-related concerns (Roman et al., 2018). Effective e-technological skills include the ability to mix communication methods, handle breakdowns, and provide a sufficient level of technical assurance. These skills result in positive outcomes such as higher individual productivity and higher employee satisfaction (Van Wart et al., 2017b). Technological skills have been identified as one of the seven most important skills for leaders in modern times, and those leaders who are poor at adopting new technology are considered poor role models and less effective (Van Wart et al., 2017a).

Finally, e-trustworthiness is a critical skill for e-leaders (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b). E-trustworthiness refers to the leader's ability to create a sense of trust through the perception of being fair, honest, and consistent in utilizing information technology (Roman et al., 2018). Trust is an essential element of all effective leadership (Meghana & Vijaya, 2019; Elyousfi et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2018). Building trusting relationships among team members with the lack of face-to-face contact is one of the most significant challenges for e-leaders (Elyousfi et

al., 2021). E-trustworthiness encompasses the leader exercising professionalism, striving to maintain expectations of work-life balance, ensuring diversity, and promoting collaboration; it results in higher productivity and employee satisfaction (Van Wart et al., 2017b). Virtual work environments made up of high trust are more cohesive and have higher levels of performance (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

Leadership Training

The implementation of effective training programs in organizations is important, and the complex, challenging environment in which leaders operate in the 21st century creates a significant need for more leadership development (Van Wart, 2015). There is a lack of empirical evidence supporting leadership training initiatives overall, and this gap in literature increases when exploring leadership training in the public sector (Seidle et al., 2016). Scholars in public management have paid limited attention to the impact of leadership training; thus, it is well-known that there is a critical need to study leadership training in public organizations (An et al., 2022). For example, in the public sector, public monies are regularly allocated for training initiatives, yet there is little documented understanding of the benefits of these expenditures (Seidle et al., 2016).

There are a few concepts regarding effective leadership training in the public sector that have been established in the literature. To begin with, research has established that by providing clear guidelines to the workforce, training can facilitate a successful implementation of programs and policy (Kwon & Jeon, 2020). Leadership development programs for public sector leaders should also acknowledge and address the differences between public sector leaders and private sector leaders (Orazi et al., 2013). Regarding existing public sector training initiatives, Seidle et al. (2016) have suggested that the constraints that hinder public sector leadership impact training

initiatives, as public sector leaders are trained in the programs on how to navigate the formal system in which they operate, which leads to continued constraints on leadership. Still, overall, training initiatives in the public sector are considered a beneficial investment in the public sector (Seidle et al., 2016). Incorporating theoretical and applied insights into a well-constructed leadership program can make significant differences in the public sector (Roman et al., 2018).

Research has also determined that competencies for effective e-leadership should be developed through training (Torre & Sarti, 2021). Specifically, a need exists for mandatory or required training for the managers of teleworkers to achieve success in telework programs (Kwon & Jeon, 2020). The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 required federal executive government agencies to provide interactive telework training and established that public sector employees should be required to complete the training prior to entering into a telework agreement (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). This training includes virtual telework training for employees and managers (Office of Personnel Management, 2022b). However, following a government study of four public sector agencies, the GAO made recommendations that included requiring supervisors to complete the telework training in a timelier manner (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). The GAO found that documenting that those responsible for implementing the agency telework policy have been trained can ensure greater consistency in how telework policies are being applied (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017).

Remote Organizational Structure and Culture

Leaders exist in a cultural environment filled with opportunities and crises (Van Wart, 2015). Organizational cultures have clearly been transformed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Spicer, 2020), but little is known about the impacts of organizational culture on

leadership in a mandatory remote environment. Thus, there is also a need not only to engage in research on effective e-leadership skills in a mandatory remote environment in the public sector, but also to consider the impact of the organizational culture in a mandatory remote environment on the effectiveness of the e-leadership skills. In addition to skills and traits necessary for effective e-leadership, leaders need support from the organization's operating model (Jones & Schoning, 2021). The need for a supportive work environment to enhance the work quality of professionals has been recognized in research (Meng & Berger, 2019).

Leadership is a process that involves the followers and the environment as well as the leader (Van Wart, 2015). The leader is recognized by scholars as a strategic individual defined by the interplay between the leaders and followers (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). There is a growing body of research establishing that the quality of organizational culture and the quality of leadership influence employee engagement, trust, job satisfaction, retention, productivity, and internal reputation, among other factors (Meng and Berger, 2019). Thus, to promote effective e-leadership, the organizational model should allow for continuous learning and adaptability to unforeseen situations that may evolve very rapidly (Jones & Schoning, 2021).

A supportive institutional environment has been shown to enhance work productivity and quality in the virtual environment (Meng & Berger, 2019). Organizational structure and culture are closely aligned, and a company's culture can go a long way toward addressing the structural issues of the company (Fischer, 2010). Research has suggested that all organizations should evaluate the impacts of leadership styles and organizational culture on organizational performance (Said, 2020). In the public sector, a performance-oriented culture has been identified as appropriate institutional support (Kwon & Jeon, 2020).

The Impact of Culture on Organizations

Culture in organizations has been defined as establishing standards, created and learned, for shared perception, cognition, judgment, or behaviors by members of a group (Chizema & Pogrebna, 2019). In simplified terms, organizational culture identifies the rules for how people should interact together in the organization (Said, 2020); research has shown that organizational culture can be passed from one generation of employees to the next (Meng & Berger, 2019). For a culture to be strong, members have to buy into it (Keiser, 2021).

Organizational culture is about shared meaning and interaction; it serves as a guide for members in doing what the organization deems acceptable, and, on the negative side, it can severely limit the success of leadership in any setting (Fischer, 2010, p. 66; Keiser, 2021; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015). For example, constant criticism of a leader from within the organization has been identified as more detrimental than any combined attacks from outside the organization (Manning, 2017). Thus, a healthy culture is important to all organizations, and it is especially important in public sector organizations where the work product impacts such a large population of individuals, since culture has also been associated with performance (Keiser, 2021; Verbeeten & Spekle, 2015). Culture has been deemed a necessary condition to address the job engagement and performance of organizational members (Meng & Berger, 2019). In fact, Peter Drucker, an influential management scholar, emphasized culture over strategy, citing culture as the “secret sauce” of successful companies (Keiser, 2021).

Leaders may be able to influence cultures, but they cannot dictate them, since culture is the product of a shared mindset of the members of the organization (Keiser, 2021). As a result of this dynamic, leadership in any environment is interpreted by followers based on various organizational factors (Campbell, 2018), and leadership effectiveness varies based on the

situation (Lieu et al., 2018). Cultural values influence how leadership and followership are constructed and enacted (Spicer, 2019). Culture moderates the leader-follower relationship (Blair and Bligh, 2018, p. 131). Transformational leaders recognize that workable elements of culture must always be retained when instituting change (Van Wart, 2015). Yet, despite the well-known relationship between culture and leadership effectiveness, there is a limited amount of research exploring the impact of organizational culture on effective leadership in a mandatory remote work environment. Avolio et al. (2014) argued that greater emphasis should be placed on the context in the definition of e-leadership (Torre & Sarti, 2020). For example, research has shown that the effects of transformational leadership are contingent on the characteristics of the context where it is performed (Campbell, 2018). The research literature can often present context and culture as synonyms, and while they are distinct concepts, they are interconnected and may influence one another (Savard & Mizoguchi, 2019).

Culture and Virtual Work

Researchers have documented a need to study the impact of organizational culture on effective remote leadership (Savard & Mizoguchi, 2019). An assessment of the literature has identified that one area of neglect is the cultural context within which leaders operate (Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). Various arguments associated with culture exemplify its importance in the study of e-leadership. First, a well-known responsibility of management is to maintain an organizational culture that fosters a cohesive and conducive working environment (Pawirosumarto et al., 2017; Starratt and Grandy, 2010; Han et al., 2010, as cited by Kulshreshtha & Sharma, 2021). However, Elyousfi et al. (2021) argue that employees who engage in remote work (known as virtual team members) no longer share culture and identity. Thus the increased use of technology impacts the entire organizational environment and culture

(Torre & Sarti, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed organizational cultures in a profound manner (Spicer, 2019). These changes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have introduced a unique set of challenges for managers as well as significant opportunities for researchers (Spicer, 2019).

As a result of the pandemic, more organizations intend to allow employees to work remotely at least part of the time (often referred to as a hybrid model) in the future (Driscoll, 2020). This requires a shift in mindset for members of the organization and affects various other areas of work (Driscoll, 2020). For example, Kwon and Jeon (2020) have found that promoting a performance-oriented culture in the workplace increases teleworker satisfaction. E-leadership has become an inevitable dimension of working relationships, even for those supervisors who, during the COVID-19 pandemic, had to discover from experimentation with e-leadership practices which approaches and organizational conditions make it most effective (Torre & Sarti, 2020). For example, the pandemic has led to situations where workers are more influenced by their own discretion than the workplace culture due to them operating in seclusion and, as a result, companies have been deemed less cohesive (Keiser, 2021). It has also changed employers' and employees' long-term notions about how and where work can be done productively (Driscoll, 2020). Torre & Sarti (2020) contend that the most difficult task in implementing effective e-leadership is to foster a culture that allows the voices of leadership to be heard. Organizations should allow the e-leader to promote a culture that is easily accepted by experienced remote workers but offers an innovative and ad hoc approach to other generations of workers (Torre & Sarti, 2020).

Future Remote Work and Organizational Culture

Culture is an important consideration when looking at the mandatory remote work

environment and the challenges it has created for leadership. Research has documented a need to consider organizational culture when looking at the reconstitution efforts of leaders following the COVID-19 pandemic (Spicer, 2020; Keiser, 2021; Meng and Berger, 2019; Kwon & Jeon, 2020). Specifically, companies must assess their organizational cultures to ensure that they are prepared for post-pandemic adjustments (Keiser, 2021). In the public sector, research has identified a performance-oriented culture as appropriate support for establishing productive cultural norms for teleworkers, such as high performance, recognition systems, constructive feedback, and essential training on basic information related to telework (Kwon & Jeon, 2021). A healthy organizational culture is essential to carrying out operations and strategies (Keiser, 2021). And organizations can be deemed hypocritical when they change visible aspects of the culture but leave deeper aspects untouched (Spicer, 2020). Spicer (2020) identifies a process to effectively influence organizational culture:

1. Ensure members have psychological safety and feel secure enough to not act in defensive or reckless ways;
2. Trigger reflexivity by encouraging organizational members to reflect on the pre-existing culture;
3. Encourage organizational members to use the pre-existing culture to form a new culture more aligned with the new environmental challenges;
4. Encourage managers to make sure the new practices become routine; and
5. Reinforce new practices by discussing them in a manner that appeals to existing ideas and emotions.

Researchers can explore the impact of cultural change on individuals by asking how rapid shifts impact employee identity and emotions (Spicer, 2020). Further, exploring organizational

members' perceptions of the organization can help assess the organization's culture: If the members' descriptions of the organization generally agree, then it is probably a strong culture (Keiser, 2021). If cultural change is determined to be a necessity, organizations can engage in cyclical processes of reflection, experimentation, and action (Spicer, 2020). Organizational leaders should always model examples for other members of the organization in order to influence culture (Keiser, 2021).

Summary

Research clearly supports the need for additional studies on e-leadership in a mandatory public sector remote work environment, including an emphasis on organizational culture (Jackson & Parry, 2008 as cited by Kargas & Varoutas, 2015) and how it impacts the effectiveness of leadership. The initial literature review conducted here establishes that effective in-person leadership skills and effective e-leadership skills have been identified through prior research. However, little effort has been dedicated to identifying effective e-leadership skills specific to the public sector. Further, the literature review demonstrates that academic research on the concept of e-leadership primarily results from academic studies on organizations that operated in an in-person work environment or voluntarily transitioned to remote work and do not discuss mandatory remote work situations. This research study fills two existing gaps that have been identified through the initial literature review. First, it specifically explored e-leadership in public sector organizations in an effort to contribute to the body of research on effective e-leadership skills in a mandatory remote environment specifically for public sector organizations. Second, it outlines an analysis of the impact of organizational culture on successful e-leadership in a mandatory remote work environment.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and identify e-leadership practices from the perspective of public sector managers and employees who operated during the COVID-19 pandemic and the government-wide mandate for remote work. The problem is that public sector organizations have not considered, identified, or trained their personnel on necessary e-leadership skills for a remote work environment that was mandated or not intentionally organized. This was highlighted in the pandemic, when many government agencies were challenged to operate in the mandatory remote work environment with little to no preparation (Philip, 2021). Remote work poses a distinct set of challenges for organizations and a distinct set of challenges for leaders operating in a remote environment, one of the greatest being the need for leading to be done appropriately (Steude, 2021; Elyousfi et al., 2021; Kwon & Jeon). This chapter provides a detailed description of the research design, procedures, and analysis used in the study.

