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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Managers' Resistance to Supervising Teleworking Employees

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Jan R. Oldham

November 2022

Dedication

Soli Deo Gloria.

Acknowledgments

Completing this study required the support and encouragement of many people, and words fall short of expressing my gratitude adequately. First, I glorify and thank God, “for from him and through him and for him are all things.” (Romans 11:36, NIV). God issued me the challenge to get started through my dearest friend April’s words, “Someday is now. Do it. I know you can.” My colleagues at work (HD, CK, KS) patiently listened and answered countless random questions, and my organization generously contributed to offset expenses.

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You are all part of the making of Dr. Oldham—look what He’s done!

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Abstract

Telework allows employees to perform work tasks in any location using information communication technology. Though organizations and employees can benefit from teleworking arrangements in many ways, most managers implemented teleworking relatively slowly prior to the COVID-19 quarantine. Research suggests managers avoided supervising remotely based on a lack of trust for remote employee productivity, a lack of technology self-efficacy, and their perceptions of organizational support and politics. Pandemic COVID-19 quarantine conditions in March 2020 required most organizations to mandate teleworking for all employees whose work could be performed remotely and simultaneously mandated teleworking supervision for managers. This narrative inquiry aimed to explore managers' experiences with mandated teleworking supervision and contribute to a deeper understanding of effective teleworking supervision practices. The conceptual framework for the study included the job demands-resources and conservation of resources theories. Three midlevel managers (between 5- and 12-years managerial experience managing at least three employees simultaneously and no remote supervisory experience before the COVID-19 related mandate) shared their experiences during three loosely structured interviews with each participant. Transcripts of the interviews formed the foundation for the collaborative creation of field texts with the researcher. Combined with the field texts, reflexive journaling was utilized to identify and explore possible threads influential to remote supervision, forming the discussion of findings and recommendations. Identified themes included the need for quantifiable performance expectations and indicators when supervising remotely working employees, managers' technology self-efficacy and confidence, and consistent organizational remote working policies. Suggestions for future research to enhance the supports organizations provide for effective remotely working employees included exploration of gender-

based self-efficacy/self-confidence influences and successful experiences of additional hierarchical levels of management (executive or front-line supervisors).

Keywords: middle managers, COVID-19, employee trust, remote working, hybrid working arrangements, organizational support

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Telework, a form of flexible work agreement (FWA) between organizations and employees, allows employees to perform work tasks in any location using information communication technology (Park & Cho, 2020). Organizations benefit from increased employee commitment (Felstead & Henseke, 2017), and employees indicate increased job satisfaction and positive attitudes due to teleworking (Almonacid-Nieto et al., 2020; Felstead & Henseke, 2017). In fact, in 2018, over 80% of U.S. federal employees surveyed (Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, 2018) indicated a desire to telework at least some of the time, illustrating the popularity of this FWA.

Curiously, 2018 U.S. Census Bureau survey estimates indicated that only 3.6% of employees teleworked half-time or more (GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com). Many organizations have been slow to adopt the practice of teleworking, perhaps basing their hesitancy on research indicating decreasing retention benefits (DeVries et al., 2019) and diminished employee well-being (Dolce et al., 2020). Teleworking practices maintained a relatively slow adoption rate until March 2020, when pandemic COVID-19 quarantine conditions forced many organizations to mandate teleworking for all employees whose work could be performed remotely.

By October 2020, 71% of U.S. workers (whose work could be performed remotely) reported teleworking all or most of the time (Pew Research Center, October 2020). Mandated teleworking conditions presented unprecedented challenges for all organizational leaders, particularly managers who previously resisted supervising remotely working employees. As organizations ease COVID-19 quarantine restrictions and a “new normal” begins to emerge, surveys indicate that more than 50% of employees teleworking express the desire to continue working remotely after pandemic quarantine conditions end (Pew Research Center, October

2020; PwC's U.S. Remote Work Survey, 2020). Organizations must develop a deeper understanding of effective teleworking supervision practices to support employee preferences and organizational performance.

Statement of the Problem

Teleworking practices offer organizational advantages such as enhanced employee performance (Golden & Gajendran, 2019; Kazekami, 2020; Spivack & Milosevic, 2018) and increased retention (Kaduk et al., 2019; Wadsworth et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019). Employees benefit from enhanced work/life flexibility (Nakrosiene et al., 2018), improved job satisfaction (Muller & Niessen, 2019; Raisiene et al., 2020; Spivack & Woodside, 2019), and greater work engagement (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019; Griffith et al., 2018). However, many telework-eligible employees do not utilize available teleworking arrangements (Bae et al., 2019; Lott & Abendroth, 2020), citing inaccessibility due to “gatekeeping” managers (Kaplan et al., 2018; Lembrechts et al., 2019; Nakrosiene et al., 2018) who deny employee access to teleworking.

