

ABSTRACT

Justin N. Yeaman. THE IMPACT OF FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL STAFF (Under the direction of Dr. David Siegel). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2021.

Recent research has indicated that employee engagement is low among America's workforce. It has also indicated that higher education as an industry is no exception to this trend. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between flexible work arrangements such as teleworking and flexible scheduling, work-life balance, and employee engagement. The theory of action in this study was based upon the tenets of Social Exchange Theory and the norms of reciprocity which would suggest that employees who receive the organizational support to balance work and life will be more likely to repay that support with increased employee engagement.

This study was initially planned to implement a high level of workplace flexibility among a group of university human resources professionals to understand their experiences with workplace flexibility. However, the implementation of the intervention was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in the study having the unique opportunity to document and learn from participants' experiences while working remotely as a result of a global pandemic and public health crisis. Through direct observations, semi-structured interviews, and participant journal entries, this study explored the impact that such a major workplace disruption had on the population's work-life balance, level of employee engagement, the challenges faced, lessons learned while teleworking, and the unit's organizational capacity. This study may be used to inform future research or decisions related to employee engagement, workplace flexibility, or response to similar workplace disruptions.

THE IMPACT OF FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL STAFF

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of the Requirements for the Degree

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Malorie. Your constant love, encouragement, and support is what got me through the long nights of classes and the long days of research and writing. You have never allowed me to doubt myself and have always pushed me to fulfill my potential. You listened to my complaints and dealt with my grumpy moods the way only a compassionate soulmate can. I love you always and thank God for you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE.....	i
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
SIGNATURE.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Problem.....	2
Problem Statement.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Theoretical Foundation.....	8
Definition of Key Terms.....	10
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations.....	13
Limitations.....	14
Significance.....	15
Summary.....	16
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	19
Employee Engagement Challenges Facing Higher Education.....	20

Employee Engagement History and Concepts.....	23
Theoretical Framework.....	26
Work-Life Balance.....	30
Flexible Scheduling.....	33
Individual and Organizational Benefits.....	34
Challenges with Flexible Scheduling.....	37
Teleworking.....	38
Employee Benefits.....	40
Challenges of Teleworking.....	42
Summary.....	44
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	45
Research Design.....	45
Population.....	53
Sample and Sampling Procedure.....	53
Organizational Context.....	54
Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent.....	56
Data Processing and Analysis.....	60
Methodological Assumptions and Limitations.....	65
Instrumentation.....	68
Pilot Study.....	69
Role of the Researcher.....	71
Summary.....	71
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	73

Data Collection.....	75
Phase One.....	76
Phase Two.....	78
Phase Three.....	79
Intervention Fidelity.....	80
Data Analysis.....	82
Phase 1 Code Definitions.....	88
Engagement Determinants.....	88
Support.....	89
Work-Life Balance (WLB).....	90
Workplace Flexibility.....	90
Phases 2 and 3 Code Definitions.....	91
Engagement Determinants.....	91
Distractions.....	92
Productivity.....	92
Telework Opinion.....	92
Participant Demographics.....	93
Results.....	93
Sub-Question 1.....	95
Work-Life Balance as an Engagement Determinant.....	95
Other Engagement Determinants.....	106
Sub-Question 2.....	114
Sub-Question 3.....	118

Challenges.....	119
Engagement Impact.....	134
Opinion of Telework.....	145
Lessons Learned.....	148
Summary.....	152
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	154
Summary of Findings.....	154
Primary Research Question.....	155
Employee Engagement Impact.....	156
Productivity.....	158
Sub-Question 1.....	159
Sub-Question 2.....	163
Sub-Question 3.....	165
Organizational Capacity.....	165
Work-Life Balance.....	168
Employee Engagement.....	169
Social Interactions/Isolation.....	170
Fulfilling Business Need.....	171
Telework Opinions.....	172
Interpretation of the Findings.....	173
Social Exchange Theory.....	174
Job Demands – Resources Model.....	177
Gallup Engagement Hierarchy.....	181

Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement.....	182
Experiences Teleworking.....	184
Limitations of the Study.....	185
Implications of the Findings for Practice.....	186
Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement.....	187
Individuality of Employee Engagement Determinants.....	189
Customer-Facing Jobs and Teleworking.....	190
Continuity of Employee Engagement.....	191
Recommendations for Future Research.....	193
Conclusion.....	195
REFERENCES.....	197
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	208
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE (PHASE 1).....	209
APPENDIX C: JOURNAL PROMPTS.....	211
APPENDIX D: RESEARCHER’S OBSERVATIONS TABLE.....	212
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE (PHASE 2).....	213
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE (PHASE 3).....	214
APPENDIX G: TELEWORKING APPLICATION/AGREEMENT.....	215
APPENDIX H: CONTINUITY OF ENGAGEMENT PLAN.....	220

LIST OF TABLES

1. Phase One Activities, Participants, and Timeline for Research.....	47
2. Phase Two Activities Participants, and Timeline for Research.....	49
3. Phase Three Activities Participants, and Timeline for Research.....	52
4. Sub-Question One Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analytic Techniques.....	61
5. Sub-Question Two Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analytic Techniques.....	64
6. Sub-Question Three Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analytic Techniques.....	66
7. Phase 1 Codes.....	85
8. Phases 2 and 3 Codes.....	87
9. Participant Demographics.....	94
10. Engagement Determinants.....	96

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Conceptual model.....	11
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, employee engagement has garnered more consideration among scholars across multiple disciplines (Nazir & Islam, 2017). The State University System and Sycamore University are likewise invested in its employees' levels of engagement. This investment is reflected in the fact that, beginning in 2018 and continuing through 2022, the State University System has endeavored to conduct an employee engagement survey at all its institutions to determine just how engaged employees are. In addition, the survey has been used to establish baseline metrics for measuring the success of engagement and job satisfaction programs at institutions. As of January 2021, Sycamore University (SU) was still in the process of using the information gathered to inform decisions and implement programs intended to increase employee engagement.

The purpose of this study aligns the overall strategic plan of the State University System and SU in that it contributed to an increased understanding of methods by which universities can affect employee engagement. By investigating how the adoption of flexible schedules and teleworking in the workplace may shape employee engagement among higher education staff, this study was able to expose cost-effective ways to influence engagement while working within the confines of a heavily regulated system.

Additionally, this study had the unique opportunity to document the experiences of a group of human resources professionals coping with the mandatory transition to working remotely because of a severe workplace disruption. The COVID-19 pandemic that struck the United States in early 2020 forced this study's participant group to work exclusively from home for a significant portion of the data collection period. As a result, the study was able to gain a

better understanding of the influence that a rapid transition to teleworking, challenges with resources, and social isolation can have on employee engagement.

This chapter serves as an introduction to employee engagement in higher education, the concepts related to increasing engagement, and flexible work arrangements such as flexible schedules and teleworking. Critical to an understanding of this research is an understanding of the theoretical framework based on Social Exchange Theory. Since several terms included in the research are ambiguous or have historically been used interchangeably, key terms will also be defined.

Background of the Problem

Higher education faces unique challenges with regard to recruiting and retaining talented faculty and staff (Jo, 2008). For over a century, academic researchers and organizational practitioners in the social sciences have been attempting to determine what it is that makes employees engaged in their work (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

A single definition of employee engagement may be difficult to find. Throughout the years, there have been several distinct but related accepted definitions such as the *preferred self* definition developed by Kahn (1990) or an early three-factor model developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). For the purposes of this study, an engaged employee was defined as one who exhibits vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work as defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002).

Many employees and some employers believe that the only way to encourage engagement is increasing pay. However, research has indicated that pay, if it is equitable and sufficient to meet employees' needs, is not always enough to encourage motivation (Singh, 2016). Therefore, organizations must find other ways to generate the needed level of engagement from their employees.

Organizations attempt to positively influence employee engagement through numerous means. One of these ways is by supporting employees' work-life balance. Research has shown that increased employee engagement, higher performance, and increased organizational commitment may result from reducing work stress and increasing work-life balance (Caillier, 2012; Solanki, 2013).

For several decades, the workforce has been evolving to include a population with much more diversity regarding outside-of-work commitments. Increasing numbers of single parents, dual-income families, and students who also work full-time have changed the needs of the typical American employee (Hayman, 2010). If organizations fail to keep pace with the needs of their employees, they are in danger of experiencing lower morale and higher rates of turnover and absenteeism (Caillier, 2016). One of the ways organizations are responding to the changing employee landscape is through flexible workplace arrangements such as teleworking and flexible scheduling.

Teleworking is working outside of the conventional workspace using telecommunications or computer technology to communicate with the rest of the organization. This could be either working from home, from a satellite office, or from any non-traditional workspace (Caillier, 2016). Since its rise as a sustainable method for conducting business, there has been a substantial amount of research done to determine how teleworking may influence an employee's level of engagement and work-life balance.

Research conducted within private and public organizations has found that employees who are allowed to telework have reported increases in job satisfaction. Employees who are not given the option while their colleagues are, in contrast, reported negative outcomes. Caillier's (2011a) research indicated that those who are denied the option to telework while others are not

reported lower levels of motivation. This difference in motivation was because they perceived that they had been denied a benefit made available to their counterparts (Caillier, 2011a). Additionally, those denied the opportunity to telework also reported higher levels of leave intention (Caillier, 2011b).

The practice of flexible scheduling can be implemented in multiple ways. One example is allowing employees to come into work earlier than they typically do so they are able to leave work earlier in the day. Another common practice is called a compressed workweek. A compressed workweek is typically done by working four ten-hour workdays as opposed to five eight-hour days. Flexible scheduling is not something entirely new to the American workforce. One of the first companies to adopt flexible schedules was the Kellogg Company who, in the 1990s, first departed from the three eight-hour shift arrangement in favor of four six-hour shifts. Having four shifts to choose from allowed employees with family commitments greater flexibility to meet their obligations (Dizaho et al., 2017).

Employees with flexible schedules can adapt to the demands of their personal lives by adjusting their schedules to whatever best meets their needs. This ability is a major benefit for the employer as well, since an employee able to manage work and life responsibilities will experience an increased sense of work-life balance which, in turn, often results in higher job satisfaction and more positive work outcomes (McNall et al., 2010).

Along with finding similar results regarding increased job satisfaction, Hayman's (2010) research also indicated that employees allowed to use flexible schedules reported lower role overload, work-life conflict, and overall job-related stress. Factors such as role overload have been noted to result in a decrease in employees' levels of work motivation (Curran & Prottas, 2017).

Just like at the State University System level, employee engagement was an increasing concern at the institution where this study was conducted. According to the employee engagement surveys conducted in 2018 and 2020, a large percentage of employees were disengaged in their work and exhibited low levels of job satisfaction for many different reasons. Much of the dissatisfaction was due to inequity (perceived or real) in pay (ModernThink, 2018). Unfortunately, such inequity is not easily remedied within the confines of the strict compensation structure of the state organization. However, as has been indicated above, the adoption of teleworking and flexible scheduling had the potential to have a positive effect on work-life balance and employee engagement.

At the time of this study, SU had policies in place that allowed for both teleworking and flexible schedules. In fact, some small areas supported the use of both of these practices. That was not the case for most of the university. Some university leaders believed that employees would abuse their rights to telework and flex their schedules either by exhibiting lower productivity during teleworking hours or decreased reliability using flextime as an excuse.

Supervisors are typically the gatekeepers to benefits such as teleworking and flexible schedules even if organizations have policies in place supporting the practices (Caillier, 2011b). SU was an example of such an organization. With the sentiment against both telework and flexible scheduling among some leaders, many employees were experiencing negative employee engagement results that stem from low work-life balance. Some areas experienced increased usage of leave time to manage work and life responsibilities and, in certain cases, increased absenteeism. Employees who were struggling to balance work and life were exhibiting symptoms of burnout such as emotional exhaustion, lowered personal performance, and

increased cynicism (Hill, 2018). This could have been exacerbated because these employees were denied the option while many others were not (Caillier, 2011a).

Problem Statement

Human capital is swiftly becoming the competitive edge of organizations. Therefore, administrators must understand what it takes to retain their talented employees (Takawira et al., 2014). However, this is rarely a priority among members of university leadership (Johnsrud, 2002). With only 33% of the American workforce reported to be engaged in their work, this is a topic that needs to be addressed among university leaders (Gallup, 2017).

Therefore, the specific problem to be addressed in this study was employee engagement among professional staff at Sycamore University. The staff population at Sycamore University comprised a large portion of the University's population. A better understanding of the determinants of employee engagement as well as how flexible work arrangements and work-life balance may support increased engagement helped to better understand ways to positively affect employees' experiences in the future.

There were also other challenges specific to the institution being studied. In recent history, funding had become increasingly tenuous. In June of 2019, the most recent revelation from SU's chancellor was that the university would, due to falling enrollments and increased on-time graduation rates, have to reduce annual spending by \$16 million before fiscal year 2020-21. As a result, the university experienced a hiring freeze. Critical positions that could have been filled became more difficult to recruit for as a result of the extensive approval process implemented during the hiring freeze (Office of the Chancellor, June 4, 2019).

As a result, employees were often required to maintain the same level of productivity and service with fewer resources and staff. Simultaneously, the opportunity for monetary rewards

such as bonuses and pay increases essentially evaporated. Therefore, it was critical that the university increase its consideration of non-monetary engagement methods to support employee engagement and retention.

Before being able to select and implement employee engagement programs, university leadership must first understand how such measures influenced employees' workplace experiences in the past. A significant amount of research has been completed related to teleworking, flexible scheduling, work-life balance, and employee engagement. However, little research has been done on how these concepts are related to higher education professional staff. Therefore, by studying the impact of flexible work arrangements, this research has the potential to inform the decision-making of university leadership regarding future large-scale program implementation or policy adjustment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact that flexible scheduling and alternative workspaces had on employee engagement among professional non-faculty staff in higher education. Understanding the relationship between workplace flexibility and employee engagement can help university decision-makers understand how work-life balance measures can be leveraged to increase employee engagement.

The data collection was completed through one-on-one interviews with the participants, employee self-reporting through weekly journaling of their experiences, as well as direct researcher observations. This study's population was one Human Resources Unit Director, two Human Resources Consultants, one Human Resources Specialist, and one Administrative Support Specialist employed in Sycamore University's Human Resources Department.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question: What impact, if any, do flexible work arrangements such as teleworking and flexible scheduling have on employee engagement and productivity among higher education professional staff?

Sub-questions:

- SQ1. How have employees' experiences balancing work and life impacted their level of employee engagement in the past?
- SQ2. Based on data gathered in the first iterative phase of research, what level of workplace flexibility is needed to adequately balance work and life while fulfilling the business need of the unit?
- SQ3. What impact did the intervention developed and implemented during the second iterative phase have on the unit's organizational capacity, employees' work-life balance, their level of engagement, and their ability to fulfill the unit's business need?

Theoretical Foundation

Research on Social Exchange Theory and the norm of reciprocity provided the theoretical foundation for the study. According to Homans (1958), an interaction between two individuals can be seen as an exchange of either material or non-material goods. Homans (1958) also suggested that those who receive a perceived benefit or reward are under an obligation to give benefits or rewards in return. In its simplest terms, his work suggested that the higher the perceived value of a reward, the more likely an individual was to perform in a way that would elicit the reward (Emerson, 1976).

Social Exchange Theory relies on relationships and reciprocity to describe social behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). During the early stages of its development, Social

Exchange Theory sought to explain the nature of relationships between humans (Yin, 2018). As it pertains to organizational behavior and employee engagement, one of Social Exchange Theory's main tenets is that when one party does something valuable for another party, the other party will reciprocate in kind with a behavior that is considered valuable to the first party (Choi et al., 2015).

Reciprocation is foundational to positive relationship evolution and Social Exchange Theory. The concept of the norm of reciprocity has been studied by theorists such as Gouldner since the early 1960s as a means to explain interpersonal relationships. Gouldner suggested that the norm of reciprocity, in its most universal form, made two demands of individuals. First, individuals should help those who have helped them. Secondly, individuals should not ignore those who have helped them (Gouldner, 1960). While Gouldner was referring to interpersonal relationships, Aselage and Eisenberger (2003) posited that employees assign their employers humanlike characteristics. Therefore, the necessity of reciprocation would be present in the employer-employee relationship like in a typical interpersonal relationship.

Therefore, based on the tenets of Social Exchange Theory and the norm of reciprocity, this study predicted that employees would normally respond to an organizational reward with higher levels of employee engagement. Organizational support is an example of an organizational reward that plays a key role in increasing employee engagement (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Perceived supervisor support, which was also considered in this study, is an example of organizational support in which employees feel that their leaders value them and care about their well-being (Jose & Mampilly, 2015).

Thus, this study drew upon the tenets of Social Exchange Theory and the norm of reciprocity to explain the relationship between flexible work arrangements such as teleworking

and flexible scheduling, perceived supervisor support, and employee engagement. See Figure 1 for a depiction of the conceptual model.

Definition of Key Terms

Absorption: The state of fully concentrating and being engrossed in one's work so that time seems to pass quickly, and one has difficulty pulling oneself away from it (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Compressed Work Week: The practice of allowing employees to work longer hours but fewer days, i.e. four ten-hour workdays per week as opposed to five eight-hour days (McNall et al., 2010).

Dedication: Feeling a sense of significance, pride, inspiration, and challenge in work. (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Employee Engagement: A positive and fulfilling state of mind that is comprised of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Flexible Scheduling: The practice of allowing employees to choose when their work takes place either through flextime or compressed workweeks (McNall et al., 2010).

Flextime: The practice of allowing employees to choose their own hours, typically with some restrictions put in place by the organization (McNall et al., 2010).

Perceived Organizational Support: An employee's general belief that the organization values them, their contributions, and cares about their personal well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Perceived Supervisor Support: The degree to which employees feel their supervisors care about their well-being, value them, and are supportive of their work-life balance and success as a member of the organization (Jose & Mampilly, 2015).

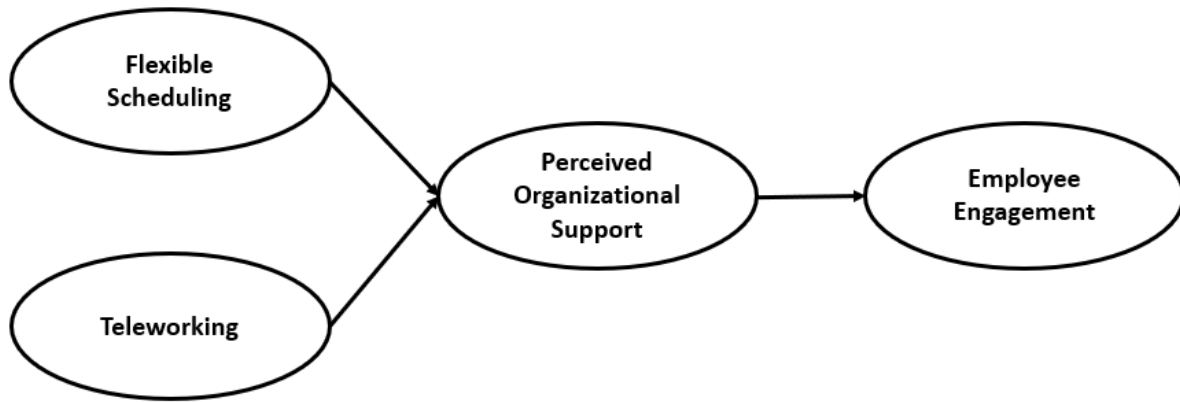


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Teleworking: A flexible arrangement that allows employees to work from a location other than the organization's main office (Caillier, 2011a).

Work-Life Balance: An individual's ability to effectively manage their commitments both at work and at home as well as any other non-work responsibilities (Parkes & Langford, 2008).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions under which I operated that were critical to the meaningfulness of the study but cannot be proven to be true. The first of these was the assumption that participants would be forthcoming, honest, and not intentionally deceitful in their reporting of experiences, opinions, and perceptions. To help bolster this assumption, all participants were assured of anonymity with regard to anything disclosed during observations, journal entries, or face-to-face interviews.

I also conducted this study under the assumption that participants would find it to be meaningful and potentially beneficial. The participants in this study had, heretofore, never experienced the level of workplace flexibility that they had the potential to experience during the study. Therefore, the participants were aware that the research could be used to inform future decisions related to workplace flexibility. As a result, I assumed that they would find the study and its future practice implications to be both meaningful and potentially beneficial to them. Because the participants would be making an effort to accurately report their experiences and perceptions, this study also contributed to the participants having a better understanding of their own circumstances and how work-life balance has influenced their levels of engagement in the past. This also may have added to the meaningfulness of the study.

Based on conversations that were held with the department's leadership team, I assumed that there would be no attempts at intentional interference from anyone outside of the study. I

was able to secure, with the caveat that measures were taken to ensure business needs were met, the support of the department head, the Associate Vice Chancellor of Human Resources.

Although their employees would not be active study participants, I also received support for the study from the rest of the department's leadership team. These two factors led me to believe that there would be no intentional outside interference in the study.

I also operated under the assumption that employees had volunteered to participate in the study without being forced by members of the department's leadership team or by me. I assumed that their participation was willful. I also assumed that participants would be appreciative of the fact that they had been given the opportunity to decide to what degree they would participate in the study.

Finally, I operated under the assumption that participants would find the opportunity to participate in the study to be a reward and a reflection of organizational support. As a result, there was the possibility of participants reporting increased levels of perceived organizational support and engagement simply as a result of being allowed to participate. According to research conducted by Eisenberger et al. (2001), organizational support plays a key role in employee engagement, and the mere fact that the organization was supportive of learning more about this topic may have had an impact on engagement.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was limited in scope in various ways and for various reasons. The primary focus was intended to be the impact that flexible work arrangements had on work-life balance and employee engagement among higher education professional staff. While this study considered the range of participants' engagement determinants, work-life balance was the focus since the institution where the research was conducted had policies in place that allowed for

flexible work arrangements with the potential to increase work-life balance. Furthermore, due to the challenging economic situation at the institution, it was important to seek out non-monetary methods for increasing employee engagement.

This study was also limited to the population described above for several reasons. With the significant amount of change that could have potentially occurred for participants during the duration of the study, the decision was made to limit the size of the population to one that was more easily managed. Therefore, a small functional unit within the Human Resources Department was chosen. This group was also chosen because, among all of the units within the department, it was the only group where most of the employees had never been able to experience a level of flexibility similar to what was proposed by the study.

This study was also limited to a small group when compared to other studies dealing with similar topics. As a result, the experiences of the participants may not have been similar to those involved in similar studies on larger scales. Therefore, the results may not be able to be generalized to a larger population.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The first of these was related to the work performed by the participants. While the study's participant group did not operate with consistent workplace flexibility, a large portion of the work they were charged with lent itself naturally to flexibility. For example, while a significant portion of the work involved face-to-face interactions with stakeholders, the population was also responsible for a substantial amount of work that did not require them to be present on campus and was not time-sensitive, meaning that did not necessitate being completed during a standard 8:00 – 5:00 workday. Therefore, this study

may not be generalized to populations whose work does not lend itself to higher levels of flexibility.

Lastly, this study was limited because the participants were employed where the research was taking place. Measures were taken to ensure participants, their unit, their department, and the institution remained anonymous. However, the participants may have been tempted to represent themselves, their supervisors, or the institution in a more positive or negative light depending on their perceptions.

Significance

This study was significant with regard not only to the institution where it was conducted but also regarding the extant literature on the topic. For the participant group involved, this study provided a measure of insight into the participants' engagement determinants, including the effect work-life balance had on employee engagement. As a result of this knowledge, leadership within the department can consider further research into this phenomenon. Additionally, they may choose to focus on increased efforts to provide organizational support to help employees balance work and life.

There is a rather significant gap in the literature regarding higher education employee engagement (Bryne & MacDonagh, 2017). This study helped to fill that gap. This study worked not only to consider work-life balance's influence on employee engagement within higher education but also to determine, to a limited degree, the determinants of engagement among higher education professional staff. This was important due to the fact that, of the literature available, a small percentage (Curran & Prottas, 2017; Hermsen & Rosser, 2008) was devoted to the consideration of staff. Most available literature placed a focus on faculty and student engagement. In addition, the majority of extant literature reviewed was either quantitative or

mixed-methods research. As a case study of a small group, this research provided a unique perspective to the employee engagement, work-life balance, and workplace flexibility literature.

Summary

The employee engagement landscape in higher education is becoming increasingly challenging (Jo, 2008). Not only is the entire industry beginning to recognize the need to promote employee engagement, but the state university system specific to this study was taking notice as well. As a result, the university system had committed to study and, if warranted, take measures to impact employee engagement at all its institutions. This study helped not only to increase understanding of engagement determinants among higher education professional staff but also to support commitments made by the university system in doing so.

In times of financial flourish, universities may have the resources to implement various programs that have the potential to increase engagement. Along with robust programming, financially strong employers are able to offer more competitive pay, which may impact engagement to an extent, especially among employees at the lower end of the pay scale (Singh, 2016). In the time of financial crisis at the institution studied, a hiring freeze had been implemented, pay increases were severely restricted, and employees were asked to do increasingly more with fewer resources. As a result, it was important for the institution to consider non-monetary methods of increasing engagement such as workplace flexibility.

One non-monetary method of affecting engagement is increased work-life balance. Reducing negative work stress and increasing work-life balance has been shown to result in higher engagement, performance, and organizational commitment (Caillier, 2012; Solanki, 2013). Workplace flexibility, considered in this study in the form of teleworking and flexible scheduling, is one of the ways by which employers may increase work-life balance. At the onset

of this study, the intent was to implement the types of workplace flexibility participants would find supportive of their work-life balance. The ultimate goal was to provide the employees with the autonomy to choose the level of flexibility that best allowed them to balance their work and life commitments. According to the tenets of Social Exchange Theory, this study suggested that the employees impacted would likely respond to the organizational reward and support of flexibility with increased employee engagement.

As will be considered in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5, the study intended to understand how the implementation of increased workplace flexibility influenced employees' work-life balance and levels of employee engagement. However, in early 2020, prior to the proposed intervention being implemented, the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact organizations across the United States. The university considered in the study, in March 2020, mandated that employees who were able to do so, telework exclusively until the pandemic was under control and working on-site no longer posed a public health risk. As a result, the intervention was unable to be implemented. However, this study was provided the unique opportunity to document the participants' experiences managing the transition to a remote workplace and the influence the transition, as well as related aspects of the pandemic such as challenges with resources and social isolation, had on their levels of employee engagement.

The subsequent chapter is a review of the literature related to employee engagement, work-life balance, workplace flexibility, and how these concepts are related. While there is no study identical to this one represented in the literature, there is sufficient evidence contained therein that suggests that workplace flexibility has the ability to increase work-life balance which, in turn, may result in higher employee engagement. This evidence supports the need to study the effect increased workplace flexibility has on work-life balance and engagement among

higher education professional staff to determine if there is the potential for similar engagement outcomes like those reported in the literature.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Both private and public organizations are concerned with understanding what it is that influences employees to be engaged in their work. Higher education is no exception to this trend. Historically, higher education researchers have concentrated on the engagement levels of faculty and students (for examples see Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Devlin et al., 2009). This is unsurprising since the primary mission of an institution of higher education is to educate students and prepare them to enter their career fields and to be productive citizens. However, professional staff is a sizable and growing population that higher education administrators and leaders cannot afford to ignore. This study intended to discover how flexible work arrangements such as flexible scheduling and teleworking affect employee engagement among higher education professional staff.

There is a significant amount of extant literature related to employee engagement. Research has focused on generating a universal definition of what it means to be engaged and attempted to understand the determinants of employee engagement. Thus, for the sake of consistency throughout this study, this literature review considered multiple seminal works that address the history of, and concepts related to, the study of employee engagement. Specifically, it examined works focused on the study of employee engagement within higher education. It also examined the history, challenges, and successes of flexible scheduling and teleworking. The literature review also considered research dealing with the study of work-life balance with regard to how it can be supported and the outcomes of maintaining work-life balance. In an attempt to predict how flexible work arrangements affect employee engagement, the literature review also examined theoretical concepts that could be applied to this study and may explain why employees react to certain conditions with increased or decreased engagement.

Employee Engagement Challenges Facing Higher Education

Higher education faces unique challenges regarding recruiting and retaining quality faculty and staff. For-profit organizations are typically focused primarily on their bottom lines and make maximizing profit a priority. However, higher education organizations, for the most part, are not focused on the bottom line but are “prestige maximizers” that compete for rank and status (Jo, 2008, p. 566). For this reason, according to Jo (2008), university employees face different challenges compared to for-profit industry employees. These include restricted resources or resistance to being fully accepted into the academic community by faculty members. As a result, the standard organizational theories may not apply.

It is estimated that the average American will change jobs seven times in the span of a career (Jo, 2008). With human capital becoming the competitive edge of organizations, administrators must find ways to retain talented employees (Takawira et al., 2014). According to Johnsrud (2002), this is rarely a priority among members of university senior leadership due to the myriad of challenges they face both internally and externally.

One of the prevailing themes in higher education is the difference in job roles and cultures among faculty and staff. In most, if not all institutions, there is typically a very clear delineation between the job roles of faculty and staff. In fact, according to Bozeman and Gaughan (2011), the differences in job roles and cultures are major reasons why administrators find that engagement techniques do not always produce the same results for both groups. As a result, there are differences in what organizational and interpersonal structures must exist to increase these groups’ employee engagement (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011).

While employee engagement has been given greater research consideration in the last three decades, there seems to be a dearth of literature related to employee engagement in the

public sector and, in particular, higher education (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017). There has been critique among researchers with regard to the focus of the literature that does exist. The highest percentage of engagement-related literature is focused on faculty engagement and not on staff. Byrne and MacDonagh (2017) claimed in their study of engagement among Irish faculty that a disproportionate amount of research has focused on primary and secondary educators while those focused on higher education tend to be focused on South African higher education. Further critique has been aimed at the fact that engagement-focused literature tends to be student-centric and ignores the climate among faculty or staff (Troy, 2013).

While there is limited extant literature, the literature that does exist related to this topic highlights the fact that there are challenges facing institutions regarding the employee engagement of both faculty and staff. Research also exposes the fact that, while there are some similarities, due to the varying cultures in which faculty and staff work, engagement determinants are often different for the two groups (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011).

Challenges with faculty engagement may be a result of several factors. In his work related to engagement among community college faculty, Troy (2013) reported that declining engagement could be associated with feelings of a lack of autonomy, job insignificance, or detachment from larger outcomes. While most of his assertions are corroborated in other research, the lack of autonomy is an aspect that is mentioned consistently (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017). According to Byrne and MacDonagh (2017), public sector employees, more so than private-sector employees, struggle to gain autonomy since local, state, and federal oversight limits the amount of latitude institutions and their employees have in affecting change that may generate increased engagement.

Another determinant of faculty engagement is the impact of tenure and collegial social interaction. Tenured faculty members have a degree of job security that non-tenured employees do not enjoy (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). As such, tenure-track faculty typically work diligently to achieve tenure and the status it brings. Since tenure is mostly about collegial acceptance, junior faculty are often worried about voicing negativity around senior faculty members who have the ability to influence their futures (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Norman et al., 2006). Overall, what determines faculty engagement differs from higher education staff. Faculty job models and forms of recognition (i.e. tenure and collegial acceptance) seem to dictate their motivations (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011).

While there is limited literature regarding what influences employee engagement among faculty, there is even less concerning higher education staff. Professional staff is defined as non-academic employees who are responsible for the day-to-day operations of a college or university (Curran & Prottas, 2017). Because staff employees fulfill a vastly different role than faculty, factors that determine engagement levels are different. Typically, higher education staff employees do not enjoy the ability to stay in their positions while moving up the ranks, i.e. the upward track from assistant to associate to full professor (Johnsrud et al., 2000). Hermsen and Rosser (2008) considered an extensive list of factors in their research examining work engagement and job satisfaction among staff. Through their research, they determined that several different but related factors are associated with increased engagement. Work-life balance as well as the level of autonomy and control employees feel they have over their work were identified as influencing engagement (Hermsen & Rosser, 2008).