Design

This study was guided by a non-experimental, qualitative research design utilizing the case study approach to obtain the lived professional experiences of government employees who experienced the transition from a traditional in-person work setting to a mandatory remote work setting as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A case study design was used for this research because it allowed for a systematic method to investigate an event in order to describe and explain a phenomenon—in this case, the transition of public sector agencies to a mandatory remote work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lune & Berg, 2017). This design was appropriate for this study, as it enabled the researcher to gather deeper insights into the lived

experiences of public sector employees in order to obtain accurate information and answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative

Qualitative research references the descriptions, characteristics, concepts, and definitions of things; the “why” or “how” (Lune & Berg, 2017). It highlights the process and meanings associated with a phenomenon in a real-life setting (Pratt, 2009; Rynes and Gephart, 2004, as cited by Ospina et al., 2017). Qualitative procedures provide a method for assessing unquantifiable knowledge about the participants with whom researchers interact or about those represented by their personal traces (Lune & Berg, 2017). It is the appropriate approach to use when a problem or issue needs to be explored, and the need exists to study a group or population to identify variables that cannot easily be measured or when there is a need to gather feedback from participants that would otherwise be unheard (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research is produced from frameworks, assumptions, and paradigms that influence the conduct associated with the inquiry and are explicit in writing (Creswell, 2007).

The design process begins with philosophical assumptions combined with certain beliefs of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Transparency is increased by stating those beliefs, which then builds trust in the findings, especially for public policymakers (Massaro et al., 2019). Qualitative data that are considered credible result from collaborating closely with research participants throughout the process and involving them in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Qualitative research was the best approach for this study because the study explores a real situation, and there is a need to study and obtain the feedback of public sector employees that were impacted by the transition to a mandatory remote work environment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research is often very applicable to the field of public

administration, because it places researchers in direct, prolonged contact with the actors involved in the research in a natural setting, thus providing insights that are difficult to obtain solely with numeric data (Ospina et al., 2017). It thereby allows researchers to share in perceptions and understandings of others to explore how they structure and give meaning to their daily lives (Lune & Berg, 2017). For example, in this research study, I obtained the perceptions and understandings of public sector employees regarding leadership in a remote work environment. “Problems cannot be detected solely through data and performance reports” (Van Wart, 2015, p. 323), and postmodern approaches to research in the field of public administration have emphasized the use of qualitative techniques (Van Wart, 2015). Qualitative research was needed in this study to obtain deeper insights about their experiences from public sector employees who experienced the government’s transition during the pandemic.

Nonexperimental

Nonexperimental research has been defined as “any kind of quantitative or qualitative research that is not an experiment” and “it is the predominant kind of research design used in the social sciences” (Reio, 2016, p. 676). Reio (2016) argues that the reason for this is that it is not usually ethical or feasible to manipulate independent variables in social science research. Non-experimental methods of qualitative research include interviews and surveys (Reio, 2016). Thus, this research was guided by a non-experimental, qualitative research design.

The purpose of research is to find the answers to questions utilizing systemic procedures (Lune & Berg, 2017). This study was guided by questions regarding the perspectives of management and employees on effective e-leadership skills in a public sector mandatory remote work environment; the impact of organizational culture on effective e-leadership skills; and

effective leadership skills in a traditional work environment that remain important in a mandatory remote work environment. The information obtained was examined and described.

Case Study

There are several common approaches to qualitative studies, including participatory action research, historical analysis, narrative research, grounded theory research, phenomenological research, and qualitative case study research (Creswell et al., 2007; Ospina et al., 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The most frequently used approach in qualitative research is the case study (Yazan, 2015), which can be summarized as an attempt to systematically investigate an event to describe and explain a phenomenon (Lune & Berg, 2017). “Case study research begins with the identification of a specific case that will be described and analyzed” and can involve a single case or multiple cases for comparison as long as the case identified can be described within certain parameters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Parameters include a specific place where the case is located and the timeframe that is analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Instrumental case studies provide insights into a single issue or concern and identify a single case that will illustrate the item of focus (Lune & Berg, 2017). This research study was identified as a single instrumental case study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a single instrumental case study involves a researcher selecting one bounded case representing the issue or concern of the researcher to illustrate the issue. Studying the selected case then provides insight into the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide a single bounded qualitative case study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of management and employees as to effective e-leadership

skills in a public sector mandatory remote work environment?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of management and employees as to effective leadership skills in a traditional work environment that remain important in a mandatory remote work environment?

RQ3: What are the perspectives of management and employees as to the impact of organizational culture on effective e-leadership skills?

Setting

An important step in data collection is to identify people or places to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants in order to obtain quality data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the setting was the U.S. Marshals Service. I chose this location because of geographical convenience and based on familiarity with this organization's system. As mentioned in Chapter One, I am employed as a government employee and have observed the lived experiences of public sector employees transitioning to a mandatory remote work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am aware of organizations within the District of Kansas, which is defined by the same boundaries as the State of Kansas, that had no prior remote work policy in place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, Kansas is a suitable location to explore the experiences of public sector employees who experienced a mandatory remote work environment due to the pandemic. Kansas is a state located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Its population estimate is 2,934,532 with 74,292 employers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

The U.S. Marshals Service was the first federal law enforcement agency in the United States and has existed since 1789 (U.S. Marshals Service, 2022). There are approximately 5,400 deputies and business professionals who serve this organization (U.S. Marshals Service, 2021); of

those, 3,561 are deputy U.S. marshals and criminal investigators that operate in 94 federal judicial districts with the headquarters located in Arlington, Virginia (U.S. Marshals Service, 2022). The U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas serves the same boundaries as the State of Kansas; it was established on January 29, 1861 and operates in three courthouses located in Kansas City (headquarters), Topeka, and Wichita (U.S. Marshals Service, 2022; U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas, 2022). I was aware that the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas did not allow remote work prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The location for the study was expanded to include the U.S. Marshals Service for the Western District of Missouri. The U.S. Marshals Service for the Western District of Missouri was established in 1857 and is headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri (U.S. Marshals Service, 2022). This additional location was selected based on geographical location and familiarity with the organization. The boundaries of the Western District of Missouri are defined by five divisions: Kansas City, Jefferson City, Springfield, St. Joseph, and Joplin; the district encompasses 66 counties in the western half of the State of Missouri (U.S. District Court for the Western District of Missouri, 2022).

Interviews were conducted in late November and early December of 2022. Whether the interviews were done in person, virtually, or by conference call was determined by each individual's geographic location, ability to participate in an in-person interview, and personal request. Six interviews were completed in person in office space provided by the U.S. Marshals Service. Four interviews were conducted virtually, utilizing the Zoom application to provide visual and audible interactions; however, in one instance, the camera technology failed to function, and so the participant was interviewed without the visual technology. One interview was conducted via telephone call in response to the participant's request, as the participant's

geographic location did not enable an in-person interview and, on the date of the interview, the participant requested a conference call due to technological limitations she was experiencing. During the interviews, all participants referenced the survey document that they had completed.

Participants

The study participants included current employees of the U.S. Marshals Service who traditionally operated in a traditional in-person work setting but were mandated into a remote work environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study in order to identify information-rich understandings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed for the intentional sampling of a group of people that could best inform the research about the problem under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because it is important that all individuals have stories to tell about their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the purposeful criterion sampling strategy was used to identify a minimum of 10 participants but not more than 20 participants. This number was intentionally small to allow for in-depth description and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Criterion sampling was appropriate for this study, since the participants are required to meet specific criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I established the criteria that participants be 18 years of age or older and be current employees of the U.S. Marshals Service who did not work in a remote environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic but worked remotely as a result of the pandemic and the government-wide mandate for remote work.

In order to conduct sampling, I obtained lists of all eligible participants from the designated agency contacts. Additionally, it was determined that snowball sampling would be appropriate to obtain assistance from public sector employees who know others and can identify what cases are information-rich (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One participant may know of other

government employees who would be eligible to participate in the study. In this study, one agency point of contact did provide information for one additional information-rich participant. After I established the list of potential participants, I emailed the group to introduce myself and the study and determine what employees were willing to participate in the study. I requested recipients to email me directly if they were willing to participate in the study, and I developed a sample list from the responses.

I finalized the list of participants and documented demographic information from those who elected to participate. All participants provided the demographic and employment information requested on the survey. Of the 11 total participants in the study, two were male and nine were female. Five of the participants indicated that they were between the ages of 35 and 46 years old, and six participants indicated that they were over 47 years of age. There were no participants under the age of 35. Regarding ethnicity, ten of the participants selected white, non-Hispanic for their ethnicity and one participant selected Hispanic. Regarding their current position in the agency, two participants served in a supervisory or managerial role, while the other nine participants indicated “other” for their position within the agency. Participants also provided their total years of government service and their years of service with the U.S. Marshals Service. This data was analyzed as follows:

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics of Participants’ Total Government Service

Total Years of Government Service		
Service		
N	Valid	11
	Missing	0
Mean		16.09
Median		17.00
Mode		22.00

Table 3.*Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Service with USMS*

Total Years with the U.S. Marshals Service		
N	Valid	11
	Missing	0
Mean		5.62
Median		3.00
Mode		3.00

Procedures

Following the research proposal approval, an application was submitted to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and approval was obtained before any data were collected (see Appendix A). Once approval was obtained, I began recruiting participants by first approaching the U.S. Marshal for the District of Kansas to discuss and obtain approval for his agency's participation in the study. This consisted of an in-person meeting with the U.S. Marshal based on his availability. During the meeting, the U.S. Marshal provided verbal consent to conduct the study, and a discussion ensued about how potential participants could be identified and contacted. During the discussion, the U.S. Marshal explained that employees of the U.S. Marshals Service are classified into two groups: administrative staff who perform the administrative duties of the organization, and operational staff who perform the law enforcement duties of the organization. The U.S. Marshal determined that administrative staff would be most qualified to participate based on the inclusion criteria for the study and the administrative staff's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The U.S. Marshal for the District of Kansas stated that he would have a maximum of eight potential administrative staff participants based on the inclusion criteria.

In order to achieve the desired minimum sample size of ten participants, the study was

expanded to the U.S. Marshals Service for the Western District of Missouri, which was a geographically convenient district. This expansion was done after confirming with the IRB that no further formal approval was necessary to do so. Following contact with the IRB, I engaged in an in-person meeting with the U.S. Marshal for the Western District of Missouri, who also provided verbal consent and agreed that the administrative staff of the organization would be the most qualified participants for the study. The U.S. Marshal for the Western District of Missouri stated that he would have a maximum of six potential administrative staff participants based on the inclusion criteria. Following this meeting, permission request letters (see Appendix B) and sample permission response letters (see Appendix C) were provided to both U.S. Marshals, who provided written consent to engage in the study.

Each U.S. Marshal then provided instructions on how to invite eligible participants to participate. The U.S. Marshal for the District of Kansas designated a point of contact to assist with providing the staff list, contacting staff members, and inviting them to participate. The staff list provided by the point of contact outlined eight potential participants and their contact information to contact them directly. The point of contact for the agency and I later identified an additional participant who would meet the criteria for the study following a discussion about other cases that are information-rich, bringing the total number of potential participants from the District of Kansas to nine. The U.S. Marshal for the Western District of Missouri provided a staff list that outlined six potential participants and their contact information in order to contact them directly.

After receiving the list of eligible participants from each district, I directly contacted each eligible participant through electronic mail. In the electronic mail, I included a recruitment flyer (Appendix D), a recruitment letter (Appendix E), a consent document (Appendix F), and the

survey questions (Appendix G). The recruitment letter provided an introduction of myself and the study and outlined the criteria for participation. It instructed participants to return the consent document prior to completing the survey, to return the completed survey to me via electronic mail at my Liberty University email address, and to provide availability for an interview in the electronic mail message. Following the initial recruitment email, six participants returned the signed consent document. Based on the instructions outlined in the recruitment letter, no additional interaction occurred between receipt of the consent form and receipt of the survey from those individuals. For those participants who did not return the consent form, a follow-up recruitment letter (Appendix H) was sent via electronic mail. Four additional participants responded following this electronic mail message. Following the discussion with the point of contact for the District of Kansas in which an additional potential participant was identified, I forwarded the individual an electronic message that included the recruitment letter, the recruitment flyer, the consent document, and the survey document.

Eleven total eligible participants returned the signed consent form via electronic mail. Based on the receipt of the consent documents, I compiled the list of participants, and the actual data collection commenced. Each of these participants subsequently returned the survey document and engaged in discussions via electronic mail concerning scheduling an interview. Opportunities to engage in observations were determined through separate discussions with the agency point of contact to determine information-rich experiences for observation.

The Researcher's Role

Qualitative researchers are a key instrument, as they collect data themselves through the examination of documents, observations of behavior, and interviews they conduct, including designing their own open-ended questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this analysis, I served as

the human instrument that gathered the data by administering the surveys, conducting interviews and taking detailed notes regarding my observations, and then interpreting and reporting the information. I designed the survey that was used, ensuring there were open-ended questions. I scheduled and participated in interviews and observations of the participants. I organized the data to make sense of it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, the researcher builds patterns, categories, and themes by organizing the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This helped me obtain the perspective of the participants rather than my own perspective based on my experience working for a government organization.

As a government employee who was employed during the COVID-19 pandemic, I recognize I have my own biases based on my personal experiences. It is important to disclose all understandings about the biases, values, and experiences that I bring to the qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have identified the case study site based on professional knowledge obtained from U.S. Marshals Service employees with whom I have a personal and professional relationship that this organization had not previously allowed remote work and was mandated to do so during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, because the public agency for which I work interacts with the study site, I recognize I have professional and personal rapport with some of the participants. However, I do not and did not hold a position of influence or authority over the participants in this study. During the study, I was an observer, non-participant with no power relationship to be managed.

Data Collection

When considering qualitative data collection, it is important to focus on the types of data and the procedures for gathering the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Typically, the researcher collects data from more than one source in qualitative data collection in order to provide a well-

rounded pool of information for analysis by the researcher and to obtain an in-depth understanding of the case in qualitative case study research (Turner, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to pursue data collection, I established a relationship with an agency representative who could serve as a point of contact early on in the study and could assist with the data collection phase of the study.