Some managers deny employee teleworking agreements based on low levels of employee trust, believing that employees require in-person observation to perform productively (Groen et al., 2018; Kaplan et al., 2018). Other managers refuse to supervise teleworking employees as a result of experiencing decreased self-efficacy and increased job stress resulting from role conflicts emerging as a result of being “caught in the middle” between superiors and subordinates (Kaplan et al., 2018; Laulie et al., 2019). Without developing a greater understanding of ways to support teleworking-resistant managers, organizations risk decreased productivity, and the full range of potential benefits from teleworking will be impossible to capture.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to inquire into the experiences of teleworking supervision-resistant managers under mandatory teleworking supervision conditions resulting from COVID-19 quarantine and methods employed to supervise teleworking employees during those quarantine conditions.

Research Question

This qualitative study employed narrative inquiry methodology to explore a central question: How do telework supervision-resistant managers describe and create methods to supervise teleworking employees when subjected to mandatory teleworking supervision conditions resulting from COVID-19 related quarantine practices?

Definition of Key Terms

Gatekeeping. Gatekeeping can be defined as the ability to control the implementation of organizational policies and changes generally resulting from the hierarchical position and role of middle managers as translators of organizational policy from upper management into operational activity for direct and downline reports (Kras et al., 2017).

I-deals. I-deals, or idiosyncratic deals, are generally defined as “voluntary, personalized agreements of a nonstandard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers regarding terms that benefit each party” (Rousseau et al., 2006, p. 978).

Involuntary. Involuntary supervision of teleworking employees is composed of supervision under compulsory conditions mandated by organizational leadership to manage work output in a disaster-altered environment (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015).

Teleworking. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management defines telework as a part of the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010. Generally understood as a flexibility arrangement

whereby employees perform work duties, teleworking entails work performed from an “approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work” (opm.gov/faqs/topic/telework/index.aspx).

Teleworking supervision-resistant. Overtly or covertly resisting granting teleworking permission to employees based on manager’s perceptions (Kaplan et al., 2018).

Summary

Although teleworking FWA’s can benefit both employees and organizations, telework supervision-resistant managers often restrained their widespread use until COVID-19 quarantine mandates demanded immediate adoption. As a “new normal” develops from pandemic-mandated changes, managers and organizations must recognize effective methods of supervising teleworking employees to support organizational performance more effectively. Previous research identifying possible reasons for the formation of managers’ resistance to supervise teleworking employees helps develop both deeper understanding and a framework through which to view the impact of mandatory telework supervision conditions resulting from COVID-19 related quarantine practices. The upcoming chapter identifies the concepts supporting the research framework and offers a review of existing studies exploring possible influences on managers’ resistance to supervise teleworking employees.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences of teleworking supervision-resistant managers under mandatory teleworking supervision conditions resulting from COVID-19 quarantine restrictions. The job demands-resources theory and the conservation of resources theory form the conceptual framework for this research study. The literature review explores three themes emerging from the exploration of managerial resistance to teleworking supervision: managers' lack of trust in employee performance, manager self-efficacy and role identity, and managers' perceptions of organizational politics and organizational support. Significant concepts within each theme comprise sections of the literature review, building an understanding of the influences on the central research question: How do telework supervision-resistant managers describe and create methods to supervise teleworking employees when subjected to mandatory teleworking supervision conditions resulting from COVID-19 related quarantine practices?

Literature Search Methods

To adequately examine existing, pre-COVID teleworking practices, I explored qualitative and quantitative studies published in journals and reports in academic and popular publications. Employing databases accessed through the ACU library and Google Scholar, I searched for the following keywords: *telecommuting, telework, teleworking, teleworking resistance, remote work, remote working, flexible work arrangements, flexible working, i-deals, and working from home*. Additional searches for theoretical underpinnings included these keywords: *job-demands resources theory, role identity theory, conservation of resources, social learning theory, social exchange, the norm of reciprocity, autonomy, and managerial trust*.

Conceptual Framework Discussion

Conceptual frameworks introduce order, providing context for research (Leshem & Trafford, 2007) and a structure to enhance “rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness” (Straughair, 2019, p. 26). A conceptual framework serves to explain the researcher’s “working understanding of the topic, setting, and situation [the researcher] is interested in... grounded in [the researcher’s] own experience, existing research, and often, an existing theoretical base” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 10). Maxwell (2013) noted that by using existing theories to establish a conceptual framework, researchers connect concepts in proposed relationships, providing a way to explain “why the world is the way it is” (p. 49).

In this study, several concepts interlink to support exploring managers’ resistance to telework supervision during mandatory COVID-19 quarantine conditions. The job demands-resources theory (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011) and the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001) serve as foundational frameworks for this study. Self-efficacy, a principle of social learning theory (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Wood & Bandura, 1989), and the managerial identity theory (Hay, 2014; Watson, 2008) supply additional scaffolding for exploring the internal barriers inherent within teleworking supervision-resistant managers. Theories of perceived organizational politics (Ferris et al., 1989) and perceptions of organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) underpin the investigation of the organizational influences on managers’ teleworking supervision resistance.