The environment in which higher education staff work also plays an important role in increasing or decreasing engagement. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model of

occupational stress proposed that to create an environment conducive to engagement, sufficient levels of resources to cope with the demands of the job must be present. An imbalance, therefore, could have an adverse effect, particularly on staff (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017). With regard to higher education staff, research has indicated that, while the number of higher education staff employees is growing and they are operating in a more competitive environment, resources are becoming increasingly scarce (Curran & Prottas, 2017; Hermsen & Rosser, 2008). For example, mid-level administrators are placed in positions responsible for strategic outcomes. However, they are often not given authority to make important decisions related to those outcomes. This leaves integral employees feeling a lack of control and autonomy (Johnsrud et al., 2000). According to JD-R, this could create an environment prone to employee disengagement (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017).

Employee Engagement History and Concepts

For over a century, employers, human resources practitioners, and social and organizational psychologists have been attempting to determine what it is that makes employees not only perform well but also *want* to perform well. However, the notion of employee engagement is a relatively new one (Macey & Schneider, 2008). While management principles have evolved beyond notions such as Taylor's in *Principles of Scientific Management* in which he posited that to get the most out of employees, they need close supervision and were motivated solely by economics (Singh, 2016).

Complicating matters is the fact that a distinction must be made between employee engagement and employee satisfaction. While often used interchangeably, employee satisfaction is not, in fact, employee engagement. Employee satisfaction is, according to Locke, a "pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job

experience” (Rich et al., 2017, p. 618). By that measure, employees can be satisfied but not actually exhibit positive performance outcomes. An example of this type of employee could be one who is very happy with their position simply because they are not held accountable for any measurable outcomes.

The contemporary study of employee engagement could be said to have started with Maslow’s *A Theory of Human Motivation* which introduced Maslow’s theory of the “Hierarchy of Needs.” He proposed five categories of needs that, when met, create the environment required for human motivation. These needs are psychological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization (Singh, 2016). Unlike theories such as Taylor’s, Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” has withstood the test of time. Since its development, it has been able to explain human motivation (Singh, 2016).

William Kahn’s (1990) seminal work on employee engagement took Maslow’s theories further to describe the amount of an employee’s “preferred self” (p. 700) that is brought to the workplace. Kahn’s study proposed that engagement or disengagement was dependent upon psychological experiences in the role. He sought to determine which psychological conditions were needed to allow an employee to bring their preferred self to work. When the employee’s preferred self is brought to work, Kahn posited, then positive performance outcomes are increased.

According to Rich et al. (2017), Kahn’s work was a unique concept and furthered the study of engagement by determining a model of engagement based on psychological conditions. Studying meaningfulness of the work, psychological safety, and availability (or access), Kahn sought to determine how those concepts were related to engagement.

Research in the field also led to an early three-factor model of employee engagement in which engagement was characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) work presented a definition of engagement that has been adopted by many practitioners in the industry and will be used to define employee engagement in this study. According to their work, employee engagement is comprised of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

To understand this definition of engagement, one must understand its three components. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and resilience in the face of obstacles. Dedication is feeling a sense of significance along with pride, inspiration, and challenge in the work. Absorption described an “absorbed” employee, one who is fully concentrated and engrossed in their work. For them, time seems to pass quickly, and the employee has difficulty pulling themselves away from their tasks – what researchers like Schaufeli et al. (p. 75) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990) call “in the flow.”

As is established in the literature, engagement is not simply about an organization getting more out of an employee for the least investment possible. It is an attempt to create an environment conducive to a win-win situation where both parties, the organization and the employee, find benefits from the relationship (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Many employees and employers may believe, like Taylor believed, that the only way to motivate employees is to pay them more. However, according to Singh (2016), pay is not a motivator as long as it is sufficient to support a comfortable life. After that point, increased pay loses its motivating effect (Singh, 2016) and other factors become more influential determinants of engagement.

Engaged employees have the ability to positively impact an organization. According to Nazir and Islam (2017), increased employee engagement is associated with increased

organizational commitment. Engaged employees not only focus increased energy on their work but are also noted to be “cognitively vigilant, focused, and attentive and are emotionally connected to their work” (Rich et al., 2017, p. 620). Salanova and Schaufeli (2008) found work engagement to have a mediating role among job resources and proactive behavior (an increased willingness to take initiative) at work in a climate of limited resources,. Therefore, leaders should concentrate more of their efforts on creating an environment conducive to increased employee engagement (Singh, 2016; Stankivska et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

In the last two decades, there has been more attention paid to the study of positive psychology or the “scientific study of human strength and optimal functioning” (Schaufeli et al., 2006, p. 701). There has been a considerable amount of research and conceptualization attempting to determine the antecedents to employee engagement. Though research has indicated which psychological conditions are necessary for employee engagement, there is a lack of explanation as to why employees respond to those conditions with increased employee engagement (Saks, 2006). Social Exchange Theory is one logical connection between positive psychological conditions and employee engagement.

According to Emerson (1976), Social Exchange Theory should not necessarily be considered a theory but more of a “frame of reference” (p. 335) that explains how a thing of value, whether it be material or non-material, moves through society. The roots of Social Exchange Theory go back almost a century to the 1920s and the work of Malinoski and Mauss, who sought to bridge the gaps between anthropology and social psychology (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). One of the most basic ideas from which Social Exchange Theory evolved was the study of interpersonal interactions on a small scale (Homans, 1958).

According to Homans (1958), at its most basic levels, an interaction between two people can be seen as an exchange of either material or non-material goods. Material goods can be represented by things such as money, benefits, or other tangibles. Non-material goods are more difficult to define. Approval and prestige are two concepts that can be considered non-material goods. He also stated that interpersonal interactions tended to result in a type of cost/reward equilibrium. As a result of this cost/reward equilibrium, individuals who are giving either material or non-material goods feel entitled to receive goods in return. Recipients of goods, in comparison, typically feel a sense of obligation to repay the giver for what goods they have received (Homans, 1958). In its simplest terms, Homans' work proposed that the higher the perceived value of the reward, the more likely an individual was to perform the behavior that would most likely elicit it (Emerson, 1976). For the purpose of this study, organizational support, supervisor support, and employee engagement are considered non-material goods involved in the type of interpersonal and organizational interactions.

Social Exchange Theory relies heavily on relationships to describe social behavior. Interactions evolve into relationships. Relationships evolve and change over time. According to Social Exchange Theory, the reciprocity that was described in Homans' work is considered the norm (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). While practitioners recognize that not all individuals fulfill their social responsibility of reciprocation, this study considers the norm of reciprocity to be valid in a typical person-person or person-organization relationship.

According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), individuals can have essentially three different positions within a relationship: independence, dependence, and interdependence. Independence is when outcomes are based solely upon one's own effort. Dependence is when outcomes are based solely on another's efforts. Interdependence was defined as when outcomes

are determined by a combination of both parties' efforts (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In early Social Exchange Theory research, independent, dependent, and interdependent relationships had typically been studied at the one-on-one or small group levels such as those addressed in Homan's (1958) work. However, these types of relationships can also form between a person and an organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Yin, 2018).

As it pertains to organizational behavior and employee engagement, one of Social Exchange Theory's main tenets is that when one party does something valuable for another party, the second party will reciprocate in kind with a behavior that is considered valuable to the first party (Choi et al., 2015). As Yin (2018) stated in their work on engagement and its effect on task performance, Social Exchange Theory has been extended as a basis for the relationship between an organization and a member of that organization. Furthermore, according to Saks (2006), these reciprocal relationships, if consistent over time, evolve into positive relationships as long as the rules of exchange are followed. The rules of exchange can be described as obligations that are generated through a series of interactions between parties who are in a state of "reciprocal interdependence" (Saks, 2006, p. 603).

Employment relationships consist of both social and economic exchange (Gould-Williams & Davies, 2007). For example, Aselage and Eisenberger (2003) stated that theorists have looked at employment as an exchange of employees' effort and loyalty for an organization's benefits. Reciprocation is foundational to positive relationship evolution and Social Exchange Theory. The concept of the norm of reciprocity has been studied by theorists like Gouldner since the early 1960s as a way to explain interpersonal relationships. Gouldner suggested that the norm of reciprocity, in its most universal form, made two demands of individuals. First, individuals should help those who have helped them. Second, individuals

should not ignore those who have helped them (Gouldner, 1960). While Gouldner was referring to interpersonal relationships, Aselage and Eisenberger (2003) posited that employees assign their employers humanlike characteristics. Therefore, the necessity of reciprocation would be present in the employer-employee relationship as in typical interpersonal relationships.

Employees can repay their employers for their valuable behaviors in numerous ways. One of those ways is through increased employee engagement (Saks, 2006). For example, the essence of Yin's (2018) work was that organizations could expect those employees who perceived that they were receiving organizational rewards to reciprocate with increased work engagement.

Organizational support can be considered an organizational reward and, according to research, plays a key role in increasing employee engagement. Eisenberger et al. (2001) studied the relationship between perceived organizational support, work motivation, and organizational commitment among postal workers. In their study, they found that perceived organizational support was positively related to employees' felt obligation to support the organizations' objectives and welfare. Furthermore, the relationship between perceived organizational support and felt obligation increased as employees' acceptance of the norm of reciprocity increased (Eisenberger et al., 2001). In a similar study, Darolia et al. (2010) found that among perceived organizational support, work motivation, and organizational commitment, perceived organizational support had the highest correlation with increased job performance.

An example of organizational support is perceived supervisor support. Supervisor support can be defined as the degree to which employees feel their supervisors care about their well-being, value them, and are supportive of their work-life balance and success as a member of the organization (Jose & Mampilly, 2015). According to Choi et al.'s (2015) research, support from

leaders increased employees' moral obligations to reciprocate positively perceived behaviors with positive behavior (i.e. increased employee engagement). One caveat to this concept was that to reap the benefits of moral obligation or reciprocity, the organization's actions must be voluntary and up to the discretion of its leadership. When mandated or imposed, what was given by one party may not be considered as valuable as if it were voluntary (Caillier, 2011b).

Another facet of perceived supervisor support is psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment can be defined as the increased "feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information" (Jose & Mampilly, 2015, p. 236). According to Jose and Mampilly's (2015) research, psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between perceived supervisor support and employee engagement. That relationship of reciprocity can be explained by Social Exchange Theory. Increased psychological empowerment can be considered a valuable behavior that, perceived in a positive light, evolved into a relationship of reciprocity (Choi et al., 2015).

Work-Life Balance

Employees have limited time and most have considerable responsibilities outside of work (Delecta, 2011). When experiencing limits on time and increased responsibilities, employees may face a higher level of work-life conflict. Kinman and Jones (2008) defined work-life conflict as the condition when role pressures from membership in one organization (such as a career) conflict with role pressures resulting from membership in another organization (such as a family or a social network). Without a proper balance between conflicting role pressures, multiple negative individual and organizational outcomes may result (Delecta, 2011). For

example, studies have shown that employees report lower job performance as a result of higher workplace and home pressures. Research has also shown that increased engagement and higher performance can result from reduced work stress and increased work-life balance (Solanki, 2013).

Work-life balance has been defined by researchers in several different ways. One proposed definition stated that work-life balance is a condition of satisfaction and functioning at work and at home with a minimal amount of work-life conflict. Another definition is “the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labor markets” (Delecta, 2011, p. 186). As defined by Parkes and Langford (2008), work-life balance is an individual’s ability to manage their commitments both at work and at home while simultaneously managing other non-work responsibilities. Work-life balance is a concept that has been getting increased attention in the literature and within organizations. As businesses and employees have continued to experience greater pressures from both work and home, there has been a growing understanding that more must be done to support employees in managing the balance between their homes and workplaces (Parkes & Langford, 2008).

Concurrently with other industries, there has been a growing realization in higher education that inequities of work-life balance are real and are potentially detrimental to the success of both employees and institutions (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Mazzerolle & Eason 2014). Work-related stress has been associated with low performance, early retirement, higher turnover, more frequent accidents, and even substance abuse (Edwards et al., 2009). In their study of academics in the UK, Kinman and Jones (2008) recognized several stressors that were impacting work-life balance. Among them were heavier workloads, less competitive pay, longer working

hours, poor communication, and a lack of recognition. Delecta (2011) also recognized that increased work time and increased fatigue resulting from heavier workloads can bleed into the home with negative results for both personal life and work life such as lower levels of engagement at work and at home. Over the past several decades, higher education has recognized the fact that there is a need to adopt practices that consider the wholeness of its employees. As a result of the shifting priorities of employees (i.e. dual-income families and single-parent homes) there has been a greater number of benefits created (such as flexible work arrangements) to address the growing need (Lester, 2015).

While inequities in work-life balance in higher education have been recognized, there is an indication in the research that a low percentage of employees are taking advantage of the work-life balance opportunities provided by their institutions. In a study of university faculty, Lester (2015) suggested that one reason more employees do not take advantage of these opportunities is the prevailing culture at their respective institutions. For example, “discouraging culture” (Lester, 2015, p. 141) was cited as a reason why employees were reluctant to take advantage of work-life opportunities. The stigma surrounding the need to use family-friendly or work-life policies prevented many employees from taking needed measures to ensure the success of their work and personal lives (Lester, 2015).

Another aspect of that culture pertains to supervisors and their support of employees’ work-life balance. Mazzerolle and Eason (2014) noted that supervisors, more than any other influencing group, acted as the gatekeepers to institutions’ work-life programs. Also, supervisors’ levels of understanding regarding work-life issues were cited as a key component of that support (Mazzerolle & Eason, 2014).

Supervisors would do well to support employees' ability to balance work and life because increased work-life balance and satisfaction with organizations' work-life programs have been associated with organizational benefits, among them increased organizational commitment (Caillier, 2012). According to Muse et al. (2008), research supports the fact that providing work-life benefits is seen as a "positive exchange" (p. 189) by employees. This positive exchange is related to perceptions of organizational support, higher performance, and an affective commitment to the organization. This behavior can be explained by Social Exchange Theory which proposes that the employee/employer relationship could be considered an exchange of resources wherein the employee feels obligated to respond to organizational support with increased employee engagement (Muse et al., 2008).

Flexible Scheduling

Flexible scheduling is part of a much broader concept known as workplace flexibility. According to Hill et al. (2008), workplace flexibility is comprised of two different perspectives. They are the organizational perspective and the employee perspective. The organizational perspective is the degree to which an organization incorporates flexibility to adapt to change. An example of this would be supplementing a workforce with temporary contingent workers or the practice of just-in-time production. Comparatively, the employee perspective addresses the degree to which a worker can choose when, where, and for how long work is done (Hill et al., 2008).

The most common forms of flexible scheduling are flextime and compressed workweeks. Flextime is the practice of allowing employees to choose their own hours, typically with some restrictions put in place by the organization. A compressed workweek is the practice of allowing

employees to work longer hours but fewer days (i.e. four ten-hour workdays per week as opposed to five eight-hour days) (McNall et al., 2010).

According to Dizaho et al. (2017), one of the earliest recent examples of flextime being used was when the Kellogg Company transitioned from the traditional standard of three eight-hour shifts per day. To better accommodate the work-life needs of its employees, the company moved to four six-hour shifts. Since then, other organizations have increasingly followed suit by adopting flexible scheduling as a means to achieve organizational goals and support employees' work-life balance (Dizaho et al., 2017; Hyatt & Coslor, 2018). In their recent research on flexible scheduling, Hyatt and Coslor (2018) reported that 59% of state and local governments offered some form of flexible scheduling.

Hill et al. (2008) considered workplace flexibility a necessity in the modern workplace. Due to changes in workplace demographics such as the increase in the number of dual-career couples, single-parent families, and eldercare responsibilities, employees are facing more challenges when dealing with balancing work and family responsibilities (Caillier, 2016; Hayman, 2010; McNall et al., 2010). In addition, due to recent financial crises and increasingly limited resources, organizations are turning more to flexibility as an alternative to redundancy (Hayman, 2010).

Individual and Organizational Benefits

The structure of work influences family life. Conflict between work and family roles has the potential to diminish the perceived quality of both work and family life resulting in increased work-family conflict and lowered work-life balance (Scandura & Lankau, 1998). In contrast, schedule flexibility, by allowing employees time to address non-work responsibilities, was found to be a mitigating factor to work-family conflict (McNall et al., 2010). Furthermore, by being

able to address other life challenges while still handling workplace responsibilities, employees have reported increased perceived work-life balance (Dizaho et al., 2017; Hayman, 2010).

Flexible scheduling has also been found to reduce the impact of role overload and job-induced stress (Hayman, 2010). Employees who are engaged are typically happier in their personal lives, report less stress, and use less sick time. Those with access to flexible work arrangements also reported fewer mental health problems (Pitt-Catsouphes, 2008). Alongside employees, organizations have also been found to benefit from the positive outcomes related to flexible scheduling.

Rofcanin et al. (2017) studied the association of family-supportive supervisor behaviors as perceived by employees and how it was related to employee engagement and supervisor-rated performance. What they found was that organizations often depended on their supervisors to implement family-supportive supervisor behaviors as they saw fit. The study reported that an increase in such behaviors resulted in higher employee engagement as well as increased supervisor-rated performance (Rofcanin et al., 2017). Access to flexible scheduling can be considered a family-supportive supervisor behavior and has been studied in a similar manner.

In general, employees with the flexibility that they need are reported to be more engaged in their work, more profitable, and safer than those employees who do not have access to needed flexibility (Pitt-Catsouphes, 2008). Therefore, according to Pitt-Catsouphes (2008), flexibility fit is a positive indicator of employee engagement. Internal organizational studies have reported that employees with even very limited amounts of access to flexibility reported increased positive outcomes such as increased employee engagement and job satisfaction (Richman et al., 2008). In addition to increased engagement resulting from flexible scheduling, researchers have also reported higher employee retention and lower leave intention.

Research has also indicated that even during the hiring process, workplace flexibility influenced employees' decisions of whether or not to pursue employment with organizations (Richman et al., 2008). Flexible scheduling has continually been shown to be related to increased organizational commitment for those employees with external family responsibilities. As a result, employees may more closely identify with the goals and values of the organization and work harder toward achieving the organization's goals and supporting its values (Scandura & Lankau, 1998).

According to McNall et al. (2010), the availability of flexible scheduling was indicative of an increase in work-family enrichment. In their study of 220 working adults, increased work-family enrichment resulted in increased job satisfaction and decreased leave intentions (McNall et al., 2010). Both formal and occasional schedule flexibility along with supportive work-life policies have been shown to be associated with not only decreased leave intentions but increased actual retention (Dizaho et al., 2017; Richman et al., 2008).

Due to employees' varying personal life responsibilities, there is no single schedule that can meet all of an organization's employees' needs (Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). While flexibility has largely been proven to result in positive outcomes, whether the schedule is a good fit for the employee's needs is a good predictor of psychological stress, perceived quality of life, and employee engagement (Pitt-Catsouphes, 2008; Richman et al., 2008). Literature has shown that the most effective forms of flexible scheduling arrangements are the ones that provide the most flexibility (Hayman, 2010). With a higher level of flexibility, employees experience a higher level of control which has been associated with positive employee and organizational outcomes (Hayman, 2010; Hyatt & Coslor, 2018).

Based on the tenets of the Control Theory, the positive benefits of flexibility are more likely when employees have the autonomy to choose (Hyatt & Coslor, 2018). According to Swanberg et al. (2011), a higher degree of schedule control resulted in an increase in perceived supervisor support, schedule satisfaction, and employee engagement. When provided a choice, flexible scheduling increased perceptions of control over work and family matters resulting in lower work-family conflict (McNall et al., 2010).

Along with research related to perceived control, autonomy, and flexible scheduling, Social Exchange Theory has been used to explain the relationship between flexible scheduling and positive individual and organizational outcomes (Caillier, 2016; McNall et al., 2010). According to Social Exchange Theory, access to flexible scheduling to give employees more time to address outside obligations is reflective of the fact that an organization cares for the employee (Caillier, 2016). As a result of perceived organizational support, employees feel obligated to reciprocate with increased employee engagement, lower leave intentions, and lower actual turnover (Caillier, 2016; McNall et al., 2010).

Challenges with Flexible Scheduling

As mentioned above, access to flexibility has the potential to result in positive outcomes. However, there are certain employee populations who, by the nature of their positions, naturally have less access to flexibility. For example, lower wage and non-exempt (hourly) employees tend to have the least access to flexibility in the workplace (Swanberg et al., 2011). In a study by Rocereto et al. (2011) on employees in a variety of positions and industries, 86% of those surveyed reported that flextime was appealing. Therefore, one could predict that lower wage and hourly workers would also find the possibility of flextime appealing. The study also found lower

job satisfaction among those employees who wanted flexibility but were denied it (Rocereto et al., 2011).

Choice may play a role in flexible scheduling outcomes (Hyatt & Coslor, 2018; Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). For example, Hyatt and Coslor (2018) examined the relationship between employer-imposed compressed workweeks and employee satisfaction in a United States municipality. In the study, a four ten-hour day workweek was imposed. Those in the experiment group reported more productivity but no increase in job satisfaction (Hyatt & Coslor, 2018). Wadsworth and Facer (2016) completed a similar study within Utah's state government following its adoption of the compressed workweek. In their study, those working a traditional work schedule reported higher work-life balance than those on the newly imposed compressed workweek. When data were disaggregated further, those working compressed workweeks who reported a desire for it, showed higher work-life balance (Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). Therefore, the desirability of the schedule and having a choice whether to adopt it played a significant role in perceived individual benefits (Hyatt & Coslor, 2018; Wadsworth & Facer, 2016).

Teleworking

Before the Industrial Revolution, the home was considered a normal place for employees to work (Olson & Primps, 1984). Since the Industrial Revolution, the typical employee-employer location model has been for employees to perform work in a centralized location among coworkers while being closely supervised by their leaders (Topi, 2004). In the past few decades, there has been an increasing shift towards taking more work back into the home or other alternative locations.

Studies have shown that employees are reporting an ever-increasing desire to have more flexibility in how they balance the pressures of work and outside life (Major et al., 2008). Many

organizations are beginning to realize that allowing increased flexible work arrangements can result in positive outcomes for the individuals and for the organizations as well. Teleworking, sometimes called telecommuting, is one of the ways many organizations are attempting to overcome the challenges associated with increased work-life conflict (Bloom et al., 2015; Church, 2015).

Telework is a flexible arrangement that allows employees to work from a location other than the organization's main office (Caillier, 2011a). Telework takes many forms and has been defined broadly as working anywhere at any time. For example, those employees working in a remote worksite such as a satellite office would be considered teleworkers. Those who work predominately in the field would also be considered teleworkers. Perhaps the most commonly identified form of teleworking is those employees who work from home either occasionally, regularly, or permanently (Morganson et al., 2010).

One of the most profound historical developments that has impacted the prevalence of teleworking is the advancement of technology over the last few decades. Technological advancements such as more readily available internet and the increased reliability of telecommunications technology have allowed for more flexibility in both work schedule and work location (Torten et al., 2016; Waters, 2015). With today's technology, many workers can truly work from any place and at any time.

It should be no surprise that, over the past several decades, teleworking has become an increasingly common practice in the United States. Its use and popularity are seen in a variety of fields (Bloom et al., 2015). The concept of teleworking first emerged during the energy crisis of the 1970s as a method to decrease fuel consumption. Even as recently as 2006, the Department of Transportation reported that telework, along with reducing fuel consumption, can also reduce

air pollution and auto accidents (Caillier, 2011b). Due to the reduced energy consumption that results from the lack of a commute to the office, telework found increasing popularity during the energy crisis and in 1990 was a popular response to the Clean Air Act (Waters, 2015). Many large corporations continue to adopt telework as a major component of their work structure. For example, all call center employees working for JetBlue telework (Bloom et al., 2015). According to research done by Waters (2015), as of 2015, 54% of employers offered teleworking as a flexible work arrangement.

Employee Benefits

In recent decades, there has been an increasing amount of research dedicated to determining how teleworking is related to both positive and negative employee outcomes. Most research has reported that allowing choice in work location results in increased positive outcomes (Morganson et al., 2010). Caillier (2011b), in a study on the impact of teleworking on the motivation levels of United States federal employees, cited the facts that working from home lowers transportation costs, is associated with increased work-life balance, aids in Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, and can even have a positive impact on the teleworkers' dependents. Teleworking is also increasingly being used to reduce the effects of work pressure experienced by today's employees. The lowered work pressure felt by employees is consistently reported to result in an increase in perceived work-life balance (Major et al., 2008; Morganson et al., 2010). According to Morganson et al. (2010), the increase in work-life balance is a result of decreased work-family conflict. For instance, a study performed to determine the impact of teleworking as a dependent care solution highlighted the benefits of teleworking along with the challenges faced by many workers (Major et al., 2008).

Major et al. (2008) surveyed 863 teleworking United States federal employees to study the impact of teleworking on employee dependent care, work experience, and job performance. They reported that caregivers for elderly dependents were absent from work twice as often as non-caregivers. They also reported more frequent tardiness. With regard to turnover, eldercare providers were 10% more likely to resign in order to dedicate more time to care for their aging dependents. When asked, teleworkers reported that the ability to spend more time at home decreased stress related to caregiving and increased job satisfaction. In fact, 97% reported that teleworking increased their work-life balance while 89% reported feeling less stress about dependent care (Major et al., 2008).

Telework's impact on work-life balance is one major benefit of working remotely. However, organizations that allow and promote telework as a flexible work arrangement can also expect to see positive organizational outcomes. For example, Major et al.'s (2008) study of dependent caregivers, not only did teleworkers report increased work-life balance, but 60% also reported that the ability to telework positively influenced their job performance. In her study performed to understand the perceived benefits of teleworking, Church (2015) reported that employees who telework can save up to fifteen days a year just from not having to spend time commuting.

Large, well-known corporations have reported similar findings. Manoocherhi and Pinkerton (2003) reported that AT&T teleworkers spent an average of one hour more per day on the job. Best Buy's teleworking arrangement reported a 35% increase in productivity while British Telecom reported a productivity increase of 20% (Church, 2015). In a similar study performed with call-center employees, Bloom et al. (2015) found that employees who volunteered to work from home reported a 13% performance increase. They attributed the

increased amount of time they were productive to the convenience of being at home. Their supervisors expressed concerns of decreased work quality with an increase in productivity but, in actuality, the teleworkers' maintained their quality of work (Bloom et al., 2015).

Turnover and leave intentions are major concerns for employers like the United States federal government. Therefore, research has been done to determine the effect that teleworking and other flexible work arrangements have on turnover and leave intentions. In Major et al.'s (2008) study, 91% of teleworkers reported that the ability to work from home increased their intent to stay with the organization. In Bloom et al.'s (2015) call center study, attrition rates dropped by 50% compared to the control group.

According to Caillier (2011b), the federal government has taken the lead in offering telework arrangements to its employees. Understanding the potential benefits of teleworking, the federal government has mandated that teleworking be made available to all eligible employees (Caillier, 2011b). Caillier (2011a; 2011b) performed multiple studies on how teleworking affects federal employees. Teleworkers and non-teleworkers reported similar levels of leave intention. However, government workers who were not allowed to telework reported that they were more likely to leave their jobs because they were denied the opportunity to telework (Caillier, 2011a). With this in mind, one must consider the challenges of implementing a teleworking arrangement properly to avoid the pitfalls observed in this study.

Challenges of Teleworking

An employer must consider the work an employee does before entering into a teleworking arrangement. According to Church (2015), teleworking is considered ideal for non-customer-facing employees. Employers must also consider the impact that telework may have on employees not allowed to telework. In the two studies by Caillier (2011a; 2011b) mentioned

above, employees not allowed to telework either showed lower levels of motivation when compared to their teleworking peers or reported higher intentions to leave. This could be considered a confirmation of the Social Denial Hypothesis that, inversely to Social Exchange Theory, states that employees will not feel an obligation to remain in an organization if they feel they have been denied some benefit. That benefit, in this case, would be teleworking (Caillier, 2011b). In addition, Major et al. (2008) recommended that, to fully realize the benefits of remote work, teleworking should not be treated like a “workplace privilege” (p. 66) reserved for the few but a “workplace strategy” (p. 66) available to all eligible employees.

Some of the challenges experienced because of teleworking arrangements were due to management perceptions of telework. For example, in the Bloom et al. (2015) call center study, members of company leadership wanted to improve work-life balance by implementing teleworking arrangements but were concerned productivity would drop without employees being directly supervised. Their concerns were related to “shirking from home” (p. 212). Therefore, it is not surprising to find Church’s (2015) assertion that the greatest challenge for supervisors was a challenge of trust since they were unable to physically see the teleworkers. However, research has indicated that these indirectly supervised employees experienced increased productivity (Bloom et al., 2015; Church, 2015; Manoocherhi & Pinkerton, 2003).

Teleworking also presents challenges for how employees relate to their organizations and what they need to be successful (Dahlstrom, 2013). According to Dahlstrom (2013), teleworkers who spend longer amounts of time working outside of the main office miss the informal relationship-building interactions that occur throughout the day-to-day lives of non-teleworkers. The resulting lack of interaction can lead to employees feeling isolated, lonely, or that their career is in danger of stagnation (Dahlstrom, 2013; Wheatley, 2012).

Teleworking has also been reported to have a negative effect on work-life balance when work is done exclusively from home. In these cases, the home may be perceived solely as the office, and work will bleed into the home life and *vice versa* (Caillier, 2011b; Dizaho et al., 2017; Morganson et al., 2010). Caillier (2011b) found that the highest level of motivation was present in employees who teleworked two days per week. He predicted that any more time away from the office than that would result in too little face-to-face interaction and growing feelings of isolation.

Summary

There have been many research efforts that have sought to understand employee engagement and engagement determinants. Early research conducted to understand interpersonal relationships and individuals' relationships with organizations laid the foundation for research that would take a more targeted approach to understanding how those relationship concepts relate to employee engagement. At the same time, research was also being conducted to provide a standard definition for the term *employee engagement*.

There has also been significant research related to work-life balance and how supervisors' and organizations' support for work-life balance has the potential to affect employee engagement. Flexible work arrangements such as flexible scheduling and teleworking opportunities are two ways by which organizations have supported employees' efforts to balance work and life. Research has indicated that these flexible work arrangements are related to increased work-life balance and higher employee engagement. The overarching theme in the literature is that organizations who support their employees' efforts to maintain work-life balance can expect employees to reciprocate with increased employee engagement.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Using the case study approach (Yin, 1994), this qualitative study examined the effect of work-life balance on employee engagement as well as the experience of teleworking as the result of a global pandemic within a small functional unit in higher education human resources. This unit was composed of a director, two consultants, a specialist, and one administrative support assistant. The study took place from November 1, 2019 through November 15, 2020, which spanned a time of normal business operations as well as time while the group was working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research took place in three iterative phases. The first phase consisted of establishing a baseline understanding of the participants' levels of employee engagement and whether increased workplace flexibility had the potential to positively influence work-life balance and employee engagement. The second phase was initially intended to be the implementation of a workplace flexibility intervention. However, the second phase of research took the form of documenting the participants' experiences working exclusively from home as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout this phase, data collection and data analysis took place simultaneously. The third phase of the research considered the participants' experiences and what influence the experience of teleworking had on their levels of employee engagement, work-life balance, opinions of teleworking, and future planning for similar workplace disruptions. It also considered the impact the transition to teleworking had on the unit's organizational capacity and ability to meet its business needs.

For the purposes of this research, it was crucial to ascertain a baseline understanding of the participants' ability to balance work and life as well as their levels of employee engagement.

This was done through three data collection methods and lasted for three months beginning November 1, 2019 and ending on January 31, 2020 (see Table 1).

The first of the two methods was semi-structured interviews held both at the beginning and end of the phase. The interviews were held in the workplace in an informal setting between individual participants and me. They lasted approximately one-hour, more or less depending on the participants' responses. The interviews were audio-recorded using Camtasia, a lecture-capture and audio recording software, and Microsoft Audio Recorder. They were later transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Each of the interviews was guided by an interview guide (see Appendix B). The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of employees' perspectives of and personal experiences with employee engagement and work-life balance. They also served to provide an understanding of the participants' how participants' experiences with work-life balance had affected their levels of engagement in the past. Lastly, the interviews served to provide an understanding of employees' then-current level of engagement and work-life balance.