Instruments

Creswell and Poth (2018) point out that relying on one source of data does not typically provide enough information for a qualitative case study to be considered valid. For example, interviews and observations are frequently used in all qualitative approaches to research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this qualitative case study, I administered a survey, conducted interviews, and completed observations. Qualitative surveys are appropriate, as they allow for the collection of qualitative data through open-ended questions (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). Interviews allow for follow-up discussions about the surveys and provide further insight from participants regarding the organizational culture (Creswell & Hirose, 2019; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Finally, observations or fieldwork allows the researcher to conduct observations in order to gather data regarding interactions among members of the organization, the overall organizational culture, and how the organizational culture impacts the leadership in the work environment.

Surveys/Questionnaires

First, qualitative surveys were utilized to obtain data in this study (Appendix G). Surveys are a distinct methodology in social science research that typically involve quantitative items but can include qualitative, open-ended questions (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). Open-ended questions result in the collection of qualitative data from questions that enable the participant to provide

short answers and they require considerable thought (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). The survey in this research consisted mostly of open-ended questions. Because this study is focused on a virtual or remote work environment, the survey was constructed in a computer program, Microsoft Word, and was distributed electronically via electronic mail to voluntary participants, as participants were experienced with virtual interactions. The surveys targeted public sector employees that work for the organization. The survey and research methodology were reviewed and approved by the Liberty University IRB. The results of the survey were intended to provide two categories of information: First, to provide information regarding effective e-leadership skills that have been identified through a literature review from the perspectives of the research participants, and second, to establish a background on the organizational culture from which the other research strategies can be developed.

Participants were advised in the recruitment letter that the survey would take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Upon completion, each participant submitted their survey via electronic mail. The surveys were received as either a Word document (8) or an Adobe document (3) attached to the electronic mail. The first two questions on the survey outlined the eligibility criteria. All 11 participants indicated on the survey that they met the eligibility criteria, and so all surveys were retained in a password-protected electronic file and utilized during the data analysis. One participant noted on the survey that she was not mandated to work remotely but engaged in remote work due to her job duties. However, based on discussions with management that remote work was only implemented in the agency as a result of the mandate, her survey was retained and included in the findings.

Interviews

Insight can be gained from collecting survey data and then following up with interviews

to explain survey results (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). Interviews have also been identified as a means to provide insight into the organizational culture and the perceptions of individuals that can be used to design additional questionnaires (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Interviewing is frequently used in all five approaches to research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In research, interviewing has been defined as a conversation with a purpose and has been described as a distinguishing characteristic or skill that is not possessed by all researchers (Lune & Berg, 2017). In qualitative research, interviewing involves attempts to “understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, as cited by Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 164).

The data that is collected through interviews is in the form of words rather than actions and is shaped by the perspective of the respondent (Lune & Berg, 2017). In this study, the standardized interview format, which references a formal, highly structured interview (Lune & Berg, 2017), was utilized. The standardized interview approach is appropriate when the researcher has a clear idea about what they want to uncover in the interview (Flick, 2006; Merriam, 2001; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, as cited by Lune & Berg, 2017). It is also useful when gathering tangible information such as priorities and when trying to understand the perceptions of the participants (Lune & Berg, 2017). Based on the instructions in the recruitment letter, most participants outlined their availability for an interview in the electronic mail when they submitted the survey. Participants were advised in the recruitment letter that the interview would take approximately 30 minutes. If a participant failed to address the interview in the email, I contacted them directly to obtain their availability for the interview.

Interviews can be done one-on-one with both the researcher and interviewee physically located in the same room or by using technology or talking over the phone (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Telephone interviews lack face-to-face, nonverbal cues (Lune & Berg, 2017); however, they can still be effective. Because I intended to explore a remote work environment, the interviews were done in person or utilizing technology and included telephone interviews when necessary. An important step in data collection is to establish rapport with participants in order to obtain quality data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, if the participants requested a virtual interview, I established a virtual meeting and provided a link to join the interview. For those who participated in in-person interviews, I traveled to their office location and the interviews were conducted in the U.S. Marshals Service office space.

Constructing effective questions for the research is a crucial component of the interview design (Turner, 2010). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest using five to seven open-ended questions. This interview included the following standardized interview questions, which were reviewed and approved by the Liberty IRB (Appendix I):

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we just met one another, and provide some background information, including years of service in this organization and total years of government service, and a number of government organizations you've worked for.
2. Please describe to me the office culture prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Please describe your relationship with your supervisor and your colleagues prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Please describe the organization's transition to a remote work environment.
5. Please describe any changes you experienced in your relationships with your supervisor and your colleagues in the remote work environment and any changes to the office culture.

6. Please describe any changes you noticed in your supervisor and senior administration's approach to leadership following the transition.
7. What leadership skills have your supervisor and senior management utilized in the remote environment that you think of as especially effective during the transition?
8. Why do you believe they were successful approaches?

Question one is considered a demographic question, which is recommended for beginning the interviews, as such questions are easy for the subject to answer and not threatening (Lune & Berg, 2017). This question ideally assists with developing rapport in order to obtain quality data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This question aimed to provide insight into the years of service question included in the survey document.

Questions two through four were more important questions for the study (they establish the pre-pandemic organizational environment), and questions five through seven are sequenced next because they exemplify even more sensitive questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018), as they explore the employee's perception of leadership and the office culture. These are considered essential questions, because they concern the central focus of the study and may be placed together as in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

All interviews were audio-recorded utilizing a digital recorder (Philips Voice Tracer Audio Recorder) for transcription and analysis purposes. The interviews were transcribed utilizing the Nuance Dragon Recorder Edition software into Microsoft Word documents. I also listened to each recording multiple times and made corrections to the transcriptions, which were then stored in a password-protected electronic file.

Observations

Observation is a key tool for collecting data in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth,

2018). It is defined as the act of “noting a phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer, often with a note-taking instrument, and recording it for scientific purposes (Angrosino, 2007, as cited by Creswell & Poth, 2018). Being in the field for a period of time can solidify evidence from a study, because researchers can compare interview data with data obtained through observation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The extent to which the observer is engaged can vary; however, as a nonparticipant, I was able to observe and take field notes from a distance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The observation type did not change over the course of the study, even after rapport was established (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By engaging in observations, I was able to collect data regarding effective e-leadership skills and the organizational culture. I compared those results to the survey and interview data to establish an understanding of the phenomenon in relation to the theoretical assumptions provided and against established standards (Ospina et al., 2017).

During the data collection period, I scheduled both observations with the point of contact for the District of Kansas based on the availability of activities to observe. Prior to the study, I had anticipated concerns related to the fieldwork and the ability to engage in observations for several reasons, including the fact that the organization I was seeking to observe is a law enforcement organization. Lune and Berg (2017, p.99) note that “All field observations begin with the problem of *getting in*,” which must be “addressed during the design stage of the research.” Access is commonly negotiated and renegotiated throughout the process (Burgess, 1991b as cited by Lune & Berg, 2017). However, the agency head granted me permission to conduct the observations, which eliminated the concerns I initially experienced.

During the data collection phase, I worked with the agency point of contact to establish the interactions that would be the most fruitful for the study. Prior to the observations, the

observation protocol (Appendix K), which outlined areas to record descriptive notes and reflective notes, was reviewed and approved by the Liberty IRB, and it was determined that I would engage in two one-hour observation activities. First I attended an administrative staff meeting, and then I engaged in a one-hour observation of an average office day. Both observations occurred in early December 2022 on different dates. The administrative staff meeting I attended was the first administrative staff meeting the organization had held. The meeting was attended both in person and virtually by staff members.

The observation of an office day occurred on a random office day on a date agreed upon by me and the agency point of contact. The point of contact selected an office day when she would be present to answer any questions and assist me in gaining access to the office space. On that day, I observed office activities and interactions between employees with little interaction. My only interaction was with the point of contact, who confirmed that this office day exemplified a typical office day in the agency, and I engaged in brief, general conversation with two study participants prior to leaving the office. Handwritten, detailed field notes were recorded from each event. Immediately following the event, the handwritten notes were studied, transferred to electronic documents in Microsoft Word, and stored electronically in a password-protected file. The handwritten notes were retained in a locked file cabinet for security.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a challenging task for qualitative researchers that not only involves analyzing text and other forms of data but also includes preparing and organizing the data, conducting an initial read-through of the dataset, representing the data, and interpreting the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A vast amount of information is typically collected through qualitative research, and the analysis of the data generally requires coding, in which categories are drawn

both directly and inductively from the raw data (Lune & Berg, 2017). In order to enable more effective retrieval of data, it must be stored in an organized fashion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout the data collection, all data was collected or transferred to an electronic format; specifically, all documents were converted to Microsoft Word. I stored all electronic data in separate, password-protected electronic folders.

Analysis Systems

Generally, this process begins with data management, which involves organizing the data into digital files and naming those digital files (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each file was organized according to the collection method and named accordingly; thus, survey data was stored in one “survey” file, interview data was stored in one “interview” file, and observation notes were stored in one “observation” file. Surveys received in the Adobe format were transcribed to Microsoft Word to enable one consistent analysis process. Files contained in each folder were named in accordance with the order in which the consent forms were received (such as Participant 1 Survey), and file names were recorded on the pseudonym list, which was stored separately. Standardized field notes were also recorded from all events and stored electronically to enable analyzing and coding of the data into records of patterns in conversations and activities (Lune & Berg, 2017).

Analysis Procedures

In order to derive meaningful findings, all qualitative data must be coded and analyzed (Lune & Berg, 2017). The practice of coding often involves a first, second, and further cycle codes when transforming the data to theory (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The data is then reduced to themes through a process of coding and then condensing codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Multiple reviews of the survey documents, the interview transcriptions, and the observation protocols were conducted to begin the coding procedure. This analysis was conducted carefully, detailed, and systematically in order to code the content as data in a format that could address the research questions (Lune & Berg, 2017). I manually coded all records utilizing the Microsoft Word program, highlighting pertinent information and entering codes as notes in the Microsoft Word document. Codes were then condensed (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and the data was sorted into categories (Lune & Berg, 2017) outlined in a separate Microsoft Word document; I was then able to develop themes and sub-themes. The themes or codes were developed by organizing the data into groups, patterns, or sections of information (Turner, 2010). I organized the themes into a diagram or theme chart with relevant materials (i.e., quotes from interviews) being sorted into each category.

Because the study involved multiple forms of data collection, it was important to achieve triangulation, where all data collection technologies measured one single construct or concept (Lune & Berg, 2017). I analyzed each set of data and then synthesized the results by examining the themes from each data collection set and deriving overarching or recurring themes based on the original research questions. This allowed me to actually relate the different types of data to each other rather than simply combining them (Lune & Berg, 2017).

Surveys

The survey included demographic information, open-ended qualitative questions, and quantitative questions, in keeping with Liberty University requirements. Demographic information was tallied both manually and by utilizing the SPSS software to determine descriptive statistics such as mean, median, and mode. The quantitative research questions were also analyzed utilizing the SPSS software. The qualitative, open-ended questions were analyzed

utilizing a manual coding process in Microsoft Word where the coding process was performed several times in order to identify codes. Codes were then classified into themes and the themes were then analyzed multiple times to identify primary themes from the surveys.

Interviews

The data from the recorded interviews was transcribed from the digital recorder with the assistance of the Nuance Dragon NaturallySpeaking Recorder Edition software quickly following the interviews. This software “transcribes spoken text that you have previously recorded into a portable recorder” (Nuance, 2019). Since the digital transcriptions were not completely accurate, I listened to each recording multiple times and made corrections and additions to each transcription to ensure accuracy. Each transcription was captured in a Microsoft Word format. Recordings and transcriptions were stored in password-protected electronic files, with the recordings in one password-protected file and the transcriptions stored in a separate password-protected file. The accurate transcriptions were analyzed utilizing a manual coding process in Microsoft Word. The coding process was performed several times to identify codes, classify codes into themes, and then identify primary themes from the interviews.

Observations

The field notes from the two observations were recorded on observation protocols and classified as descriptive notes and reflective notes. In observations, complete, detailed and accurate field notes are important and should be completed immediately following every field interaction (Lune & Berg, 2017). During the interactions, I was careful to take rich, detailed handwritten notes that were reviewed soon after the interaction to ensure accuracy. Following the interactions, the notes were read multiple times to establish an understanding of the culture of the agency, and they were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. I engaged in manual coding

of the notes in the Microsoft Word program to determine themes and patterns regarding the culture of the organization.