Job Demands-Resources Theory

Demerouti and Bakker (2011) described the job demands-resources (JD-R) model as integrating the stress research tradition with the motivation research tradition to create a model that “specifies how demands and resources interact” (p. 1). Job resources, defined as aspects of

the job that contribute to successful job achievement and individual well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Demerouti et al., 2001), support “well-being (e.g., job satisfaction, motivation and engagement as well as lower burnout), greater productivity, and enhanced proactivity at work” (Van Veldhoven et al., 2020, p. 6). Applying the JD-R theory to managers’ job resources, managers may consider their ability to directly observe, evaluate, and control employee behaviors as job resources.

In contrast, job demands are “aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort, and are ...associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 2). According to the JD-R theory, though job demands may not be inherently harmful, they can turn into job stressors if the necessary effort to meet those job demands is perceived to require high levels of effort or energy from an individual (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Kwon and Kim (2020) noted that “decreasing job demands helps employees concentrate on their jobs and minimizes moments of unproductivity” (p. 2), but job demands that are perceived to be overwhelming can hinder performance outcomes. For example, suppose a job demand (monitoring employee productivity) has been met by a job resource (direct observation of employee behavior) that becomes unavailable, such as under mandatory teleworking supervision resulting from COVID-19 related quarantine conditions. Managers must develop different job resources to support the job demand of monitoring employee productivity and ensure their productivity.

Conservation of Resources Theory

The conservation of resources (COR) theory proposes that individuals are motivated to gather, keep, and protect resources while preventing currently held resources from being depleted (Hobfoll, 2001, 2012). COR theory recognizes that well-being, self-esteem, and

purposefulness are universally valued resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018), but other valued resources vary among individuals because valuation is based on “personal experiences and situations” (Halbesleben et al., 2014, p. 1335). Loss of valued resources induces increased job stress (Chen et al., 2015; De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2020; Hobfoll, 2011, 2012), which leads to decreased well-being, burnout, and depression (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Hobfoll et al. (2018) suggested that when resources are exhausted, “individuals enter a defensive mode to preserve the self” (p. 106), either withdrawing or becoming aggressive or irrational. These behaviors may result from the effort to conserve existing resources or a search for alternative strategies to replenish lost resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Applying these COR theory principles to managers’ teleworking supervision resistance, managers may perceive teleworking supervision as stressful and threatening to their existing resources. Those threat perceptions can lead managers to refuse teleworking supervision implementation to conserve a current resource (the direct observation of employee productivity behavior).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, recognized as the belief in one’s ability to summon resources needed to experience a sense of self control over events in one’s life, develops through experiencing successful performances, observing others’ successful performances, social encouragement, and self-assessing physical and emotional states of capability (Bandura, 2012; Wood & Bandura, 1989). According to Bandura and Locke (2003), an individual’s beliefs of self-efficacy “contribute significantly to the level of motivation” (p. 87), thereby increasing attempts to build new skills (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Without sufficient self-efficacy, an individual’s capacity for motivation to attempt new skills may be limited (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Conditions of mounting stress, anxiety, and depression deplete self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2012; Srinivasan & Jomon, 2018). Bandura (1986) noted that depleted self-efficacy often “gives rise to avoidance behavior” (p. 1390) and that by minimizing attempts of challenging tasks, individuals with low levels of self-efficacy avoid failures that reinforce perceptions of self-inadequacy (Bandura, 1997). Managers experiencing increased stress or anxiety and the resulting depletion of self-efficacy may avoid even attempting teleworking supervision to avoid failures.

Role Identity and Role Conflict

Watson (2008) defines self-identity as “the individual’s own notion of who and what they are,” and proposes that social identities, the culturally created personas or “notions of who or what any individual might be” serve as “inputs into self-identities” (p. 131). As one experiences new events and changing circumstances across time, self-created narratives integrate ongoing lived experiences to discursively reconfigure identity (Alvesson et al., 2008; Bolander et al., 2019; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). Narratives are initiated, crafted, and recrafted based on social interactions, particularly encounters that trigger “uncertainty, anxiety, questioning or self-doubt” (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 15).

Work identity, and the narratives created to define it, is also “heavily influenced by attributes of the organizational and professional settings in which relationships are formed and maintained” (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 150). Hay (2014) noted that within traditional managerial structures, managerial identities often include “expectations that the manager is among other things, one who ought to be in control, right and knowledgeable” (p. 512). Suppose managers adopt a traditional managerial social-identity persona as part of their self-identity. In that case, they may equate being in control with visible proximity to their direct reports

(Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2019) and define teleworking supervision practices as displaying a lack of control. As organizational structures shift to capture the emerging benefits from FWAs, managerial role identities and expectations must move away from managers' classically defined role identities employing “eyes on” supervision as the determiner of employee productivity (Birkinshaw et al., 2021; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2019).