The second method used to gain a baseline understanding of the participants' abilities to balance work and life and well as their levels of employee engagement was through journals kept by the participants. The participants were expected to make weekly entries where they described challenges that they faced regarding work-life balance as well as instances when work or life experiences, responsibilities, or restraints had a negative influence on one other. Employees were encouraged to be as detailed as possible and to include as much pertinent information as they were able to. These journal entries were guided by the prompts I provided (see Appendix C).

The third method of data collection was researcher observations. Because I worked in close proximity with the participants, I had the opportunity to interact with them regularly. This

Table 1

Phase One Activities, Participants, and Timeline for Research

Activities	Participants	Timeline
Semi-structured interviews	Researcher, unit director, and participants	November 1, 2019 – January 31, 2020
Participant journal entries	Participants	November 1, 2019 – January 31, 2020
Researcher observations	Researcher	November 1, 2019 – January 31, 2020

allowed for observation of instances when participants may have been experiencing work-life strain or instances of low or high engagement. These observations, as well as researcher notes, were recorded in a T-table (see Appendix D). The data collected during the first iterative phase was analyzed and used to inform the intervention that was planned to be implemented in the second phase of the study.

The planned phase two of the study consisted of an analysis of the data collected during phase one, implementation of an intervention that had been informed by phase one's data, and consistent data collection throughout the period the intervention would be in place (see Table 2). Phase two lasted from February 4, 2020, through July 17, 2020. The first step, which was conducted from February 4, 2020, through March 1, 2020, consisted of phase one data analysis and the design of the workplace flexibility intervention that was planned to be implemented in the second phase. At the time, the participant group had no standard form of flexible work arrangements, whether they be flexible schedules or teleworking practices, in place. The intervention proposed, if supported by the data collected in phase one, was to implement a practice of flexible work arrangements and simultaneously collect data that would be used in phase three to determine the impact that the intervention had on work-life balance and employee engagement.

Before implementing the intervention, there needed to be parameters set to better ensure the fulfillment of the unit's business needs. Between March 1, 2020, and March 7, 2020, I met with the director of the unit as well as the department's leader to discuss university policies and standards as well as to determine the departmental/unit parameters that should be set. The parameters included the number of days per week employees were to be allowed to telework or the core hours around which schedules could potentially be flexed. Once the intervention had

Table 2

Phase Two Activities, Participants, and Timeline for Research

Activities	Participants	Timeline
Phase one data analysis	Researcher	February 4, 2020 – March 1, 2020
Intervention design	Researcher	February 4, 2020 – March 1, 2020
Establish intervention parameters	Researcher, unit director, department head	March 1, 2020 – March 7, 2020
Video journal Entries	Unit director and study participants	March 25, 2020 – July 17, 2020
Direct Observations	Researcher	March 25, 2020 – July 17, 2020

been designed and parameters have been determined, I planned to conduct a meeting with the unit director and the study participants to outline the intervention, the parameters that would be set, and my own data collection methods and expectations.

However, as has already been mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an adjustment to that plan. With the participant group's March 2020 transition to teleworking exclusively, I recognized that I would be unable to implement the intervention that I had designed. However, this transition presented an opportunity to document the participant group's experiences during a major historical public health crisis and that the data collected could serve to increase institutional memory as well as inform future decisions related to teleworking and organizational response to major lengthy workplace disruptions.

From March 25, 2020, through July 17, 2020, the participants worked, with rare exceptions, exclusively from their homes. During this time, they were expected to continue fulfilling the business needs of the unit from a remote environment. Additionally, due to the public health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, they also experienced varying degrees of quarantine having very limited social interactions. During this time, data were planned to be collected using three methods. In practice, only two were used. The first method used was direct observations. Even though the department was working remotely, I had the opportunity to occasionally interact with the participants in a work capacity via virtual platforms such as Microsoft Teams. These observations and researcher notes were recorded in an observation table (see Appendix D).

The second method of data collection that was planned was semi-structured, bi-weekly interviews. These interviews were designed as checkpoints to be held with the employees during the planned intervention. They were planned to be structured according to an interview guide

(see Appendix E). However, due to the already disrupted workplace, the additional strain that the pandemic had placed on the participants, and the success of the third data collection method, I decided to forgo the planned bi-weekly interviews.

The third data collection method used was weekly video journal entries (using FlipGrid) where the employees documented their experiences during and after the transition to exclusively teleworking. The employees were expected to make weekly entries where they described challenges that they faced as a result of the transition from the office to working remotely, challenges balancing work and life, and how the transition had influenced their levels of employee engagement. Participants were encouraged to be as detailed as possible and to include as much pertinent information as they were able. These video journal entries were guided by prompts provided by me (see Appendix C).

The third phase of the study began with data collection employing semi-structured interviews guided by an interview guide (see Appendix F). These interviews were intended as a follow-up opportunity to understand the participants' experiences and perspectives of how teleworking during the pandemic affected their work-life balance and employee engagement. It also consisted of an analysis of all the data gathered in phase two as well as the final interviews culminating in a comparison of phase one, two, and three data. Codes were drawn from both the extant literature as well as the direct observations, semi-structured interviews, and journal entries. These codes were separated into categories and then used to draw patterns and themes regarding the effect of the pandemic and teleworking. The first step was the final semi-structured interviews that were conducted between July 31, 2020, and August 6, 2020 (see Table 3). Next, data analysis was conducted between August 7 and October 31, 2020.

Table 3

Phase Three Activities, Participants, and Timeline for Research

Activities	Participants	Timeline
Semi-structured interviews	Researcher, unit director, and participants	July 31, 2020 – August 6, 2020
Phase three and overall data analysis	Researcher	August 7, 2020 – October 31, 2020
Member-checking	Researcher, unit director, department head	November 4, 2020 – November 15, 2020

Population

The target population of this study was a small functional unit in the human resources department at a large research university in the southeastern United States. The university in which the study took place had a total permanent employee population of approximately 5,800 employees including faculty, staff, and administration. The department in which the study population worked consisted of approximately 60 human resources and administrative professionals. The population for the study was made up of five employees.

The director of the unit, Clara, was a white female in her mid-30s. She had been at the university for the longest time and had approximately 12 years of related experience. One of the HR Consultants in the group, Jimmy, was a white male in his mid-30s who had recently made the transition from working at a municipal government to higher education. While he had approximately 10 years of related experience, only one and a half years of it was in higher education. The other HR Consultant, Bob, was in his mid-40s and had approximately 20 years of experience in human resources. At the beginning of this study, he was new to the university having just arrived prior to the study's inception. The population also had an HR specialist, Kathy, who was a white female in her mid-20s. She had been in the organization and in human resources the least amount of time with all of her one and a quarter-years of experience being at the university considered. Lastly, the Administrative Support Specialist, Karen, was a white female in her early 60s who had over 40 years of administrative support experience and approximately nine years of experience within the university considered.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

To begin the sampling procedure, the first factor considered was access to the institution to be studied. Logically, the institution selected was the one to which I would have the greatest

level of access which happened to be the university where I worked at the time of the study. Of the university's total employee population, access and sphere of influence were the most important factors considered in selecting a department in which to conduct the research. Of the available departments considered, the human resources department was selected because I was a member of the leadership team in this department. Of the functional units in the department, the participant group eventually selected was chosen due to several reasons.

First, it was chosen because the unit did not have any form of consistent, standardized flexible work arrangements in place. This played an important part in the study due to the fact that there would have been, if an intervention was implemented, a more substantial change in the workplace as a result of the intervention than if the study merely adjusted arrangements that were already in place. Secondly, this population was large enough to give the study the perspective of multiple individuals with differing backgrounds and at different points in their careers. It was also small enough to be manageable for the scope of this study. Lastly, this population was chosen due to its proximity to my own work location which granted more ease of access to interact with and gain data from the participants.

Organizational Context

The Department of Human Resources (HR) in which the participant group was located was a mid-sized administrative department at the university. It was charged with administering the HR function for all 8 divisions that make up the university. This included not only professional staff but student employment and some faculty employment as well. To execute this charge, the department was divided into seven distinct units; HR Administration, Benefits, Classification and Compensation, Employee Relations, Employment, HR Information Systems, and Learning and Organizational Development.

HR Administration was the department's executive leadership team consisting of an Associate Vice Chancellor, an Assistant Vice Chancellor, an HR Consultant, and one Executive Administrative Assistant. Under this unit were the functional units of the department. Benefits was charged with administering the state benefit programs for all faculty and staff. Classification and Compensation was responsible for ensuring employees were seated in properly classified positions and administered the compensation plan for non-faculty university employees. Employee Relations oversaw the performance management aspect of HR including performance evaluations, progressive discipline, and the grievance processes.

The Employment Unit provided assistance to hiring officials and candidates related to the recruitment and selection process and also administered the university's applicant tracking system. HR Information Systems oversaw the university's HR information systems such as Banner and PeopleAdmin. Lastly, Learning and Organizational Development (L&OD) was responsible for all training and development programming produced by HR including New Employee Orientation as well as being tasked with leadership development programming and employee engagement initiatives. Along with those responsibilities, L&OD actively managed the university's employee learning management system.

Like most organizations, there were several challenges that this department faced. The workforce, with some exceptions, had grown increasingly disengaged with regard to not only its work but also its relationship with the university's leadership. This stemmed from multiple factors. For instance, HR's employees did not perceive that they were being paid equitably when compared to other areas across campus as well as when compared to current market rates for similar positions. In fact, with the newest update in market rates, the average HR employee was being paid roughly 83-85% of the market rate.

Another reason for the department's decreasing level of engagement may have been the recent changes within the department. Over the previous year, executive leadership within the department had undergone changes. The Associate Vice Chancellor of Human Resources position was vacant and filled with an interim for over a year with an initial search being unsuccessful. Following the initial search, the second search resulted in the interim being placed in the position permanently.

There were also concerns related to intradepartmental communication as well. Certain units and employees had expressed concerns related to feeling "out of the loop" when it came to important changes at the university and within the department. The sentiments were a result of a perception of a lack of top-down communication and dialogue between department/unit leadership and staff.

Ethical Consideration and Informed Consent

Before being able to gain access to perform the study with the group that had been chosen, there were various informal and formal approvals needed. The first to consider were the informal approvals of those involved in the study either directly or indirectly. They included the department head where the study took place, the department's leadership team comprised of the directors of each functional unit, and the director of the unit being studied.

The first set of conversations was held with the department head. I expressed my desire to conduct research related to employee engagement and work-life balance within her department. Upon describing the nature of the research, the population impacted, and what I predicted to be the intervention that would result from initial data collection, she gave her approval of the study with two requests. First, she requested that parameters be collaboratively agreed upon between herself, the unit director, and me, to ensure that the business needs of the unit were able to be

met. Secondly, she requested assurance that, if the workplace was disrupted to the extent that customer service or performance suffered significantly, measures would be taken to eliminate the disruption. Those measures could have taken the form of further limiting the flexibility an employee could choose or, in the most extreme of cases, discontinuing the study.

The second informal institutional approval that was needed was the approval of the departments' leadership team. While the units other than the one studied were not directly impacted by the study, I thought it necessary to describe the nature of my research early in the process to both gain their support and to give them the opportunity to express any concerns. One member of the leadership team expressed a desire not to be included in any research due to the nature of their work. Another member of the leadership team expressed a willingness to be considered for the study. Overall, the reception was positive, and the leadership team did not express any concerns related to the research.

The final informal institutional approval that was needed was that of the unit director of the population to be studied. She was a part of the initial conversation with the leadership team and, in that meeting, expressed a willingness to participate. Upon selecting her unit as the ideal group within the department, I proposed the idea to her. After describing the proposed research in detail, which included potential interventions, data collection methods, and timing, she was supportive of the study and communicated her desire to not only have her unit be studied but also to be an active participant.

Formal approval to perform the study was also required. This came in the form of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A). After successfully presenting and defending the study proposal to my dissertation committee, I submitted the required

documentation to the IRB through the ePIRATE portal. Upon review and approval of the IRB, I gained the requisite approvals to perform the study.

There were also ethical concerns that had to be addressed. The first concern that was addressed was the potential that the intervention would disrupt the workplace to the extent that the group's level of customer service would suffer or that employees would feel an excessively negative effect on their work or life or both. In the case that the level of service decreased to an unacceptable level, measures were planned to remove the cause of the decrease. For example, if a participant was consistently working outside of the parameters set at the beginning of the intervention, then they could have been removed from the intervention altogether or at least until their performance improved. If the participant was removed from the study altogether, then the data collected up to the point of removal would have been reported in the final data analysis. With the COVID-19 pandemic eliminating the potential for intervention, none of these measures were needed.

In the same manner, if a participant felt that the study was negatively affecting them to the point that it caused excessive work or life stress, they had the option to withdraw themselves from the study. If a participant decided to withdraw themselves from the study, then the data collected up to the point of withdrawal would have been reported in the final data analysis. The participants were assured that the decision to withdraw was solely theirs, and that there would be no negative workplace repercussions if they chose to withdraw from the study. However, no participants chose to remove themselves during the study.

Ethical consideration was also given to how data were collected, stored, and reported. As mentioned above, data were collected through researcher direct observations, semi-structured interviews, and electronic and video employee journal entries. To ensure ethical compliance, the

direct observations were made in an unobtrusive manner that did not in any way interfere with the work that the participants were doing. Therefore, the observations were made passively in a way that did not involve me placing myself in an observational position when I otherwise would not have been interacting with the participants.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted in a form consistent with ethical research. The interviews took place in the workplace either in a neutral conference room, the participant's workspace, my own office, or virtually. I scheduled the interviews to ensure that they did not interfere negatively with the participants' work or personal lives. They were conducted in a secure area with limited possibility for non-participants to hear the contents of the interviews. Participants were informed that, if they felt uncomfortable or no longer wished to participate in an interview, they could decide to either take a break or conclude the interview prematurely.

Data were also collected in the form of participant journal entries. The journals were electronic in the form of Microsoft OneDrive shared documents during the first phase of research and video journals during the second phase.

All data were kept confidential and stored securely to help ensure confidentiality. The names of the institution and participants have been changed to better ensure the confidentiality of participants. Any physical data such as written journal entries or researcher observations were stored in a locked container with access limited to me. Electronic data were stored in a password-protected drive on my personal computer or via electronic documents shared on Microsoft Teams or Microsoft OneDrive between the participants and me.

Ethical consideration was also given to the fact that the research was conducted within my own work environment. Measures were taken to ensure that no potential conflicts of interest

occurred. As a result, and to ensure that there is was no perception that I was abusing my own work time, I committed to not conducting any active research, outside of passive observations, during work time. Interviews conducted in the workplace were conducted during either my own break period, before the workday, or after the workday. The decision to use weekly participant journal entries as a form of data collection was also made because the research took place within my own work environment. Journal entries were selected as a second method of data collection to help counter the compulsion to skew their responses to what they thought I wanted to hear that participants may have felt during face-to-face interviews.

Data Processing and Analysis

As noted above, this study sought to answer one primary overarching research question as well as three sub-questions based on the three iterative phases of research that took place. Both the primary research question and the three sub-questions are listed below along with the data processing and analysis methods that were used for each sub-question (see Table 2).

Primary Research Question: What impact, if any, do flexible work arrangements such as teleworking and flexible scheduling have on employee engagement and productivity among higher education professional staff?

SQ1. How have employees' experiences balancing work and life impacted their level of employee engagement in the past?

The first sub-question was used to establish a baseline understanding of participants' understanding of employee engagement and how their experiences balancing work and life had affected their levels of engagement in the past. Data were gathered by several methods (see Table 4). First, data were gathered during semi-structured interviews with participants guided by an interview guide (see Appendix B). The interviews were recorded and transcribed into a

Table 4

Sub-Question One Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analytic Techniques

Research Question	Data Source	Analytic Technique
Sub-question 1. How have employees' experiences balancing work and life impacted their level of employee engagement in the past?	Semi-structured interviews with participants (at beginning and end of phase 1)	Organize and review data (using NVivo)
	Direct observations of participants in the current state of limited flexibility	Reduce data through coding and pattern identification
	Participant journal entries (weekly)	Relate patterns to larger themes
		Reflect on experiences and perceptions of participants. Use themes to determine the design of the intervention.

Microsoft Word document. Data were gathered by means of direct researcher observations. These observations as well as researcher notes were recorded in a table (see Appendix D). Lastly, participants were instructed to make weekly journal entries to record their levels of engagement as well as how work-life balance issues affected engagement. These journal entries were guided by the journal prompts I provided (see Appendix C).

General data analysis was conducted using methods defined by Miles et al. (2013). These data, once compiled, were organized, and reviewed using the NVivo software. Once the data had been reviewed, they were reduced into codes. Codes were drawn from the available literature as well as through the data collected from participants using techniques such as those outlined by Saldana (2015). Once coded, the data were grouped into categories to help identify patterns. The patterns that emerged were further related to themes that had been drawn out of the first iterative phase of the study. These themes were used to inform decisions related to the second phase of the research. The themes were used to determine (a) if there was a basic need for a workplace flexibility intervention, (b) if an intervention similar to the one described above was the type that was needed, and (c) if it was not, what intervention design was best suited to the participants' needs based on the emergent themes.

SQ2. Based on data gathered in the first iterative phase of research, what level of workplace flexibility would be needed to adequately balance work and life while fulfilling the business need of the unit?

Data from the first phase of the study was used to inform the type of intervention planned to be implemented in the second phase of the study. During the second phase, the study intended to answer the second sub-question regarding the level of flexibility required to achieve work-life balance while fulfilling the unit's business needs. Although an intervention was planned, the

COVID-19 pandemic eliminated the possibility of its implementation. Therefore, the study shifted to documenting the participants' experiencing during and after the transition to teleworking as a result of the pandemic. During this phase of the study, data were collected in a similar manner to the first phase (see Table 5).

First, data were gathered by means of direct researcher observations. These observations as well as researcher notes were recorded in an observation table (see Appendix D). Secondly, participants were required to make weekly video journal entries to record their experiences of teleworking, work-life balance, and employee engagement during the period of teleworking. These journal entries were guided by the journal prompts I provided (see Appendix C).

This data, once compiled, was organized and reviewed using the NVivo software. Once the data had been reviewed, it was reduced into codes. Codes were drawn from the available literature as well as through the data collected from participants. Once coded, the data were grouped into categories to help identify patterns. The patterns that emerged were further to related themes that were drawn out of the first iterative phase of the study. The themes that emerged from the second phase of the study were related to the themes from the first phase during the third and final phase of the research wherein an overall data analysis took place.

SQ3. What impact did the intervention developed and implemented during the second iterative phase have on the unit's organizational capacity, employees' work-life balance, their level of engagement, and their ability to fulfill the unit's business need?

During the third phase of the study, data were provided from the data collection that took place in the first and second phases of the study. Also, data were collected by semi-structured interviews with the participants guided by the interview guide (see Appendix F). Once the interview data were collected, it was organized and reviewed using NVivo. The data were then

Table 5

Sub-Question Two Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analytic Techniques

Research Question	Data Source	Analytic Technique
Sub-question 2. Based on data gathered in the first iterative phase of research, what level of workplace flexibility would be needed to adequately balance work and life while fulfilling the business need of the unit?	Semi-structured interviews Direct observations Participant video journal entries (weekly)	Organize and review data (using NVivo) Reduce data through coding and pattern identification Relate patterns to larger themes Compare themes to experiences and perceptions from phase 1 data

reduced to codes using codes gathered from the literature as well as the previous two phases of the study. These codes were then used to identify patterns. The patterns were subsequently related to larger themes including those themes that emerged during the first and second phases of research. By comparative analysis, I used the data collected to draw conclusions related to the primary research question. Once these conclusions were drawn, I used member-checking with the participants to verify the conclusions (see Table 6).

Methodological Assumptions and Limitations

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, there were several methods used. Following the framework outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), measures were taken to ensure creditability, transferability, confirmability, and dependability.

I used two methods to ensure the study's credibility. First, I used methods triangulation by using three different forms of data collection. Because I had a working relationship with the group being studied, it was essential that I use methods that were more likely to produce reliable data. With this in mind, I took measures to allow for data collection that did not involve direct contact with the participants as well as a method that did involve direct contact.

First, workplace observations were conducted during interactions that were organic to the professional relationship that I had with the study population. Although I was in contact with the participants, it was in a natural setting not in a formal research setting. Secondly, during both phase one and phase two of the iterative research process, I gathered data by having the participants provide weekly journal entries that described their experiences and what, if any, impact these experiences had on their employee engagement. Thirdly, I used semi-structured interviews that involved direct contact with the participants that were guided by an established interview guide.

Table 6

Sub-Question Three Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analytic Techniques

Research Question	Data Source	Analytic Technique
Sub-question 3. What impact did the intervention developed and implemented during the second iterative phase have on organizational capacity, employees' work-life balance, their level of engagement, and their ability to fulfill the unit's business need?	Semi-structured interviews	Organize and review data (using NVivo) Reduce data through coding and pattern identification Relate patterns to larger themes Compare emergent themes to phase one and two themes to draw conclusions and verify through member-checking.

The second method I used to ensure credibility was member-checking. During the third phase of the iterative research process, I presented my interpretations and conclusions to the participants of the study. This gave them the opportunity to add any additional clarifying information or correct any errors that I may have made.

To ensure transferability, I took measures as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as well as Korstjens and Moser (2018) in their work on practical guidance for qualitative research. In addition to data collection through semi-structured interviews, observations, and journal entries, I provided a thick description of the participants, the research process, and the organizational context within which the research took place. This allowed future readers the ability to assess the applicability of the research to their own setting and make an informed decision regarding whether to engage in similar research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

To ensure confirmability, I provided a detailed audit of the research process from beginning to end. Included in this audit trail are notes regarding decisions that were made during the research process, details regarding the data collection process, and rationale regarding code development and data analysis. Included within this chapter is also a reflexive section that addressed the role of the research which included my own position with regard to the ideas researched and the role that I held in the research space.

The audit trail mentioned above also served as a measure to help ensure the research's dependability. In addition to the audit trail, the research process was reviewed and evaluated by a committee to ensure that it was consistent with best practices in the field of qualitative research. The data collected, and analysis thereof were likewise evaluated. The combination of the multiple methods used to ensure credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability served to help ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

Instrumentation

Five qualitative instruments were developed for use during this study. These instruments consisted of three interview guides, a table for researcher observations and notes, and two participant journal entry guides.

I developed the first interview guide that was used during phase one of the study (see Appendix B). This interview guide was designed to help gain a baseline understanding of participants' experiences balancing work and life as well as their levels of employee engagement. It consisted of an introductory paragraph that introduced the study to the participants and ten mostly open-ended questions. The questions were designed to allow the participant to describe their pertinent experience in the field, their own definition of employee engagement, how their engagement had been influenced in the past, and their experiences balancing work and life.

The second instrument developed was a set of prompts that I provided to guide participants' journal entries (see Appendix C). Weekly participant journal entries were used during both phase one and phase two of the study to gather data in a way that was more impersonal for the employee. Different journal prompts were used for each phase. The prompts were, essentially, two open-ended questions designed to give the participant the opportunity to describe their experiences balancing work and life during the week and to describe their level of employee engagement during the same period. Participants were encouraged to be as descriptive as possible giving any information they felt to be pertinent to the study.

The third instrument developed was a researcher observation guide table (see Appendix D). It was a T-table that consisted of two columns. One column was intended for researcher observations. The second column was intended for researcher notes and commentary on

researcher observations. Though used during phases one and two, the same researcher observation guide was used during both phases.

The fourth instrument developed was an interview guide intended for use during phase two of the study (see Appendix E). This interview guide was designed to gain an understanding of participants' experiences with flexible work arrangements during the intervention stage of the study. This interview guide consisted of six mostly open-ended questions designed to determine how the participants took advantage of flexible arrangements, how that flexibility impacted their ability to balance work and life, any change in their levels of engagement, and to what they attributed the change in level of engagement. Since the interviews planned for the second research phase were not conducted, the interview guide was not used. However, it is included in this document for reference purposes.

The fifth instrument developed was a final interview guide used during the third phase of the study (see Appendix F). This interview guide was designed to gain an understanding of participants' experiences during the time spent teleworking because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It consists of six questions intended to allow participants the opportunity to describe their experiences, both positive and negative, during the period of teleworking, any change in their levels of employee engagement, their perception of how the experience impacted work-life balance and employee engagement, the lessons they learned from the experience, and any change in their opinions of telework.

Pilot Study

In an earlier, work-related project, I had the opportunity to have a discussion with two potential study participants about their thoughts and experiences related to work-life balance, employee engagement, and the effect that workplace flexibility may have on the two. During

these conversations, I was able to collect preliminary data that suggested that the availability of flexible work arrangements has a positive influence on work-life balance and that the ability to balance work and life results in increased employee engagement.

During these conversations, I had the opportunity to discuss experiences balancing work and life with the potential participants. The two individuals came from two distinctively different backgrounds and related different experiences. One person described experiences in the past when a supervisor did not support her efforts to balance work and life. At the time she was the mother of two young children with substantial personal obligations outside of work. Because her supervisor did not provide the needed work-life balance support, she experienced increased work-life stress during times of increased personal responsibility such as when a child was sick or when she experienced a death in the family. As a result, she reported lower employee engagement simply due to the feelings of being overwhelmed she experienced in trying to fulfill both work and personal obligations without supervisor support to do so.

The other potential participant had experienced supervisor support with regard to work-life balance in all of her previous positions. In contrast to the individual mentioned in the previous paragraph, this employee reported experiencing high levels of work-life balance support that resulted in feelings of perceived supervisor and organizational support. She also reported high levels of work-life balance as well as high employee engagement.

While these interactions were not nearly as substantial in size as the study conducted, the preliminary data contained therein certainly suggested that the ability to achieve work-life balance, as well as perceived supervisor and organizational support, affected employee engagement. Also, it suggested that access to workplace flexibility had an impact on the ability

to achieve work-life balance. As a result, I believed that these interactions further supported the necessity of the study.

Role of the Researcher

At the time of the study, I was employed within the department the research was conducted and served as the director of the functional unit tasked with HR Learning and Organizational Development. The study's participant group was a team with whom I had a collegial relationship. In the course of working, the participant group of the study was one with whom I frequently collaborated. I also possessed beliefs related to the focus of the study. I believed that work-life balance plays a role in employees' levels of engagement. I considered balancing work and life to be critical to both employee engagement and job satisfaction. Additionally, I believed that a feeling of organizational support has the ability to impact employees' engagement levels due to the fact that employees will likely repay support with positive work outcomes as indicated by research on Social Exchange Theory.

Summary

This study took place in three iterative phases. The first phase was to develop a baseline understanding of participants' employee engagement levels and to determine if an intervention had the potential to increase the participants' levels of engagement. The second phase occurred over a period of time when the participants were forced to transition to working remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected using three methods: direct researcher observations, semi-structured interviews, and journal entries made by the participants. The final phase consisted of data collection in the form of follow-up interviews as well as data analysis using codes drawn from both the literature and data collected throughout the first and second phases.

The study's population was chosen for several reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, this unit had no standard form of flexibility in place. Therefore, the study was planned to be able to compare the data from a time of substantial flexibility with that of a time with little to no flexibility. Secondly, this population was large enough to give the study the perspective of multiple individuals with differing backgrounds and at different points in their careers while also being manageable for the scope of the study. Lastly, the proximity of the population to my own work location allowed for consistent access and interaction with the participants.

Multiple measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness. Methods triangulation and member checking were used to ensure credibility. To ensure transferability, I provided a thick description of the participants, the research process, and the organizational context of the study. A detailed research audit trail was provided to ensure confirmability. The audit trail along with an evaluation of the research process by the dissertation committee served to ensure dependability.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This study had initially been designed to evaluate the effectiveness of introducing flexible work arrangements, such as teleworking and flexible scheduling, as a means to improve employee engagement and productivity among higher education professional staff. Ultimately what I aimed to discover was what, if any, impact do flexible work arrangements have on employee engagement and productivity. To answer this primary question, I found it necessary to develop three sub-questions.

To address the sub-questions and, ultimately, the primary research question, I designed a qualitative study that was divided into three iterative phases wherein each phase addressed its own research sub-question. The first phase was designed to determine how employees' abilities to balance work and life in the past had affected their employee engagement. During this phase, I gathered data by three methods: direct observations, semi-structured interviews, and weekly participant journal entries.

The data gathered during the first phase was used to develop a workplace flexibility intervention to be implemented in order to answer the second sub-question (intended to be addressed in the second iterative phase of the study) which considered what level of flexibility was needed to adequately balance work and life while still fulfilling the business need of the participants' unit. The third iterative phase was initially planned to be conducted to assess what effect the flexible work arrangements introduced during the second phase of research had on the participants' work-life balance, employee engagement, and ability to fulfill the business needs of the unit. However, as will be discussed, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic forced me to adjust the format of the second and third phases of research.

Beginning in late Fall 2019, a new strain of fast-spreading and potentially deadly (especially to the aged and those with preexisting respiratory conditions like asthma or COPD) respiratory infection, COVID-19, began to spread globally. Realizing the public health emergency that the United States was facing, federal, state, and local governments began to implement measures to increase social distance and lower the risk of infection. These included closing non-essential businesses and, for many individuals, working from home.

On March 23, 2020, the participant group was forced to abandon the workplace and begin teleworking exclusively. With the workplace significantly disrupted by the pandemic, it was impossible to implement the intervention designed based on data gathered during the first phase of research. Therefore, I used the workplace disruption precipitated by the pandemic as a replacement for the intervention. During this adjusted second phase of research, I used two methods to gather data. First, I had the participants record semi-weekly video journals from March 25 through July 17, 2021 that documented their experiences during and after the initial transition to telework. I supplemented this video journal data with final semi-structured interviews conducted during the last week of July.

The second and third phases of research were initially intended to analyze the influence of a planned intervention on the participants' work-life balance, employee engagement, and the unit's organizational capacity. Considering the severe workplace disruption and the forced implementation of telework, the third sub-question needed to be altered. However, the data gathered during the time of workplace disruption was analyzed and considered in the same manner as was initially planned.

In this chapter, I will describe the data collection process, data analysis process, and the final results of the data. In addition, and to provide additional context to the research, I will

provide a description of both the participants and the environment in which they worked. I will also provide a summary of the results as an introduction to the discussion contained in Chapter 5.

Data Collection

Before beginning the first phase of data collection, I held a meeting with the participant group I had identified. I had obtained permission to formally introduce the study to them and obtain their informed consent. The meeting took place on October 25, 2019. During the meeting I was able to provide the potential participants with a clear understanding of the purpose of the study, its design, and what they could each expect throughout the study's duration.

The questions that the potential participants asked were mostly related to data collection security methods and ensuring that responses to interview questions or journal entries would not be shared outside of the study and that they would not be used against them in any employment matters. I subsequently reiterated the data security measures included in Chapter 3 and ensured the participants that their participation was not only completely voluntary but could also not be used against them in any way.

During the initial meeting, the group I had selected appeared to be excited about the prospect of participating in the study and the potential access to increased flexibility. Before the conclusion of our meeting and without my prompting, the participants had already started brainstorming ideas for ways by which they could implement the level of workplace flexibility that I had discussed during my review of the study. Their discussion made it evident that to introduce a high level of flexibility into their high-touch work environment, it would take planning and coordination of efforts to ensure that the business unit needs would be met. Ultimately, I was able to secure informed consent from all five of the individuals with whom I met.

Phase One

Data collection for the first research phase began on November 4, 2019. Initial semi-structured interviews were conducted between November 4, 2019, and November 14, 2019. I had initially planned to conduct all of the initial in-person interviews between November 4, 2019, and November 8, 2019. Ultimately, due to scheduling conflicts, it took until November 14, 2019. During that time, I was able to meet with all five participants individually for between 30 minutes and an hour depending on the length of the participants' responses. Interviews were recorded using Camtasia recording software and were transcribed by hand.

Data were also collected through direct observations. Direct observations were not obtained frequently because work priorities necessitated that the work of the participant group and I grew increasingly separate. Therefore, I was unable to spend as much time in their work environment as initially planned. While not as frequent as initially predicted during the design of this study, there were several instances when I was able to record information that proved informative for this study. An example of one such observation would be the content and questions of the initial research introductory meeting. As mentioned above, while introducing the participants to the research plan, the participants were initially excited about the prospect of increased workplace flexibility and began developing preliminary plans for flexibility.