Data Integrity

In qualitative research, researchers seek to ensure that the research is an accurate reflection of the information that was gathered (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allows them to be confident in the results. For example, transparency is increased by stating the researcher's beliefs, which then builds trust in the findings, especially for public policymakers (Massaro et al., 2019).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a validity procedure in qualitative research that includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In order to establish trustworthiness, I sought to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

There is a general consensus that qualitative researchers need to demonstrate that their studies are credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000). There are multiple procedures researchers engage in to do so, including triangulation, thick descriptions, and reporting of their results (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation can be achieved by utilizing multiple data-collection technologies (Lune & Berg, 2017). A thick description refers to researchers providing details about a case or theme, and rich description means there are abundant details outlined from the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers allow readers to make decisions regarding the credibility of the study by generating rich, thick descriptions of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rich, thick descriptions address the setting, participants, and themes of a qualitative study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credible data also comes from close collaboration with research participants

throughout the process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, I ensured credibility by triangulating data from multiple sources and providing detailed, thick descriptions that I obtained through interactions with the participants.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are similar to the concept of reliability in quantitative studies and can be addressed in qualitative research by obtaining detailed field notes, using good-quality recording devices, and accurately transcribing digital files (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ensuring a quality data analysis process, including careful interpretation of findings, is key to dependability and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the human instrument responsible for the data analysis, I worked to increase this study's dependability by ensuring that quality field notes were documented promptly and accurately recorded and transcribed. I reviewed the recorded interviews, transcripts, and notes multiple times in order to ensure accuracy. Finally, Creswell and Poth (2018) note that using reflexivity about the researcher's position, which refers to how the researcher positions themselves in the research, is an evaluation standard for dependability and confirmability. In order to do so, I ensured that my study conveyed my background and what I have to gain from the study and detailed how my background informs my interpretation of the information in the study.

Transferability

Transferability is an aspect of qualitative research that refers to the possibility that, by outlining detailed descriptions of the study, the readers can transfer the information to other settings and determine if the findings can also be transferred (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These details can include physical descriptions, movement descriptions, and activity descriptions and can involve describing the general ideas and interconnecting details through the use of strong

verbs and quotations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell & Poth (2018) suggest reviewing raw data soon after it is collected to add additional important detailed descriptions to achieve this validation strategy. I ensured that I included important details such as information about the setting and the sampling strategy to increase the transferability of this study. I also engaged in multiple reviews of the raw data soon after it was collected and added any important details that were not included. Finally, I have outlined detailed descriptions of the study for readers.

Ethical Considerations

The IRB approval number for this dissertation is IRB-FY22-23-44. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that ethical issues must be carefully considered, as researchers regularly encounter challenges during data analysis, representation related to disclosure of findings, and protection of participants from harm. In order to do so, I have ensured that participants' names were masked as soon as possible to avoid their identification in analysis files (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To accomplish this, I used pseudonyms and stored identification information in a password-protected computer file, separate from the data, to prevent anyone from determining the participants' identities. I ensured that I did not hold a position of influence or authority over any participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants; it detailed the voluntary nature of the study, the right to withdraw at any point of the study, and details about how participants' confidentiality would be protected. I also ensured that what I heard and observed was not discussed with other individuals. Finally, the information has been stored on a password-protected device in order to protect the data from unauthorized access, and hard copies of any documents were stored in a locked file cabinet.

Summary

In summary, in order to determine effective e-leadership skills in a mandatory public sector work environment, a qualitative case study was conducted to obtain the perspectives of government employees who experienced the transition from a traditional in-person work setting to a mandatory remote work setting as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter discussed the research design and rationale for choosing the case study approach and outlined how surveys, interviews, and observations effectively gathered in-depth data from research participants in this study. Details regarding the setting and participants are outlined, as are ethical considerations and methods I utilized to ensure trustworthiness. Through my use of these procedures to ensure validity, the information obtained in this study can inform government leaders in future decisions about successful e-leadership and mandatory remote work.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and identify effective e-leadership skills from the perspectives of managers and employees who operated in a mandatory remote work environment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique circumstance where remote work was implemented and expanded across the United States government in a mandatory fashion (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Office of Personnel Management, 2021). As a result, many public sector organizations failed to prepare leaders regarding the e-leadership skills necessary for successful operation in a mandatory remote work environment.

I outlined the leadership skills that were previously identified in research for successful leadership in a voluntary remote environment as e-communication skills, e-social skills, e-change skills, e-team skills, e-tech skills, and e-trustworthiness (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b; Liu et al., 2018). However, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the need to evaluate successful leadership skills in a mandatory public sector remote environment where there was very little to no organizational preparation for staff members, including training, to transition from an in-person environment to a remote work environment. Additionally, I explained that the culture of any organization must be considered a necessary condition when evaluating successful organizational performance (Meng & Berger, 2019). The focus of this chapter is to present the research findings. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective e-leadership skills in a public sector mandatory remote work environment?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective leadership skills in a traditional work environment that remain important in a mandatory remote work environment?

RQ3: What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to the impact of organizational culture on effective e-leadership skills?

This chapter begins with descriptions of the study participants. Next, study results are presented in the form of themes that were developed after a thorough data analysis. Finally, the synthesized findings regarding each research question's answer are discussed.

Participants

After receiving a list of participants from the designated points of contact within the U.S. Marshals Service, 15 participants were invited to participate in the study. There were 11 individuals who voluntarily participated in the study. Of the 11 participants, nine were employees of the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas and two were employees of the U.S. Marshals Service for the Western District of Missouri at the time of the interview. Three of the participants had worked for both districts during their term of government service. All participants in the study met the criteria for participation and were persons who were over 18 years of age and current employees of the U.S. Marshals Service. Additionally, all participants had performed their job duties in a traditional in-person work environment and then, during the COVID-19 pandemic, performed their job duties in a remote work environment. I indicated in the methodology and to participants that their involvement would be confidential, and published reports would not include any information that would make it possible to identify a subject. Therefore, pseudonyms are utilized in the results, and caution has been used not to provide information that makes it possible to identify the subjects.

Terry

Terry was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas at the time of the interview, which occurred in a private conference room in the U.S. Marshals Service office space. Terry had over 20 years of total government service at the time of the interview and had been employed just less than 20 years for the U.S. Marshals Service. Terry's service with the U.S. Marshals Service included both the District of Kansas and the Western District of Missouri. Terry's position in the agency was described as an independent position that does not require a lot of oversight from management.

Fran

Fran was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the Western District of Missouri at the time of the interview. Fran was interviewed in person in a private conference room located within the U.S. Marshals Service office space. Fran had 10 years total of government service but had been employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for less than 10 years and described her position as a unique position within the agency. She explained that she worked independent of others in the local agency and required very little interaction with other members of the organization. Fran expressed that she hoped this study would enable the U.S. Marshals Service to continue offering remote work options to employees.

Lisa

Lisa was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the Western District of Missouri at the time of the interview. She was interviewed via conference call due to technical limitations at the time of the interview. She had over 20 total years of government service but had been employed with the U.S. Marshals Service for less than 10 years. While serving in an administrative position,

she described her position as one that works closely with the operational or law enforcement positions within the agency.

Sandy

Sandy was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas at the time of the interview. She was interviewed in person in her private office in the U.S. Marshals Service office space. Sandy had over 20 total years of government service and had been employed with the U.S. Marshals Service for less than 10 years. Sandy served in a leadership or managerial position within the agency. Sandy noted that she was not with the agency prior to the pandemic but instead was employed by another government agency, and she had been a key player in the implementation of remote work in that agency's transition to a mandatory remote work environment. This experience provided Sandy with a point of reference when sharing her experience in the U.S. Marshals Service. When she began employment at the U.S. Marshals Service, remote work was still being used as a result of the pandemic, and Sandy was knowledgeable about the agency's transition as she received information from other managers within the organization.

Ana

Ana was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas at the time of the interview. She was interviewed in person in a private office in the U.S. Marshals Service office space. She had over 20 years of government service and had been with the U.S. Marshals Service for less than 10 years. Ana described her position as one where she typically works independently with minimum collaboration with other employees. Ana expressed that the experience during the COVID-19 pandemic led her to believe a hybrid remote environment was the best approach moving forward for the agency.

Emma

Emma was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas at the time of the interview. She was interviewed virtually, based on her personal request. She explained that she first worked for the government as a contractor and then became a government employee. She had worked for the government for less than ten years and had been with the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas for less than ten years. She had also been employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the Western District of Missouri in the past.

Liz

Liz was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas at the time of the interview. She was interviewed virtually due to her geographic location and an agreed-upon request. She had over ten years of total government service. She had been employed full-time with the U.S. Marshals Service for less than ten years but had previously worked in a contract position for the U.S. Marshals Service. She described her position as one that is unique within the District of Kansas, requiring her to work independently, and requiring little interaction with the law enforcement duties of the organization.

Shannon

Shannon was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas at the time of the interview. She was interviewed virtually due to her geographic location; however, the camera function failed for an unknown reason during the interview and so the interaction occurred without visual interaction. Shannon had over ten total years of government service and reported that she had been with the U.S. Marshals Service for less than ten years. While she had been in the District of Kansas for a short period, she previously worked for the U.S. Marshals Service for another district that did not participate in the study. She described the office cultures

of the two U.S. Marshals Service locations as similar, noting that staff worked independently in both locations.

Susan

Susan was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas at the time of the interview. She was interviewed virtually due to her geographic location. Susan was working remotely from home at the time of her interview. She reported that she had worked for the government for over 20 years and had less than 10 years of employment with the U.S. Marshals Service. She was employed in one of the district's sub-offices, and she described the office as a small office that requires everyone in the office to work together. Most of her interactions with leadership prior to the pandemic were virtual due to her geographic location.

Mary

Mary was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas at the time of the interview. She was interviewed in person in her work space in the U.S. Marshals Service office space. Mary reported that she had less than 10 years with the U.S. Marshals Service and her period of employment with the U.S. Marshals Service made up her total years of federal government service. During the interview, she added that she had previously worked as a contractor for the U.S. Marshals Service for several years prior to becoming a full-time employee.

Alex

Alex was employed by the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas at the time of the interview, which occurred in person in a private office within the U.S. Marshals Service office space. Alex reported a total of over 10 years of government service, and Alex had served with the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas the entire term of service. Alex was

able to share a unique perspective because he served in a law enforcement position rather than an administrative position. Additionally, Alex shared a managerial perspective at the time of the interview.

Results

Data for this qualitative case study were obtained through responses from participants to the qualitative, open-ended survey, one-on-one standardized interviews with the participants, and two field observation experiences conducted as an observer, non-participant. In total, I reviewed 53 pages of survey data, 25 pages of interview transcript data, and 4 pages of observation data, for a total of 82 pages of raw data.

Through the data analysis and coding process, three themes were identified and will be discussed in this chapter. The following primary themes were identified: 1) effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills; 2) e-trustworthiness is important in the mandatory remote work environment; and 3) the organizational culture facilitated effective leadership. Additionally, eight sub-themes were identified.

Theme Development

The primary data collection method utilized in this study was the qualitative survey, and the follow-up interviews served as a secondary data collection method to further explain survey results and to provide insight into the organizational culture (Creswell & Hirose, 2019; Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition, the two observations were conducted during the data collection phase in order to provide deeper insight into the agency culture and note the phenomenon in the field setting (Angrosino, 2007, as cited by Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Surveys were disseminated and submitted electronically via electronic mail. I reviewed the survey results multiple times and began organizing the data. Interviews were conducted in person, virtually, and by telephone as agreed upon between each participant and me based on each participant's individual circumstances. I listened to the recordings from the interviews multiple times, carefully read the transcripts, and reviewed them to ensure the accuracy of the participants' responses. Finally, two in-person observations occurred. The handwritten notes taken from the observations were transcribed to electronic notes. I analyzed the survey results, transcripts, and field notes several times in an effort to grasp the data before breaking it into parts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I observed that many of the responses of the participants were similar or exactly the same as those of other participants. Each of the questionnaires, interviews, and observation notes was then coded and used in thematic development.

First Cycle Coding

The structure of coding often involves a first, second, and further cycle codes during the transformation of data into theory (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). First, cycle coding was conducted after the data were initially read and checked for accuracy. Inductive reasoning was used in this analysis, because I sought to discover the crucial patterns that explain the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the coding process, I also engaged in writing notes in accompanying text files or charts as key concepts, ideas, and phrases presented (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I manually conducted the coding process, analyzing the survey data line by line, developing codes, and affixing them as notes (Lune & Berg, 2017) in the Microsoft Word program. This process was performed multiple times and resulted in the identification of 26 initial codes from the survey data. The codes were transferred to a chart with codes listed on the

y axis and a column for each participant (unidentified) on the x axis (See Table 4). I entered a number count for each interviewee into the chart to show the repetition of codes. Through this process, I was able to visualize the frequency with which a topic was discussed. I also developed a separate chart that organized chunks of relevant data according to each identified theme.

Table 4.

Initial Analysis of Survey Responses

Topics from Open-Ended Surveys	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	J	I	J	K
Law Enforcement Culture Identified in the Agency		1	1	3						3	3
Communication is the most important e-leadership skill in any public sector work environment	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	
Communication is the most important e-leadership skill in the mandatory remote work environment	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
There is a perceived friendly and effective culture	1			1	1	1			1		
Culture facilitated more effective leadership in the remote work environment				1		2			1		
There was no training on effective leadership in a mandatory remote environment					1				1	1	
The culture did not interfere with the leadership in the mandatory remote work environment	1	1	1		1	1			2	1	
Culture was not changed based on the pandemic and mandatory remote work	2	1	1			1		1	1		1
All e-leadership skills are transferrable between the remote and in-person environment	1					1		1			
Electronic communication is widely used in the agency		1	2	1							2
Communication is perceived as part of the organization's success							2	1			
e-Tech skills are not important for effective leadership; there is a capable IT department			1	1	1	1	1			1	
e-change skills are important in the mandatory remote work environment							1		1		
e-Social Skills are not important in the mandatory remote work environment			1						1		
Employees need information in the pandemic and mandatory remote work environment			1						1		
Supervisors and leaders did not lack skills in the mandatory remote work environment/No change in leadership effectiveness	1		1		1	1		1		1	
Administrative versus LEO work defines culture						1	1				
e-trustworthiness is important in the mandatory remote work environment		1		1							
Perception of trust was initially a challenge for management			1	3			1				

Trust is important in any work environment	1									1
Communication Builds Trust									1	
Supervisors and staff were learning at the same time/unique challenges	1									1
Stressful Culture										1
There are other effective leadership skills		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

A digital recorder and accompanying software were utilized to record and transcribe data from the interviews into Microsoft Word documents. I manually conducted the coding process, analyzing the data line by line, developing codes, and affixing them as notes (Lune & Berg, 2017). During that process, 24 initial codes emerged from the interview transcript data. This data was captured in a table (See Table 5). A separate chart was also created that sorted chunks of data according to each initial code.