Role Conflicts Unique to Middle Managers. Middle managers simultaneously navigate roles as superiors over their subordinates and as subordinates to their superiors (Harding et al., 2014). This duality forces constant negotiation of relationships and exchanges (Azambuja & Islam, 2019; de Jong et al., 2021; Falls & Allen, 2020; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Harding et al., 2014). Watson (2008) recognized that conflicting expectations resulting from multiple role identities frequently present “contradictions and struggles, tension, fragmentation and discord” (p. 124).

As a result of the conflicting expectations, managers often confront role ambiguity, confusion, and dissonance (Bryant & Stensaker, 2011; Falls & Allen, 2020; Hegarty & Cusack, 2016). Conflicting explicit, implicit, and informal distribution of power and authority within organizations contributes to middle managers' role confusion and ambiguity (Falls & Allen, 2020). Anicich and Hirsh (2017) pointed out that employees' perceptions of organizational power distribution are fluid, which increases confusion for most employees, but particularly for middle managers who frequently find themselves functioning as “powerful in one moment and powerless in the next” (p. 676).

Middle managers are often expected to translate “policy into practice” (Kras et al., 2017, p. 173). However, practical application behaviors may create conflicts with other organizational policies or expectations and lead to role dissonance for managers. Role dissonance, the

discrepancy between cognitive information and behaviors (Andiappan & Dufour, 2017), can occur for middle managers when brokering the conflicting expectations of their superiors for managers' contributions to successful organizational performance and their personal perceptions of subordinates' needs for advocacy and support. Role dissonance is uniquely intense for middle managers because "whether or not they agree with imposed policies, middle managers must convey and justify directives to their work teams" (McConville, 2006, p. 648). Managers often struggle to broker moral and human resource dilemmas when navigating between personal moral values and employee advocacy needs (Evans, 2017; Hadjisolomou, 2021), which can lead to gatekeeping behaviors by managers (including teleworking supervision resistance) to avoid the stress of role dissonance (Kras et al., 2017).

Perceptions of Organizational Support

Organizational support theory suggests that perceptions of organizational support (POS) result from employees' beliefs about the extent to which their organization values their contributions (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Kurtessis et al. (2017) theorized that POS create a social exchange relationship "wherein employees feel obligated to help the organization achieve its goals and objectives" (p. 1855) and subsequently assume that their increasing efforts for the organization will result in increased advantages. The felt obligation toward the organization and its' objectives often leads to extra-role supportive behaviors, such as helping others learn additional skills or complete their assigned duties (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

Feeling supported by the organization makes managers more likely to treat subordinates well (Shanock et al., 2019). Based on favorable treatment from managers and the tendency of employees to view their managers as agents of the organization, subordinates' POS also increase. Correspondingly, when employees believe the organization fails to supply what employees

believe is due, signaling an organizational reduction in value to employees, POS decrease (Kiewitz et al., 2009). If managers believe that the organization has failed to fulfill promises made, they may resist teleworking supervision for employees due to low levels of POS and felt obligation.

Perceptions of Organizational Politics

Perceptions of organizational politics (POP) reflect employee perceptions of the level of political behavior occurring in the work environment (Rosen et al., 2014). Ferris et al. (2002) proposed that perceptions compose one's view of reality, influencing responses despite the possibility that perceptions can be misrepresentative of events. This subjective attribution of political motivation to identified behaviors led Ferris et al. (2019) to assert that "the actual acts of others become less important than an individual's interpretation of them" (p. 311).

Organizational conditions, including ambiguity, promote political behaviors within organizations and contribute to POP (Ferris et al., 1989). Multiple studies recognize a direct positive relationship between POP and ambiguity or unpredictability in working environments, as well as change resistance and job stress (Bergeron & Thompson, 2020; De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017; Haider et al., 2020; Lampaki & Papadakis, 2018; Landells & Albrecht, 2019; Maslyn et al., 2017; Sun & Chen, 2017). Managers may be uncertain about the political acceptability of teleworking allowance, despite its' organizational allowance, and may reject implementation in the effort to reduce the job stress and working environment uncertainty resulting from negative perceptions of organizational politics (Hochwarter et al., 2020).

Summary of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides the lens through which the research process is viewed and determines the focus for the study. For this narrative research study, the job

demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and Hobfoll's conservation of resources theory (2001) serve as the foundation that supports the conceptual frame of this study that explores managers' resistance to telework supervision during mandatory teleworking COVID-19 conditions. The principles of social learning theory (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Wood & Bandura, 1989) and managerial identity theory (Hay, 2014; Watson, 2008) frame the examination of personal barriers inherent within resistant managers. Lastly, perceptions of organizational politics constructs (Ferris et al., 1989) and perceptions of organizational support constructs (Eisenberger et al., 1986) form the framework for exploring possible organizational influences on managers' resistance to supervising teleworking employees.