Additionally, they were interested in data collection procedures as well as data security.

Participants were also asked to provide journal entries. They were instructed to make journal entries at least once a week for the duration of the data collection period. They were asked to respond to two journal prompts developed to collect data regarding how they had experienced work-life balance each week as well as their self-reported levels of employee engagement (see Appendix C). As opposed to keeping hard-copy participant journals or storing

electronic copies in a password-protected drive on my own device, journals were set up electronically using Microsoft OneDrive and Microsoft Teams. This method provided the same level of security assured to the participants as was mentioned in Chapter 3 by being password-protected and only accessible to the participant and me. Additionally, it provided the participant the ability to review his/her responses after entering them without having to request access.

January 31, 2020 was the final date of the first phase of data collection. Participants completed the journal entries with varying degrees of consistency. The range of consistency ranged from making weekly journal entries as requested at the beginning of the study to having only made four entries up to that point with prompting from myself as a reminder. When discussing journal entry frequency with participants, the most common barrier to weekly entries was simply remembering to make the entries. I encouraged them to place reminders on their calendars and also reminded them myself periodically. Regardless, there were a sufficient number of entries from participants that, when coupled with the initial interviews, exposed themes related to workplace flexibility and employee engagement.

From January 28, 2020, through January 30, 2020, I conducted another round of semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interviews were guided by an interview guide (see Appendix B) but participants were allowed to stray from the questions asked. Additionally, if needed, I gave myself the latitude to ask related probing questions to extract additional information from participants. I was able to meet with each participant, in person, for between 30 minutes and an hour depending on the length of their responses. The interviews were recorded using Microsoft Voice Recorder and transcribed by hand.

January 31, 2020, marked the end of the first phase of research. Per the research timeline, I began first phase data analysis not long after the first phase ended. However, in early-March

2020, it became evident that the second and third phases of research would likely be altered by the growing COVID-19 pandemic. On March 11, 2020 it was announced by the university's leadership that, due to the pandemic, as of March 23, 2020, all employees would be directed to maximize teleworking to reduce the population density on campus. According to the announcement "beginning March 23 [2020], SU will seek to maximize teleworking opportunities to the extent possible for employees whose physical presence is not deemed mandatory or essential with respect to university operations, including conducting classes" (Office of the Chancellor, March 11, 2020). The Human Resources department was subsequently ordered by the university's Chief Human Resources Officer to restrict on-campus operations to only those functions that were impossible to conduct virtually. As a result, all five of the study's participants began the transition working remotely on March 23, 2020.

Phase Two

On March 25, 2020, I met with the participant group virtually via WebEx. I used this meeting as an opportunity to answer any questions that the participants had about the status of the research project (there were none) and to introduce a new method of data collection. Understanding that it would be critical to document their experiences during the transition to teleworking and while quarantined, I proposed to the group that they continue journaling their experiences twice a week like in the first phase of the research. Instead of using Microsoft Teams or OneDrive, they would be using FlipGrid. FlipGrid is a tool used primarily for asynchronous instruction and engagement. It allows users to record short videos that can be shared with other group members or the "teacher."

For the purposes of this study, I created a "grid" for each participant that was visible only to the participant and to me. I then requested that they record videos up to two minutes in

length as often as they wished but at least twice a week. The purpose of the video journals was to document the participants' experiences as they transitioned from the office environment to working strictly from home. When deciding what to include in their entries, they were invited to consider the challenges (if there were any) they encountered during this time, how the transition to working from home influenced their work-life balance, and things they may have found surprising about the transition. The participant group was unfamiliar with the FlipGrid program but was characteristically willing to be flexible and use it. I assured them that, if they felt uncomfortable with the technology or recording video files, they could continue using the journals from the first phase of the study. None of them opted to do so.

On March 31, 2020, I gave them all access to their individual "grid." FlipGrid was open for the participants until July 17, 2020. They completed FlipGrid recordings with varying degrees of consistency. However, except for one participant, there were sufficient recordings to develop a clear understanding of their experiences. Over the course of the three and a half months FlipGrid was available, participant recordings ranged from four to 27. This data, along with data collected during direct observations and semi-structured interviews, was used to answer the third research sub-question (see Results section).

One study participant, Clara, the unit director, only recorded four entries. However, as a peer member of the department's leadership team, I interacted with her on an almost daily basis and was able to record direct observations that served to supplement her lack of journal recordings.

Phase 3

From July 31, 2020, through August 6, 2020, I conducted final semi-structured interviews with each participant. I was able to meet with them, in person, for between 30 minutes and an

hour depending on the length of their responses. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the Otter® app.

Intervention Fidelity

Chapter 3 described a workplace flexibility intervention designed and implemented based on data collected during phase 1 of the research. As will be addressed in the results section of this chapter, phase 1 data indicated that such an intervention was warranted and would likely produce positive outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic's disruption of the workplace rendered that intervention impossible. The intervention was designed to allow for flexibility with regard to work location as well as scheduling. The public health mandate for the participants to work from home and not return to the office eliminated the possibility of work location flexibility. Additionally, I decided that implementing scheduling flexibility was not prudent at the time since the participants were already coping with a significant workplace disruption. However, a description of the intervention designed (and not implemented) and the workplace conditions during the pandemic will help provide a fuller picture of the research environment.

The proposed intervention consisted of two components: flexible work schedules and teleworking. While the participants' supervisor had supported employees flexing schedules should the need arise, there had never been a flexible scheduling arrangement that would allow the employees to flex their time based upon what was most beneficial to their own levels of engagement and productivity. Therefore, the flexible scheduling aspect of the intervention would have consisted of the participants being allowed to work whatever schedule they felt most benefited their engagement and productivity provided two things: (1) that the business needs of the unit were met and (2) that they were working during the "core business hours" of 10:00 am – 3:00 pm.

While employees had been able to telework in extreme circumstances such as adverse weather, telework had never been fully supported within the unit. For the purposes of the intervention, employees would have been able to telework from whatever location they chose up to two days per week provided two things: (1) The business needs of the unit were met and (2) they attended in-person meetings on location when they were scheduled.

Considering the lack of experience the participants had with flexible scheduling and teleworking, this intervention would have likely caused some level of workplace disruption and possibly personal stress for the participants. As a result, the intervention would have only lasted three months. This would have been long enough for the participants to experience the workplace flexibility recommended by phase 1 data without causing too significant of a risk for them.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, workplace environments changed on a global scale and the university represented in this study was not exempt. All academic classes were rapidly transitioned to remote learning to promote social distancing. Additionally, with the exception of employees whose work simply could not be done remotely, all employees were mandated to maximize teleworking. With the pandemic forcing the participants to move from the office to strictly teleworking, it was no longer possible to implement any intervention since the workplace was already severely disrupted. Although the participants were now teleworking, there was not, in fact, an increase in workplace flexibility. There was only a major shift in workplace location. As mentioned above, the intent of the intervention was to allow participants greater choice in work location and schedule. The shift to telework only changed work location and did not increase flexibility.

All the participants began working strictly from home on March 23, 2020, and continued to do so throughout the remainder of the study. Unless absolutely necessary as a result of paper processes not able to be conducted virtually and only including the time it took to conduct that paper process, none of the participants were allowed to work from their traditional office settings. As a result of the significant level of workplace disruption that had been caused by the pandemic, such as the shift to strictly teleworking and the challenging transition necessitated by this shift, I also decided not to attempt to implement any form of flexible scheduling during this time. Therefore, unless situational arrangements were made with their supervisor or leave time had been taken, each participant worked during their traditional 8:00 am – 5:00 pm schedule.

Data Analysis

Each of the three iterative phases of research included in this study involved the collection and management of a large amount of data. As a result, all data needed to be managed in a way that was not only conducive to later analysis but was also maintained the level of security promised to the participants and was not overly administratively burdensome for the researcher.

During phase 1 of the research, data were collected via semi-structured interviews at the beginning and the end of the phase, through direct observations, and through semi-weekly journal entries made by the participants. Each interview was audio recorded using Camtasia audio recording software or Microsoft Audio Recorder and was transcribed by hand. The decision was made to transcribe the interviews by hand as opposed to a transcription software because, that early in the research, I felt manual transcription would provide an opportunity to spend more time interacting with the data in order to better understand the participants’

experiences. Once the interviews were transcribed, each one was uploaded to NVivo data analysis software as an individual file under the participants' names.

The phase 1 journal entries were collected using Microsoft OneDrive. Each participant had a single Microsoft Word document that was visible only to him/her and to me. At the end of the first phase of research, each participant's journal entries were copied from the OneDrive shared document and uploaded into NVivo as an individual file under the participants' names.

While direct observations were not as frequent as initially predicted since my own work and the work of the participant group grew increasingly separate during data collection, they did occur. Direct observations were noted on the Researcher Observation Table (see Appendix D) and were later uploaded into NVivo in the file under the participants' names.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the second phase of research was conducted differently than initially planned. Rather than providing semi-weekly typed journal entries, I had each participant provide semi-weekly video journal entries through FlipGrid. Additionally, due to the already significant strain from the transition to remote work as well as the workload placed on the participants due to the pandemic, I decided to forgo the bi-weekly semi-structured interviews that had been planned. Regardless, the FlipGrid journals proved to be able to provide a wealth of data without placing undue strain on the participants. At the end of Phase 2, each FlipGrid journal entry was transcribed using the Otter® application. Once the entry was transcribed, I exported the transcription as a Microsoft note. Each note was copied into a Microsoft Word document that was then uploaded into NVivo under the participant's name.

Like in phase 1, while direct observations were not as frequent as initially predicted, they did occur. Direct observations were noted on the Researcher Observation Table (see Appendix D) and were later uploaded into NVivo in the file under the participants' names.

During phase 3 of the research, data were collected via a final semi-structured interview conducted with each participant. Since in-person interviews were impossible due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was forced to use Microsoft Teams as a platform for each interview. The interviews were recorded and simultaneously transcribed using Otter®. Once they were transcribed, I exported the transcription as a Microsoft note. Each note was copied into a Microsoft Word document that was then uploaded into NVivo under the participant's name.

Throughout each phase of research and before coding and analysis, I conducted an initial data review. This review consisted of, essentially, reviewing the data in its original form (either text, audio, or audio/visual) in order to gain a foundational understanding of what was communicated by the participants. This review allowed a quick, overarching consideration of the data to familiarize myself with it in its entirety before categorizing it into codes, patterns, and themes.

After my initial review of the phase 1 data, I constructed a list of starter codes from the literature that I expected to use based on my review of the data. Once the data were organized by starter codes, I further organized the data by emergent codes that evolved from the data itself. A table of these codes can be found in Table 7. Once the phase 1 data had been coded, I considered the codes, their frequency, and their context to develop themes that would serve to answer research sub-questions 1 and 2: "How has employees' experience balancing work and life impacted their level of employee engagement in the past?" and "based on data gathered in the first iterative phase of research, what level of workplace flexibility is needed to adequately balance work and life while fulfilling the business need of the unit?"

After my initial review of phase 2 and phase 3 (final interviews) data, I considered the list of starter codes from the literature that I used during phase 1 analysis. I also recognized that,

Table 7

Phase 1 Codes

Engagement Determinants	Support	Work-life Balance (WLB)	Workplace Flexibility
Relationships	Positive Supervisor Support	Support for WLB	Telework
Workload	Lack of Supervisor Support	Lack of support for WLB	Flexible Scheduling
Family Influence	Positive Organizational Support	Childcare	Previous Experience
Flexibility	Lack of Organizational Support	Education	Desire/Preference for
Progress	Disproportionate Support	Holiday Stress	Autonomy
Energy levels	Resources	Holiday Break	Summer Schedule
Salary	Team Support		
Role Clarity			
Enjoyment			

at the time, there was not a significant amount of literature related to employee engagement and workplace flexibility during a global pandemic. Therefore, I knew I would need to rely more heavily on the data for code development. Once the data were organized by starter codes, I further organized the data by emergent codes that evolved from the data itself (see Table 8). The method used was consistent with recommendations made by Saldana (2015). Once the phase 2 data had been coded, I considered the codes, their frequency, and their context to develop themes that would serve to answer research sub-question 3; “what impact did the transition to a fully remote workplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic have on organizational capacity, employees’ work-life balance, their level of engagement, and their ability to fulfill the unit’s business need?”

For all sub-questions, the data analysis process allowed me to recognize patterns in the participants’ reported and recorded experiences. Once data were coded, data under each code were scrutinized for similarity and frequency across the participant group. Participants’ experiences that were consistent with others’ experiences were considered a pattern of experience. For example, participants’ experiences with teleworking due to the COVID-19 pandemic consistently led to an altered opinion regarding the viability of telework as an alternative workspace. Therefore, a pattern emerged that experience with telework altered opinions.

Once data were analyzed down to patterns of experience, the patterns were further scrutinized for themes that emerged. These themes emerged from the high level of consistency across multiple participants or through the difference with which participants experienced aspects of the study. Taking the pattern of changed opinions of telework for example again, a theme emerged wherein participants were more likely to accept telework as a viable workspace after having experienced success within themselves.

Table 8

Phases 2 and 3 Codes

Engagement Determinants	Distractions	Productivity	Telework Opinion
Communication	Cabin Fever	Interruptions	Pro-telework
Job Resources	Childcare	Surprise	Anti-telework
Outlook	Pet Care		Future Plans
Routine	Roommates		Comfort with telework
Social Interactions	Spouse		Benefits of
Support	Technical Difficulties		
Weather			
Workload			
Balance			

Phase 1 Code Definitions

Engagement Determinants

Relationships: primarily used to code for interpersonal connections, either positive or negative, that influenced participants' levels of engagement.

Workload: used to code descriptions of how the amount of work a participant was required to complete, either as a result of leadership directive or personal initiative, affected the participants' engagement.

Family Influence: used to code descriptions of the level of influence that external family responsibilities had on participants' levels of engagement.

Flexibility: flexibility with regard to the choice of work location or work schedule. Primarily used to code the ability to flex location or schedule in response to an external responsibility.

Progress: the sense that one was making meaningful progress in their work, i.e. getting projects done.

Energy Levels: used to code descriptions of the degree to which personal energy levels influenced levels of engagement.

Salary: primarily used to code instances when participants commented on if and how salary influenced engagement.

Role Clarity: used to code descriptions of the degree to which a participant understood the expectations of their role as well as how their work fits into the overall mission/vision of the organization and how that understanding influenced engagement.

Enjoyment: used to code if and how the degree to which a participant enjoyed their work influenced engagement.

Support

Positive Supervisor Support: used to code instances when participants described situations when they felt their supervisor supported them in areas important to them, i.e. work-life balance or career progression.

Lack of Supervisor Support: used to code instances when participants described situations when they felt their supervisor did not support them in areas important to them, i.e. work-life balance or career progression.

Positive Organizational Support: used to code instances when participants described situations when they felt their organization supported them in areas important to them, i.e. work-life balance or career progression. These could be through university policy or members of university leadership.

Lack of Organizational Support: used to code instances when participants described situations when they felt their organization did not support them in areas important to them, i.e. work-life balance or career progression. These could be through university policy or members of university leadership.

Disproportionate Support: used to code instances when participants described situations when they felt they received either less or more support in areas important to them, i.e. work-life balance, career progression, or resources than other groups.

Resources: used to code instances when participants commented on the level of needed job resources they felt they either possessed or lacked.

Team Support: used to code descriptions participants gave of their experiences receiving support from members of their team.

Work-Life Balance (WLB)

Support for WLB: used to code when participants described instances when they experienced either organizational or supervisor support for work-life balance.

Lack of Support for WLB: used to code when participants described instances when they experienced a lack of support at either an organizational or supervisor level for work-life balance.

Childcare: used to code descriptions of how childcare responsibilities influenced participants' levels of work-life balance.

Education: used to code descriptions of how educational responsibilities influenced participants' levels of work-life balance.

Holiday Stress: used to code participants' descriptions of instances when holiday stress (primarily Christmas and New Year's) impacted their experience of work-life balance.

Holiday Break: used to code participants' descriptions of how the holiday break influenced their level of work-life balance.

Workplace Flexibility

Telework: used to code participants' opinions of teleworking.

Flexible Scheduling: used to code participants' opinions of flexible scheduling.

Previous Experience: used to code participants' descriptions of their previous experience with either teleworking or flexible scheduling.

Desire/Preference for: used to code participants' indication of their level of or lack of desire/preference for teleworking or flexible scheduling.

Autonomy: used to code participants' description of how their experience of autonomy influenced their feelings of flexibility.

Summer Schedule: used to code participants descriptions of their experience with “summer scheduling,” which is a university-specific practice of flexible scheduling during the summer break.

Phases 2 and 3 Code Definitions

Engagement Determinants

Communication: used to code instances when participants described how interpersonal or organizational communication influenced their levels of engagement.

Job Resources: used to code participants’ descriptions of how access to or lack of access to needed job resources influenced their levels of engagement.

Outlook: used to code instances when participants described how their outlook towards work, home, or the situation regarding the global pandemic influenced their engagement.

Routine: used to code participants’ descriptions of how their experience of a personal routine affected their levels of engagement.

Social Interactions: used to code participants’ descriptions of how the experience of or lack of social interactions influenced their levels of engagement.

Support: used to code participants’ descriptions of how experiences of team, supervisor, or organizational support influenced their levels of engagement.

Weather: used to code instances of when participants described the weather as having an influence on their levels of engagement.

Workload: used to code participants’ descriptions of how the level of work they were expected to complete influenced their levels of engagement.

Balance: used to code participants’ descriptions of how their experience of work-life balance influenced their levels of engagement.

Distractions

Cabin Fever: used to code participants' descriptions of instances when their weariness of quarantine and isolation or a desire to leave home distracted them from their work.

Childcare: used to code participants' descriptions of instances when their childcare responsibilities distracted them from their work.

Pet Care: used to code participants' descriptions of instances when their pet care responsibilities distracted them from their work.

Roommates: used to code participants' descriptions of instances when their interactions with roommates distracted them from work.

Spouse: used to code participants' descriptions of instances when their spouses distracted them from their work.

Technical Difficulties: used to code participants' descriptions of instances when difficulties with job resources prevented them from completing their work.

Productivity

Interruptions: used to code participants' descriptions of interruptions to their ability to be productive.

Surprise: used to code participants' descriptions of their levels of surprise at how productive they had been able to be while working remotely.

Telework Opinion

Pro-Telework: used to code participants' expressing their favorable opinions of their experience teleworking.

Anti-Telework: used to code participants' expressing their unfavorable opinions towards teleworking.

Future Plans: used to code participants' descriptions of their desire for or against teleworking as an option for workspace in the future.

Comfort with Telework: used to code participants' descriptions of the level of comfort with teleworking they had been able to gain during the data collection period.

Benefits of: used to code benefits of using telework as an optional workspace as described by participants.

Participant Demographics

As can be seen in Table 9, the participants varied in age, gender, marital status, and number and age of children. All participants were white, non-hispanic. The group was comprised of three females and two male participants. All of the participants, with the exception of Kathy, were married. Clara, Jimmy, and Karen had children. Clara and Jimmy each had young children with three and two children respectively. Karen had three adult children. The participants ranged in age from 25 to 60 with Kathy being the youngest at 25 and Karen the oldest at 60. Table 9 provides a succinct representation of the group's demographics.

Results

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the impact that flexible work arrangements such as teleworking and flexible scheduling have on employee engagement and productivity among higher education professional staff. I set out to answer this question by answering three research sub-questions. I was able to substantively answer the first two of these sub-questions with the data gathered during the first phase of research and was forced to alter the third sub-question due to the workplace disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the sections that follow, I will consider each of these sub-questions and the individual experiences of

Table 9

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Marital Status	Children
Clara	37	Female	White	Married	3
Jimmy	36	Male	White	Married	2
Bob	44	Male	White	Married	0
Karen	60	Female	White	Married	3 (adult)
Kathy	25	Female	White	Single	0

each participant. Once each sub-question has been considered, I will present the results for the participant group as a whole.

Analysis of the data produced four key themes. First, while the trend in higher education and many organizational structures is standardization and uniformization, employee engagement and the determinants thereof are individualized and largely based upon one's personal life situation, stage in life, external responsibilities, and personality (see Table 10). Secondly and related to the first point, while there is a constant desire for the availability of workplace flexibility (whether through telework or flexible schedules) the level of desire for flexibility is also very individual and based largely on similar criteria as engagement determinants. Third, like employee engagement determinants and the desire for flexibility, the impact of work-life balance on engagement is also highly individual. Lastly, I will consider how the experiences during the transition to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic altered participants' perceptions and opinions related to workplace flexibility.

Sub-Question 1

How has employees' experience balancing work and life impacted their level of employee engagement in the past?

Work-Life Balance as an Engagement Determinant

Kathy was in her mid-20s and early in her career with the university. Being single without any children and living either by herself (except for her dog) or with a roommate who was often out-of-town during the three months of the first phase of research, she did not experience significant responsibilities outside of work. Therefore, she did not experience any significant work-life imbalance.

Table 10

<i>Engagement Determinants</i>					
	Kathy	Clara	Jimmy	Karen	Bob
Primary	Interpersonal Relationships	Work-Life Balance	Appreciation / Work-Life Balance	Interpersonal Relationships	Role Clarity – Interpersonal Relationships
Secondary	Org. /Supervisor Support	Job Enjoyment	Relationships	Work-life Balance	Workload
	Job Enjoyment	Interpersonal Relationships	Autonomy	Job Enjoyment	Work-life balance
	Level of Challenge	Level of Challenge	Workload	Appreciation	Progress / Meaningful Work
				Job Resources	

According to her:

...nothing has really come up in the last three months where I needed a work-life balance. Nothing has gone on personally where I have had to balance...something small might happen where I would be able to flex time a little bit or have that flexibility but nothing crazy...

According to the interviews conducted in both November 2019 and January 2020, her experience with work-life balance challenges, for the most part, was dealing with “something small” occasionally that was able to be overcome with relative ease.

Additionally, Kathy was a self-described creature of routine. According to her, she liked a routine such as a Monday – Friday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm, in the workplace situation. When asked at the beginning of the first phase of research if she could choose to either have a flexible schedule or telework, she replied that she would prefer a flexible schedule if forced to choose because, according to her, “I feel like if I teleworked at my house I would be too focused on my dog or whatever else I have to do at the house. I don’t think I would be as productive.”

Based on the interviews conducted with Kathy and the journal entries that she made during the first phase of research, I concluded that being able to maintain work-life balance has not had a significant influence on Kathy’s level of employee engagement or productivity. This could be attributed to the fact that she had not experienced, at that stage of her life and career, significant work-life strain. Although work-life balance had not played a significant role in determining her level of engagement, that does not mean that she did not possess at least a foundational level of desire for the availability of workplace flexibility. Although she preferred a traditional routine, she agreed that merely the availability of flexibility, not necessarily the exercise thereof, would be a positive workplace change. As she mentioned in one interview, “I

think if I knew something happened, I can go to Clara and say I need to leave... just the reassurance that I can do that is good.”

Clara was in her mid-30s and had been at the university for about 12 years. With the exception of a short stint in a human resources position within a large, private, for-profit, scientific research firm, she had spent her entire career at the university where she worked during this study. Since she had been employed there, she had moved up the ranks from an Administrative Support Assistant to an HR Consultant, to her position as a director of a unit. Outside of work, Clara was married with three small children ranging in age from three to ten. Clara reported that due to her responsibilities outside of work such as taking her children to school, daycare, sports practices, or her social obligations, her ability to balance work and life had played a role in her level of employee engagement. With her significant amount of time at the university, Clara was able to provide a perspective of someone who had worked under several different leaders. Therefore, before reporting on her experiences during the first phase of research, I will first consider her experiences in the past while working under different leadership.

According to Clara, the university administration was “fairly supportive” of work-life balance. Perhaps not going as far as the extreme levels of flexibility that I initially proposed, but supportive of employees doing what they needed to do to maintain a level of balance. For example, the organization allowed remote work for some positions determined conducive to it or during adverse weather events when it was deemed unsafe to travel to campus. Additionally, the department head was supportive of employees under her leadership taking limited measures needed to balance work and life. However, it had not always been that way. According to the interview conducted at the beginning of the first phase of research, there was no encouragement

with regard to the need for flexibility that came with parenthood. During this time, Clara felt like she “had to work twice as hard to be prepared to be out for that time [off] or think ‘was it even worth taking the time because of what you were going to come back to?’”

In fact, she described one instance where a colleague who did not have children was given the opportunity to work a flexible schedule and be off every Friday afternoon. Meanwhile, if she needed to take an afternoon off, she was forced to go through an approval process where she had to gain supervisor approval plus ensure there was someone else in the unit to cover her work, even if it were only for a couple of hours. She reported feelings of frustration and being disgruntled when recognizing that other employees were given access to flexible resources instead of her, with no real reason given why. When asked if work-life balance affected and continued to affect her level of engagement, she responded with a resounding “absolutely.” In instances such as the one just described, she found herself asking questions like “why do I put so much of myself into this place and have to jump through so many hoops just to take a day away? Why do I invest so much?” These types of questions may be indicative of frustrations with the level of organizational support she previously received.

During the three months of the first phase of research, balancing work and life continued to influence Clara’s level of engagement. For example, at the beginning of the first phase, her husband was out of town leaving her with three young children as well as a job that was increasingly taxing. According to her, she had “a lot going on logistically before and after work that is kind of draining and taking away what I would consider my normal ambition for my job.” With childcare responsibilities, she felt like it was a “marathon” to get to work. She went further to say that she was not experiencing a lower level of engagement since she enjoyed her work and the people with whom she worked. This was an indicator of other engagement determinants that

will be addressed shortly. During this time, she reported that she found herself focusing primarily on getting the work that had to be done completed without much of her usual desire to expend discretionary effort in her work.

I can conclude, based on the comments made by Clara, that maintaining work-life balance had an impact on Clara's level of engagement. This could be attributed to the level of supervisor support as was mentioned with her previous supervisor as well as the level of physical and mental capacity she was able to maintain while dealing with both work and life responsibilities.

Jimmy was an HR Consultant in his mid-30s who was married with two children aged two and five. He had been working in his position for approximately 3 years by the end of the study but had around 13 years of experience working in human resources. Before transitioning to higher education, Jimmy worked for private, for-profit companies as well as, most recently, as a Human Resources Manager for the local municipality. With experience in the private sector, local government, and higher education human resources, Jimmy was well-positioned to provide a unique perspective among the study's participants. Like Clara, Jimmy had considerable responsibilities outside of work. His children required a great deal of time dedicated to their care with one in kindergarten and the other needing additional care related to healthcare challenges. Data from his phase 1 interviews and journal entries indicated that the ability to effectively balance work and life had an influence on his level of employee engagement. According to Jimmy, the amount of influence work-life balance had was related to the level of external responsibility.

Jimmy reported that, before having children, he worked a "ton of hours" at the private sector position he held. He even mentioned that he would, at times, stay at work "almost 72

hours straight” and “did not even care” and still be able to be engaged. He attributed this ability to work extreme hours and still be engaged to two things. First was the fact that he was shown a great deal of appreciation for the work that he did. Secondly, he attributed his ability to work such long hours and maintain engagement to the fact that he, at the time, did not have children and, therefore, his long hours did not affect anyone other than himself (and presumably his wife). However, once he had children, that all changed.

Jimmy reported that, once he had children, his perspective on work-life balance began to shift. In fact, it was a deciding factor in his leaving a previous position. According to Jimmy:

I had an overbearing boss that was relentless, a bully, and was not understanding of the amount of work that needed to get done and the time allowed. I was highly disengaged at that point and I left there because of that. I took a pay decrease to come to the university.

He reported that the same previous supervisor who was a “bully” mandated that work always came first and family second. According to Jimmy, that mandate was enough for him to say “welp, time for me to find another job,” which eventually led him to work in higher education.

Since making the transition to working in higher education, Jimmy reported that he had been better able to maintain work-life balance. This balance positively influenced his level of employee engagement. He described his work environment as one that he appreciated and one in which he was appreciated for the work that he did, was not overworked or pressured to do anything he did not want to do. While he did not report high levels of flexibility in his work schedule or work location, he did report that simply being able to consistently leave on-time to pick his kids up from daycare or to be able to leave as needed to go to doctors’ appointments had been a positive influence on engagement. According to Jimmy, “when I compare where I was

three years ago it makes me more engaged because I appreciate it more knowing what it's like *not* having that stuff.”

During the first phase of research, however, Jimmy experienced a unique situation when one of his children fell ill during the data collection period. Out of respect for his privacy, I decided not to go into detail regarding the illness except to mention that it was potentially life-threatening and necessitated a significant amount of childcare responsibilities for him and his wife. As a result, he had to devote more and more of his attention to matters at home and attending to his children's needs. Jimmy reported that his engagement dropped towards the beginning of this period but eventually began to steadily rebound. He attributed this not necessarily to the level of accommodation afforded him by the university, but to his processing of his child's health concerns coupled with the child's improving condition.

...my [child's] health was more suspect in the beginning months [of the study] so I was more lack of engaged [sic] just due to worry about things outside of work; and then as those treatments have become more normal, it's not really bothered me. I've kind of learned to balance the two. So, at this point, I am not more or less engaged than before all that started.

According to Jimmy, he had learned how to balance the mental strain of both work and home responsibilities and, while his engagement dropped, it was back up to where it started by the end of the first phase of research.

Karen was an Administrative Support Assistant in her early 60s who, though actively working during the first and second phases of research, retired during the third phase. Her primary work history was with a municipal utility company where she worked for over thirty years before retirement. After retirement from the utility company, Karen began working again

at the university and has since retired. Like Clara and Jimmy, Karen experienced significant responsibilities outside of work. Although all her children were adults during this study, one of those children and their two children were living with Karen and her husband during the first phase of data collection. Additionally, she had an active social life through friends and church. Like Clara and Jimmy, Karen agreed that the ability to balance work and life had an impact on her level of engagement.

Karen had a unique perspective on the topic due to the fact that she had not only already retired once in her lifetime, but her position had also recently transitioned to full-time from being a part-time, thirty-hour per week. Even though the pay was less, she reported that she preferred the part-time role to the full-time one due to two primary reasons. First, working only thirty hours a week afforded her more free time in her schedule where she was better able to attend to responsibilities outside of work. With the transition to full-time, even with the pay increase, she reported a preference for the previous schedule. Secondly, while working part-time she was allowed the autonomy to determine her own schedule. While it may have been occasionally altered due to workload demands, she reported that level of autonomy to be preferable to the mandated Monday through Friday, 8:00 – 5:00 schedule.

During the first phase of research, Karen reported a desire for increased flexibility to respond to external factors. For instance, she reported during one interview that her mother-in-law had recently fallen, was injured, and needed more care than usual. According to Karen, she had responsibilities at work that were “too priority and [she] felt like [she] couldn’t be away...” As a result, she was left with work-life strain resulting from the conflicting priorities of her workload and her family needs.

There are days that I am here and I have needs to be home. Like right now I have a mother-in-law that fell earlier this week and she could use...there are other family members luckily. We are dividing the time this week, but I have not been able to offer my services to assist.

Outside of her life responsibilities, Karen commented several times on the increased workload that resulted from the need to take time off work whether for external responsibilities or vacation leave. According to her, the days leading up to being off were met with an increased workload in preparation for time off. This resulted in increased work-life strain due to either increased working hours or the challenge to pull one's thoughts away from work and responsibilities there while in the home.

Holidays can throw a monkey wrench into your work schedule... A lot of the things that I do are time-sensitive so when I am out, it can lead to some issues or having to speed up before the holidays to get things done in advance so the daily work increases.

In comparison, knowing that the workload would be increased ahead of some projects created a similar increase in workload in the home. As Karen once mentioned,

If I knew I was going to have some interesting weeks at work, I tried to make some preparations at home as well, so I didn't have so much stretching me out. So this week, if I knew things were going to be crazy at work I try to get things at home squared away so that next week at home...I made sure the grandkids didn't need GiGi [the name they call her] for anything because she wasn't going to be available.