Table 5.

Initial Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Codes from interviews
Electronic Communication is commonly used
Pandemic-driven Management meetings increased communication to staff
Technology enhanced communication
Communication was better due to the pandemic and electronic communication
Trust is Important in the Mandatory Remote Work Environment
Participants Perceive they Remain at Computer all the time in remote environment
Perception that management initially struggled with trust
Supervisor is not a micromanager
No changes to Relationship with Manager in the Remote Environment
Experienced Physical Isolation due to Pandemic
Administrative vs Operations Culture
Independent work structure enabled remote work

Adjustment from in-person environment
Communication facilitates work flow
Participants appreciate being informed through communication
Everyone remained in close communication
Communication is the most effective leadership skill in transition
Capable IT Department
Presence in the office was part of culture
No changes in office culture
Perceived good/friendly relationships
Learn As You Go Environment in the Transition
Independent Work Environment
Culture facilitated effective leadership

Finally, I engaged in the coding process of the observation data. The handwritten data was transcribed to Microsoft Word, and I manually conducted the coding process, where the data was analyzed line by line and codes were developed and affixed as notes (Lune & Berg, 2017) in Microsoft Word. From this analysis, four codes were identified from the observation data: The independent work environment, distinct operational and administrative cultures, cohesive administrative group, and technology facilitates agency communication.

I then engaged in the development of themes. This was done by analyzing the codes and categorizing them to identify themes. This process was repeated multiple times. Time was spent on the careful selection of wording and phrasing to best reflect the theme for maximum understanding. Themes were not built based solely on the number of times each subject appeared but were also based on the importance and value of the information to the goal of the research. Wording of themes was finalized. As a result of the analysis, six themes emerged from the

survey data, four themes emerged from the interview data, and two themes emerged from the observation data (See Table 5).

Table 6.

Emerging Themes from Each Data Set

Surveys	Interviews	Observations
Communication is More Important than Other Leadership Skills	The Need for Communication	Technology Facilitates Communication
Communication is Important in any Work Environment	Perception of Trust is Important in the Mandatory Remote Work Environment	Administrative vs. Operational Cultures in the Organization
Culture was Unchanged in the Remote Work Environment	Unchanged Organizational Culture in the Pandemic	
Leadership Perceived as Effective in the Pandemic	Culture Facilitated Effective Leadership	
The Importance of E-trustworthiness in the Remote Work Environment		
Culture Facilitated Effective Leadership		

Quantitative Survey Questions

The survey included two quantitative survey questions. One question inquired if participants believed the organization experienced cultural change as a result of the pandemic. The results revealed that three participants felt the organization did experience a cultural change, while eight participants did not believe the organization experienced a cultural change. These results were manually tallied and stored on a separate electronic file.

The second quantitative survey question asked participants to rank the six e-leadership skills that research has shown public sector leaders possess to lead government employees effectively in a voluntary remote work environment (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b; Liu et al., 2018). The results of this question were analyzed using the SPSS software to perform a nonparametric Friedman test, because ordinal numbers, numbers to represent the ranks, were involved. In the test, one represented the skill which was ranked as the most important e-leadership skill in a remote work environment, and six represented the skill ranked as the least important e-leadership skill in a remote work environment, with the other choices ranked as second choice, third choice, fourth choice, and fifth choice.

Table 7.

Survey Results of Mean Rank of Most Important e-Leadership Skills When Operating in a Mandated Remote Work Environment

Ranks	
e-Leadership Skills	Mean Rank
e-communication skills	1.09
e-social skills	4.73
e-change skills	3.91
e-team skills	3.82
e-tech skills	4.91
e-trustworthiness	2.55

Ten of 11 participants ranked e-communication skills as the most important skill for leaders operating in a mandated remote work environment. E-trustworthiness was most frequently classified as the second choice for most important skills for leaders operating in a mandated remote work environment. Seven of 11 participants ranked e-trustworthiness as second choice. Finally, e-tech skills was ranked as the least important leadership skill in a mandatory remote work environment. Six of 11 participants ranked e-tech skills as the least important skill

for leaders operating in a mandated remote work environment. The results were utilized in the study.

Synthesis

All results were synthesized by conducting a careful analysis of themes from each data set and then categorizing and combining or discarding themes. The following primary themes were identified: 1) effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills, 2) e-trustworthiness is important in the mandatory remote work environment, and 3) the organizational culture facilitated effective leadership. Additionally, eight sub-themes were identified: *communication is important in any work environment* (related to effective communication), *the perceived need for information by staff* (related to effective communication), *technology facilitated communication* (related to effective communication), *trust is perceived based on the leader's action* (related to e-trustworthiness), *trust is proven by government employees* (related to e-trustworthiness), *the organizational culture remained unchanged during the pandemic* (related to the culture theme), *the independent administrative culture* (related to the culture theme), and *leadership was perceived as effective throughout the pandemic* (related to the culture theme). These themes and sub-themes were captured on a theme chart (Appendix L).

Effective Communication Is More Important Than Other Leadership Skills

Effective communication as the most important leadership skill emerged as the first primary theme during the analysis of the data. This theme was constant across survey and interview data. The communication theme addressed the leadership skills that were perceived as the most effective in the in-person setting, during the transition to a remote work environment, and in the mandatory remote work environment. Though several other leadership skills were

identified by participants as important leadership skills, none were as consistently identified by all participants across multiple data collection methods. This was further evidenced in the quantitative survey question, as ten of 11 participants selected e-communication as the most important skill for leaders operating in a mandatory remote work environment. This theme was coded into three sub-themes as follows:

- (1) Communication is important in any work environment
- (2) A need for information by public sector employees
- (3) Technology facilitated communication

Communication Is Important in Any Work Setting

The theme of communication as the most important leadership skill in any public sector work setting was constant across interviews and emerged through the quantitative question posed on the survey. The participation criteria required participants to have worked in an in-person environment and then experienced the government-wide mandate to remote work. All 11 participants discussed the need for effective communication in the work environment. Terry stated,

As a leader you need to have the ability to communicate effectively with your employees; especially when working remote, you need to be able to communicate the tasks to your employees in a clear and understandable manner. No leader wants to have to have employees redo a task, because of lack of understanding the task.

Alex stated, “Effective communication helps to further the mission.” Mary described the reason communication is the most important supervisor or management is skill is that it “keeps your people from having to guess what is going on or what they are supposed to be doing,” while

Fran indicated it is most important because communication “allows a manager to effectively communicate expectations and needs to others.”

A statement from Liz specifically clarified that the type of work environment (in person or remote) does not impact the need for effective communication: “Communication, regardless of telework or in the office...communication is key for success.” Further, Shannon expressed how communication establishes relationships and provides clarification on expectations:

“Without communication there is no relationship, and we would not know what is expected of us.” Finally, Sandy shared a management perspective on the importance of communication:

“Open communication...promotes a transparent workplace where all know they are seen and heard.”

Need for Information

The perceived need for information by public sector employees was prevalent among interviewees. Some participants focused on the need for information related to the COVID-19 pandemic that facilitated the remote work environment during the period of the study. Liz stated, “With COVID, things were changing everyday it seemed like, so to have your supervisor communicate all changes were helpful.” Fran also shared regarding the initial transition in the pandemic: “Good e-communication skills are vital in order to keep employees informed in an oft-changing environment, which allows employees to effectively manage their workloads.” She also noted about management: “They tried to keep us in the loop, informed as much as they could.”

Participants also expressed the need for information due to the remote work environment, but not related to pandemic updates. For example, Liz stated, “Since we are not in the office every day, being up to date with all the new events is necessary in our line of work.” She also

clarified about the communication they received from management: “[be]cause you’re not in the office, you have no idea what’s going on, so it was good, it was good.” Shannon noted: “To me, all comes down to just communication. If you don’t have good communication, then nothing’s going to get transmitted to us or...so if there’s no communication then with [the manager] or whoever then we’re just not going to know what’s going on.” Susan advised: “Everybody likes to know what is going on in the other offices, and that weekly meeting of all supervisors lets that go on, and then that email puts it out through everybody, so everybody knows what’s going on in the other sub-offices.”

Technology Facilitates Communication

The theme that technology facilitates communication was constant among participants. First, participants established that the use of alternatives to in-person communication, including email and telephone, were common practices in the organization prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Lisa explained, “We communicated, even though we were in the office, probably more via email than we did in person,” and regarding her supervisor, she noted, “If I was going to give an average, I’d say 70% of the time via email, 30% of the time in person while we were in the office.” Susan noted, “The way we interact with all of [management]...it’s always been virtual 90% of the time,” and “I don’t interact with [management] face to face, you know, yes we do phone calls and everything, but a lot of times, it’s easier to shoot an email.” Fran also explained, “I can’t think of any training that we received that was specific, because again it was just things we were already doing, as far as utilizing the technology, how to communicate with each other, I think it stayed the same.” Regarding the law enforcement personnel, Alex stated, “DUSMs are always on call and are expected to be able to respond to

messages or calls at any hour.” Shannon noted, “We all know how to communicate with each other whether in the office or not.”

Many participants also discussed that during the pandemic, enhancements were made to technology. During the observation, Sandy explained that the conference room technology had been enhanced to allow for more effective virtual meetings. The meeting that I observed included participants from various locations, including sub-offices and remote work environments, and they were all present on a screen and able to interact with the in-person participants and other virtual participants. Also, when asked about the effective leadership skills that were utilized in the transition to a mandatory remote work environment, Susan noted, “I think bringing on [instant chat messaging program] was another one. Our office did not use [the program] prior...”

Finally, participants shared that the electronic communication has remained constant. Lisa stated, “Although we have returned to an in-person work environment, we still do 70% of our communicating electronically.” Ana also shared how the enhanced instant messaging technology has continued to facilitate communication. She stated, “Like if my boss is working remotely, I can just call her [on the instant messaging application] and then I can talk to her and it's funny, because I'm doing that rather than calling on a cellphone...I feel like, okay, if they're online, I can just chat with her.”

E-Trustworthiness Is Important in the Mandatory Remote Work Environment

The theme of e-trustworthiness as a necessary skill for effective leadership in a mandatory remote work environment was constant across interviews and also emerged through the quantitative question posed on the survey. Regarding the mandatory remote work environment, the participants expressed a need to be able to get their jobs done with little to no

oversight. Liz stated, “So I do work independently; before COVID, after COVID, nobody really does what I do, so I’m kind of just me.” Further, several participants referenced the term “micromanager” in the study. During the interviews, there were five references to micromanage and micromanagers, and there was one reference in the surveys. All comments expressed micromanaging in a negative light. Ana noted on the survey, “For example, controlling personality = micromanager.” The theme of trustworthiness as a necessary skill was coded into two sub-themes as follows:

- (1) Trust is perceived through the leaders’ actions
- (2) Trust is proven by public sector employees

Trust Is Perceived by the Leaders’ Actions

First, several participant responses revealed that the perception of trust is based on the leader’s actions. Terry stated, “I’ve got my stuff to do, they leave me alone,” and “a good leader trust[s] his employees to be able to accomplish their task on a timely manner with minimum supervision.” Susan described,

Being able to tell your employees in a short an[d] effective manner what you need from them, in ever[y] format they may be doing their job, allows management to create a strong foundation of trust with employee. If management cannot tell the employee how to do their job, without clear instructions, it is hard to build a solid trust.

Sandy stated, “I think as a leader, if you can display that you trust your employees, they’re going to respond to that.” Emma noted, “You have to have some trustworthiness with your employees.” Regarding leadership skills that were especially effective during the transition, she also explained, “We still just do our work. I guess just allowing us to do it. Just know that we can.” Ana stated, “Trustworthiness was a big one...because I think that’s what it all came down

to...was, are we able to do...do we still see the amount of work being done,” and she also conveyed, “I think trust has been the hardest part for managers.”

Trust Is Proven by Government Employees

Another theme that emerged in the discussion of e-trustworthiness is that the staff perceived that they earned trust, and they proved they are deserving of trust. Participants indicated that in the beginning of the pandemic, as an organization that had never engaged in or permitted work remotely, the leadership was perceived as uncertain about whether the new system would work. Ana stated, “I think management was a little wary of it. I think they, they had to kind of see that’s okay. It’s working.” Susan noted, “I think...initially everybody was like, ‘how are we going to do this?’ Following it, they were just a lot more open-minded once we got going and realized ‘hey, this is going to be okay.’” Emma stated, “Now they are able, we’ve all kind of proven ourselves and we don’t get behind on our jobs, so there is some trustworthiness there.”

Participants also discussed their efforts to gain the trust of management. Ana explained, “And then you know it was the feeling of you don’t want to break that trust with your supervisor.” Terry observed, “[The supervisor] may not know everything that we are required to do, but she is trusting us to be able to do our jobs without micromanaging us...so far, we have not proved her wrong.” Finally, Susan stated, “One needs to be trustworthy to take our equipment and data home.”