Review of Teleworking and Supervision Literature

Historically, teleworking has been considered part of a larger group of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) developed by organizations to help support employee work/life balance (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019; Williams et al., 2021). FWAs offer employees "flexibility and choice to control and readjust their working hours and/or spatial location of work" (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019, p. 2). Although some research indicates neutral or even negative outcomes from FWAs (DeVries et al., 2019; Kazekami, 2020), most studies indicate FWAs benefit employees and organizations (Chen & Fulmer, 2018; Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). Organizational benefits include enhanced employee performance (Golden & Gajendran, 2019; Kazekami, 2020; Spivack & Milosevic, 2018) and increased employee retention (Golden & Gajendran, 2019; Kazekami, 2020; Spivack & Milosevic, 2018). Employees report FWAs improve their work/life flexibility (Nakrosiene et al., 2018; Vroman, 2020), which increases job satisfaction (Chen & Fulmer, 2018; Muller & Niessen, 2019; Raisiene et al., 2020; Spivack & Woodside, 2019) and work engagement (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019; Griffith et al., 2018).

Curiously, not all FWA-eligible employees access available organizational offerings. Some employees avoid using FWAs for fear of career consequences (Bourdeau et al., 2019; Lott & Abendroth, 2020; Smith et al., 2019; Vroman, 2020; Wynn & Rao, 2020). FWA-seeking employees may face stigmatization for deviating from a “work devotion schema that places working hard at one’s job at the center of one’s life and construes ideal workers as being always available and committed to work” (Bourdeau et al., 2019, p. 173). Lott and Abendroth’s (2020) findings illustrate the impact of the ideal worker schema, noting that employees who perceive their supervisors “attach great importance to the physical presence of staff in the workplace” (p. 13) report intentionally avoiding teleworking. Although Golden and Eddleston (2020) found similar numbers of promotions achieved when comparing teleworking and nonteleworking employees, teleworking employees do experience slower salary increases.

Although organizations may officially adopt FWA’s, implementation decisions often rest with an employee’s supervisor (Laulie et al., 2019). In addition to organizational adoption, Williams et al. (2021) proposed that supervisors also consider implicit organizational signals, dominant organizational culture, and senior leadership usage and support as part of implementation decisions. As a result, many managers act as gatekeepers, restricting FWA-implementation for employees, particularly teleworking (Kaplan et al., 2018; Lembrechts et al., 2019; Nakrosiene et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021).

Managers’ biases and personal “work mindsets” may affect decisions to permit employee FWAs. Smith et al. (2019) propose that managers whose work mindset demands control over employees’ work productivity often maintain “distrust toward those who work under alternative, flexible arrangements” (p. 562). In fact, research supports this proposal, revealing that managers

most frequently credit their opposition to teleworking arrangements to a lack of trust in employees (Kaplan et al., 2018; Laulie et al., 2019; Lembrechts et al., 2019).

Managers' Trust in Employees

Trust, defined as the “willingness to be vulnerable” (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 712), is an essential component of effective leadership (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Kim et al., 2018; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Schoorman et al., 2007). Mayer et al.’s (1995) seminal model purport that trust emerges from an individual’s propensity to trust (dispositional trust) combined with perceptions of others’ trustworthiness as determined by evaluating others’ ability, benevolence, and integrity. Ability refers to others’ capability to produce desired outcomes, while others’ subordination of self-centered goals to more widely desired organizational outcomes indicates benevolence, and perceptions of integrity arise from one’s awareness that others behave according to a set of acceptable principles (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007, 2015).

Applying Mayer et al.’s (1995) model to organizations, managers’ trust for employees typically emerges from strong employee performance (Martinez-Tur et al., 2019) that reveals employees’ ability, benevolence, and integrity, the components of trustworthiness. However, in the context of teleworking, reduced levels of direct observation through face-to-face contact with employees exacerbates many managers’ fears about employees’ trustworthiness and lack of conscientiousness (Golden & Eddleston, 2020; Holland et al., 2016; Kaplan et al., 2018; Laulie et al., 2019). Holland et al. (2016) suggested that reduced levels of direct oversight allow teleworking employees to engage in work-irrelevant behaviors such as playing video games or watching movies more easily and propose that such work-irrelevant behaviors “could not as easily be enacted in a traditional workspace” (p. 175). After finding that managers’ ratings of employee performance decrease as the amount of teleworking time increases, van der Lippe and

Lippenyi (2019) concluded that managers desire to monitor employee performance directly to retain greater control of employee productivity. Kaplan et al. (2018) even suggested that reduced direct observability of employees initiates managers' fears that decreased employee productivity will "result in negative evaluations of their own effectiveness" and conscientiousness (p. 366).

Managers also contemplate the influence of teleworking allowance on overall team performance (Kim & Lee, 2021; Laulie et al., 2019; Lembrechts et al., 2019). Lembrechts et al. (2019) reported a negative relationship between managers' support for teleworking arrangements and the level of team-interdependent work required, explaining that managers may fear decreased team communication, effectiveness, and productivity could result from highly interdependent teams working without co-location. Additionally, managers may internalize role expectations including minimizing potential conflict between subordinates and maintaining fairness and justice between team members. Managers reporting high levels of fairness and justice awareness are less likely to grant individual employment arrangements (e.g., teleworking) as a result of intense awareness and consideration for how allowing personalized agreements impacts both other individual team members and "the team as a whole" (Laulie et al., 2019, p. 12).