Bob was an HR Consultant in his mid-40s who was married without children. Of the five participants, Bob had been at the university the least amount of time. At the beginning of the study, Bob had been in his current position for only a month. However, he had around 20 years

of experience in human resources at private, for-profit companies at the time of his hiring. He previously worked as a recruiter and recruiting manager for a Fortune 500 private sector company, as an HR generalist, and, later, as a Senior HR Director for the same company. He also served as a Vice-President of Human Resources and Human Development for another multinational company. Bob brought another unique perspective to the study since the position he held before making the transition to higher education was almost exclusively remote. As a Vice-President of Human Resources and Human Development of a global company that operated in fifteen time zones, it was up to Bob to determine the work location and work schedule that allowed him to be the most effective. In the transition from private industry to higher education, Bob also had to make the transition from a very flexible work environment to a traditional, Monday through Friday, 8:00 – 5:00 work environment.

Like others in the study, Bob reported that the ability to effectively balance work and life affected his level of employee engagement. However, work-life balance was not the primary determinant of engagement for him.

For me, it's about finding a reasonable balance... I've grown up with Baby Boomer parent who, you know, work needs to come first and that's your primary focus. Where I don't necessarily agree is that that's how most people should operate. I think, with me, flexible arrangements, the ability to manage my time, I would say it has a pretty moderate impact on my engagement. It's kind of nice to have, not a *have* to have.

This was all mentioned during the beginning of the first phase of research when Bob was only one month into his career in higher education. As time progressed during his onboarding process, he reported that having a supervisor who was understanding of his external responsibilities and

was supportive of him doing what he needed to do to attend to those responsibilities had a positive influence on his level of engagement.

Other Engagement Determinants

Each participant reported that either their experience balancing work and life or the knowledge that they had the resources to do so had a positive influence on their levels of engagement. However, work-life balance was not the only engagement determinant revealed in this study. Each of the participants had both a primary determinant and multiple secondary determinants. In this section, I will consider the engagement determinants participants reported other than work-life balance.

Although maintaining work-life balance did not have a significant impact on Kathy's engagement, the data revealed her other engagement determinants. Her primary employee engagement determinant was the social aspect of her workplace experience. When asked what the biggest determinant in the past had been for her, she quickly replied as such stating "I feel like I am pretty engaged...the people I work with here are really what get me here..." Additionally, the people outside of her unit with whom she worked had an influence. For example, she stated that "everyone I work with outside of my unit...is great to work with and I feel like they respect me..."

Negative interpersonal experiences also affected her level of engagement. On two occasions when reflecting on circumstances that may have decreased her engagement, the responses she gave were related to negative interactions with coworkers when a coworker either impugned her professional ability or did not respect her opinion in a matter. For example, during one instance when she was conducting interviews with a coworker, she reported

I honestly felt very disengaged as an employee doing [interviews] with him. Every time I would ask a follow-up question or answer a question an employee had, he always had something to say. It made me feel like I wasn't there, I didn't answer the question correctly or the way he would have, or he just needed to control the conversation and have the last word. Just made me feel small and that I didn't need to be there. This week, if I had to rate my engagement, I would rate it a 3.

Therefore, I would conclude, according to her responses, that positive interpersonal experiences increased her engagement and negative interpersonal experiences worked to decrease her engagement.

While the interpersonal aspect of the workplace was her primary employee engagement determinant, there were also secondary determinants present. Support for her development as a professional, both from the organization as a whole and from coworkers, was reported as a determinant although not as frequently as the social aspect. This was key for an employee still developing in her position. She also reported the amount of enjoyment that she got out of the work as well as the level of challenge that she experienced as determinants. For example, she mentioned in one interview that she was a natural problem solver and enjoyed that aspect of her work. Therefore, when assigned those types of tasks, she often found herself more highly engaged. Regarding the level of challenge, she reported that being challenged positively impacted her level of engagement due to the level of absorption, or feeling "in the flow," it caused as well as the sense of progress and positive professional development.

While work-life balance was, perhaps, Clara's primary engagement determinant due to the responsibilities she had both at work and at home stemming from her role as the director of a human resources unit as well as a mother of three small children who demanded a significant

amount of her time and attention in their care, it was not the only determinant. Determinants such as the enjoyment she got out of her work, the level of challenge she experienced, and the relationships she experienced also affected her level of engagement.

Like Kathy, data revealed that Clara had multiple engagement determinants other than work-life balance. As alluded to earlier, Clara mentioned that the enjoyment she found in her work helped mitigate the strain she felt with having her husband out of town while she was working to fulfill responsibilities as a parent as well as responsibilities related to her work. She felt as if it were a “marathon” to simply get to work because of her external responsibilities with childcare. However, according to her response to one interview question, she did not experience lower engagement because, overall, she enjoyed her work. She enjoyed the people with whom she worked as well as the work that she was required to do.

Clara also reported several times that the level of challenge and progress she experienced were determinants of her level of engagement. For example, during times in which she felt overwhelmed with meetings and calls, she reported that her engagement was influenced negatively because she felt “as though [she] wasn’t accomplishing anything as [she] was just going from one meeting to the next.” In contrast, during times when she felt like she was challenged enough to keep her absorbed in her work but not overwhelmed, she reported higher levels of engagement. These periods of higher engagement were also reported when she was experiencing optimal levels of challenge while being able to accomplish key tasks that resulted in progress. For example, she reported that one week her level of engagement was moderately high since there were fewer people on campus due to the holiday season. This lowered her meeting and phone call load and allowed her the time to focus on non-routine tasks that she had been delaying “due to constant interruptions.”

Lastly, similar to what Kathy reported, Clara reported that relationships and interpersonal interactions were additional engagement determinants. For example, in a journal entry during a period when she was required to work outside of her normal schedule conducting training sessions for housekeeping staff, she primarily focused on how the opportunity to connect with employees and help them understand their rights influenced her engagement. Several times in journal entries and interviews, she mentioned how opportunities to interact with colleagues outside of human resources, as well as the relationships she had within the department, supported an increase in her level of engagement. One example from a journal entry contained the following quote:

This week also included a lot of opportunities to interact with others across campus as we were promoting our EAP [employee assistance program]. The ability to interact with employees and supervisors outside of the normal realm of employee relations is always fuel for engagement for me.

In a separate entry, she mentioned that her team had:

... 5 trainings scheduled this week over a three-day period that allowed me to interact with a group of employees that I would otherwise have not had the opportunity to. While some of these trainings required me to work outside of my normal schedule it was a great way to connect and interact with these employees and help educate them on their rights as employees. Although I had a lot going on this week in regard to work-life conflict, I feel I was still able to approach these trainings with energy that resulted in positive feedback.

Like Kathy and Clara, Jimmy reported multiple engagement determinants as opposed to a singular one. It was difficult to determine a single primary determinant for Jimmy. When

considering solely the first phase of research, I would conclude that his primary engagement determinant was the ability to effectively balance work and life due to the increased level of childcare responsibilities that accompanied his child's sickness. However, when considering his work history along with the first phase of research, I concluded that the appreciation felt for his work was a primary determinant due to its role in mitigating the strain of the extreme workloads he had experienced.

However, there were other determinants that affected Jimmy's level of engagement. For instance, several times in journal entries and interviews he mentioned the relationships that he was able to build and enjoy as an engagement determinant. He once mentioned how:

...this position allows me to engage with a lot of people. I get to know them, have friendships with them, which is the part of HR I prefer the most rather than doing clerical work...which is monotonous and boring.

He attributed this opportunity as one of the primary reasons he worked in his chosen field. Additionally, the level of autonomy in his work as a result of not having an overbearing and micromanaging supervisor was reported as an engagement determinant. As he mentioned regarding his current environment, "nobody is overbearing. I have a very hands-off supervisor. I don't feel bullied or pressured to do anything I don't want to do." Lastly, he also reported workload as an engagement determinant.

It has to do with the workload, but demand is different. So, if there's a project I am working on and I need an extra two weeks, there is no major crackdown on it 'that can't be done' like deadlines have to be met without fail.

While he appreciated the opportunity to be challenged, he also reported that work demand and the fact that he experienced flexibility as needed with deadlines had a positive influence on his level of engagement.

Like the other participants we have considered, work-life balance influenced Karen's level of engagement but was not the only engagement determinant. For Karen, work-life balance would better be categorized as a secondary determinant along with job enjoyment, appreciation, and job resources. According to the first phase interviews as well as her journal entries, I concluded that her primary engagement determinant was the social aspect of her work. Like Kathy, positive interpersonal experiences affected her engagement positively while negative interactions resulted in decreased engagement.

For example, when asked about the things that influenced her engagement, she quickly responded that "the atmosphere and that I am a social person and like being around other people" played a significant role. Additionally, early in her career at the university, negative experiences with those in leadership positions being "condescending with subordinates" had a negative impact on her level of engagement. "When I first came on board, there were some directors that were a little condescending with subordinates. And I didn't, obviously, take kindly to that."

Additionally, Karen identified job enjoyment, appreciation, and resources as secondary engagement determinants. Like others in the study, Karen reported that she enjoyed the type of work that she does, and that mere enjoyment had a positive impact on her engagement. She also cited the level of appreciation that she experienced from her supervisor, colleagues, and customers as supporting increased levels of engagement.

The reps that I'm involved with at the university have always shown me appreciation for my job performance. It hasn't always been from a monetary perspective but from the fact

that they do the employee appreciation week every year where they allow us certain privileges and I know that usually at the end of the year there's always some kind of divisional gathering...

Lastly, of the five participants, Karen was the only one who mentioned job resources as being an engagement determinant during the first phase of research. According to her, having sufficient resources to do her job was a positive engagement determinant. She stated, "I am always allowed, for the most part, whatever items I need for my job. I can tell you I've been at places previously where I have worked in my youth and it's not that way."

Bob provided the perspective of someone early in their career with an organization. His interviews and journal entries provided the image of someone whose engagement determinants developed and transitioned as he progressed through the onboarding process. Early in the study, Bob reported that his primary engagement determinant was role clarity and an understanding of how he and his position fit into the mission, vision, and hierarchy of the organization.

I think within the first ninety days understanding role clarity is the big issue. If you were to ask me again a year from now, I am probably going to talk to you about long-term professional development, career coaching, and mentoring as being bigger impacts on my engagement level.

As his onboarding progressed and role clarity became better understood, Bob began to report more about how the interpersonal interactions and relationships influenced his level of engagement. He reported that the transition from an almost exclusively remote work environment to a traditional work environment, while challenging, provided him the opportunity to develop new and meaningful relationships with coworkers and customers.

I have been in a remote and solitary environment. So, for me, I think I have a jumpstart and a much higher level of engagement on day one because I was looking forward to returning to those in-the-office interactions and building face-to-face relationships.

Commenting on a challenging experience with a colleague, Bob mentioned how even the difficult interactions could have a positive influence on his engagement.

Following a relatively personal challenge with a colleague this week, I've found my level of vigor slightly diminished this week. I suspect this was more of an ego check for me, and therefore not something I would relate to the normal flow of engagement. I continue to be excited about the work I'm doing and am somewhat re-energized by the negative experience of this week towards being more open and accepting of new methods for building and developing relationships.

Additionally, Bob reported several secondary engagement determinants. Like other participants, workload was reported to influence Bob's engagement. He reported that being able to strike a "reasonable balance" would likely help increase his engagement.

With fewer engagements and meetings, I was able to work ahead in the mornings when I was most creative and complete a balanced workload well before the end of the day. This is one of those weeks when in past roles I would have let employees take time off as needed if their work was done, and I feel that I had the ability to do so this week had I needed it.

Bob also craved challenge to a certain degree but not to be overwhelmed, especially in the early days of his experience with the university. As time progressed during his onboarding period, Bob reported the ability to experience a sense of progress (development, learning, new

relationship building) along with the ability to perform “meaningful work” as a positive determinant of engagement.

Engagement was easy this week, as returning from a long break meant that I had higher energy levels and impetus to engage in meaningful work. I was able to follow up with several individuals with whom I’d met prior to the holiday, and in doing so set a good tone in those relationships that hopefully shared some of my dedication to meaningful work with them. I did struggle somewhat with a lessened workload but was able to find ways to use my extra time more effectively by looking for opportunities to learn during the slower week.

Sub-Question 2

Based on data gathered in the first iterative phase of research, what level of workplace flexibility is needed to adequately balance work and life while fulfilling the business need of the unit?

As was just mentioned, the ability to balance work and life had a positive influence on the participant group’s engagement. Collectively, each member of the participant group mentioned either in journal entries or in interview interactions that work-life balance affected engagement. Even Kathy, for whom it had not had a significant influence in the past, reported that just the knowledge that flexibility was available if needed would have a positive effect. Therefore, there was potential that increased flexibility in the workplace may have had a positive influence on work-life balance and, potentially, result in higher levels of employee engagement. Participants like Clara, Jimmy, and Karen who reported high levels of responsibilities outside of work would have potentially benefited from increased flexibility. It was critical to consider a type and level of flexibility that would be most likely to have a positive and profound impact on

work-life balance and engagement. I considered the types of flexible workplace arrangements available for this study (teleworking and flexible schedules) as well as the level of flexibility for the two.

Based on the first phase data, I concluded that telework would likely have a positive influence on the participants' levels of work-life balance. For participants with small children or grandchildren, teleworking would allow them to concentrate on workplace responsibilities while also being available for their children or grandchildren should a need arise. This would be especially beneficial for participants whose children may be sick or may become ill and need closer care at home. Of course, according to university policy, teleworking could not be a replacement for childcare (see Appendix G).

By state policy, Teleworking cannot be used as a substitute for dependent care. SU recognizes that one advantage of working at an alternate worksite is the opportunity to have more flexible time; however, it is the employee's responsibility to insure that he or she is fully able to fulfill work requirements and assignment completion schedules without having concurrent dependent care responsibilities. (SU Teleworking Application/Agreement)

However, for certain circumstances, if allowed, teleworking and childcare could be accomplished simultaneously without either one suffering. This could be done in cases where there is an older child who merely needed someone at home with them or a small child that may sleep throughout the day.

I also concluded that flexible schedules would likely have a positive influence on the participants' levels of work-life balance. Flexible scheduling would allow participants to rearrange their schedules based on their work, as well as non-work obligations, to craft a

calendar that best suited their needs. It would also allow participants to arrange their schedules around the times they were most likely to be engaged. For example, several participants reported that they were more prone to being engaged during times outside the typical 8:00 am – 5:00 pm workday. By implementing flexible scheduling, employees would be able to take advantage of time periods they are personally more likely to be engaged as opposed to being locked into a set workday.

Next, I considered what level of flexibility would be optimal for both adequately balancing work and life while also fulfilling the business need of the unit. Beginning with flexibility, I concluded that, since work-life balance had such varying degrees of influence on the participants' levels of engagement, then the highest level of flexibility would be optimal for balancing work and life to the degree needed by the various participants. That way each participant could work when and where it was best for them and their levels of work-life balance. However, I had to then contend with the business need. To do that, I had to have a conversation with the unit's director, Clara.

This conversation took place directly after the first phase of data collection. During the meeting, we discussed the study up to that point and I verified that, so far, the study had not had any negative effects on the participants' engagement or ability to fulfill the unit's business need. Assured of that, I informed Clara that the data I had collected during the first phase led me to believe that increased workplace flexibility may have a positive influence on work-life balance and engagement. She agreed based on her own experiences. I outlined my preliminary ideas as described above and requested her input on how we could best implement increased flexibility with the group while maintaining its ability to fulfill the unit's business need.

Based on that conversation and my own experience working alongside the participants, I understood that Clara's unit was a high-touch group that had a great deal of in-person and telephone interactions with colleagues and customers. Human resources, by its nature, requires employees to be able to meet to discuss topics of a sensitive nature. The study's participant group fulfilled one of the most, if not *the* most sensitive business needs in a human resources department. They needed to be available to meet in-person as the unit required. So, within the pre-pandemic workplace environment, while in-person meetings were the norm, teleworking all day every day would be impossible. During a meeting with Clara, she also expressed her concerns over the optics of having this group out-of-office for significant periods of time. However, she also understood how beneficial it could be to allow participants (herself included) to telework at least some. We concluded that teleworking up to two days per workweek would allow participants the opportunity to be flexible with work location but would also not be likely to negatively affect their ability to fulfill the unit's business need.

During the same meeting with Clara, we discussed flexible scheduling. The university, as well as the Department of Human Resources, worked on a standard 8:00 am – 5:00 pm workday with limited variations. Therefore, Clara and I determined that it would be critical to set parameters for how flexible participants could make their schedules. We determined that, to fulfill the business need of the unit while simultaneously providing participants the ability to flex their schedules, that participants should be allowed to work whatever schedule they felt most beneficial to their own work-life balance provided they worked around a set of core business hours. Those hours would be 10:00 am – 3:00 pm. For example, recognizing that the typical workday is eight hours long, participants could work any combination of hours provided that they (a) work a full workday and, (b) were available either in the office or via teleconference (if

teleworking) between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm. Therefore, participants could work shifts such as 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, 6:00 am – 3:00 pm, a split workday of 10:00 am – 3:00 pm and 9:00 pm – 12:00 am, or any other combination of hours within those parameters.

Considering both the work-life balance needs of the participants and the business needs of the unit, I was able to design and have approved an intervention that would allow participants to both telework and flex their schedules. Overall, participants would be able to telework from any location of their choice up to two days per week provided they be available for meetings on campus as they were scheduled during those days. The participants would also be able to flex their schedules around a core, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm set of hours provided, like when teleworking, they were available for meetings on campus as they were scheduled. Participants would be able to take advantage of the flexible arrangements to the degree they desired and would not be required to telework or flex their schedules unless they wanted to. The duration of the intervention would last three months. Implementing flexibility to this degree could result in significant workplace disruption such as confusion regarding work schedule for the purpose of scheduling meetings and challenges with resources logistics moving from work location to work location while participants are teleworking. Therefore, it was important to limit it to the degree that the influence on work-life balance and engagement could be understood while limiting the potential for workplace disruption.

Sub-Question 3

What impact did the transition to a fully remote workplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic have on organizational capacity, employees' work-life balance, their level of engagement, and their ability to fulfill the unit's business need?

As was mentioned above, this study was initially designed to implement an intervention introducing a high level of flexibility into the participants' workplace. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent mandate for all non-essential employees to begin working on a strictly remote basis, I was forced to abandon that plan and adjust for the mandate. The workplace was already severely disrupted due to the rapid transition from the office environment to a 100% remote work environment. Any attempt to implement a workplace intervention may have risked further workplace disruption by allowing altered schedules while simultaneously adapting to a new workspace. This could have resulted in work-related stress stemming from the significant amount of change. Therefore, I decided to study the effect that the transition to remote work had on participants' work-life balance, engagement, and ability to fulfill the unit's business needs.

Studying the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while not initially planned, still provided important information related to how sudden workplace shifts affected participants' work-life balance and levels of engagement. Additionally, it provided the opportunity to gather important information regarding how a high-touch, traditionally in-person team was able to perform their job functions completely remotely. In the section that follows, I will consider each participants' experiences individually and will address the challenges that they experienced, the effect the experience had on their levels of engagement, how, if at all, their opinion of teleworking changed as a result of the experience, and what they may have learned that could inform future decisions related to flexible work arrangements.

Challenges

When the move to fully remote work was mandated, Kathy, like all other participants, packed up what she felt she would need to set up a home office and, on March 23, 2020, began

working exclusively from home. Except for her pet dog, Melvin, and her roommate who was sporadically home between time spent traveling, she was largely by herself. During the initial transition and through the first week of August 2020 when I concluded data collection, Kathy experienced several challenges and incidents that had an influence on her level of engagement as well as her ability to successfully fulfill her job duties.

Of all the challenges she experienced, the most prevalent and constant were the challenges related to insufficient job resources. When participants began the transition to working remotely, they were under the assumption that the move to telework would last for between four and eight weeks. As a result, the group took home what they felt they would need for work during that period. As a result, Kathy made the transition leaving an office with a desk, a laptop connected to three widescreen monitors, a dedicated phone line, and a printer. In the office, she also had access to a printer/copier/scanner/fax machine unit and a conference room with full audio/visual capacity within a few feet of her office. At home, she only had her laptop and, due to the lack of a home office, moved from the dining room table to the couch depending on her level of comfort. This resulted in certain job resource challenges.

For example, by April 1, 2020, Kathy was reporting that she was having a tougher time because

there's stuff that I feel like I need to go into the office and do because I don't have a printer or scanner. I don't have that sort of stuff so I am trying to figure out how I can do it.

Her position regularly dealt with hard copies of documents, so these were critical tools to have. These types of comments were consistent throughout her video journal submissions between March and the end of July. For example, she stated:

I miss my office, my office mates. I miss my three monitors, because working on one laptop is a lot different than having three monitors. I don't have a printer at home so that's something that I miss as well, and having paper copies.

She also stated:

I think I can't really fully do my job at home because I don't have all the resources and everything that I need. I mean, I'm getting stuff done. I'm getting it done, one way or another but it's not what I'm used to. And that's fine. I'm getting it done but there's just something about working in an office having everything you need right there.

In our final August interview, while still teleworking, Kathy reported that one of the biggest challenges she faced was simply not having the basic tools she needed to do her job readily available. Things like monitors and a desk were not her greatest resource-related challenge though. Her largest challenge was her internet connection.

Along with shifting employees of the university to telework, all students from elementary through graduate school were learning remotely. This, unsurprisingly, put additional strain on the local internet infrastructure which led to people having difficulty with internet connectivity. Due to location, bad luck, or some other unknown reason, Kathy experienced extreme challenges with her internet connection. Of all the participants, she mentioned internet access as a challenge the most by a very wide margin. In fact, she mentioned either having zero or spotty internet connectivity in eight of her video journal entries. By April 17, she mentioned she had a feeling that the “videos are going to just get, like, repetitive because I’m having the same issue basically every day...crappy internet.” A good day for her was one in which the internet was only “in and out...but nothing major.”

As a result of her connectivity challenges, Kathy reported being consistently pulled away from her work or being interrupted in the middle of work to deal with an internet connectivity issue. For example, in one video journal, she mentioned how she was on an important conference call and her internet kept dropping over and over disconnecting her from the call. Sometimes the interruption in internet service was so profound that she would be forced to leave her house and travel to her parents' house to be able to check email or join video-conference calls. For example, she mentioned on May 7, 2020 that:

This is my second day having to come to my parents' house because of internet issues. Yesterday, I didn't have internet for about an hour and 15 minutes and kind of was like 'screw it, I'm going to my parents' house.' Usually, it's not down for that, or most of the time it hasn't been down that long. It was down for that half a day.

Without the most basic of job resources, Kathy often found it challenging to begin or complete needed tasks which, as will be discussed shortly, negatively influenced both her level of engagement and, at times, her ability to fulfill her job functions.

Distractions also proved to be challenging for Kathy, although not as challenging as her difficulty with job resources. Kathy was not a parent, but she did have a pet who, at times, presented a distraction. While she reported that her dog was typically very well-behaved, she did mention that it was a challenge to adjust to having him in the workplace. She was not used to having him barking, whining, or needing to go out to use the bathroom during her workday. As a result, she would be pulled away from work to tend to his needs. Additionally, she would occasionally have to apologize to colleagues during calls or video-meetings because of his barking or her needing to step away to let him outside.

During this time, Kathy also had a roommate. Although the roommate was often out-of-town, she occasionally posed a challenge for Kathy in the form of a distraction. For example, Kathy reported that her roommate would often forget that she was working and would walk into her conference calls and begin speaking to her. This was only exacerbated because of the fact that, having no home office or desk in her bedroom, Kathy was forced to work in the common spaces in the house. Eventually, Kathy began taking her phone calls outside where she knew she would not run the risk of interruption.

Lastly, the lack of social interaction was a challenge. Working remotely removed the ability to have the regular in-person social interaction that Kathy craved and had grown accustomed to. For example, she reported that she felt “less engaged than I am in the office just because I feel so isolated and separate from everybody.” According to her, what kept her engaged in the job was the people and the interactions she was able to enjoy.

Like the rest of the department, when the announcement was made that the university was moving to remote instruction and that employees were expected to work remotely if possible, Clara packed up her office with what she believed she would need to work from home and began teleworking exclusively on March 23, 2020. In contrast to Kathy who lived alone, Clara went from working in an office with her teammates to now working at home among her husband and three small children. Her husband, working in the forestry industry, was deemed an essential employee and was often forced to be away at work. This often left Clara as the sole caregiver for her children during the day. Additionally, as part of her position in human resources, Clara was charged with playing an important role with regard to the university’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She sat on the committee that oversaw the university’s response to the pandemic and also managed the human resources function of employee return-to-

work procedures and pandemic-related furloughs. As a result of the transition to working remotely, her childcare responsibilities, and her work responsibilities, she experienced multiple challenges with the potential to impact her level of engagement.

For Clara, the first few weeks of the transition from the office to working remotely were a significant challenge. In an interview, she described the transition as “stressful and painful” and how, following the Monday announcement, “all of [her] worlds meshed together.” The worlds to which she was referring were her professional life and her personal life. In her professional life, she was the director of a human resources team of four with a critical mission at the university. In her personal life, she was a married mother of three small children. According to Clara, she had learned to be very adept at compartmentalizing her life and to leave work at work and home at home.

As she made the transition to working from home, she realized that it was quickly becoming difficult to compartmentalize the two halves of her life. Although she was lucky enough to have a home office with the necessary resources and a door that she could shut to reduce the outside noise, she found herself dealing with interruptions. Whether it be from a child who had a question about their homework, a child wanting a glass of orange juice, or a husband who needed help with a child’s homework, home and work seemed to regularly clash. To use her words from a video journal entry in early April 2020 shortly after the transition to telework was announced, Clara said:

So, you want me to tell you how things are going working remotely during this pandemic challenge? The three children that are in my house... they belong to me, and they're here every day. While I'm trying to work. Two of them have school to do. One is a two-year-old who just is watching live TV. My husband works in forestry so he's essential. So, he

is gone about four to five hours today to do work. So that leaves me here with the kids, trying to do my work which consists of some video calls and phone calls. So that's definitely challenging right now. The transition, as far as impact on my work-life balance. There really is no work-life balance right now. It's all kind of mashed together because I'm just in this house all the time.

Eventually, Clara was able to learn how to better separate the two worlds to allow for more productive work time while also ensuring that childcare responsibilities were taken care of. The children had to learn when she was free to disturb for whatever they needed and when she was not. Although this took some time, eventually, both Clara and the kids were able to successfully adapt to the new normal of working from home and, for the kids, going to school from home. Although he was deemed essential and often had to leave home for work, her husband was also able to learn how to balance his work needs with changing needs of his family. Even though she was able to adapt to her new circumstances, this adaptation did not come without its challenges.

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges faced when working from home with three small children, according to Clara, was the recognition that she was not able to step away from her work every time the kids called her name or to attend to their needs each time a need arose.

In her words:

...that was pretty gut-wrenching. That was the hardest part because I felt I felt like I was failing. I feel like I was failing as a mom because I couldn't meet their needs but also felt like I was failing as an employee or supervisor depending on who I was talking to because I couldn't give them the full attention because I'm worried about the needs of my child...

There was a positive aspect, however, regarding familial relationships and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Clara reported that she was astonished by how resilient and adaptable her children were during this transition and how well they learned the new patterns of home.

I think that it took me a while to be okay with not attending to every one of my children's needs. Because if I was on a call I couldn't. But I think that I was just blown away by just how resilient the kids were and how quickly they adapted to things and how quickly they adapted to “okay this is a conversation where I can interrupt and say ‘hey’ to this person, or “this is a call that I cannot interrupt mom on.”

Additionally, she reported that she was appreciative of the time that she was able to spend with her children. She was able to see them and interact with them more than she had ever been able to while working and, also, they had been able to spend more time with each other. According to one interview, she was proud of the bond that her children were able to build during this time when, since she and her husband were busy with work responsibilities, they were left with only one another for entertainment. She noted that:

... just to see the bond that the kids built, because there were times where they just had each other for entertainment. If I was on a call or [her husband] was considered essential so, I mean, there were days where he had to leave, you know, the house for work...

In addition to the competing work and family responsibilities, Clara also reported that there were challenges related to the interpersonal aspect of her workplace. Like Kathy, she enjoyed the ability to interact with her teammates and colleagues both within and outside of the department. As a result of working remotely, she was no longer able to have those interactions. However, she did not report feeling isolated or that she lacked enough interaction with other

people since she was in a house with four other people each day. Even though they were often the only people with whom she interacted, this helped to stave off isolation.

Along with the rest of the participant group, Jimmy began the transition from working in the office to teleworking each day once the March announcement was made. The transition and time spent teleworking after “getting in a groove” posed certain challenges for Jimmy. Like Clara, Jimmy went from an office environment to working at home with his two children, one of whom had been dealing with significant health problems. Jimmy’s wife, an essential healthcare worker, spent a large amount of time at work because of the nature of her job. Although Jimmy was often left alone at home with his children, he had family members who were available to provide help with childcare.

The first challenge that Jimmy communicated was the initial transition itself. Jimmy was pointed in how he described the transition as “sudden” and how the almost instantaneous shift to remote working caused stress. Initially, the plan for the department was for a gradual shift that would have consisted of a slow transition to telework. Employees would have spent increasing amounts of time teleworking as the pandemic progressed. They would have rotated on and off telework until the department was comfortable moving all business to a remote environment. Due to the rapid spring surge of COVID-19 cases, the state and the university decided to transition everything that could be shifted to remote as quickly as possible. This left the department, including Jimmy, with a week to make the change.

According to Jimmy, “I think that it would have been better if we kind of had a gradual change, but instead, I never did my first rotation of that. They basically said, ‘hey, we scrapped that idea. Stay home.’” Jimmy described himself as very “routine-based.” This rapid shift resulted in Jimmy having to abandon his routine faster than he would have preferred and make

the transition as best as possible. According to one interview, it took him from March 23 to mid-May to get acclimated to teleworking and adjust to a new routine. According to Jimmy:

There was a transition period and there was a lot of uncertainty in the world about what was going to happen with COVID. It took probably about, that was mid-March, I would say until about the first of May, so a month and a half until I totally got in the groove of teleworking, where it seemed natural.

Jimmy also found the experience of being quarantined to be particularly challenging. Even though he was not isolated in the sense that he was alone, he did report a sense of isolation because, other than the occasional errand, he was not able to leave home. Social interactions, both professional and personal, were all but eliminated except for workplace video-conference meetings. This was especially profound during the first three months of teleworking while the state in which the institution was located was in a heightened level of quarantine.

I've been quarantined only. You know, working at home so I haven't really gone anywhere. So being stuck in my house for two weeks, and randomly go pick up some food or something here and there. 99.9% of the time I've been in my house, or my yard, and it's just taking a toll on me, needing to get out. So, not in a great mood.

This was only exacerbated by the fact that, since Jimmy had a child dealing with health problems with immune system concerns, his interactions were even more limited. Over time, as the team and the institution began to adapt to remote work, Jimmy reported that the impact of quarantine became less profound.

Jimmy also reported that distractions were a challenge that he experienced during and after the transition to teleworking. Although he had family members who were available to help with childcare, Jimmy was often pulled away from what he was working on to help his oldest

child with what he was learning in school. As the quarantine progressed and public schools were closed, Jimmy spent more and more time working with his child on schoolwork. According to Jimmy:

This week, kids started to do more virtual learning than in the past. The past was kind of a loose system. Now let's show you how to do all these projects and stuff and it's like I should be getting paid at [local county] schools. It's ridiculous the amount of time I have to stop what I'm doing and go help my kid because they have a thing every hour. So that's quite distracting.

While virtual learning was the most common distraction, Jimmy found that his kids simply walking into his office space to ask him a question or show him something they wanted him to see was also occasionally distracting.

The last challenges Jimmy consistently reported were challenges related to workload. Early in the study, Jimmy reported that one of his engagement determinants was his workload. As long as it was not overwhelming, a heavy workload often resulted in higher engagement. Once the transition to teleworking had been completed and Jimmy had adapted to his new work environment, he would often report how, when the workload was lower, his engagement would also be lower. As a result of the pandemic, Jimmy's workload dipped towards the beginning of the quarantine but slowly returned to pre-COVID-19 levels.