Organizational Culture Facilitated Effective Leadership

The theme that the culture facilitated effective leadership was constant across data collection methods. First, participants explained that the culture facilitated effective leadership. For example, Susan stated, “[The culture] allowed for a smoother transition.”

Participants also noted that the culture did not interfere with the effectiveness of leadership, thereby facilitating effective leadership. Emma stated, “[The culture] may have slowed down things a bit, but overall, everything still got accomplished.” Participants also clarified that despite the changes in the work environment (i.e., in-person to remote work), the purpose and expectations of the organization did not change. This theme was coded into three sub-themes as follows:

- (1) The Organizational Culture Remained Unchanged Throughout the Pandemic
- (2) Independent Administrative Staff Culture
- (3) Leadership Perceived as Effective Throughout the Pandemic

Organizational Culture Remained Unchanged Throughout the Pandemic

As a law enforcement agency, the overarching culture of the organization was defined as “mission-driven.” Fran stated regarding the culture, “It’s very mission driven, especially for the Marshals.” Alex explained, “The USMS culture is mission-driven. Everything we do at the district level is to support the overall mission of the agency.” The U.S. Marshal for the District of Kansas explained in the initial interview that this organization has two primary functions: administrative functions and operational or law enforcement functions. The U.S. Marshal for the Western District of Kansas also acknowledged these distinct roles.

The study revealed that these two areas of work—administrative functions and law enforcement functions—also have distinct cultures, and these cultures remained unchanged during the pandemic. Alex shared, “Law enforcement has historically shared a close group mindset due to the dangerous environments we work in,” and noted regarding the pandemic that “checking on others while they were in quarantine was a result of the close group culture of law enforcement.” However, when asked about the administrative staff, Alex clarified, “they do more

independent staff.” Other participants also shared information regarding administrative staff culture. Terry described the organizational culture as “us and them refers to operational versus administrative.” Fran noted regarding law enforcement, “Deputies have the other offices and they’re usually rarely in the office,” but regarding administrative staff “...so much on the admin side at least, it’s all computer work.” When asked about cultural changes due to the mandated remote work environment, Susan clarified that the “deputies” may have experienced changes, “I think the deputies were a little more relaxed in the sense that they weren’t as stressed...,” distinguishing them from the administrative culture.

The fieldwork observations that were conducted also revealed the distinct cultural differences. On the date of the second observation, which involved an observation of an office day, the administrative staff members who were present in the office were each observed working independently in their own work space. The office space was observed to be very quiet. During this experience, I also observed that several operational staff members were together in a large office space engaging in group conversation.

Finally, in addition to addressing the specific cultural traits that remained unchanged, participants directly indicated that the culture was not changed. Terry stated, “There has been no change in the culture of the USMS as a result of COVID-19 and remote working conditions.” Fran stated, “I would say effectiveness of leadership mostly remained the same.” Mary noted, “No change in the culture of the agency.” Alex also noted, “No change.”

Independent Administrative Culture

Throughout the study, the theme that the administrative staff’s culture is defined by independence was also revealed. First, both observations revealed the independent nature of the administrative staff work. During the first observation, which included attending an

administrative staff meeting, the manager engaged in an activity where each staff member discussed their current work duties. In that exercise, each staff member presented independent work duties, and no staff members discussed group activities. A discussion did ensue about one staff member assisting another with a deadline-driven assignment, which further evidenced that the administrative staff work independently. Additionally, during the observation of an office day, three administrative staff members were present at the observation site. Each individual had a separate work station, the environment was very quiet, and each individual was observed working at their respective workplace. The point of contact clarified that in the District of Kansas, the administrative staff are stationed as follows: Four staff members work in the headquarters office; one staff member works in the same headquarters building on a separate floor; two staff members work in one sub-office; and two staff members work in a separate sub-office. The staff members also engage in remote work. In the Western District of Missouri, Fran described her office space as, “So a lot of times, I’m just down here by myself, just doing my own work...”

This theme also emerged through survey and interview responses provided by participants. Shannon noted, “if we need to work together, we did so but other than that, we just worked independently.” Sandy noted regarding the administrative staff, “So, it wasn’t as if they all worked really, really closely together, and that may have attributed to the [success] when they did go into that mandatory telework environment during the pandemic, ’cause they were already so used to working independently.” Lisa summarized, “I think that we collaborate, as in we have one goal, but we have to do our certain parts of it to make it happen.”

Effective Leadership Throughout the Pandemic

The perception that leadership was effective throughout the pandemic was also constant throughout the study. Participants consistently noted no concerns with the organization's leadership during the pandemic. Fran noted, "Because most of managements' communication was already done via email or MS Teams, I think they were able to carry on as usual for the most part." Terry noted, "There was no problem with the leadership during the pandemic." Fran observed that she "felt so bad" for the chief, and that "he would send emails that would say that this is the latest guidance we've received, it's going to change on a daily basis," and then "so, I felt like they had our best interest in mind—to the extent that they could really tell us anything themselves." Lisa noted, "My supervisor is a tech-oriented person and communicates with us—before home telework environment—at very effectively utilizing everything that's in place, and so he just continued to utilize what was in place when we got together, I don't think there was anything that really changed." Liz noted, "Leadership did a great job during COVID, keeping everyone up to date on all changes." Several participants expressed that they felt that leadership effectiveness was enhanced during the pandemic. Ana shared that the culture, "may have made leadership more effective by improving morale of staff by making them feel trusted." Liz stated, "Communication has gotten 10 times better because of COVID."

Research Question Responses

Research Question One

What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective e-leadership skills in a public sector mandatory remote work environment? Two themes were identified during data analysis to address this research question: 1) effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills and 2) e-trustworthiness is important in the

mandatory remote work environment. Three sub-themes were identified within the communication theme based on the participants' lived experiences and perceptions:

Communication is important in any work environment, the perceived need for information by staff, and technology facilitated communication. Two sub-themes were identified within the trustworthiness theme based on the participants' lived experiences and perceptions: *Trust is perceived through the leader's actions and trust is proven by public sector employees.*

The participants' lived experiences and perceptions consistently identified the need for effective e-communication as an effective e-leadership skill in a public sector mandatory remote work environment. Participants consistently expressed the need for effective communication in any remote environment but emphasized the need for such communication in the mandatory remote work environment. Terry explained, "As a leader you need to have the ability to communicate effectively with your employees, especially when working remote." Participants expressed a need for information in the mandatory remote work environment. Shannon said, "Without communication and not seeing everyone every day, we may miss information." They also consistently noted that technology facilitated effective communication in their lived experiences. Emma stated, "Leadership communicates mainly via email whether in the office or not, so telework didn't change that."

The need for effective e-trustworthiness was also identified as an effective e-leadership skill in a public sector mandatory remote work environment. Participants consistently discussed the need for trust to be present to enable the participants to complete their work duties. Ana stated, "I think the manager and employee trust relationship was the most difficult, and most important in allowing the employees to telework and leaders accepting it. It will not work if leaders are not able to trust employees." When discussing e-trustworthiness, the participants

consistently discussed how trust is perceived through the actions of the leader, and they shared their experiences related to proving their trustworthiness.

Research Question Two

What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective leadership skills in a traditional work environment that remain important in a mandatory remote work environment?

One theme was identified during data analysis to address this research question: effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills. Three sub-themes were identified within the communication theme based on the participants' lived experiences and perceptions: *Communication is important in any work environment; the perceived need for information by staff; and technology facilitated communication*. The participants' lived experiences and perceptions consistently identified effective e-communication as an effective e-leadership skill that was important in any work environment, including the mandatory remote work environment. Emma stated, "Effective communication is vital for both teleworking and in-person work environments." This understanding was constant across interviews and surveys. Through this theme, participants shared their need for information, and they emphasized how technology facilitated effective communication.

Research Question Three

What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to the impact of organizational culture on effective e-leadership skills? One theme was identified during data analysis to address this research question: The organizational culture facilitated effective leadership. Three sub-themes were identified within the unchanged culture theme based on the participants' lived experiences and perceptions: *The organizational culture remained unchanged throughout the pandemic, the independent administrative staff culture, and leadership perceived as effective*

throughout the pandemic. The participants' lived experiences and perceptions consistently identified the culture facilitating effective leadership in the remote work environment. Liz stated, "Once the mask mandates lifted and the vaccine mandates relaxed, nothing was different with the office environment," and Shannon noted, "The only difference from pre-COVID to now is the ability to telework more." Thus, the existing culture of the administrative staff participants, defined through the lived experiences of participants as an independent work culture, remained unchanged during the transition. Yet, leadership was perceived as effective throughout the case study experience. Susan said, "None of my supervisors had the prior experience mentioned, to my knowledge; however, I found nothing lacking as this was a learning experience for us all." The unchanged culture facilitated effective leadership by not interfering with or impacting effective leadership. The independent work culture also facilitated effective leadership. Ana stated,

If you had a problem, you just brought it up at that point; otherwise, we each really function very independently. You can even see how the office is set up. There were days that I didn't even need to speak to anybody, so it's always been like that, even pre-pandemic.

Susan shared a manager's perspective, "And then when I came on here, it was an easy transition because things were pretty much running smoothly."

Summary

I presented the findings of the research questions, including both the process and the progress of development of three themes and eight sub-themes. These findings provided clear and robust insight previously not described. I analyzed the interview data, the survey data, and the data from observations and presented the information in this chapter. I also supplied narrative

answers to each of the research questions using data collected, the themes developed, and participant quotes to support responses to the research questions. In the following chapter, I discuss the interpretation of findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study research was to explore and identify effective public sector leadership skills when operating in a mandatory remote work environment from the perspectives of managers and employees who were mandated to work in a remote environment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research topic was driven by the adjustments many public sector organizations were mandated to make due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter provides a detailed description of the summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings and the implications in light of the relevant literature and theory, the methodological and practical implications of the study, an outline of the study delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

In order to explore and understand how managers and employees who operated in a mandatory remote work environment perceive effective public sector leadership skills in that environment, three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective e-leadership skills in a public sector mandatory remote work environment?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective leadership skills in a traditional work environment that remain important in a mandatory remote work environment?

RQ3: What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to the impact of organizational culture on effective e-leadership skills?

The case study method aims to describe and define phenomena in order to investigate and provide insight into an event (Lune & Berg, 2017). It provides a deep understanding of a case, issue, or problem by using the case as a specific illustration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study explored the perspectives and lived experiences of employees of the U.S. Marshals Service who operated in a mandatory remote work environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to address the research questions, themes and sub-themes were developed and descriptions of the participants' lived experiences during the mandated transition to remote work as a result of the pandemic were analyzed. Descriptions were also provided from observation fieldwork that was completed to provide insight into the agency culture in order to explore the impact of the agency culture on effective leadership skills. Three themes emerged that provided answers to the research questions: 1) effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills, 2) e-trustworthiness is important in the mandatory remote work environment, and 3) the organizational culture facilitated effective leadership. Additionally, eight sub-themes emerged. Themes one and two were used to answer research question one, and theme two was used to answer research question two. Theme three was used to answer research question three.

Research Question 1

What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective e-leadership skills in a public sector mandatory remote work environment?

The data analysis revealed two themes addressed this question: 1) effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills and 2) e-trustworthiness is important in the mandatory remote work environment. Through further data analysis, three sub-themes were identified in describing the first theme: *Communication skills*

are important in any work environment, there is a perceived need for information by public sector employees, and technology facilitated communication. Two sub-themes were identified in describing the second theme: *Trust is perceived through the leader's actions* and *trust is proven by public sector employees*.

Research Question 2

What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to effective leadership skills in a traditional work environment that remain important in a mandatory remote work environment?

The data analysis revealed that one theme addressed this question: effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills. Three sub-themes were identified within the communication theme based on the participants' lived experiences and perceptions: *Communication is important in any work environment, the perceived need for information by staff, and technology facilitated communication*.

Research Question 3

What are the perspectives of public sector employees as to the impact of organizational culture on effective e-leadership skills?

The data analysis revealed one theme addressed this research question: the organizational culture facilitated effective leadership. Three sub-themes were identified within the organizational culture theme based on the participants' lived experiences and perceptions: *The organizational culture remained unchanged throughout the pandemic, the independent administrative staff culture, and leadership was perceived as effective throughout the pandemic*.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perspectives of public sector employees and managers regarding effective leadership skills in a mandatory remote work

environment. Additionally, the study analyzed the impact of organizational culture on the effectiveness of leadership in the mandatory remote work environment. The theoretical framework that guided this study was traditional public sector leadership theory and the emerging e-leadership subfield. A qualitative case study design was utilized, and three collection methods were engaged (surveys, interviews, and observations). Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used to identify a minimum of ten participants for the study. This section discusses the study's findings in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The results corroborate and extend previous research on public sector leadership theories and the e-leadership subfield. The results also corroborate previous research that establishes that organizational culture should be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of leadership.

Theoretical Literature

Traditional public sector leadership theories and the emerging e-leadership subfield served as the theoretical framework for this study. Traditional public sector leadership theories focus on general leadership theories but within the unique constraints and unique working environment of public sector leaders (Van Wart, 2003; Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). They consider the skills, traits, and behaviors of leaders in relation to the distinct mission and environment in which public sector leaders operate (Van Wart, 2003; Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). In this study, I focused on three traditional public sector leadership theories: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and servant leadership. Transformational leadership theories focus on purpose in work, and transactional theories focus on rewards and sanctions (Nielsen et al., 2018), while servant leadership is focused on a leader's effort to focus on the needs of their followers (Sharpp et al., 2019). The emerging e-leadership subfield is built

on traditional leadership theories but integrates the advancements that technology generates for modern leadership (Avolio et al., 2000).