Under COVID-19 quarantine conditions, observation of employee trustworthiness and conscientiousness by co-located supervision became impossible. Teleworking supervision-resistant managers have had to employ other means of evaluation to replace direct observation of employee behavior. Since their shift to COVID-19 related remote working conditions, managers focus more on "task mode" rather than relationships (Birkinshaw et al., 2021). Kim and Lee (2021) found that making the transition "from managing face time to managing performance" is possible, reporting that supervisors shifting to employing results-based performance evaluation

under teleworking supervision conditions were still able to identify improved organizational performance (p. 269). Additional findings from Dolce et al. (2020) may serve to caution managers who resist the shift to results-based evaluation when telework supervising. Employees perceiving their managers as engaging in technology-enabled excessive monitoring (e.g., Zoom meetings or Teams communication channels) report increased exhaustion, decreased well-being, and lowered job satisfaction.

Through the JD-R lens, employee trustworthiness and conscientiousness serve as a job resource for managers. Many managers use direct observation of co-located employees' job performance behavior to meet the demands required to supply the job resource of trust in employee productivity (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015; Laulie et al., 2019; van der Lippe & Lippenyi, 2019). Using the COR theory, managers may refuse to implement teleworking supervision in an effort to prevent depletion of a currently held resource (i.e., the direct observation of co-located employees' job performance behavior) that supplies an additional resource (i.e., trust in employee productivity). Developing a greater understanding of ways teleworking supervision-resistant managers can build and maintain trust in teleworking employees' productivity could lead to a more successful implementation of teleworking supervision in the future.

In addition to forming perceptions of trustworthiness based on evaluating employees' ability, benevolence, and integrity, managers' individual personality traits also influence their trust in employees (Alarcon et al., 2018; Bande et al., 2019; Gill et al., 2005). Bande et al. (2019) proposed that managers' willingness to take risks and tolerate vulnerability directly influences their propensity to trust. If managers expand their risk willingness behaviors and extend more opportunities for employees to display trustworthy behavior, social exchanges between them

increase. Increasing social exchange levels facilitates trust-building opportunities (Colquitt et al., 2007; Hanna et al., 2019), supporting Brower et al.'s (2009) proposal that "leaders need to not only gain the trust of their subordinates but also learn to trust their subordinates" (p. 343).

Expanded social exchange relationships lead to increased efforts by employees to reciprocate for the trust extended (Gill et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018; Skiba & Wildman, 2018). In addition, broader social exchange relationships may result in improved communication, information sharing, and increased engagement (Martinez-Tur et al., 2019). Kim and Lee (2021) found that stronger social exchanges lead to improved organizational performance, while Brandl (2021) suggested that enhanced employee problem-solving behaviors result from social exchanges and result in more robust organizational profitability.

Managerial Self-Efficacy

Managers' sense of self-efficacy influences their resistance to teleworking supervision (Carillo et al., 2020; Massu et al., 2018; Prodanova & Kocarev, 2021; Silva et al., 2019). Defined as the belief in one's ability to summon resources needed to experience a sense of self control over events in one's life, self-efficacy develops through successful performances and observation of others' successful performances (Bandura, 2012; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Wood & Bandura, 1989). As successful performances increase, feelings of efficacy and capability build, increasing motivation and willingness to attempt new skills (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Perceptions about specific behaviors in specific situations (specific self-efficacy) predict self-efficacy growth more readily than a general sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Schreurs et al. (2010) went on to identify job self-efficacy as an individual's "specific beliefs about their ability to exercise control over difficult job situations and successfully perform" (p. 61). In the context of this research, ease of use and usefulness of technology impacts job self-efficacy and

impacts managers' willingness to implement teleworking supervision practices (Kim & Lee, 2021; Molino et al., 2020; Prodanova & Kocarev, 2021; Silva et al., 2019).

Doargajudhur and Dell's (2020) found that managers' technology self-efficacy positively influences their self-perceptions of job performance. Managers reporting technology self-efficacy and confidence also report lower levels of emotional fatigue (Almonacid-Nieto et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2021), and managers' technology self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of successful adjustment to teleworking supervision during COVID-19 mandatory quarantine conditions (Carillo et al., 2020). After finding a direct relationship between risk-taking willingness and communication technology self-efficacy, Jokisch et al. (2020) suggested that willingness to implement telework supervision may be attributed to managers' higher levels of communication technology self-efficacy (i.e., ability to interact successfully with others through technology).

Not surprisingly, studies indicate that as technology anxiety increases, job stress increases (Kim & Lee, 2021; Molino et al., 2020; Prodanova & Kocarev, 2021). Prodanova and Kocarev (2021) proposed that technology anxiety results from fear that technology use may result in adverse outcomes, including creation of widely obvious mistakes such as losing organizational data or appearing incompetent when navigating multiple technology applications during remote conferencing with others. This fear potentially increases resistance to technology usage for teleworking supervision.