Bob's experience transitioning from in an office environment to strictly teleworking was the most unique among participants. Bob was the only one with any significant experience working remotely. As was mentioned above, a large portion of Bob's career until he transitioned to working in higher education was in the private sector working almost exclusively remotely. Therefore, he not only had a great deal of experience working remotely, but he also was very

comfortable with it. He already had an office set up in his home with all the resources he needed to successfully work there. For him, it was “like putting on an old pair of slippers.” In fact, Bob once remarked that he had only recently gotten used to being back in an office when the pandemic forced the telework transition. Even with his unique perspective, his experience was not without some challenges.

For example, Bob’s transition back to working remotely posed somewhat of a challenge. While not overly impactful to his level of engagement, Bob did mention how the transition back to telework occurred directly after he was able to fully transition back to an office environment. What made this significant was that his entire career with the university had been spent in some sort of transition, either to an office environment or back to telework. Bob called it the “rubber band analogy” where he had been stretched one way (office environment) and was just beginning to feel comfortable and then rapidly had to stretch a different direction (telework). Due to his prior teleworking experience, however, it did not take him long to make that transition. In fact, it took him much less time than the other participants to settle into a routine of working remotely.

I kind of used the rubber band analogy. Like, I had stretched and was starting to relax and feel pretty comfortable with being back in a day-to-day, face-to-face all the time. And then immediately that stretches back to, you know, it kind of stretched back to moving into that mode [telework], and the transition would for me was probably a couple of days of getting used to it as opposed to, you know, a few weeks or even months for some people.

The most significant challenge Bob experienced during the data collection period was the lack of social interactions once he, like the other participants, transitioned to remote working in March 2020. Part of what Bob had gotten used to while in the office setting were the regular, in-

person social interactions he experienced with his teammates and colleagues across campus. Bob mentioned in one video journal entry:

Well, it's week four [of quarantine], and I gotta tell you, I am really really missing social interactions. I'm grateful because on the plus side of things I do get to hang out with these two crazies [points to his dogs] all day, and that's been nice and fun, but I am really falling apart when it comes to social interaction. So, I think that's been the big one that I've picked up is, I don't find myself as happy most of the days. And, you know, since I'm married to my coworker [referring to his wife who also works at the university and was working remotely], it seems to make things a little bit more challenging.

Like other participants, Bob mentioned the daily staff meetings on Microsoft Teams that his team held to be a fulfilling substitute for the daily, in-person social interactions. According to Bob, these meetings were very loosely structured in a way that provided a sufficient balance between personal and work-related conversations that allowed the team to connect on a collegial level but also allowed for professional information sharing.

I don't want to say we're wasting that time, but I feel like we just process a lot of what's happening in our world and sometimes that becomes, you know, we're having some struggles with a certain department or we're having some challenges with getting data or like there are some, some work-related things but we're also letting that bleed over into, you know, 'my dog is having an anxiety attack at night and doesn't want to go in the kennel' and, you know, 'the kids are struggling with not being able to play with their friends' and, so, I would say about half of our time is that and then and then there's kind of the business half of that meeting.

Bob posited that the daily video staff meetings that developed organically as a means to stay connected reflected more of a focus on maintaining team communication than any formal strategy used at previous remote employers.

One observation that Bob made regarding social interactions was related to the use of video calls as opposed to traditional telephone calls. According to Bob, in the remote environment, traditional phone calls were largely being replaced by Microsoft Teams video calls. As a result, he proposed, although he lost the physical touch of shaking hands or seeing someone face-to-face, he was able to maintain a level of social interaction if only by seeing another person's face during a call.

The final participant to consider is Karen. Like all the other participants, after the announcement to begin teleworking was made in March 2020, Karen packed up what she believed she would need to work remotely for four to six weeks and began working entirely from home. Although she was older and close to retirement, she went home to a retired husband, one daughter, and two grandchildren living in her home. Up to this point in her career, she had never worked from anywhere other than an office setting. As a result of her lack of experience with teleworking, her family members posing a distraction, and the availability of needed resources, Karen experienced challenges making the transition to working remotely.

The most difficult time for Karen during the data collection period was the initial transition which, for her, lasted approximately six weeks. According to Karen, she had never worked from home in her entire career. She was very exacting in how she liked her workplace, and her workflow for that matter, to be organized. She mentioned how she was “a structured person, and I like to have my ducks in a row, things in order, where I need them when I need them.” The transition to telework represented a removal from the comfort zone that she had

cultivated over years in an office. As a result, she experienced stress related to reconstructing her workspace at home with a separate set of resources.

Karen, like Kathy, experienced challenges related to a lack of resources. Although she did not experience the severe challenges that Kathy did with her internet connectivity, she did experience challenges with a lack of hardware. As an Administrative Support Specialist, her work relied heavily on access to hard copies of paperwork, printing paperwork, and scanning documents. While she had a small home office printer, not having access to her paper files or a scanner, she was left devising other ways for fulfilling the responsibilities of her position. For example, for accessing hard copies of personnel files for customers, she simply had to wait until the university would allow her to return to the office to access those files for one half-day a week.

Lastly, Karen experienced challenges related to the family with whom she shared her home during the teleworking period. Her experience during the initial transition to telework was best described in the following quote from an interview.

I'm not accustomed to having my home life being so close to work life. And having two grandchildren in the house... along with a retired husband. It didn't... it wasn't going well in the beginning because nobody knew their boundaries.

In an attempt to find a private space where she could work with limited distractions, she eventually took over her husband's home office.

However, finding a private space did not completely eliminate distractions and interruptions. Karen remarked that early in the transition, it was an adjustment for everyone in the house including the young children. There were challenges related to:

... the kids having to maintain their volume and activities in the house, when I'm on phone calls or on team meetings, just like this right now. I think they're pretty good at it now, but it was very painstaking in the beginning.

Additionally, her husband and grandchildren had to adjust to the fact that, while she was working, they were no longer able to walk in and out of the office whenever they wanted something from inside or needed to ask her a question. This was especially challenging for the grandchildren and husband who were:

... just unpredictable and they come in and they're curious and want to know what Gigi is doing. And then my husband, you know, I'm working from his own office, his personal man cave. And so, he thinks nothing of just barging in you know when he needs something or wants to do something or wants to ask me something. You know he just kind of forgets that I'm working.

Engagement Impact

Kathy's level of engagement was influenced by her environment and experiences working remotely. Each one of the challenges that she faced affected her level of engagement. Each one's effect on her level of engagement as well as her level of engagement throughout the period of teleworking will be addressed. It is key to remember that engagement is not necessarily simply whether or not an employee gets his/her job done. Engagement, as defined in this study, is the degree to which employees exhibit vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work. Kathy was able to successfully navigate the transition to telework and the challenges it brought to fulfill her work responsibilities. However, her engagement, which is what I was primarily concerned with, was impacted.

The most influential factor was job resources. Throughout the teleworking period, Kathy experienced internet connectivity that was spotty at best while working in a less than ideal workspace without all the resources (like a desk, printer, or multiple monitors) that she was accustomed to having. As a result, it was difficult for her to work with a great deal of vigor or to experience a great deal of absorption simply because her work would often be interrupted by either an internet connectivity issue or a realization that she did not have a needed resource available when it was needed. For example, in an interview at the end of the data collection period, she stated:

I feel like I don't focus as much as I do in the office. In the office, it's like, I can separate the home life and the work life. And, at home, I'm constantly thinking of everything else that I need to do in my house. I have a load of laundry in my dryer right now. I have, like, the dishwasher's full and I need to put those away so it's like, I don't focus on work as much as I probably would if I was in the office.

Therefore, she often found herself expending a great deal of time and energy that could have been spent in her work on either making phone calls to her internet provider, driving to her parents' house to access their internet, figuring out alternative ways to get work done without needed resources, or switching to other projects that did not require either internet or whatever other resources she lacked. Kathy reported through video journals and interview conversations that it was very difficult to be engaged in her work when it was so difficult to have the most basic needs required to get work done.

...I feel like I'm able to focus more and get a lot of stuff done in that time that I'm in the office, just having the phone the printer all the resources right there, like my normal setup, I can get things done faster, having the three screens I get things done faster and I

just feel more productive and that makes me feel more engaged because I can be more productive. Whereas at home, working on a laptop, it is it's slower, or I'm having to wait for the internet to reconnect, that kind of has some impact on my engagement just because I'm not as quick and as focused as I would be in the workplace.

Distractions negatively affected Kathy's level of engagement. As was mentioned in the previous section, Kathy had a pet dog. She also had a roommate who was sporadically present. Both were found to be sources of interruption through distraction whether it was the dog whining to be let out to use the bathroom or the roommate walking into their shared space where Kathy worked interrupting her with questions. Like the lack of appropriate job resources but to a lesser degree, Kathy reported that it was challenging to be engaged in work with vigor or absorption when the work was being interrupted.

The lack of social interactions was another challenge that affected Kathy's level of engagement. Considering that social interaction and interpersonal relationships were her primary engagement determinant, this came as no surprise. Kathy reported that the inability to have consistent, regular, in-person interactions had a negative impact on her engagement because, as someone who could lean towards both introversion and extroversion, she needed the social aspect of her work to maintain engagement. In a video journal entry, she mentioned "I miss coming into the office and having people to be around to ask questions, and I think that's what kept me engaged in my job was the people."

As a result of the lack of interaction, she was forced to get on phone calls or Microsoft Teams video chats to initiate any social interaction. She was used to being able to shout across the hall or pop into someone's office when the need to interact arose and the inability to do so only made her feel isolated. When coupled with the fact that she was typically alone in her

house, except for a roommate who she stated would rather not see anyhow, she experienced profound isolation which negatively affected her engagement level.

Kathy was not the only participant to experience a longing for more social interaction and the feelings of social isolation to some degree. As a team, they recognized this and made an organizational change that had a positive impact on the group as a whole. While video-conference meetings were not preferred when compared to the traditional in-person meetings that the participants were used to, they recognized that video-conferencing was better than no interaction at all. Therefore, without any urging from me or their leadership, they instituted a daily staff meeting held on Microsoft Teams video-conferencing software to maintain some level of social interaction.

When these meetings were instituted, they were a means for the unit to meet and discuss projects that were in progress, share information related to work, and for the unit director, Clara, to share information from university leadership. Soon after they began, these daily staff meetings began to transform in nature. They shifted from strictly a business meeting to an opportunity for colleagues to reconnect on a personal level each day. Of course, business was still conducted, but the team began to spend more time catching up on personal matters such as adventures in a child's potty training, introducing one another to their pets, weekend plans, or any other in a myriad of reported topics.

These meetings became crucial for Kathy and the other participants. While it did not completely remedy all of the social isolation that she was experiencing, it did provide Kathy with a means to connect with teammates on a social level in a way that, to a small degree at least, supported her continued engagement. According to Kathy, it was an opportunity to take "a break from the phone calls and the emails and [gave] us a chance to just kind of take a breath and get

clarity and kind of have that interaction that we're used to." As I will also address with other participants, the ability to have regular social interactions, even if via video, was a critical development for the participant group that allowed them to maintain at least some semblance of normal socialization during a time of extreme workplace disruption.

It is important to note that, while interpersonal relationships were Kathy's primary engagement determinant, the lack of social interactions did not have as deep an impact on her level of engagement as her challenges with job resources. Therefore, I would conclude that, regarding Kathy's experience at least, that appropriate job resources provided a foundation for all other determinants. After all, as she reported, it was difficult to be engaged in her work when her resources prevented her from doing work.

Although she faced some significant challenges while working remotely, Clara reported that her level of engagement did not suffer. It did not increase significantly either. Of course, she reported that not every day was the same and that some days she was more engaged than others. There were several aspects of the transition to telework that she reported influence her level of engagement from day to day.

With regard to interpersonal interactions, Clara reported that the daily Microsoft Teams staff meetings were an effective tool that helped maintain the level of interaction between her and her team. Like others on the team, she grew to look forward to the daily meetings since they provided the opportunity for interaction outside of her family. Bob and Karen both reported that these meetings were what got them through the days that did not allow much interaction with other people. Clara stated:

it initially started off as information sharing for me to keep my team up to date, but it quickly evolved into almost a, you know, almost more of like a morale booster and not

just to check in on a work standpoint professionally. I think it also just became like a personal check-in, just to see how everybody was doing as people, because we all had different, you know, our home lives were also different.

As mentioned at length above, her ability to balance work and life affected her both positively and negatively. For example, on days when she found the balance shifting more towards her personal life, she reported how it was difficult to focus and be engaged in work. In contrast, on the days where she was better able to manage the interruptions and where the balance was good, she found it easier to be engaged in her work. It is key to note that there is a distinction between productivity and engagement. Clara noted this distinction with what she termed “forced engagement.”

According to Clara, the level of work that was required because of the pandemic and the level of challenge that resulted did not give her much choice with regard to her level of engagement. As she mentioned in an interview:

...I use the term forced engagement. So, I think the level of work that has been required out of the quarantine COVID period. I think that it almost forces engagement like you don't have a choice not to engage. Now, whether it's healthy engagement or not... I do feel like I'm, from an engagement perspective, I have been for the most part, actively engaged. I mean, there were definitely days where I'd get burnt out. And, you know, just feel like I need a change of scenery. There hasn't really been a lot of days where I've been like 'I can't do this anymore'...

How I interpreted this was that due to her preexisting level of dedication (a facet of engagement) and commitment to the organization, she felt compelled to work hard to get the increased level of work done regardless of external factors. One thing to note is how she questioned whether this

type of “forced engagement” was healthy or not. Even though it was the only time in video journals or interviews when she questioned how healthy the workload was, it did give some indication of how the workload and stress may have, at times, impacted her mental or physical health.

Clara also reported that the level of appreciation she felt from both her supervisor and colleagues throughout the organization was a positive influence on her level of engagement. The fact that those in leadership positions recognized the fact that she was being consistently given more responsibility and related stress and expressed their appreciation was welcome and created an environment that supported her engagement.

So, from a positive perspective, I think one thing that has been consistent throughout is sentiments of appreciation and. In, I will say accolades, [HR Executive Leadership] in their leadership roles have both been very appreciative and thankful and acknowledging the amount of stress or work that has been put on myself and subsequently my unit at certain periods of time depending on whether it was leave provisions or furloughs...

Over time, her ability to adapt to exclusively working from home had a positive effect on her work-life balance and, as a result, her reported level of engagement. Over time, Clara was able to learn how to balance the responsibilities of her work with the needs of her family. For her, the most influential measure was learning how to leave her home office, shut the door behind her, and turn her mind to her family once her work was complete.

I think I learned to take, as if things progressed, I got better at being faster and faster, walking away and shutting this door, and I did better *not* coming into the office on the weekend, and just really tried to take advantage of the time away, and then by doing that I found out we're fresh and energized, to come back.

According to her, simply the knowledge that her work materials (laptop, desk, printer, etc.) were so easily accessible created a temptation to either work later than usual or to return to work after the day was complete. The act of shutting the door and removing herself from that workspace helped her to transition from work to home.

Jimmy's level of self-reported engagement varied during the period of teleworking. This was attributed to two main factors: his level of perceived isolation and his workload. According to video journal entries and interview transcripts, as his level of isolation decreased, his engagement increased. Early during this period of data collection, Jimmy reported a drop in his level of engagement. In fact, during one video journal entry, he mentioned how his mood had changed because of being quarantined and the increasing feelings of isolation. "So, not in a great mood. I've lost some engagement due to that, but it's more from the quarantine side of things than the telework..." Jimmy mentioned in an early entry. According to him, for two weeks he had spent 99% of his time either in his house or in his yard. It was taking a toll on him mentally and his mood and engagement suffered as a result. It is important to note that his engagement did not drop to the point where he was not fulfilling his job duties. Self-described as intrinsically motivated by his work, Jimmy continued to apply himself at work. It just was not with the same level of vigor or absorption he had in the past.

As the period progressed, Jimmy was able to interact with others outside of his family to a greater degree. On May 12, 2020, he reported that he was able to "break quarantine" by getting together with another couple for a few hours in his backyard. Even though that was not remotely close to the level of social interaction that he was used to, Jimmy reported that he was "in a much better mood and less crabby because at least I've gotten some energy out seeing people, talking to people, hanging out." He said in the same video journal entry that this resulted in an increase

in his level of engagement “up to 7 [on a scale of 1-10] from a 5.” This pattern of an ability to be social resulting in an increase in engagement continued throughout the remainder of the data collection period.

Like Kathy and Clara, the daily staff meetings on Microsoft Teams proved to be a booster for Jimmy’s engagement. According to him, adopting this daily routine as a team was “extremely beneficial.” It allowed the team the opportunity to interact on a more informal basis than they had been experiencing up until that point during the pandemic. According to Jimmy, the meetings that, before COVID-19, would have begun and ended with small talk and informal social interactions, were now typically strictly business while working remotely. Staff meetings provided a social outlet that, for someone like him whose social interactions influenced engagement, was sorely needed.

We have a group team meeting that's about 25 to 30 minutes of work talk and 25 to 30 minutes of BS of talking about the news or talking about whatever, which basically emulates what we did in the worksite. Which is you know, gets in our team-building exercises where you just learn to be friends and not talk about work all the time. And I think all of us, most of us are extroverts...it's like the kind of what we need every day is to talk about something other than work. I found that has been extremely beneficial.

One of Jimmy’s engagement determinants was his workload. According to Jimmy, as long as it was not overwhelming, a high workload commonly resulted in an increase in engagement level. The period during and after the initial transition to telework saw both highs and lows in workload and resulting increases and decreases in engagement. The excerpt below from a video journal in May is representative of the influence that workload had on Jimmy’s engagement level.

My work has finally caught up. I've been swamped. The past day and a half, where I had nothing for a week, people just have been unloading on me on phone calls and meetings and everything else. I've been working nonstop for the last twelve hours, you know, twelve work hours... motivation's back! I still feel like I'm motivated by workload. I actually have things, exciting things to work on and to do... So, engagement is back high again until I kind of burn through this load of incoming work, because I just got a lot. I feel like that seemed to be a driver. For me, being engaged is liking my job, but having work that motivates me interests me and I'm doing things I feel an urge to get work done.

As a result of the fact that Bob had significant experience working remotely, had all of the necessary resources readily available, and, except for limited social interactions, did not experience a great deal of challenges during and after the transition to teleworking, he did not report a great deal of change on his level of engagement. What change he did report, was positive.

As noted above, Bob mentioned how his team actively tried to drive engagement via regular team meetings, video calls, and the chat function through Microsoft Teams. When asked how the experience of transitioning back to teleworking as a result of the pandemic influenced his level of engagement, he remarked that he felt like it has been a positive experience for him and the team because of the fact that there has been more of a focus on driving engagement.

We've not had the, I'm going to pop my head in your office and have a quick conversation, but we've replaced that with the chat function within teams and we have quick video calls and I think we rely on video probably more heavily to make sure that we drive that engagement. I think it's been, for me, it's been a very positive experience

just because I think our group has focused more on remote engagement than my previous employers did.

Although her initial challenges may have influenced her level of engagement negatively for a short time, Karen reported that the shift from working exclusively in an office to teleworking resulted in an increase in engagement. She attributed her reported engagement increase to two primary factors. First, she attributed her increased engagement to her fear of “dropping the ball” and letting her level of customer service decrease. Secondly, she attributed her engagement increase to the regular Microsoft Teams staff meetings that she had with her team.

While Karen did not report competence as being one of her engagement determinants, her video journal entries and interview question responses were indicative of someone who takes pride in her level of service. She did, however, mention that it was somewhat challenging to “turn it off” when she got to the end of the workday. Her experience with her desire to maintain her level of customer service affecting her was expressed in the following quote from an interview.

I think it's been it's gotten me more engaged because I've been afraid that I was going to drop the ball... and I realize I set a standard for myself. And I think because I was afraid, I was not going to give the same level of service that I have been doing in the office. I was going to, I think, I have personally been going a little above and beyond from home to try to make sure that our clients are still receiving the same level or better of service that they did in the office. My family has even chastised me because they feel like I've done too much at times, you know, it's time to get off the clock.

Karen also reported the regular video-conference staff meetings she experienced as being another reason for her level of engagement. Karen's primary engagement determinant was her experience of interpersonal relationships. For someone like her, maintaining engagement in an exclusively remote environment was challenging. However, the staff meetings allowed her to continue to interact with her coworkers in a more personal way than by email or via the telephone. Three weeks into the telework transition, Karen remarked in one video journal entry that she was:

still dealing with some of the distractions of the noise and movements, about family and home life you know here in my new home workspace, but it's getting better. Still a bit of a battle at times, but better, and the saving grace has been that we are having regular Microsoft team meetings, together with my coworkers. That has definitely been a saving grace. It's good to see their faces and hear their voices because I do miss that.

Opinion of Telework

At the beginning of the study, I asked each participant about their experiences with flexible workplace arrangements and how conducive they felt their work was to flexible scheduling and telework. Kathy was doubtful that their work, being high touch, would be very conducive to teleworking. With social interactions being so important to her, she had very little desire to telework either.

Throughout the course of her experience with telework because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kathy's opinion of teleworking changed slightly. According to her, "at the beginning of this, I said our jobs weren't conducive to telework. And now, I mean, clearly, we can since we're doing it." Throughout the experience, her opinion changed to the point where she felt confident that their work could be done remotely. However, due to her challenges with job

resources and the desire to have regular social interactions, by the end of this study, she would still not choose to telework if given an option to return to the workplace or telework.

Clara's opinion of teleworking changed dramatically over the course of this study. Prior to the experience, she reported that she would have supported an employee's desire to telework but would not have thought anyone would be able to telework 100% of the time. After experiencing 100% telework, she has changed her opinion to one that is more accepting of telework as a viable workplace environment. Clara mentioned in one interview that:

I don't know that I would have thought someone could fully 100% telework. But after doing it, I think that yeah. I mean, if you'd asked me in March, I was like 'I don't know how we're going to make this work.' But after having done it, it's like, 'oh this stuff can work.'"

In addition, she had it reported to her from someone external to the department that her team was more responsive to customers working remotely than they were prior to the shift to telework. However, her change in opinion did not come without a few caveats.

According to Clara, one of the key components to how successful she, her team, and the university was with teleworking was the fact that almost the entire organization was working remotely. Since telework was the norm during the COVID-19 pandemic and not the exception, it was more accepted and expected. As a result, the organization's culture adapted to it. Clara reported that she does question how the office dynamic would change if only one employee was teleworking while everyone else was working from the office.

If you had an office where one person teleworks all the time and everybody else was in the office, I think that would impact the office dynamic... I think you'd have to have a

healthy balance of remote and in-person interaction. But I've been blown away by what we've been able to accomplish from a virtual setting.

Early in the study, Jimmy was very clear in his opinion of telework. He did not have any desire to work remotely. According to him, he was most engaged while working in an office setting. Dressed for business and in his office, he was in “work mode.” In jeans and a t-shirt at home, he was in “home mode.” However, as he got more acclimated to working remotely because of the pandemic, his opinion of telework changed considerably. While he experienced challenges early on with the abrupt transition to working remotely, he was soon able to adapt to it and see the value in it. According to Jimmy,

I think that now that I've gotten used to it, and I feel confident that I can do my entire job virtually. And without any detriment to the quality of work that I do. I would have no issue teleworking two to three days a week post-COVID. Which I think is a big thing that I've got that basically tells me how much I've gotten used to it, that it doesn't bother me. I'm very efficient and flexible at doing it virtually.

Bob began this study with a great deal of experience and comfort with teleworking. As a result of his experience and comfort level, he already had a positive opinion of teleworking. When asked if this experience has changed his opinion on telework, he remarked that it had not changed his opinion. On the contrary, it had reinforced his opinion that telework can be a viable and successful working environment when properly implemented.

Karen was similar to Jimmy in that, prior to the experience of teleworking, she had no desire to telework. In contrast to Jimmy, her opinion did not change to any extent. While Karen became comfortable teleworking and eventually felt like she was able to fulfill her job duties

while working remotely, her opinion never shifted towards seeing herself wanting to telework in the future.

We have found that we can with our team meetings we can still do that [stay close] and still keep in touch with each other. And, you know, so we've all been good with it and I really, I was surprised that we've been able to accomplish and work around, and still maintain the level of service, I think that we were doing, even in the office.

The main change in her opinion was how she viewed telework as a viable work-life balance solution. From a work-life perspective, she saw the benefit of eliminating a morning and evening commute. This allowed her to better manage her time when dealing with home responsibilities like cooking or laundry.

It is nice not having to make that drive every day, you know, saving on the gas and the vehicle mileage. And being able to clock out by five o'clock and walk right into my kitchen and be able to start supper or whatever and being at home to take my lunch break and put something in the crockpot for dinner or put a lot of clothes in the washer I mean it has its personal benefits, working from home...

Lessons Learned

For Kathy, the biggest lesson learned from this experience was the planning that needs to occur in the future to better respond to an event such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition to telework was a rapid and unpredicted one and, as a result, there was a great deal of confusion regarding the transition of paper processes to online processes. In her opinion, conversations need to be happening now to plan continuity of operations if there is another severe workplace disruption in the future.

Clara reported two major lessons that she learned regarding telework and workplace disruptions. First, she reported that she learned that, regardless of the work location, if you have an employee who is engaged in their work and is motivated to achieve, that employee will be productive and get their work done. In contrast, if you have an employee who is already disengaged in their work, they should not be rewarded with the ability to work remotely. In her opinion, if they are not engaged in the office, they are not going to be engaged while working from home. While her opinion may be contradictory to the extant literature if that disengaged employee is disengaged because of poor work-life balance and telework would remedy that imbalance, it is still important to note.

Secondly, she reported that she learned the importance of organizational continuity of operations planning. In her opinion, while departments at her university were all required to develop continuity of operations plans in the event of adverse weather or some other major disruption, the department should also develop virtual continuity of operations plans in the event that a workplace disruption like the one brought about by COVID-19 occurs again. She believed having such a plan would work to mitigate the stress experienced from such a rapid transition from working in an office to working exclusively from home.

I would think from a continuity of operations plan... that all departments have continuity of operations plans, but also think they probably need to have virtual continuity of operations plan so it's not just if a hurricane comes. It's 'if we got to turn this operation on a dime to a virtual setting, what does that look like?'

Although Jimmy was able to successfully navigate the rapid transition to working remotely, there were things that he learned that would inform his future recommendations for similar situations. First, one of the biggest challenges that Jimmy saw that could be planned for

in the future was the change itself. According to him, much of the organizational stress experienced during the transition was because the transition was abrupt. Jimmy felt that, if allowed to make a more gradual transition like the one that was originally planned, employees would have been better able to maintain engagement and productivity during that transition.

Additionally, Jimmy mentioned resources as both a lesson learned and concern for the future. Primarily, he mentioned internet access and how it impacted many employees' ability to perform their jobs. Jimmy proposed an idea where the institution would pay for higher speed internet access for employees working from home during a similar workplace disruption as opposed to spending the same money on other things.

We need to I think look at more why things like Internet access issues because, you know, I don't know if we pay the citizen that money, but I think honestly, instead of paying all these time-and-a-half people that were on campus it'd been probably better served to do some stipends for Internet access or other things to help people.

While Bob did not report any personal lessons learned regarding his own experience with teleworking, he did recommend that, in future instances of workplace disruption, the transition to telework needed to be managed properly by someone with experience with teleworking. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, each department and team were left to determine how the transition would be managed and, in most cases, those managing the transition had little to no experience working remotely.

Additionally, Bob felt that there needed to have been an increased focus, institutionally, on planning for not only the logistics of transitioning the work to a remote environment but also transitioning the workplace culture to a remote environment. Bob noted that many supervisors

with whom he worked understood how to transition workplace processes but lacked understanding in the emotional impacts.

How do you manage that emotional transition to working at home? And I don't think a lot of our managers really understood that. They expected them [employees] to pick up a laptop, go home, and do their work and didn't think through the grander picture of how you maintain your workplace culture and how you maintain your workplace relationships.

Karen came away from the experience having learned two lessons that, she said, would serve organizations well in the event of a similar workplace disruption in the future. First, she felt that her department lacked the resources to be prepared to move the entire department to telework. For example, Karen's office computer was a desktop computer. If the department had not been able to find an old spare laptop for her to use, it would have had to reach out to other departments with similarly limited resources or purchase one. Once she was able to obtain a laptop to use at home, she realized it was an older model that experienced random, unpredictable shutdowns.

Additionally, Karen found that the department and institution did not have a sufficient plan for handling an extended workplace disruption such as the one experienced because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Departments are required to develop and submit Continuity of Operations Plans to plan for short-term disruptions that could occur because of an adverse weather event or loss of electricity due to a breakdown in infrastructure. These plans do not consider the possibility of a long-term disruption and, according to Karen, the institution and department were unprepared to shift to telework. This resulted in the transition being more challenging than it may have been had a long-term Continuity of Operations Plan been in place.

Summary

This study posed three research sub-questions. First, it asked how the ability to balance work and life had influenced participant employee's engagement in the past. The study then sought to learn, based on the data collected for the first sub-question, what level of workplace flexibility would be needed to adequately maintain work-life balance while fulfilling the business need of the unit. Lastly, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study sought to learn what effect the transition to a fully remote workplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic had on organizational capacity, employees' work-life balance, their levels of engagement, and their ability to fulfill the unit's business need.

Through data analysis, I recognized several themes related to work-life balance, employee engagement, and the effect that the rapid transition to working remotely had on work-life balance, and engagement. For the participants studied, work-life balance and the desire for workplace flexibility were closely related to the level of external, non-work responsibilities such as childcare. Additionally, analysis of the data showed that the ability to maintain work-life balance had, in the past, supported higher engagement levels.

The data also revealed themes regarding engagement determinants. In addition to work-life balance, the data revealed several other engagement determinants ranging from social interactions to job resources. The data also provided a greater understanding of the individuality of what influences engagement and how determinants may be influenced by career status, personality, or personal needs.

Based on the individuality of engagement determinants and the variation in desire/need for workplace flexibility, I developed a workplace intervention that would have allowed the greatest amount of flexibility within parameters developed by the unit director and myself to

ensure the group's ability to fulfill the unit's business needs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the intervention was unable to be implemented. However, I was able to study the shift to remote work that the pandemic necessitated.

Studying teleworking during a global pandemic provided a unique opportunity to document the experiences of a group of human resources professionals dealing with a significant workplace disruption and the collision of work and home lives. Data revealed the challenges with which participants dealt and how these challenges influenced their levels of engagement. Additionally, I was able to observe how the participants grew to realize that teleworking had the potential to be a viable workplace flexibility solution for their team.

In Chapter 5, I will provide a summary of the findings detailed in Chapter 4. Additionally, I will provide an interpretation of these findings with regard to the individuality of engagement, flexibility as an influencer on engagement, how leaders can better understand the engagement determinants of their employees, and how organizations can learn from the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for future workplace disruptions. Lastly, I will provide recommendations for future research that could inform decisions on a broader scale than this small-scale study.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was originally designed to better understand the influence that the ability to maintain work-life balance had on employee engagement and how the implementation of flexible work arrangements such as teleworking and flexible scheduling can influence work-life balance and employee engagement. The unforeseen effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the extreme workplace disruption it caused rendered my implementation of any flexible workplace arrangements beyond those necessitated by the pandemic not only difficult but also potentially unethical. However, the participant groups' shift to working remotely as a result of the pandemic allowed for an in-depth study of the impacts that phenomena such as a rapid workplace change, exclusively teleworking, varying levels of job resources, and varying levels of isolation had on employee engagement.

By considering the influence that work-life balance had on employee engagement, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, conclusions can be drawn from this study that may be used to inform university leaders' decisions regarding employee engagement as well as continuity of operations planning for future major workplace disruptions. This chapter will provide a summary and interpretation of the findings from the previous chapter, review limitations of the study, make recommendations for further study, and consider how the findings may inform current practice.

Summary of the Findings

The primary research goal of this study was to better understand the impact, if any, that flexible work arrangements such as teleworking and flexible scheduling have on employee engagement and productivity among higher education professional staff. To fully address this question within the parameters of this study, it was necessary to divide the primary research

question into three sub-questions with the study designed primarily to answer those three sub-questions. In addition to those, the study provided additional insight into topics related to, but distinct from, the research sub-questions. This section provides a summary of the primary research question and sub-questions, as well as additional insight the study provided in the areas of workplace flexibility and employee engagement.