This study expanded on traditional public sector leadership theory and the e-leadership theory subfield by exploring effective leadership skills that are specifically applicable to a mandatory remote work environment, which was not previously included in theoretical analyses. Several skills have been identified for effective e-leaders in government operating in a traditional or voluntary remote work environment. These skills include e-communication skills, e-social skills, e-change skills, e-team skills, e-tech skills, and e-trustworthiness (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b; Liu et al., 2018). In this study, the participants provided perspectives and lived experiences of public sector employees and managers regarding the e-leadership skills public sector leaders need to effectively operate in a mandatory remote work environment.

The first two themes that emerged, effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills, and e-trustworthiness is important in the mandatory remote work environment, provided evidence of the e-leadership skills that public sector employees operating in a mandatory remote work environment find to be the most important for public sector leadership success. In the quantitative survey question, ten of 11 research participants ranked e-communication skills as the most important skill for leaders operating in a mandatory remote work environment. Further, in the open-ended questions, all participants reported that communication was the most important skill for leaders in a mandatory remote work environment. This information was corroborated through the follow-up interviews. Seven of 11 participants ranked e-trustworthiness as the second most important skill for leaders operating in a mandatory remote work environment. Additionally, the open-ended survey question answers and the interview question answers supported that e-trustworthiness was also

considered an important leadership skill in the mandatory remote work environment. This study's findings highlighted the importance of emphasizing two e-leadership skills, e-communication and e-trustworthiness, when referencing effective public sector leadership skills in a mandatory remote work environment.

Empirical Literature

This study corroborates previous research regarding e-leadership skills and the impact of organizational culture on the effectiveness of e-leadership skills. Throughout the study, participants consistently described how communication or e-communication skills are the most important leadership skill for public sector managers, and that trustworthiness or e-trustworthiness is important in the mandatory remote work environment. Research has documented that while the skills needed in traditional in-person work environments and the skills needed in virtual environments are not the same (Van Wart et al., 2017b; Orazi et al., 2013), some skills may be applicable to both environments (Dennis, 2021). This study explored what skills are effective in a traditional in-person work environment that remain important in a mandatory remote work environment. The first theme that emerged, effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills, provided evidence of the leadership skill that remains important in the mandatory remote work environment. The qualitative survey responses and the interview question responses supported that communication or e-communication is the skill that is important in any work environment. The sub-themes that were identified through further data analysis of the first theme included the finding that communication skills are important in any work environment.

This study also expanded on prior empirical research concerning the impact of organizational culture on leadership effectiveness. The quality of the organizational culture and

the quality of leadership influences several employee success factors (Meng & Berger, 2019; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015). Culture also influences and moderates the relationship between leaders and followers (Spicer, 2019; Blair & Bligh, 2018, p. 131). Overall, organizational culture guides members of the agency in what is acceptable, and this culture can limit the success of leadership (Fischer, 2010, p. 66; Keiser, 2021; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015). The increase in technology use has been documented to impact the organizational culture (Torre & Sarti, 2020). The third theme that emerged, the organizational culture facilitated effective leadership, provided evidence that the organizational culture impacts the effectiveness of leadership. During survey responses and responses to interview questions, a consistent response was that the leadership within the organization studied was deemed successful in the mandatory remote work environment. Participants noted “no problem” with management and expressed the belief that management had their “best interest” in mind during the pandemic. During the study, when directly asked, participants reported that the organizational culture either did not interfere with the already existing effective leadership or facilitated effective leadership.

Implications

This qualitative case study explored the lived experiences of public sector employees who operated in a mandatory remote work environment as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several implications have been recognized from this study. This section addresses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. Recommendations for policymakers and government leaders regarding effective leadership skills in a mandatory remote work environment are also provided.

Theoretical Implications

This study described the lived experiences and perceptions of public sector employees from the U.S. Marshals Service regarding effective leadership in the mandatory remote work environment that was implemented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional public sector leadership theories and the emerging e-leadership subfield provided the theoretical framework to analyze this phenomenon. Traditional public sector leadership theories acknowledge the role of the skills, traits, and behaviors of traditional leaders but incorporate an analysis of the unique mission and environment in which public sector leaders operate (Van Wart, 2003; Yeboah-Assiamah & Adams, 2019). The e-leadership theory subfield further integrates the technological advancements that modern leadership faces into traditional public sector leadership theory (Avolio et al., 2000). The findings revealed that communication, or e-communication, and trustworthiness, or e-trustworthiness, are the most important leadership skills for public sector managers when operating in a mandatory remote work environment.

All participants in this study provided their perspectives and shared their lived experiences regarding their observation of effective leadership skills displayed by their agency's leadership team during the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional public sector leadership theory and the e-leadership subfield have failed to explore the significant differences in effective leadership skills resulting from a transition to a mandatory remote work environment rather than a planned remote work environment. It is well-known that the transition to a mandatory remote work environment occurs very quickly and with little preparation (Philip, 2021), differing in this respect from the implementation of a planned remote work environment. The participants described a similar experience in their organization. Ana stated, "Within one week's timeframe, we basically got told, you're going to telework." Fran stated, "Yeah, it was just make sure you

take your laptop and your card so you can access everything and just do what you can from home. If you can't get everything done, communicate with those that might still be in the office.” Thus, understanding how the participants perceived leadership in this unique working environment was crucial in this study.

This study expands traditional public sector leadership and the emerging e-leadership subfield by analyzing the skills necessary for effective leadership that are specifically applicable in the mandatory remote work environment. Thus, this study's findings highlight the importance of emphasizing specific e-leadership skills (e-communication and e-trustworthiness) for public sector managers and supervisors when faced with operating in a mandatory remote work environment.

Empirical Implications

This study has generated significant empirical implications. The first implication is the evidence supporting prior research that organizational culture impacts the successfulness of leadership (Fischer, 2010, p. 66; Keiser, 2021; Kargas & Varoutas, 2015). Participants provided their perspectives and lived experiences regarding the culture of the organization and impacts or changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the government-wide mandate for remote work. Understanding the participants' perceptions of the organizational culture and how it impacted leadership effectiveness during the transition to mandatory remote work was also critical to this study. Organizational culture has been determined to be a defining element of the success of leadership (Fischer, 2010; Savard & Mizoguchi, 2019). The findings of this study demonstrated that the organizational culture was perceived by public sector employees and managers as facilitating the effective e-leadership skills in the mandatory remote work environment, thereby corroborating previous research. Thus, this study's findings highlight the

importance of emphasizing the organization's culture when implementing leadership initiatives related to a mandatory remote work environment.

Practical Implications

This study produced several practical implications for government leaders. First, following the COVID-19 pandemic, government leaders are now faced with implementing opportunities to aid the government in attracting and retaining a talented workforce in the future (Office of Personnel Management, 2021), such as workplace flexibility and remote work options. These advancements necessitate the clear identification of effective e-leadership skills. While several e-leadership skills exist and are considered important in various contexts, e-communication and e-trustworthiness were determined by this study to be important leadership skills when operating in a mandatory remote work environment. Thus, government leaders should address these specific leadership skills (e-communication and e-trustworthiness) when engaged in decision-making regarding leadership and mandatory remote work environments. Based on the study findings, it is recommended that government leaders establish protocols for effective e-communication and e-trustworthiness that ensure adequate information is provided to government employees without interfering with e-trustworthiness by the leader (i.e., do not create the appearance of micromanaging); government leaders should also encourage sufficient engagement of technology for communication.

Another practical implication is that organizational culture impacts the effectiveness of leadership skills in a mandatory remote work environment. Generally, culture can be explored with members of the organization, and a strong culture can be determined by a general agreement in the description of the organization (Keiser, 2021). In this study, the participants' work culture was categorized as an independent work culture, and it was determined that this

culture facilitated effective leadership in the mandatory remote work environment. Thus, government leaders should consider assessing the organizational culture when engaging in decision-making regarding leadership in a mandatory remote work environment to determine if the organizational culture is able to sustain effective e-leadership skills. If the culture of an organization is determined to need change, organizations can engage in a cyclical process that involves reflection, experimentation, and action (Spicer, 2020).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are conscious limitations that are established by the author of the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study's delimitations were based on the purpose of the study, which was to obtain the perspectives of public sector employees and managers on the effective leadership skills for operating in a mandatory remote work environment. In this study, the participants were required to meet certain criteria (18 years of age or older and a current employee of the U.S. Marshals Service) and to have performed their duties in a traditional in-person environment before the COVID-19 pandemic, but to be mandated to do the job in a remote work environment (often referred to as telework) after the onset of the pandemic.

Early in the study, a decision was made to utilize the qualitative case study approach. The qualitative case study allows the researcher to investigate an event in order to understand how the subject operated or functioned (Lune & Berg, 2018). Due to the need to evaluate culture in order to understand its impact on the effectiveness of leadership, an ethnographic study was initially considered. However, ethnographic research requires extensive time to collect data based on prolonged periods of time in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, it was determined that the case study approach would better allow for the use of multiple collection

methods (surveys, interviews, and observations) and provide the information and insight needed to answer the research questions.

The first criteria established for the study was that participants were to be 18 years of age or older and a current employee of the U.S. Marshals Service. The rationale behind this decision is that the U.S. Marshals Service only employs adults, and it was critical that the participants be actual employees of the agency to ensure consistency in their experience, including in receiving directives and experiencing the organizational culture. Those individuals who were employees of the U.S. Marshals Service were able to provide insight and lived experiences of government employees who were only allowed to work remotely following the implementation of the government-wide mandate based on the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second criterion of the study was that employees of the U.S. Marshals Service had to have performed their duties in a traditional in-person environment before the COVID-19 pandemic, but to have been mandated to do the job in a remote work environment (often referred to as telework) following the onset of the pandemic. The rationale behind this decision was it would ensure that participants were able to provide insight and lived experiences for public sector employees who experienced two distinct work environments, a pre-pandemic in-person work environment and then, as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, an environment where remote work was allowed as a result of the government-wide mandate for remote work.

Limitations of a study are the potential weaknesses usually not within the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study experienced limitations. One of the limitations of this study was the demographic representativeness. Nine of 11 participants identified themselves as females, and only two identified themselves as male. Additionally, ten of the 11 participants identified as white, and one participant identified as Hispanic. There were

no Black or African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, or other ethnic group participants. Finally, five of the participants indicated they were between the ages of 35 and 46 years old, and six participants indicated they were over 47 years of age. There were no participants under the age of 35.

Another study limitation concerned the participants' understanding of the mandatory remote work environment. Because the organization was a law enforcement organization, those who served in an operational or law enforcement agency were not permitted to work remotely for extended periods despite the government-wide mandate. Ana stated, "The deputies and task force officers didn't telework due to the nature of their work." Emma noted, "I can tell you that most of our deputies didn't get to telework." Sandy, a manager, clarified, "But I do know they all went...into that environment, but I think of course it didn't last long for the first responders because they were pulled back across the nation." As a result of the law enforcement requirements of the organization, the understanding of participants regarding mandatory remote work and the length and extensiveness of participation in remote work varied across participants. Mary stated, "I didn't start to telework until [certain requirements] became mandatory." Fran observed, "Yeah, that's hard to answer, especially because we didn't do it on a full-time basis."

Recommendations for Future Research

In qualitative case study research, the case under study represents an illustration of something larger, one event from a broader category, and can easily serve as a "breeding ground for insights and even hypotheses that may be pursued in subsequent studies" (Lune & Berg, 2018, p. 167). This qualitative case study explored the perspectives and lived experiences of public sector employees who operated in the public sector during the COVID-19 pandemic and the government-wide mandate for remote work. The findings revealed that communication, or e-

communication, and trustworthiness, or e-trustworthiness, are the leadership skills public sector employees determined are most important when operating in the mandatory remote work environment. Further, the findings revealed that the organizational culture facilitated effective leadership in the mandatory remote work environment. These findings establish recommendations for future research.

Leadership skills are learned characteristics, and they are highly impacted by training, education, and practical application. Leadership skills can actually be acquired and enhanced through study and practice (Van Wart, 2015). The findings of this research should be incorporated into training for public sector leaders. The findings have revealed that two e-leadership skills (e-communication and e-trustworthiness) are important e-leadership skills for leaders operating in a mandatory remote work environment. In the future, further research should explore these two skills to establish how strong communication skills can be established in a mandatory remote work environment despite the minimal planning involved in the transition, and how e-trustworthiness skills are established in the mandatory remote work environment. A qualitative case study design would be effective to gather perspectives of public sector employees and managers on the appropriate frequency of communication and the specific actions leaders can engage in or avoid to establish e-trustworthiness.

The findings of this research have established that organizational culture impacts the effectiveness of e-leadership in a mandatory remote work environment. As a result, leadership initiatives moving forward should include reference to the importance of evaluating organizational culture and how it impacts effective e-leadership. In this study, the primary culture in which the research participants operated was defined by independence, and this culture facilitated effective e-leadership. Future research should explore other cultures to determine what

cultural traits are effective and what traits are ineffective in facilitating effective e-leadership. A similar qualitative case study design using the same research questions could be conducted in various government organizations to determine the defining cultural traits of the organization and whether those traits facilitated effective e-leadership.