According to COR theory, when resources are threatened or lost, anxiety and job stress increase (Chen et al., 2015; De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2020; Hobfoll, 2011, 2012), which leads to efforts to conserve remaining resources. Managers with low technology self-efficacy may resist teleworking supervision either to conserve the existing resource of self-efficacy felt

when supervising collocated employees or to avoid the additional job stress of technology anxiety. Further exploration of teleworking supervision-resistant managers' self-efficacy with technology can offer a greater understanding of supports necessary to overcome resistance and facilitate further access to the organizational benefits of teleworking.

Middle Manager Role Identity. Conceptualized as one's response to "existential questions such as 'who am I?,' 'who do I want to become?' and 'how should I act?'" (Brown, 2021; Vough et al., 2020), identity emerges from the ongoing, active process of engaging with others (Bolander et al., 2019; Thomas & Linstead, 2002). Watson (2008) maintained that identity forms by "a coming together of inward/internal self-reflection and outward/external engagement—through talk and action—with various discursively available social-identities" (p. 130). Within and outside their situations, people create narratives about themselves and others to integrate internal and social identities into "coherence and consistency" (Watson, 2020, p. 287). When disruptive events or expectations emerge, people reshape or construct new identity narratives that make sense of confusion. Sensemaking organizes change (Vough et al., 2020; Weick et al., 2005) and builds coherency (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Weick et al., 2005).

For middle managers in organizations, sensemaking can serve as a way to "understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves based on the information surrounding ... change" (Rouleau, 2005, p. 1415). Managers play a "crucial role in how change ultimately gets passed on" from senior leaders to lower-level employees (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 559). In their role as "ferryman" (or gatekeepers) between superiors and subordinates (Kieran et al., 2019), middle managers receive assignments, operationalize the required tasks for completion, and translate the tasks to subordinates. Middle managers' successful sensemaking (for themselves) and sensegiving (to others) is vital for organizational strategy alignment (Surju et al., 2020). In

fact, Kieran et al. (2019) proposed that sensemaking activities (i.e., planned discussions between senior leaders and middle managers that focus on meaning-making) can be more effective than mere information delivery to help middle managers make sense of change strategy and support the transmission of changes to subordinates more successfully.

Role Ambiguity and Conflict. Organizational change frequently leads to role ambiguity and role conflict for managers (Bolander et al., 2019; Falls & Allen, 2020; Pfiffner, 2019). Evans (2017) recognized role ambiguity exists “when there is little or no information about role expectations or the role expectations lack clarity” (p. 3131). Role ambiguity particularly impacts newly appointed managers, who cite circumstances in which they simply do not know how to respond to what is happening as the most frequent source of struggles (Bolander et al., 2019).

Role conflicts are “a core aspect of working in, and inhabiting, middle managerial positions” (Azambuja & Islam, 2019, p. 560). Hadjisolomou (2021) illustrated middle managers’ unique conflicts when describing one COVID-19 pandemic dilemma involving subordinates and their families. After being required by the organization to falsify COVID-19 test results, the research participant described placing “my moral values [as a leader] on the side and follow management’s decision [as a subordinate], even though I disagreed with it, to protect the organization’s financial stability and not put my job at risk” (Hadjisolomou, 2021, p. 404).

Competing organizational objectives also lead to role conflict for middle managers. Evans (2017) reported that managers prioritize productivity and profitability responsibilities when facing competing organizational goals between performance expectations and long-range HR goals for employee FWAs including teleworking. Not surprisingly, these simultaneous and divergent expectations from supervisors, subordinates, peers, and multiple external stakeholders lead to emotional exhaustion for managers (Shin et al., 2020).

Navigating the ambiguous, often-contradictory expectations of leaders, followers, and other stakeholders demands significant levels of energy resources. The JD-R theory recognizes that job demands are “associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 2) and require the job resource of ongoing physical or psychological energy. Managers may refuse teleworking supervision because they perceive a lack of energy resources.

Perceptions of Organizational Support

Rooted in social exchange (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), organizational support theory (OST) proposes that employees expend effort for and remain dedicated to an organization in exchange for pay and other tangible benefits such as esteem and caring (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Way et al., 2018). This exchange relationship supports a psychological contract, recognized as beliefs about the perceived mutual obligations held for both parties in relationship (Bal et al., 2017; Rousseau et al., 2006, 2018). Psychological contract breach (PCB) occurs when employees, including managers, perceive that the organization has not met its’ obligations (Bankins et al., 2020; Griep et al., 2020; Ng, 2015).

Perceptions of organizational support (POS), a critical concept of OST, form from employees’ beliefs about how much their organization values their contributions and well-being (Baran et al., 2012; Eisenberger et al., 1986, 2019, 2020; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Shanock et al., 2019). As a result of employees’ POS, they “feel obligated to help the organization achieve its’ goals and objectives” (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The felt obligation, combined with the expectation that increased efforts will produce greater rewards, results in extra-role supportive behaviors, such as helping others learn additional skills or

complete their assigned duties or enhanced work engagement (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Way et al., 2018).