Primary Research Question

What impact, if any, do flexible work arrangements such as teleworking and flexible scheduling have on employee engagement and productivity among higher education professional staff?

The HR professionals who participated in this study were each in a different stage of life and career with their own sets of circumstances. Clara, the team's director, was 37 years old and married with three small children with extensive childcare needs such as virtual learning or sports team practices. Similarly, Jimmy was an experienced 36-year-old who was married with two small children, one of whom faced significant health challenges during the study that necessitated high levels of care. Karen was 60 years old, close to retirement, and married with grown children. At the time of the study, one of her daughters was living with Karen along with her own children. Bob, 44, was married without children and had recently joined the team after spending most of his career in private sector industry. Kathy, the only unmarried member of the participant group, was 25 years old with no children and a largely absentee roommate.

Before addressing the primary research question, it is important to understand the conditions under which the flexible work arrangement, telework, was implemented. Typically, flexible workplace arrangements are implemented in a manner that provides employees with the ability to decide whether to participate based upon their own preferences. In the case of this

study, teleworking was implemented because of a global pandemic. Therefore, the element of choice and autonomy in how study participants experienced telework was nonexistent. Even without the choice of whether to telework or not, the participants' experiences provided valuable insight into how working remotely affected their engagement and productivity.

Employee Engagement Impact

During this study, the experience of teleworking had an impact on participants' self-reported levels of employee engagement. Whether or not it was positive or negative and the degree to which participants' engagement was affected was dependent upon how much value the ability to work from home had in relation to participants' engagement determinants as well as the level of access participants had to necessary job resources.

In the case of this study, teleworking negatively impacted engagement for those participants for whom social interactions were either a primary or secondary engagement determinant. Since each participant's engagement was determined, to some degree, by social interactions or relationships, each participant's engagement was impacted negatively by teleworking at some point during the study. For example, Kathy, who lived alone apart from a largely absent roommate, reported high levels of social isolation and loneliness while teleworking. With social interactions as her primary engagement determinant, the high level of isolation resulted in a pronounced decrease in her level of engagement.

Others shared similar experiences. Early in the study, Jimmy reported high levels of isolation because of teleworking and quarantining which resulted in a decrease in his level of engagement. However, the effect was not as profound as Kathy's since his primary engagement determinants were reported to be work-life balance and appreciation. In fact, during the teleworking experience, his engagement was influenced to a similar degree by his workload. Bob

was the only participant in the study who had extensive prior experience teleworking more than occasionally. Even though he had experience teleworking and felt comfortable doing so, he had grown accustomed to a high level of social interaction during his brief time at the university and, as a result, felt his engagement negatively impacted once he had to leave the office to work from home.

There were mitigating factors to how profound the change in the level of engagement was. The most influential factor throughout the period of telework was the daily virtual team meetings conducted via Microsoft Teams. Although participants were unable to interact face-to-face, merely the opportunity to communicate informally in these meetings and see one another on their screens seemed to lessen the negative impact that the lack of social interactions had on engagement. Another mitigating factor, in Karen's experience at least, was the commitment to her level of service. Although interpersonal relationships were Karen's primary engagement determinant, her commitment to getting her job done pushed her to maintain her level of engagement out of fear that she might "drop the ball" on one of her projects.

Next, the availability of sufficient resources while teleworking influenced the amount of influence working remotely had on participants' engagement levels. Kathy and Karen experienced this the most because of Kathy's severely inconsistent internet connectivity and the fact that a significant portion of Karen's work was bound to paper processes that necessitated access to printers and scanners. Without the needed resources that they were accustomed to, their levels of engagement decreased. They reported that it was difficult to maintain engagement in their work when they were unable to be as proficient as they had been in the past due to a challenge with resources. To their credit, they were able to adapt to the lack of resources to fulfill the business need but had to expend greater effort in doing so.

Productivity

It is important to note that, throughout the period of mandated teleworking because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participant group was able to consistently fulfill the business needs of their unit. However, that does not mean productivity was not affected by the transition to telework. Two main factors stood out as impacting productivity: resources and adapting paper processes to be electronic. Apart from Bob, none of the participants had a great deal of experience teleworking exclusively. Therefore, they all needed to get acclimated to their new workspace. Part of that acclimation was to set up an office space at home. For some, like Clara, Bob, and Jimmy, this did not have a major impact on productivity since they, for the most part, had the resources they needed to do their jobs. Kathy and Karen, in contrast, experienced challenges with resources that impacted productivity.

As has been mentioned in Chapter 4, Kathy had significant challenges with internet connectivity. Therefore, the effort that would have normally been spent completing job duties, was often forced to be expended resetting wi-fi routers or on the phone with her local internet provider. At times, she was even forced to leave her home to travel to her parents' home to have sufficient internet access. So, in those cases, time that would have been spent completing job duties was spent in transit to another workspace. She was still able to fulfill her responsibilities but often found herself either expending extra energy to do so or taking longer to complete them because of the technological challenges she experienced.

Karen did not experience internet connectivity challenges. However, since her job duties were largely dependent on access to a printer and scanner, she did experience resource-related challenges that had an affected her productivity. Without a commercial-grade printer or a scanner at home, she was forced to find other means by which to complete the tasks that called for those

resources. This meant either taking the time to find alternate methods or, in some cases, driving to the office to access paper files. Therefore, time that would have been spent completing job duties was sometimes spent adapting paper processes or traveling to the office.

The second factor that affected productivity was transitioning paper processes to electronic processes. As mentioned above when addressing Karen's resource challenges, many of the processes that the participants completed each day were typically done on paper. For example, documents needed signatures, and paper personnel files needed to be accessed for review. Once the group was working remotely, they needed to adapt these processes to electronic methods. Therefore, there was a temporary decrease in productivity shortly after the transition to telework. Once processes were successfully adapted, the negative impact was eliminated.

After these paper processes were adapted and during times when no participants were experiencing challenges with resources, productivity increased. Participants even reported that they were able to focus more on their work during the times they were not experiencing distractions. They also reported that, with the lack of informal office distractions like coworkers stopping by their office for small talk, there was more time to complete job duties. Additionally, with all meetings being via video-conferencing software, travel time between meetings was eliminated resulting in participants being able to spend more time interacting with colleagues and customers.

Sub-Question 1

How have employees' experiences balancing work and life impacted their level of employee engagement in the past?

Research conducted during the first phase of the study helped not only answer research sub-question 1 but also provided a greater understanding of the unique and individual nature of

what influenced employee engagement, both positively and negatively, for each participant. This information was critical when considering the optimal level of workplace flexibility that will be addressed in research sub-question 2. First, I will review how participants' levels of work-life balance impacted their levels of engagement previously in their careers. Second, I will consider the individual nature of employee engagement determinants.

A simple response to research sub-question 1 is "it depends." Except for Kathy, each participant reported that work-life balance and the experience of workplace flexibility in the past had some level of influence on their engagement to varying degrees based upon several factors. The first and, perhaps, most influential factor, was external responsibilities. According to participants' responses to interview questions and journal entries, the degree to which the ability to balance work and life had affected their levels of engagement increased as the levels of non-work responsibilities increased.

For example, consider Clara's experience. As a mother of three young children, each with active lives, she experienced a considerable number of external responsibilities and reported that being able to balance her responsibilities with her family alongside her work responsibilities was very beneficial. With sufficient work-life balance, she was not preoccupied with home responsibilities and able to be more focused on her work while at the office. Additionally, she was better able to "leave work at work" and focus on her family while at home.

Jimmy's experience provided another example. Early in his career, prior to having children, he would work long hours and be happy to do so as long as he found the work rewarding. Once he had a family and had a supervisor who did not provide support for work-life balance, he resigned and took a job making less money because, among other reasons, he

expected he would have sufficient support to balance work and life working in a new role in higher education.

Kathy was the only participant about whom we could not state work-life balance had significantly affected engagement. This was because she did not experience the levels of non-work responsibility that would result in high levels of work-life conflict. Without work-life conflict posing a challenge, work-life balance had a negligible impact on her engagement. As a result, the things that influenced her level of engagement were the areas that were most important to her based on her career and life such as interpersonal relationships and support. For example, being early in her career, she valued the opportunity to develop new and meaningful relationships that supported her professional development. She also valued supervisor and colleague support during times when she had questions related to job responsibilities.

The data gathered during the first stage of research also exposed the individual nature of employee engagement determinants. As seen in Table 10, participants' engagement determinants are displayed as "primary" and "secondary." All participants reported similar workplace experiences such as interpersonal relationships and job enjoyment as engagement determinants. However, the primary determinants and the degree to which secondary determinants were influential varied by participant. Based on journal entries and interview question responses, I attributed these variations to both stages in career, personal life, and personality differences.

For example, one of Bob's primary determinants was role clarity. This was a result of the fact that, during the first phase of research, Bob was new to the university. Therefore, understanding the expectations of his role as well as how he contributed to the overall vision and mission of the university and department affected his engagement. Furthermore, by understanding expectations, he was better able to direct his efforts toward meeting those

expectations. And by understanding how his work contributed to the organizational mission and vision, he felt more connected to the institution with his contributions. During the later stages of research after Bob had successfully settled into his new role, role clarity had less impact. Kathy's experience as someone early in her career and relatively new to the organization could be a reason why interpersonal relationship-building was one of her determinants. Being able to make new workplace connections allowed her to learn from more experienced colleagues who were able to provide guidance and advice. She saw these relationships as critical to her growth and, therefore, sought them out.

The variations in engagement determinants could also be attributed to personality. For participants who were more socially inclined and enjoyed the opportunity to interact with colleagues and customers, like Karen, relationships and the ability to experience positive interactions with others were engagement determinants because they allowed them to fulfill their desire for social connection. As another example, for someone like Jimmy who enjoyed feeling in control, the ability to experience autonomy was a determinant. With each of the five participants, an individual set of variations in engagement determinants was present.

Regarding sub-question 1 and based on the data collected during the first phase of research, I concluded that, for this group of participants, the ability to balance work and life affected their levels of engagement to varying degrees based on their personal sets of circumstances with regard to their stage in life and career. For participants with higher levels of external responsibilities, work-life balance had a greater impact. As seen in the literature, workplace flexibility has been proven to help enable employees to better balance work and life. Therefore, the first phase of research data indicated that increased workplace flexibility and the

ability to maintain work-life balance had a positive influence on the participants' levels of employee engagement.

Sub-Question 2

Based on data gathered in the first iterative phase of research, what level of workplace flexibility is needed to adequately balance work and life while fulfilling the business need of the unit?

As mentioned above, the ability to maintain work-life balance had a varied, but consistently positive, influence on the participants' levels of employee engagement. Additionally, all participants reported that they would appreciate the ability to at least have the option to experience workplace flexibility should the need arise. Therefore, there was a case for the necessity of flexibility in the workplace.

Due to the varying degrees of need and desire for workplace flexibility among the participants, I realized that the way flexible workplace arrangements should be implemented should be flexible itself. Therefore, if the COVID-19 pandemic had not interrupted the study, participants would have been able to telework, flex their schedules, do both, or do neither at the level their need and desire dictated within a set of parameters that ensured the business needs of the unit were still able to be met.

Prior to the pandemic, the participants performed high-touch work that required that they be available for in-person meetings and that there be a presence from their group during the normal office hours of the institution; 8:00 am – 5:00 pm. Therefore, after meeting with the unit's director several times to discuss the business needs of the unit, we decided that the optimal situation was one in which participants were allowed to telework from locations of their choice

no more than twice a week and flex their schedules however they chose around a core set of working hours; 10:00 am – 3:00 pm.

This study also provided insight into the nature of the need and desire for workplace flexibility. First, I will consider the need for workplace flexibility and its relationship with work-life balance. First phase data collection revealed how the need for workplace flexibility was related to external responsibilities. An external responsibility is a responsibility or obligation external to the participants' work or personalities, such as childcare, eldercare, or community involvement, that influenced their need for workplace flexibility to balance work and life. For example, the more external responsibilities a participant experienced, the higher their need for increased workplace flexibility would likely be. To better understand this concept, consider the comparison between Kathy and Clara.

During the first phase of the study, Kathy experienced very few external responsibilities. She had no significant other, no children, was not caring for aging parents, and did not have any significant social obligations that had the potential to affect her work-life balance. Therefore, her need for workplace flexibility was lowest among all participants. Clara, in contrast, had a husband, three young children, and social obligations (such as volunteer work) that all threatened her work-life balance. Therefore, her need for workplace flexibility in order to maintain work-life balance was higher. However, a need for flexibility was not the only factor that influenced a participant's desire for workplace flexibility.

If need was the only factor, one may predict that Kathy would have had little to no desire for flexibility. In fact, she did report a desire for the availability of workplace flexibility should she need it due to an unforeseen need. This was because the overall desire for workplace flexibility was a result of the need (as mentioned above) as well as intrinsic factors. For example,

Kathy had no great need for flexibility but reported that she felt that the mere availability of it, should the need arise, would help promote her sense of organizational support and her employee engagement. Additionally, Bob reported that he did not experience a great number of external responsibilities but did experience a desire for flexibility due to the facts that (a) he enjoyed being able to work from home and (b) he appreciated being able to be in control of his schedule and work environment.

Sub-Question 3

What impact did the transition to a fully remote workplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic have on organizational capacity, employees' work-life balance, their levels of engagement, and their ability to fulfill the unit's business need?

The transition to a fully remote workplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic was a major disruption not only to the workplace but also to the participants' home lives. As a result, each of the aspects considered in sub-question 3 was impacted to some degree. The remainder of this section will consider each of these aspects (organizational capacity, work-life balance, engagement, and ability to fulfill business needs) separately to provide a thorough summary of the findings related to this sub-question. Additionally, the study provided unexpected findings related to telework opinions and lessons learned related to organizational continuity that were not included in research questions but are pertinent to include here.

Organizational Capacity

For the purposes of this study, organizational capacity was defined as the unit's ability to fulfill its responsibilities to its stakeholder groups like customers, coworkers, or the state's university system office. When considering the participant group as a whole, the transition to a fully remote workplace served to temporarily decrease organizational capacity. This effect was

observed more prominently at the beginning of the transition and, as the remote conditions became more of the norm for the university and the participant group, was observed less and less. The decrease in organizational capacity can be attributed to four primary factors: the rapid transition to a new workplace environment, the need to transition paper/in-person processes to electronic processes, challenges with job resources, and the collision of work and home.

While the participants' department had planned to slowly transition to working remotely, the quick development of the pandemic and state government orders necessitated a rapid transition. As a result, the participants were forced to gather what resources they felt they would need, such as a laptop, note pads, and other office supplies, and move directly into a strictly remote workplace. They did this while simultaneously continuing to fulfill the human resources function for which they were responsible. Thus, with the exception of Bob, who had teleworked most of his career, participants were forced to balance learning how to work from home with preexisting work and home responsibilities. As a result, a portion of their time and attention, as would be expected in such circumstances, was diverted to these conflicting priorities resulting in a small, temporary decrease in organizational capacity. As participants became more comfortable with telework, organizational capacity quickly rebounded.

The transitioning of paper and in-person processes to an electronic format had a temporary negative effect on organizational capacity as well. Historically, the participant group's work had relied heavily on paper processes and in-person interactions. With the rapid transition to teleworking, they were forced to adapt these processes to a remote environment. Therefore, they experienced a temporary decrease in organizational capacity as they endeavored to adapt those processes. For example, paperwork that had previously required a wet-signature had to be adapted to a PDF format that allowed for digital signatures. Additionally, sensitive meetings that

had always been held in-person had to be adapted to Microsoft Teams or another virtual format. Often these meetings were complicated with multiple parties possessing varying degrees of competence with virtual meeting platforms. Once processes had been adapted and the participant group, as well as their stakeholders, became more comfortable with them, the temporary negative impact was eliminated.

Challenges with job resources also had a temporary negative effect on organizational capacity. While these challenges were more acutely felt by Karen and Kathy, they affected the organizational capacity of the group. Dealing with poor internet connectivity (Kathy) or the lack of needed job-related files or hardware such as a printer (Karen), resulted in downtime when participants were required to either stop working to reset an internet router or call the internet provider or, in more extreme cases, leave home to temporarily work somewhere with the needed resources. For example, Karen would occasionally have to go into the office (upon gaining permission) to gain access to the paper files that she needed. Over time, job resource challenges were resolved which allowed organizational capacity to recover.

Lastly, the rapid collision of work and home responsibilities also contributed to a temporary decrease in the group's organizational capacity. The transition to a fully remote workplace was not something that was expected or planned by the university or HR. As a result, participants had not had the opportunity to consider how they would balance work and home responsibilities if such a transition took place. Additionally, for Jimmy, Clara, and Karen, the transition also brought school-aged children who, under normal circumstances would have been in school during the workday, back into the home. As a result, participants had to find ways to balance childcare and their children's educational needs with their workplace responsibilities.

This presented a rather steep learning curve that participants had to quickly overcome. As a result, priorities were often conflicting, and their time and attention were averted from work to home responsibilities during the workday. Participants were occasionally forced to work late to complete assignments or work through their break times to ensure their work responsibilities were met. The longer the group teleworked, the better they were able to adjust to their new circumstances and develop routines that allowed for better balance. Over time, and as the collision of work and home became normalized, the effect that these conflicting priorities had on organizational capacity was lessened.

Work-Life Balance

Similar to the effect on organizational capacity, the transition to a fully remote workplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a temporary decrease in the participant group's work-life balance. The level of decrease in work-life balance was dependent upon the level of personal life responsibilities. For example, participants like Clara or Jimmy who had small children, experienced a more profound temporary decrease in work-life balance than Kathy, who had fewer personal life responsibilities. For example, the pandemic not only forced university employees to work from home, but also forced school-aged children to transition to virtual learning. As a result, Clara and Jimmy had to cope with the new challenge of balancing their workloads with the recent addition of support for their children's virtual learning. Kathy, in contrast, primarily had to deal with the challenge of transitioning to teleworking without significant external responsibilities.

The fact that the transition to a fully remote workplace was unplanned was the primary reason that work-life balance was temporarily negatively affected. As mentioned above, participants with childcare responsibilities were particularly impacted because, with little to no

warning, they were forced to transition to working remotely while also having to care for their children's personal and educational needs. This resulted in an adaptation period where participants learned how to re-achieve the work-life balance they had experienced prior to the transition to teleworking.

After the participants were able to move through the adaptation period, however, they were better able to obtain and maintain work-life balance. The participant group proved to be adept in how they were able to rapidly adjust to their new workplace environment and constantly shifting personal responsibilities. Several of them reported that they were somewhat surprised and encouraged at how well they adapted to the new environment. Therefore, although the rapid transition to working remotely combined with increased external responsibilities resulted in a significant, although temporary, decrease in work-life balance, the group was able to rebound and re-achieve work-life balance over time.

Employee Engagement

The primary area of focus for this study was employee engagement. While teleworking is traditionally implemented as a choice for employees to provide workplace flexibility and to support work-life balance, its implementation in this study was mandated because of a global pandemic. Participants did not have the option to choose whether to work from home because it was a matter of public health. Therefore, although the study was not able to determine the influence of high levels of workplace flexibility on employee engagement, it was able to consider how the transition to a fully remote workplace as a result of a global pandemic can affect engagement. For the participant group, self-reported engagement was affected to varying degrees for various reasons. Through journals, interviews, and observations, I was able to determine five key employee engagement impactors. These impactors, in descending order of

prevalence, were social interactions/isolation, job resources, work-life balance, workload, and self-pressure.

Social Interactions/Isolation

Each of the five participants noted that the lack of social interactions and isolation impacted their experience while working remotely. The transition to telework eliminated, with the exception of extremely limited circumstances, the possibility for face-to-face interaction. Through their work, the participants had all grown accustomed to, and appreciated, the opportunity for regular face-to-face interaction. Of all functional units in the department, the participant group's unit was, perhaps, the most high-touch, interactive group. In fact, as seen in Table 10, several reported that interpersonal relationships and interactions were their primary determinant of employee engagement.

At the beginning of the transition to teleworking, the participant group went from regular in-person meetings and almost constant intrateam interactions to, essentially, no in-person interactions at all. This ripped them from their workplace norms and comfort zones and, with the exception of Bob, placed them in a workplace dynamic that they had never experienced, were not prepared for, and did not desire. Therefore, it came as no surprise when the abrupt lack of interaction resulted in decreased engagement.

Related to social interactions, feelings of isolation affected engagement levels. Participants reported that feelings of isolation lowered their motivation and desire to engage with their work. Feelings of isolation seemed to be related to the number of interpersonal interactions a participant routinely experienced. For example, Clara, Karen, and Jimmy had family and children in their homes. Although they were not able to enjoy the types of interactions they had enjoyed pre-pandemic, they were still able to interact with their families and did not report high

levels of isolation; even though Jimmy did comment on it. Kathy, in contrast, typically lived alone or with a mostly absentee roommate and only occasionally was able to interact with her family. She reported the highest levels of isolation. Her engagement, as self-reported through weekly video journals, was negatively affected because her primary engagement determinant was interpersonal relationships and her level of isolation resulted in the inability to have regular face-to-face social interactions.

A mitigating factor for the influence of the lack of social interactions and increased isolation was the regular Microsoft Teams meetings that the participants conducted. Having experienced such a high level of informal interaction in the workplace in the past, the group spontaneously, and with instruction from its leadership, began to hold daily team meetings via video-conferencing technology to share work-related information and, perhaps more importantly, regain some semblance of informal office dynamics. This could be indicative of their high level of desire to experience the types of interactions that, as a high-touch unit, they had learned to enjoy and expect prior to transitioning to working from home. Although these were not in the in-person environment that the group was accustomed to, they were still able to enjoy informal social interactions with their teammates. Each of the participants reported that these Teams meetings had a positive impact on both their morale as well as their levels of employee engagement.

Fulfilling Business Need

To understand the group's ability to fulfill the business need, I turned to the team's supervisor, Clara. While she was also a participant in the study, she was the person best poised to determine whether or not each participant, as well as the group as a whole, was able to fulfill the business need. According to her, while there were some initial challenges related to job resources

and adapting to working remotely, each participant, as well as the group, were able to fulfill their responsibilities. Additionally, while there were challenges that were mentioned related to job resources and adapting processes to remote work, none of the participants reported being unable to fulfill their responsibilities either as a group or as an individual contributor.

Telework Opinions

The participants had varying opinions of telework at the beginning of the study based on their own experiences and workplace desires. Other than Bob, none of the participants had significant experience working remotely prior to this study. Neither Clara, Jimmy, Kathy, or Karen had a great deal of experience with teleworking outside of adverse weather events. They also did not have the desire to work outside of the traditional office setting. The prevailing sentiment was either that their work was too high touch and needed to be conducted in-person or, in the case of Jimmy and Kathy, that they simply preferred to work in the office because that was the environment in which they felt best able to concentrate and be productive.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, none of the participants had a choice regarding workplace location. As of March 23, 2020, they were all forced to pack essential resources from their office and transition to working remotely until further notice. As a result, the participants who had no real desire to telework were mandated to do so. Interestingly, each of those participants' opinion of teleworking changed to at least some degree because of the experience. Kathy and Karen had the least amount of change in opinion regarding telework. Although, at the end of the study, they still did not have a desire to telework if given the option, they did both realize that teleworking was a viable workplace environment for their team. They both recognized that they could, with the needed resources, be successful in fulfilling their duties from a remote environment.

Jimmy and Clara had the most marked changes in opinion. At the beginning of the study, Jimmy mentioned that he had no desire to telework. He preferred to keep home and work separate to the greatest extent possible. After overcoming the initial challenges related to the quick transition to teleworking, Jimmy realized that not only was teleworking possible but that he was able to be productive and engaged while doing so. Eventually, he would remark that he would be interested in continued telework on a limited basis once the pandemic subsided.

Clara's opinion of telework also changed significantly after her experience of working remotely. Like Jimmy, Clara had no real desire to telework at the beginning of this study. She believed the nature of their work necessitated an in-person experience. By the end of the study, she remarked that their work was able to be conducted remotely. She did, however, caution that that ability may be lessened if most of their customers and colleagues were not teleworking as well.

Bob, having successfully teleworked for the majority of his career, had no major change in opinion. He did, however, report that the experience further confirmed his opinion that telework was a viable workplace environment for their type of work.

Interpretation of the Findings

With regard to the literature contained in Chapter 2, this study worked to examine several assumptions made regarding Social Exchange Theory, the relationship between the ability to maintain work-life balance and employee engagement, and the experience, both individual and shared, of teleworking. Additionally, the results of the study exposed ideas about employee engagement regarding the Job Demands – Resources Model and Gallup's Engagement Hierarchy not included in the literature review but critical to understanding the study's results.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory relies on relationships and the norms of reciprocity to understand social interactions. One of its most basic tenants is that when one party does something valuable for another party, the second party is likely to reciprocate in kind (Choi et al., 2015). For the purposes of this study, the flexibility and resources needed to maintain work-life balance were considered the “something valuable” that those in leadership positions and the organization provided to employees. According to Eisenberger et al. (2001), such organizational support would be more likely to elicit positive employee behavior such as increased engagement.

This study supported Social Exchange Theory and the research of Eisenberger et al. (2001). Participants, in recounting their previous experiences with workplace flexibility and the ability to maintain work-life balance, described how that ability was valuable to them and made them feel appreciated by leaders and their respective organizations and, as a result, they responded with increased levels of employee engagement. This manifested itself in a form of reciprocity wherein participants who felt supported and appreciated responded with higher levels of dedication to the organization and to their work. Jimmy, for example, compared a previous supervisor who was not supportive of work-life balance with his work-life situation at the beginning of this study. He mentioned, “when I compare where I was three years ago it makes me more engaged because I appreciate it more knowing what it’s like *not* having that stuff.” In this quote, he considered “that stuff” (the support to maintain work-life balance) as something of value and responded with increased engagement.

Similarly, Clara reported feeling that a former colleague received more support for work-life balance than she did. While her colleague was routinely allowed to flex her schedule with little accountability, Clara found it challenging to even request an afternoon off to tend to a

childcare need without her former supervisor being reluctant to grant her request or suggesting that her husband handle the issue. Clara reported that, when she felt a lack of support from her supervisor, she often found herself questioning why she put the level of effort into her work that she did.

These are examples of Jimmy and Clara experiencing a lack of perceived supervisor support. Perceived supervisor support is defined as the degree to which employees feel their supervisors care about their well-being, value them, and are supportive of their work-life balance and success as a member of the organization (Jose & Mampilly, 2015). Employee engagement is a multifaceted concept not solely dependent upon the level of support one experiences from their supervisor or organization. However, as indicated in this study, the level of support experienced can affect an employee's level of engagement. Jimmy and Clara perceived a lack of supervisor support with regard to their well-being and work-life balance. As a result, they felt unappreciated. This was, for them, an environment in which it was more challenging to be engaged. In Jimmy's case, at a new organization, with a new supervisor, he perceived a higher level of support. As a result, he found himself in an environment more conducive to employee engagement. For Clara, a new supervisor that expressed greater concern for her well-being resulted in greater feelings of appreciation and an environment more likely to produce engagement.

Social Exchange Theory was not only applicable with regard to supervisor support for work-life balance. For Kathy, the positive workplace experience of respect and support from colleagues influenced her level of engagement. She reported how her coworkers, in addition to her supervisor, supported her efforts to progress in her career which resulted in feelings of organizational support. Additionally, the level of respect and appreciation that she received from

her customers resulted in feelings of appreciation. The experience of support, respect, and appreciation from colleagues and customers created an environment wherein she was more likely to report higher levels of engagement.

For the purposes of this study, Social Exchange Theory worked well to explain the relationship between the perceived organizational and supervisor support that participants received and the levels of employee engagement that they reported. These relationships were more prominently revealed when considering past experiences with low levels of perceived organizational and supervisor support. Like in the examples just given of Jimmy and Clara's experience of a lack of support, one can see how the participants felt, essentially, disincentivized to respond with higher levels of engagement. They both reported questioning their levels of motivation and effort expended to their organizations and supervisors when they felt that their motivation and effort were not appreciated, rewarded, and reciprocated.

If I would have been able to implement an intervention, I expected to see participants respond with higher levels of engagement. If they responded to lower levels of work-life balance support with lower engagement, it would have been a logical expectation for them to respond to a higher level of work-life balance support (i.e. workplace flexibility) with higher engagement. Without being able to implement flexibility, I was unable to see how they participants responded to those levels of support. As participants began to report their experiences during the transition to working remotely, additional theories began to become relevant. As I address in the next two subsections, the Job-Demands Resources Model and Gallup's Engagement Hierarchy work to explain the participants' responses to challenges with resources while teleworking.

Job Demands – Resources Model

An additional theoretical model can be used to further explain the experiences of employee engagement among the participants in this study. The Job Demands - Resources Model posits that each occupation has its own risk factors associated with job stress. They can be classified into two general categories: job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Bakker and Demerouti (2007), the two researchers who developed the Job Demands – Resources Model, defined demands as:

Physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. Examples are a high work pressure, an unfavorable physical environment, and emotionally demanding interactions with clients (p. 312).

Resources were defined as “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are either/or functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312).

Demands, in and of themselves, are not necessarily negative. However, they can turn into job stressors when meeting them requires effort from which an employee does not adequately recover. For example, a demand may turn into a job stressor if an employee is forced to routinely work overtime because of a looming deadline and does not have the time or opportunity to recover physically or mentally from the workload each day. Job resources may act as a buffer between the employee and the potentially negative impact of high demands (Bakker et al., 2007). If job resources are not adequate to act as that buffer, the resulting imbalance between resources

and demands can result in job strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In this study, we saw the effect of the changing demands and challenges with resources that participants experienced.

The work for which the participant group was responsible was demanding by nature. While not physically demanding, it typically involved them expending significant amounts of psychological effort to fulfill their responsibilities. The nature of their work meant that they routinely dealt with challenging interpersonal interactions, had difficult conversations regarding sensitive topics, mediated disputes, and delivered bad news related to university staff members' employment. The participants in this study, when dealing with disciplinary actions, terminations, or other equally grave and sensitive tasks, reported that the work was often extremely psychologically taxing.

Considering first the pre-pandemic (in the office) environment, the participants had significant physical, psychological, social, and organizational resources to meet the high demands of their work. Although the work was not physically taxing in nature, each participant had the physical resources needed to fulfill their demands. They each had their own office, a sufficient desk, and a comfortable chair. They each had multiple computer monitors and consistent access to high-speed internet. They also had file cabinets full of documents if needed as well as a printer/scanner/fax combination machine outside of their office suite.

Moreover, they were all psychologically well-poised to meet the demands of their job. They each reported feelings of competence and self-efficacy with regard to their job duties. They all felt that they possessed the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities that allowed them to fulfill their responsibilities and meet or exceed their customers' expectations. For each participant, the type of work they were required to do was something that they found, although sometimes challenging, enjoyable. Additionally, they each had access to psychological resources

external to the university through a third-party employee assistance program designed to support employee emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Socially, each participant reported experiencing strong, positive relationships internal and external to their team that, they felt, supported their success as an individual. As a team, they shared a strong social support network that was strengthened by their close proximity and shared enjoyment of and commitment to the work. Additionally, they had complementing personalities and found it easy to relate to one another and form positive, collegial relationships.

Organizationally, the participant group worked within an organization with leaders who understood the necessity of the work that they did and supported their endeavors as long as they were within state law, federal law, and university policy. They were supported by leaders at each level of the hierarchy from the Chief Human Resources Officer, to the Vice Chancellor of Administration and Finance and University's Chancellor.

As the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact the United States and the order was given in March 2020 for the Human Resources Department to begin teleworking exclusively, the level of resources, in some respects, changed drastically and influenced the participants' levels of engagement. The two areas of resources primarily impacted by the transition to telework were physical and social.

Physically, the participants were removed from their office comfort zones with all of the physical resources that they had been accustomed to and moved into a relatively unfamiliar workspace at home. Having worked extensively from home in the past, the transition was not a great challenge to Bob from a physical perspective since he already had everything needed in his home office.