One limitation of the study was the participants' understanding of the mandatory remote work environment and variation in the participants' length of time and level of participation in remote work, because the study site was a law enforcement agency that had to deviate from the government-wide mandate to fulfill its mission. During the study, Sandy described previously working in a non-law enforcement agency at the time of the transition to a mandatory remote work. She stated, "It was like, like within minutes we were told we had to evacuate the building," and she described variation in the experience in that agency from the U.S. Marshals Service. Thus, another recommendation from this study would be to conduct the same study at a non-law enforcement public sector agency. As the study revealed, the mission of the organization defined the overall organizational culture. Therefore, conducting the study at a non-law enforcement agency would be beneficial to determine if the results of this study are unique to public sector law enforcement agencies, or if different findings would emerge in a non-law enforcement public sector agency.

In addition to variations in the participants' experience with remote work, the participants also represented different demographic groups, such as gender and race, and years of government and agency service. However, this study did not explore correlations or relationships between variables present in the study. A final recommendation for future research would be to engage in correlational research to investigate the statistical relationships between identified variables.

Summary

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of public sector employees and managers operating during the COVID-19 pandemic during the government-wide mandate for mandatory remote work. A qualitative case study research design was used to explore and interpret the perspectives and lived experiences of the participants. Traditional public sector leadership theories and the emerging e-leadership subfield provided the theoretical framework for the study, and qualitative research methods of surveys, interviews, and observations were utilized. The study was guided by three research questions: 1) What are the perspectives of management and employees as to effective e-leadership skills in a public sector mandatory remote work environment, 2) What are the perspectives of management and employees as to effective leadership skills in a traditional work environment that remain important in a mandatory remote work environment, and 3) What are the perspectives of management and employees as to the impact of organizational culture on effective e-leadership skills. Three main themes emerged from the results of the study: 1) effective communication or e-communication skills are more important than other leadership skills, 2) e-trustworthiness is important in the mandatory remote work environment, and 3) the organizational culture facilitated effective leadership.

Additionally, eight sub-themes were identified: *Communication is important in any work environment* (related to e-communication), *the perceived need for information by staff* (related to e-communication), *technology facilitated communication* (related to e-communication), *trust is perceived based on the leader's action* (related to e-trustworthiness), *trust is proven by government employees* (related to e-trustworthiness), *the organizational culture remained unchanged during the pandemic* (related to the culture theme), *the independent administrative culture* (related to the culture theme), and *leadership was perceived as effective throughout the*

pandemic (related to the culture theme).

By exploring the participants' lived experiences and obtaining their perspectives, it became evident that communication, or e-communication, and trustworthiness, or e-trustworthiness, are the most important leadership skills for leaders operating in a mandatory remote work environment. Further, it is evident the organizational culture does impact the effectiveness of leadership operating in a mandatory remote work environment and should, therefore be taken into consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of leadership. This study made a significant contribution to the empirical literature that explores effective public sector leadership skills, specifically in a mandatory remote work environment. In the future, government leaders can utilize this study's results to inform future decisions regarding effective leadership in light of the rapid technological advancements currently occurring in the government and any operational or training changes implemented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 30, 2022

Sara Valdez Hoffer
Gerald Regier

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-44 Effective Public Sector Leadership in a Mandatory Remote Work Environment

Dear Sara Valdez Hoffer, Gerald Regier,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46.104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: Permission Request Letters

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Company]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

Dear [Recipient],

As a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the Ph.D. in Public Administration degree. The title of my research project is Effective Public Sector Leadership in a Mandatory Remote Work Environment, and the purpose of my research is to identify effective e-leadership skills from the perspective of managers and employees operating in a mandatory remote work environment.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your staff to invite them to participate in my research study. Participants will be asked to complete an online survey and an audio-recorded interview conducted in person, over the phone, or virtually. I am also requesting permission to conduct observations, which would include observing office interactions for approximately one hour on two separate occasions in the Wichita and Topeka divisional offices.

Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond to me by email at [REDACTED]. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Sara J. Valdez Hoffer
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX C: Example Permission Response Letters

[Date]

Sara J. Valdez Hoffer
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
[Address 1]
[Address 2]

Dear Mrs. Valdez Hoffer:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Effective Public Sector Leadership in a Mandatory Remote Work Environment, I have decided to grant you permission to contact my staff and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

- I will provide our staff list to Sara Valdez Hoffer, and Sara Valdez Hoffer may use the list to contact our staff members to invite them to participate in her research study.
- I will not provide potential participant information to Sara Valdez Hoffer, but I agree to provide the name of a point of contact with whom Sara Valdez Hoffer may work to develop a list of staff members to invite to participate in her research study.
- I grant permission for Sara Valdez Hoffer to contact staff members to invite them to participate in this research study.
- I grant permission for Sara Valdez Hoffer to utilize divisional conference rooms or other private office spaces to conduct interviews with staff members.
- I grant permission for Sara Valdez Hoffer to participate in scheduled opportunities to conduct observations of the organization.

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Title]

APPENDIX D: Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

Effective Public Sector Leadership in a Mandatory Remote Work Environment

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you a current employee of the U.S. Marshals Service?
- Were you mandated to work remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic after previously working primarily in a traditional in-person setting?

If you answered yes to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study. There is no benefit or compensation for participating in this research study.

The purpose of this research study is to identify effective e-leadership skills from the perspective of managers and employees operating in a mandatory remote work environment.

Participants will be asked to complete an online survey and submit to one interview. Observations of office interactions will also occur.

Benefits include an increased understanding of the skills needed to lead effectively in a mandatory remote work environment which will aid the government in attracting and retaining a talented workforce in the future

If you would like to participate, please contact Sara J. Valdez Hoffer at the phone number or [email address](#) provided below.

A consent document will be given to you prior to the survey.

Sara J. Valdez Hoffer, a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Please contact Sara J. Valdez Hoffer at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

APPENDIX E: Recruitment Letter

Dear Recipient,

As a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the Ph.D. in Public Administration degree. I am conducting research to identify effective e-leadership skills from the perspective of managers and employees operating in a mandatory remote work environment, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, and be current employees of the U.S. Marshals Services who performed their job duties in a traditional in-person work setting but were mandated into a remote work environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete an online survey and participate in an audio-recorded interview that will be conducted in person, over the phone, or virtually. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedures listed. I will also be conducting two in-person observations of office interactions, lasting approximately an hour each. Identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please return your completed survey by email to [REDACTED]. In the email, please provide your availability to schedule an interview in the near future.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to read and sign the consent document and return it to me by email before you complete and return the survey.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Sara J. Valdez Hoffer
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX F: Consent Document

Title of the Project: Effective Public Sector Leadership in a Mandatory Remote Work Environment

Principal Investigator: Sara J. Valdez Hoffer, Doctoral Candidate, Helms School of Government, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, be a current employee of the U.S. Marshals Service for the District of Kansas/Western District of Missouri, and have been mandated to work remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic after previously working primarily in a traditional in-person setting. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to identify effective e-leadership skills from the perspective of managers and employees operating in a mandatory remote work environment. The results will assist in decision-making concerning effective leadership in public sector virtual work. The study is being done as the final step of the student's Ph.D. program.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete an online survey, which will take approximately 30 minutes.
2. Complete an interview with myself in person, over the phone, or virtually, which will take approximately 30 minutes.
3. Agree to the researcher conducting in-person observations of office interactions. There will be two observations and each will last approximately one hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include increased understanding of the skills needed to lead effectively in a mandatory remote work environment which will aid the government in attracting and retaining a talented workforce in the future.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a computer in separated electronic folders that will be secured with password protection and may be used in future presentations. Any hard copies will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hard copies will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on digital recorder for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Sara J. Valdez Hoffer. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gerald Regier, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You may print a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Effective Leadership Skills

1. Leadership skills are summarized as the learned characteristics of leader performance (Van Wart, 2015). Common examples of leadership skills are good communication skills and team building skills. Please describe the three supervisory/management *skills* that you believe are the most important for a supervisor to possess in any public sector work setting? Please explain why these are the most important skills for supervisors/managers.

2. During the COVID-19 pandemic, your agency was mandated to transition to a remote work environment to protect the safety of Americans often referred to as telework. Can you please describe the procedure that was implemented to facilitate this transition, including any training you received on interacting with agency leadership while operating in the mandatory remote work environment? (For example, if you received instructions on how to communicate with supervisors/managers in the new work environment or how to expect communication from them, please describe this system.)

- 2b. Please indicate if this system/procedure was successful in facilitating effective leadership during the transition and beyond.

3. The following skills have been identified for public sector leaders to possess in order to effectively lead government employees in a remote work environment (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b; Liu et al., 2018):

_____ e-communication skills: the leader has the ability to communicate utilizing information technology in a manner that is “clear and organized, avoids errors and miscommunication, and is not excessive or detrimental to performance” (Roman et al., 2018, p. 10; Liu et al., 2018).

_____ e-social skills: summarize the leader’s ability to create a positive work environment, establish a sense of friendliness, and improve collaboration and communication through a variety of virtual communication methods (Roman et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018).

_____ e-change skills: refer to the leader’s ability to manage change initiatives effectively through information technology (Roman et al., 2018; Van Wart et al., 2017b).

_____ e-team skills: the leader’s ability to manage teams in the virtual work environment, including building teams, motivating them, and holding them accountable (Roman et al., 2018).

_____ e-tech skills: the leader remains current on information technology developments and security-related concerns (Roman et al., 2018).

_____ e-trustworthiness: the leader’s ability to create a sense of trust through the perception of being fair, honest, and consistent in utilizing information technology (Roman et al., 2018).

Please rank the leadership skills outlined above in the spaces provided at the beginning of each skill.

Please score them between 1 (most important) and 6 (least important) in the order of importance for leaders operating in a mandated remote work environment based on your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. For this question, please refer to the skill that you designated as number 1 (most important). Based on your experience, please describe why this skill is the most important skill for managers to possess when operating in a mandatory remote work environment, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. For this question, please refer to the skill that you designated as number 6 (least important). Please describe why this skill is the least important skill for managers to possess when operating in a mandatory remote work environment, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. Based on your experience during the transition from a traditional in-person work environment to a mandatory remote work environment, which of these skills are transferable or equally important in the in-person setting and the mandatory remote work environment and why?
7. For this question, please consider supervisors and managers in your agency who had no prior experience leading in a remote work environment. Which of the skills outlined in question 3 was most visibly lacking by those supervisors/managers? Please explain.
8. Please describe any training you have undergone applicable to your current agency on effective leadership in a remote work environment. If this training included training on leading in a mandatory remote work environment, please specify.

Culture

9. Culture has been defined as establishing standards, created and learned, for shared perception, cognition, judgment, or behaviors by members of a group (Chizema & Pogrebna, 2019). How would you describe the culture of your organization prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?
10. Did your organization experience cultural change as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
 Yes No
11. Please describe how your organization's culture was changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. Based on your observations, how did your organization's culture impact the effectiveness of leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic driven mandatory remote work environment?

12b. Did the culture of the agency interfere with the effectiveness of leaders in the remote work environment? If so, how?

12c. Did the agency's culture facilitate more effective leadership? If so, how?

APPENDIX H: Recruitment Follow-Up Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the Ph.D. in Public Administration degree. I am conducting research to identify effective e-leadership skills from the perspective of managers and employees operating in a mandatory remote work environment, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study. Two weeks ago, an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete an online survey and participate in an audio-recorded interview that will be conducted in person, over the phone, or virtually. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedures listed. I will also be conducting two in-person observations of office interactions, lasting approximately an hour each. Identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please complete the attached survey and return your completed survey by email to [REDACTED]. In the email, please provide your availability so we may schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to read and sign the consent document and return it to me by email before you complete and return the survey.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Sara J. Valdez Hoffer
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX I: Interview Questions

Title of the Project: Effective Public Sector Leadership in a Mandatory Remote Work Environment

Principal Investigator: Sara J. Valdez Hoffer, Doctoral Candidate, Helms School of Government, Liberty University

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we just met one another, and provide some background information, including years of service in this organization and total years of government service, and a number of government organizations you've worked for.
2. Please describe to me the office culture where you work prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Please describe your relationship with your supervisor and your colleagues prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Please describe the organization's transition to a remote work environment, including any training you received to facilitate the transition.
5. Did you experience any changes in your relationship with your supervisor and your colleagues in the remote work environment?

5b. Did you experience any changes in your office culture in the remote work environment?

5c. Please describe any changes you experienced in your relationships with your supervisor and your colleagues and/or office culture in the remote work environment and any changes to the office culture.
6. Please describe any changes you noticed in your supervisor and senior administration's approach to leadership following the transition.
7. What leadership skills have your supervisor and senior management utilized in the remote environment that you think of as especially effective during the transition?
8. Why do you believe the leadership skills you identified in question number 7 were successful approaches?

APPENDIX J: Observation Protocol

Observation Protocol

Date: _____ Time: _____

Activity: _____ Length of Activity: _____

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Description of Activity <input type="checkbox"/> Description of Physical Setting <input type="checkbox"/> Number of Participants Involved <input type="checkbox"/> Describe observations pertaining to the culture of the organization, including communication and interactions <input type="checkbox"/> Describe interactions between supervisors/managers and non-supervisory staff <input type="checkbox"/> Describe interactions between peers 	

APPENDIX K: Chart of Themes and Sub-Themes

THEME: Effective Communication is More Important Than Other Leadership Skills