The reduction of physical resources such as printers and scanners meant that effort that would have normally been expended fulfilling business needs via processes already in place had to be expended in adapting those processes to a virtual environment. And the typical job demands continued to be present. This resulted in additional effort being expended while dealing with decreased access to resources. While each participant was impacted by this in some way, Kathy dealt with the most significant challenges with regard to physical resources.

Due to her seemingly constant challenges with internet connectivity, Kathy struggled with the basic physical resource of being able to access email, files, and documents needed to complete her work. Additionally, since almost the entire organization was working from home and depended on email and video-conferencing platforms to communicate, she often lost her ability to interact with her colleagues and customers. Losing the needed access to work materials and the ability to communicate, she found it difficult to experience engagement in her work. Simply put, she could barely access her work at times, much less be engaged in it.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting transition to telework also greatly affected the social resources that the participants experienced. As mentioned above, the social resources the participants relied upon were largely a result of their working in the same physical space. The transition to telework eliminated all in-person interactions leaving the group telephone, email, and Microsoft Teams instant messaging and video-conferencing software as the only means by which to interact. Shortly after the transition was made, participants recognized how much they had depended on the social resources they had access to in the office and missed the interactions that they had been accustomed to.

As a result of the recognition of the need for social resources, and without prompting from any member of leadership, the participants began scheduling and conducting the daily

virtual staff meetings described in Chapter 4. Each of the participants in their interviews or video journal entries described how these meetings, even if only virtual and not face-to-face, bolstered the morale of the group and largely took the place of the in-person interactions that they were used to having.

The Job Demands – Resources model can be further used to describe the participants’ experiences with the changing demands and resources they experienced at home. While the majority of JD-R literature deals with the influence of demands and resources at work, the responsibilities of the home could also be considered a “job” with the challenge of balancing demands and resources. For each of the participants, demands and resources at home changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For those with school-aged children, the demands changed drastically.

Both Clara and Jimmy experienced the change in demands at home when their children shifted from in-person instruction to virtual learning. As a result, there were increased demands on their time and mental effort in order to help their children with virtual learning. As a result, some of the effort that may have been expended on job demands was transferred to “home demands” during certain assignments. Often the timing of these assignments conflicted with work time and Clara and Jimmy would have to step away from work to assist their children.

Gallup Engagement Hierarchy

Gallup, one of the most prolific employee engagement survey conductors, developed an Employee Engagement Hierarchy similar to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Whereas Maslow’s Hierarchy presents five levels of needs that must be met to create the environment for human motivation, Gallup’s Hierarchy presents four levels of needs needed for employee engagement. They are basic needs, management support, teamwork, and growth (Gallup, 2017). This study

presented an opportunity to discover how employee engagement is affected when employees' basic needs are not met. The two basic needs according to Gallup are employees understanding what is expected of them and having the materials and equipment needed to complete their job duties. These needs, if not met, eliminate almost all the possibility for employee engagement (Gallup, 2017). One of the major struggles for participants in this study, especially Kathy and Karen, was having the materials and equipment needed to complete their job duties.

While both Kathy and Karen struggled with job resources, Kathy's challenges with internet connectivity were most pronounced. During times without internet connectivity, Kathy found it nearly impossible to complete her duties. Due to the nature of her work, all of her files and documents were stored on a cloud drive that was only accessible from home while logged into a virtual private network (VPN). Without the internet, she could not connect to a VPN. Therefore, during the extended internet outages she experienced, she was unable to access what she needed to work. Unable to access work materials, it was essentially impossible to be engaged in work. Additionally, one of the most basic needs for an employee is the ability to communicate with others. The internet connectivity challenges she faced eliminated most of her ability to do so. Considering the fact that she was, when compared to the other participants, the most socially isolated, this only compounded the barriers to her engagement.

Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement

This study worked to expand the literature contained in Chapter 2 by recording higher education professional staff's experiences attempting to maintain work-life balance and how that balance influenced their levels of engagement. First, studies conducted by researchers such as Solanki (2013) considered how an increase in work-life conflict resulted in lower work-life

balance. Work-life imbalance led to negative employee outcomes such as low performance, early retirement, higher turnover, accidents, and even substance abuse.

While there were not any instances of extremely lowered performance, early retirement (Karen's retirement was on schedule), turnover, accidents, or substance abuse, the instances of lower work-life balance did produce negative outcomes. These were most often experienced and reported as a sense of frustration or regret that the participant was unable to give attention to an external responsibility because of job demands. We can consider Karen's example of when her mother-in-law fell, and she felt like she needed to be there to help as an example of this phenomenon of frustration or regret.

There are days that I am here, and I have needs to be home. Like right now I have a mother-in-law that fell earlier this week and she could use...there are other family members luckily. We are dividing the time this week, but I have not been able to offer my services to assist.

Clara's experience of being unable to turn away from work to attend to her children's immediate needs was another example of frustration or regret.

...that was pretty gut-wrenching. That was the hardest part because I felt I felt like I was failing. I feel like I was failing as a mom because I couldn't meet their needs but also felt like I was failing as an employee or supervisor depending on who I was talking to because I couldn't give them the full attention because I'm worried about the needs of my child...

Secondly, this study expanded upon Solanki's (2013) research that concluded that increased engagement and higher performance may result from reducing work stress and increasing work-life balance. For example, Jimmy's experience with his child's healthcare

challenges was indicative of how the decrease in work-life conflict and increase in work-life balance can have a positive influence on engagement.

...my [child's] health was more suspect in the beginning months [of the study] so I was more lack of engaged [sic] just due to worry about things outside of work; And then as those treatments have become more normal, it's not really bothered me. I've kind of learned to balance the two so at this point, I am not more or less engaged than before all that started.

Something to note is how, although the treatments did not change, the level of strain that they created lessened as they became more normal. Therefore, the work-life conflict did not necessarily arise from having to take the child to treatments or having to endure them, it seemed to be more from the mental strain and worry that they created for Jimmy.

Experiences Teleworking

Much of the literature contained in Chapter 2 dealt with the employee and organizational benefits of teleworking. Major et al. (2008) reported increased work-life balance and increased productivity among employees allowed to telework. Additionally, Bloom et al. (2015) reported lower attrition rates among teleworkers. However, these studies were conducted during pre-COVID-19 conditions in an environment far different than what participants in this study experienced.

Although the circumstances were different, some of the challenges referenced in the literature review can be considered here. According to Church (2015), teleworking is not ideal for employees whose positions are high-touch and customer-facing. Going into this study, I expected that to be one of the primary challenges of the participant group. In contrast, while all of the participants did not enjoy the teleworking experience and may not choose it if given the

option in the future, they all agreed that telework was a viable workplace for the work that they performed.

Additionally, according to Dahlstrom (2013), teleworking poses challenges with how employees relate to the organization. Longer amounts of time outside of the office may lead to employees missing the informal, face-to-face interactions that can only be experienced in the office setting. Lacking these interactions may result in feelings of loneliness and isolation. In this study, each participant reported similar feelings to various degrees based on the amount of interpersonal interaction they experienced at home. Kathy, who reported the highest degree of isolation, also experienced the lowest levels of interpersonal interactions during the study. In contrast, Clara, reporting the least amount of isolation, spent almost every day interacting with her husband and children.

Lastly, multiple researchers (Caillier, 2011b; Dizaho et al., 2017; Morganson et al., 2010) reported a decrease in work-life balance when work was done exclusively from home. Participants in this study also reported the sensation that the office and home bled into one another with several participants reporting how they felt like work and home had, essentially, become the same place.

Limitations of the Study

In addition to the limitations discussed in Chapter 1, the execution of this study revealed several limitations that are key to understanding its scope. These limitations serve to inform the implications of the study as well as recommendations for future research. They are related to the level of choice participants had with regard to work location and the fact that the study was conducted under pandemic conditions.

First, the study was limited due to the level of choice participants experienced with regard to work location. According to Hyatt and Coslor (2018), the benefits of flexibility in the workplace are more likely to be experienced when employees have the autonomy to choose. While participants in this study were able to experience what would typically be considered a workplace flexibility measure (telework), it came without a choice. Therefore, this study was limited because it was not able to measure the influence that teleworking, along with the ability to choose work location, had on work-life balance and employee engagement.

This study was also limited because the second phase of data collection was conducted during a global pandemic. The study intended to learn more about the influence of workplace flexibility on work-life balance and employee engagement. An ideal environment to gain a better understanding of that topic would be during typical business operations. The study taking place during a pandemic introduced aspects that had an influence on engagement outside of work-life balance. These included social isolation, concerns over the health and wellbeing of loved ones, social unrest, among others.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

This study was initially undertaken to gain an understanding of the relationship between workplace flexibility and employee engagement among higher education staff. While data collected certainly provided a deeper understanding of that relationship among staff, it also revealed several patterns that could serve to inform policy, practice, and decision-making in higher education with regard to workplace flexibility, understanding and reacting to employee engagement determinants, high-touch, customer-facing jobs and teleworking, and continuity of employee engagement practices during a severe workplace disruption such as the one considered in this study due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement

This study examined how the ability to maintain work-life balance has the potential to be an employee engagement determinant. This study and the research done by Kinman and Jones (2008) and Mazzerolle and Eason (2014), show that work-life imbalances are real in higher education and have the potential for negative employee and workplace outcomes such as lowered engagement, lower performance, and, as we saw in the case of Jimmy's previous municipality employment, higher turnover. Therefore, higher education leaders should take heed of this realization and strive to cultivate an environment in which employees have the resources needed to balance work and life.

The first step to cultivating such an environment is understanding what, exactly, the resources are that employees need to better maintain work-life balance. One aspect of work-life balance that was revealed during this study, especially during the first phase of data collection, was that individual employees have unique circumstances that may require different measures for adequately maintaining work-life balance. For some, the opportunity to occasionally telework in order to stay by the bedside of a sleeping sick child may be enough. For others, the ability to flex their schedule to accommodate external responsibilities may be. For others with few external responsibilities, simply knowing that they are supported should a need arise may be enough. Regardless, university leaders should have conversations with their employees and ask questions aimed at understanding work-life balance needs.

Along those lines, employees needing resources should feel empowered to approach their supervisors with those needs to have them met. This study supported the claim that a higher level of supervisor support experienced by employees was related to a positive influence on employee engagement. Empowering employees to speak up if there is a need would help leaders better

understand the resources needed to maintain work-life balance. Meeting that need has the potential to positively influence that employee's level of engagement.

Once an understanding of needs-related work-life balance is gained, middle and lower-level university leadership should have the delegated authority to provide the resources needed. Supervisors at this level would be best poised to make those decisions. At the university-level, decisions related to work-life balance tend to be made through a utilitarian lens, aimed at providing the greatest good for the greatest number of employees. Delegating that authority under a broad, university-wide set of guidelines may, in fact, provide the actual greatest good.

One thing leaders should bear in mind, however, is the business need of the university. It may be tempting to provide extremely high levels of flexibility when one begins to see improvements in employee morale and engagement. However, I would caution leaders not to sacrifice the organizational capacity of a team for the implementation of extreme flexibility. For example, if a team needs to be available to answer phone calls from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm each day, it would be counterproductive to allow everyone on the team to flex their schedules to a point where the team is understaffed and unable to answer the calls.

I would also caution leaders to be mindful of the level of autonomy individual employees are capable of handling. For example, there are likely employees within almost any given organization who, left to their own devices, would not have the level of personal accountability to fulfill their duties as needed if offered a high level of autonomy and flexibility. Therefore, these employees would not necessarily be the best candidates for higher levels of autonomy with regard to their workspaces and schedules.

Individuality of Employee Engagement Determinants

Another aspect of employee engagement that this study exposed was the individuality of employees' engagement determinants. Within the organization where the study took, decisions made regarding employee engagement measures were, like work-life balance decisions, designed to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of people. For example, consider the employee engagement survey conducted in 2018 and mentioned in Chapter 1. This survey was designed to understand employee engagement at a macro-level and decisions made and programs initiated as a result of the survey were aimed at impacting the greatest number of employees with the least amount of effort.

However, no two employees are exactly alike. Based on this study, there are likely many different combinations of engagement determinants for each individual employee. Therefore, I would propose that the greatest good could potentially be done by individual supervisors learning what their own employees' most influential engagement determinants are and working to cultivate an environment where those determinants are present.

This could be a process similar to the one outlined above with regard to work-life balance resources. Middle and lower-level supervisors should be empowered to learn more about their employee's engagement determinants and cultivate an environment that would be likely to support those determinants. Using this study's participant group as an example, one can predict what this may look like on a supervisor-supervisee level.

For example, and only considering the primary engagement determinants, Kathy and Karen both reported interpersonal relationships as their primary engagement determinants. As a result, their supervisor may do well to put them in the position to cultivate more positive relationships by involving them in team projects or in meetings with new individuals who have

the potential to be positive influences. For Clara, work-life balance was the primary engagement determinant. Therefore, her supervisor may want to gain a better understanding of the resources she needs to achieve work-life balance and, if possible, provide them. For Jimmy, work-life balance and appreciation were the primary engagement determinants. His engagement may be positively affected by the same work-life balance measures as Clara as well as being mindful to show Jimmy appreciation for jobs well done. Lastly, Bob's primary determinants were role clarity and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, to better engage Bob, his supervisor may work to help cultivate relationships like with Kathy and Karen. Additionally, Bob's supervisor could ensure that he understands his role, where it fits within the organization, and that he is provided clear expectations and regular feedback.

The key is understanding the engagement determinants for individual employees. Gaining this understanding may be as simple as holding candid discussions with employees aimed at understanding how workplace experiences influenced their engagement in the past. Supervisors could also encourage employees to journal their experiences, like was done in the first and second phase of data collection in this study, to understand how experiences influence their engagement. Leaders throughout the organization should recognize that what influences engagement for one employee does not necessarily influence engagement for them all.

Customer-Facing Jobs and Teleworking

Church (2015) stated that teleworking is ideal for non-customer-facing employees. This study showed that there is potential for teleworking amongst customer-facing employees as well. While a significant portion of this study's participants' work is not customer-facing and, according to Church (2015), would be ideal for teleworking, they were also required to spend a large portion of their time interacting with customers. During pre-pandemic conditions, this was

in face-to-face meetings. While teleworking as a result of the pandemic, this took the form of virtual meetings via Microsoft Teams, WebEx, or other video-conferencing platforms.

This study's participants were able to transition well to the virtual format. Once comfortable with the technology and barring technical challenges like poor internet connectivity, they were able to continue meeting with colleagues and customers as easily as they had in the office. Understanding that customer-facing roles have the potential for successful telework, university leaders may do well to review their current restrictions on the types of jobs eligible to work remotely.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent large-scale migration to remote work have left the participants' university with an employee population, with some exceptions, adept at virtual meetings and teleconference technology. As a result, when organizations return to normal operations, virtual customer interactions will no longer be alien but will likely seem rather ordinary. As a result, jobs such as high-touch human resources positions would be prepared to take advantage of teleworking as a workplace flexibility option.

Continuity of Employee Engagement

This study revealed that to better ensure morale and employee engagement during a workplace disruption such as the one experienced because of the COVID-19 pandemic, university leaders must not only plan for the continuity of operations but also for the continuity of engagement. In preparation for and response to the pandemic, the university developed and communicated plans for adapting to remote instruction, continuing operations, and supporting student success amid a global pandemic. Additionally, the Department of Human Resources where the participant group worked developed several planning documents. One example was the "COVID-19 Reduced Operations Plan" that outlined how the department would continue to

operate remotely. It dealt with general operations such as limited physical hours on-site, use of leave during the pandemic, and which functions would be necessary to take place on-site.

However, neither the university nor the Department of Human Resources made any plans for the continuity of support for employee engagement. Focus was placed almost solely on the continuation of operations. Individuals and teams throughout the organization were left to develop their own responses from the bottom up. One example of this was the virtual staff meetings that the participant group from this study held as a replacement for the social interactions that they were accustomed to in the office. Regardless of engagement determinant, each participant reported that these meetings were a boon to morale and kept them connected to their team.

Just like the continuity of operations, continuity of engagement during such a workplace disruption can be planned for. A Continuity of Engagement Plan (see Appendix H) was developed using the findings in this study. Based on an understanding of and planning for employees' primary and secondary engagement determinants, university leaders can be better prepared for similar transitions from the office to remote work in the future. While simple in nature, completing a Continuity of Engagement Plan such as the one provided would take effort on the part of leadership. Additionally, the fluid nature of engagement determinants (based on personality, point in career, and personal life) would necessitate the occasional revisiting and maintenance of the plans.

At its core, the Continuity of Engagement Plan serves two functions. First, it provides a means by which supervisors and employees can hold discussions aimed at discovering engagement determinants. Secondly, it provides an opportunity for supervisors and employees to

collaboratively plan for the continued support of engagement in the event of similar future workplace disruption.

Recommendations for Further Research

Perhaps the most obvious recommendation for future research is the recommendation to undertake a study like the one initially intended and described in Chapters 1 and 3. Higher education is still facing challenges in recruiting and retaining faculty and staff (Jo, 2008) A study that works to understand how workplace flexibility can be used to influence work-life balance and employee engagement would help university leadership better understand ways by which they can retain qualified faculty and staff who may otherwise be tempted to leave the organization for positions elsewhere.

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, there is a literature gap regarding higher education employee engagement (Bryne & MacDonagh, 2017) and a study of that nature could serve to fill that gap. The majority of literature dealing with higher education engagement found during the literature review was devoted to faculty engagement. Therefore, a study like the one originally designed could serve to supplement the limited extant literature devoted to staff employees.

Further study could also be conducted among a cross-section of participants from multiple functional units within the Department of Human Resources. For example, there are functional units within human resources whose responsibilities are less high-touch than the participants in this study. During typical, non-pandemic conditions, they work primarily in their respective offices dealing with reports, information systems, compensation issues, and other tasks that do not necessitate a great deal of interpersonal interaction. Therefore, a study conducted among a cross-section of the human resources department would provide more diverse perspectives from those with different work responsibilities.

Across the university, there are groups of employees who typically experience very little to no workplace flexibility in location or schedule. Further study could also be conducted among a cross-section of staff employees external to the human resources profession. This would provide a broader perspective to how flexibility may influence work-life balance and engagement among employees whose work responsibilities are markedly different from those in human resources. Additionally, this would provide perspectives from employees' representative of various workplace cultures and norms within their respective teams and departments.

Another study conducted on a larger scale with a larger, more diverse population for a longer period would provide additional insight. The present study only considered the experiences of a group of five participants. A study of a larger group may be more generative since it would be more likely to be a representation of the norm as opposed to the experiences of a few.

From a demographic perspective, this study lacked racial diversity. All five of the participants identified as white, non-Hispanic. A study conducted with broader racial diversity more representative of the university's organizational demographics would provide a more applicable understanding of the influence of workplace flexibility since it would consider the perspectives and experiences of more than a singular racial representation.

Further research could be conducted for a longer time period. Due to the time constraints of the study, I was only able to collect first phase data for three months and second phase data for 4.5 months. A study conducted for a longer period would provide further insight into the influence of workplace flexibility as work and life responsibilities progress and evolve over time.

Lastly, this study was a qualitative study during which participants were allowed to self-report their own levels of employee engagement. A more comprehensive examination of how

workplace flexibility affects work-life balance and employee engagement could be undertaken if the present study was paired with a quantitative or mixed methods study. There are several employee engagement measurement tools, such as the Gallup Q12 survey, that would provide quantitative data to support the qualitative narrative developed in this study.

Conclusion

This study attempted to gain a better understanding of how the ability to maintain work-life balance influences employee engagement among higher education staff. The participants' experiences during this study, especially the first phase of data collection, suggested that the ability to maintain work-life balance has a positive influence on employee engagement. Their experiences also revealed other themes related to employee engagement such as the individuality of employee engagement determinants and what factors influence how those determinants develop. Using this understanding to guide conversations with employees in the future may help university leaders be better able to understand what engages their employees and cultivate an environment that fosters engagement.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact the participant group, the study shifted from the possible implementation of workplace flexibility to study the effect that a rapid transition to working remotely had on the group. The opportunity to study a group of human resources professionals who, except for one, had never extensively teleworked provided a wealth of information with regard to challenges related to job resources when making such a transition and the influence of social isolation on a group of employees accustomed to significant in-person social interaction.

This study also provided real-time documentation of a team of human resources professionals' experiences coping with the rapid transition from the office to strictly teleworking

due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant, in their own words, revealed experiences laced with emotions ranging from exasperation to contentment and from isolation to encouragement. These experiences helped develop a better understanding of how organizations may be able to plan for not only the continuity of operations but also the continuity of engagement in the event that something like the COVID-19 pandemic happens in the future.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Justin Yeaman](#)
CC: [David Siegel](#)
Date: 9/27/2019
Re: [UMCIRB 19-002092](#)
The Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements on Employee Engagement Among Higher Education Professional Staff

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 9/27/2019. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category #2B.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE (PHASE 1)

Introduction:

You have been selected to speak with us today about your experiences with flexible work arrangements such as flexible scheduling and teleworking and how they impact employee engagement. This research project focuses on determining if access to flexible work arrangements increase employees' level of work-life balance and whether or not that increase translated into increased employee engagement. Ultimately, I am trying to learn how to use alternative work arrangements as a form of non-monetary employee engagement program in higher education.

1. How long have you been working in human resources?

2. Has all of that been in higher education?

If yes, go to 3.

If no, go to 2a.

2a. Where did you work in human resources before in higher education?

2b. What would you say some of the biggest differences are?

3. What comes to mind when you hear the term "employee engagement?"

4. How would you describe your level of engagement at work?

4a. Why do you think that is?

5. What are some things the university/department/leadership has done that has had an impact on your engagement positively?

6. What are some things, if any, they have done that have had a negative effect?

7. Have you ever felt like others in the department have been more supported than you? If so, how has that impacted your level of engagement?

8. How has, if at all, being able to balance work and life has an impact on engagement?

9. Tell me about your experience with flexible scheduling and teleworking.

10. If you had to choose one or the other to have access to, which would it be?

10a. Why?

APPENDIX C: JOURNAL PROMPTS

Phase 1

1. What have been your experiences balancing work and life this week? Please be as descriptive as possible including any information you may feel is pertinent to this study. For example, discuss times during which you may have experienced increased work-life conflict or times during which you were able to balance work and life well.

2. How would you describe your level of employee engagement this week based on the three characteristics of engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption). Please be as descriptive as possible including any information you feel is pertinent to this study.

Phase 2

1. What are some of the challenges (if there are any) you're encountering during this time?

2. How has the transition to only working from home impacted your Work-life Balance and Engagement?

3. What are some things you've found surprising about the transition?

APPENDIX D: RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS TABLE

Observations of Participants	Researcher's Notes

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE (PHASE 2)

1. Over the past two weeks, have you taken advantage of the flexible work arrangements offered through this study?

If yes go to 1a.

If no go to 1b.

1a. How did you come to the decision to use that type of flexible work arrangement in that manner?

1b. Why did you elect not to take advantage of flexible work arrangements that were offered?

2. Describe the impact, if any, that flexible work arrangements had on your ability to balance work and life.

3. What barriers to work-life balance did you face over the past two weeks?

4. How did you overcome those barriers?

5. Based on the engagement factors of vigor, dedication, and absorption, how would you describe your level of employee engagement over the past two weeks?

6. Was there any difference in your perception of engagement during this time period over the past?

If yes go to 6a.

6a. What do you believe to be the determinant of that difference?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE (PHASE 3)

1. How would you describe the transition from in the office two working strictly from home?
2. Do you feel like now you're comfortable with, working from home telework?
3. If you had the choice when you went back to the office, would you consider teleworking?
4. So, as a result of this whole COVID event, would you say that you've learned anything that might would inform a future experience with a pandemic like this?
5. How has the move from in the office to working remotely has that impacted your own level of employee engagement like how motivated you feel how dedicated you feel?
6. How, if any, has your opinion of telework been confirmed or changed as a result of this experience?

APPENDIX G: TELEWORKING APPLICATION/AGREEMENT

SYCAMORE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Teleworking Application/Agreement for Sycamore University

This application/agreement is between the employee noted below and SU. The purpose of this agreement is to specify the terms and conditions applicable to the arrangement for performing compensable work at an alternate work site on a regular basis. The alternate work sites, such as an employee's home, are not provided for or maintained by SUSU.

EMPLOYEE NAME: _____ ID# _____

Department: _____ Position: _____

Please state the reason for the request to telework: _____

Alternate worksite address and telephone number is:

STREET ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

Specify days of the week you wish to telework: _____

Will your teleworking require access to Personal Identifying Information (PII) or Personal Health Information (PHI)? Yes No

If "Yes", indicate: 1) what protected information will be accessed, 2) how it will be accessed, and 3) how it will be protected during off-site use.

Are there any departmental/divisional-specific requirements for teleworking, including eligibility, productivity requirements, etc.? Yes No If yes, these requirements **must** be attached to this Agreement.

The signatures below attest to the understanding and mutual agreement of the following:

START DATE: _____

END DATE: _____

(not to exceed one year)

1. This agreement is scheduled to begin and continue through the dates noted above. Any modifications or extensions require mutual agreement and the signature of both parties.
2. By signing this agreement, the employee understands and agrees that teleworking is not an employee benefit. Therefore, this agreement does not extend to others not named above nor is any employee entitled to or guaranteed the opportunity to telework or the continued ability to telework.
3. The salary, overall job responsibilities, and fringe benefits are not changed because of this agreement. Specific work assignments are still assigned by the supervisor of this position and are identified in the Work Plan.
4. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) covers all compensable work. Vacation leave, sick leave, time records, overtime, and other related wage-hour provisions remain in effect. The total number of hours an employee works per week is not to change as a result of this agreement. The specific work hours for this agreement are: **(LIST DAILY WORK SCHEDULE)**
5. The teleworker, if subject to overtime, agrees to avoid working any overtime without prior written approval from the supervisor.
6. All other SU policies and procedures that govern terms and conditions of employment continue to apply to the teleworker. This shall include, but is not limited to, performance management. Teleworking assignments do not change the conditions of employment or required compliance with policies and rules.
7. Once implemented, SU may reassign campus office space (formerly assigned to the teleworker) to others as the university deems appropriate and in its sole discretion. Due to the shortage of office space on campus, this could likely result in limitations on the teleworker being able to immediately return to a campus office if he or she chooses to terminate this agreement. Therefore, the teleworker agrees to give SU ample notice of any intent to terminate this agreement so that university provided office space can be arranged.
8. The teleworker may be required to be on campus for certain assignments and meetings. The times and amount of presence on campus will vary depending on the expectations of the supervisor. Travel from home or the normal telework location to the university is considered ordinary commuting and is not compensable as business travel.
9. SU may choose to provide payment for certain services that would facilitate this agreement. Examples include private high speed internet service. Such provisions

would be subject to the State purchasing rules and regulations and any other applicable SU policy.

10. SU recognizes that effective communication is essential for this agreement to be successful. Therefore, the teleworker must be available to communicate with campus (supervisor, other offices, etc.) at any time during the specified work hours. Such communications may be via email, SU approved instant messaging, fax, telephone, etc. as directed by the supervisor. It is the responsibility of the employee to provide his/her supervisor and coworkers of up-to-date contact information.
11. SU may provide certain office equipment or other items to facilitate this agreement. Examples include a computer, software, etc. All such items remain the property of SU at all times and must be returned upon request. Further, the teleworker agrees to obtain written approval from SU before taking any university property off campus. SU will provide routine office supplies as needed.
12. The teleworker agrees to use the university-owned equipment and other job-related materials for university business only, and to protect them against unauthorized access, use, modification, destruction, theft, or disclosure. Incidental personal use of electronic equipment is permitted but it must not interfere with work assignment or communication and is subject to the applicable University Computer Use Policy (<http://www.SU.edu/cs-itcs/policies/staffstudentpolicy.cfm>). The teleworker agrees to report any loss, damage, or unauthorized access to one's supervisor as soon as possible and in accordance with the Misuse of State Property Policy.
13. The teleworker agrees to return all SU property to the university within 24 hours of being notified by an appropriate SU administrator, or upon termination of this agreement.
14. The teleworker agrees to allow periodic visits to the alternate site to inspect, repair, or retrieve SU property. SU will provide at least 24 hours notice before such visits.
15. SU will not provide for or reimburse any expenses related to the construction, repair, renovation, heating, lighting, utilities, and any other operational costs for the alternate worksite.
16. SU is interested in the teleworker's health and safety while working at the alternate worksite just as if one were working in a campus facility. For this reason, the employee is required to maintain a healthy and safe work environment at the alternate worksite. The worksite must be equipped with a functioning smoke alarm and fire extinguisher. If the employee has questions about the adequacy/safety of the alternate worksite, SU will advise on how to go about making an assessment and obtaining professional assistance. SU reserves the prerogative to conduct a safety inspection (during established working hours) of the alternate worksite before the commencement of this agreement and periodically throughout its duration.

17. SU will be responsible for work –related injuries under North Carolina workers compensation laws, but this liability is limited to injuries within the course and scope of employment. Claims are to be processed according to established university procedures. The employee must indemnify and hold SU harmless for injuries to others at the alternate worksite that may occur outside the course and scope of employment.
18. By state policy, Teleworking cannot be used as a substitute for dependent care. SU recognizes that one advantage of working at an alternate worksite is the opportunity to have more flexible time; however, it is the employee’s responsibility to insure that he or she is fully able to fulfill work requirements and assignment completion schedules without having concurrent dependent care responsibilities. Teleworkers subject to overtime must honor the established work hours noted in this agreement.
19. It is the employee’s responsibility to determine any income tax implications of maintaining an alternate worksite in the home. SU will not provide tax guidance, nor will it assume any additional tax liabilities related to an alternate worksite at the employee’s home.
20. Accomplishing certain tasks may require the teleworker to access confidential information from the alternate worksite. Consequently, there is a greater risk that such information may be disclosed to third parties. The employee’s supervisor must grant permission for the teleworker to work on restricted-access information or materials at the alternate worksite. Therefore, the teleworker agrees to take reasonable precautions to secure confidential information to prevent any such disclosure and to follow any specific SU-approved security procedures to ensure confidentiality and security of data, including but not limited to the following:
 - All PII and PHI necessary for telework assignments must be accessed remotely. Removing hard-copy PII or PHI from SU for telework assignments is prohibited.
 - Access to the internet must not be through unencrypted wireless internet; rather, it must be accessed only through the university approved encrypted connection (VPN).
 - If at all possible, the use of a university-provided laptop or desktop configured with the appropriate security controls is preferred.
 - No University data of any kind may be stored on any non-University computer or other unapproved storage media.
 - It is the responsibility of the user’s department management to provide university-issued computers. Requests for secure configurations of such computers should be sent to the SU IT Helpdesk.
 - All telework participants must adhere to SU’s desktop security requirements.
 - Computers used for University business must be plugged into a surge protector and maintain current virus protection software and security patches.
 - SU is not responsible for payment of internet connectivity at a non-SU worksite or computer support or repairs for non-University computers.

- 21. SU may terminate this agreement at any time and for any reason upon written notice.
- 22. The teleworker agrees to adhere to specific departmental standards set forth by the supervisor as indicated in the attached document. These standards will include appropriate security controls, participant attributes, procedural requirements, criteria and conditions, and productivity expectations of the teleworker.

I have read and understand this agreement, understand its provisions and, by signing below, agree to be bound by its terms and conditions.

Employee: _____ Date: _____
(signature)

SU Authorization:

SUPERVISOR: _____ Date: _____
(signature)

Supervisor Printed Name: _____

DEPARTMENT HEAD: _____ Date: _____
(signature)

Department Head Printed Name: _____

HUMAN RESOURCES: _____ Date: _____
(signature)

APPENDIX H: CONTINUITY OF ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Continuity of Engagement Plan (COEP)

Position _____ Incumbent _____

Position's Critical Functions: List all of the engagement determinants of the employee below. Remember, engagement determinants are those facets of the workplace experience (i.e. autonomy, supervisor support, appreciation) that influence an employee's level of employee engagement.

1. _____ (PRIMARY)
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Identify Support Actions needed for each Engagement Determinant: List actions to be taken or arrangements made that will support the engagement determinant in the event of workplace disruption.

<u>Engagement Determinant</u>	<u>Support Actions</u>
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.