For managers, some research indicates that felt obligation to the organization results in more supportive treatment of subordinates (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Shi & Gordon, 2020; Woznyj et al., 2017). However, other studies find a negative relationship between managers' felt obligation to the organization and their supportive treatment of subordinates (Frear et al., 2018; Zafari et al., 2019). Frear et al. (2018) theorized that managers may believe their felt obligations to the organization's success require them to "be tough and demanding of subordinates" (p. 65). In a telework-specific context, Zafari et al. (2019) considered that managers' felt obligation to meet organizational goals generates increased employee performance demands when direct observation is not possible.

Organizational change disrupts felt obligations, shifting managers' POS (Arneguy et al., 2018; Gigliotti et al., 2019). Finding that increased levels of POS facilitate more successful change implementation, Gigliotti et al. (2019) proposed a pivotal relationship exists between POS, change acceptance, and trust for organizational leadership. When considering managers' resistance to teleworking supervision in the context of organizational change, perhaps managers' level of POS may not include enough felt obligation to contribute to the organizational goal or enough expectation that efforts to implement will produce greater organizational rewards.

Furthermore, if managers believe the organization has not sufficiently met their perceived obligations necessary to incorporate change, psychological contract breach (PCB) may occur (Griep et al., 2020; Probst et al., 2020; Shi & Gordon, 2020). Recent studies report that PCB contributes to physical and mental health complaints (Griep et al., 2020) and reduces engagement (Probst et al., 2020; Shi & Gordon, 2020). An earlier meta-analysis reports that PCB

significantly impacts several work-related outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intent (Zhao et al., 2007).

During COVID-19 quarantine conditions, many managers faced mandated teleworking supervision implementation with little or no preparation. As organizations face adaptation, related changes continue to impact managers' POS. If managers believe their organization fails to provide the necessary and expected support (e.g., training for successful telework-supervision practices or technology support including hardware, software, and access), managers' POS may decline enough to result in PCB. Exploring managers' POS during COVID-19 required mandatory teleworking supervision will contribute to developing additional supports organizations can continually provide teleworking-resistant managers.

Perceptions of Organizational Politics

Perceptions of organizational politics (POP) refer to employees' subjective opinions about the level or type of self-serving behaviors exhibited in the workplace by fellow employees (Ferris et al., 2019). Although recent research proposes POP can be positive (Landells & Albrecht, 2019; Lawong et al., 2018; Maslyn et al., 2017), a vast number of studies recognize employees' POP as negative (Crawford et al., 2019; Lawong et al., 2018; Liu & Liu, 2018). Behaviors generally considered as political include "striving for in-group status, sucking up to others, backstabbing, and pursuing personal goals instead of those that benefit the group or organization" (Hochwarter et al., 2020, p. 882). Landells and Albrecht (2019) observed that POP are typically identified with the "abuse of relationships, communication channels, resources, reputation, and decision-making" (p. 8).

Interestingly, both positive and negative POP create conditions of uncertainty and elicit anxiety (Maslyn et al., 2017). POP behaviors intensify unpredictability and ambiguity in the

workplace, directly contributing to anxiety and stress (Cho & Yang, 2018; Haider et al., 2020; Landells & Albrecht, 2019; Webster et al., 2018). As POP increase, so do anxiety and depression (Cho & Yang, 2018) and employees' awareness of negative emotions (Webster et al., 2018). POP elicit increased feelings of hostility (Meisler et al., 2020) and additional negative POP behaviors as a result of frustration and anger generated by POP (Chinelato et al., 2020). After finding a direct relationship between POP and deviant behaviors, Crawford et al. (2019) contend that POP lead employees to feel violated and "respond with deviant behaviors that are unfavorable to the organization" (p. 95).

According to the COR theory, managers' self-preservation efforts may become aggressive or irrational when their resources are overstretched or exhausted (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Liu and Liu (2018) reported that some managers increase abusive behavior (such as unfair treatment compared to others, intimidation, and relationship manipulation) toward subordinates in effort to reacquire resources, power or control during uncertainty and change. Not surprisingly, when supervisors' abusive treatment of subordinates increases, subordinates' POP and political behaviors also increase (Liu & Liu, 2018). In the context of this research, the uncertainty of shifting organizational politics combined with the changes required by teleworking supervision may overtax managers' resources, resulting in possibly unjust or even irrational refusal to allow teleworking agreements for otherwise qualified employees.

Summary

The literature review explores research relevant to some of the reasons managers may resist supervising teleworking employees, including lack of trust in employee performance and managerial self-efficacy and role identity. The foundational frameworks and concepts discussed, including the job demands-resources theory, the conservation of resources theory, and themes

from self-efficacy and identity theory, support and guide the exploration of the research question. An explanation of the chosen research design and rationale, along with population, sampling, data collection, and analysis processes follows.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This narrative inquiry study explored the experiences and supervisory methods employed by teleworking-resistant managers working under mandatory teleworking supervision conditions during COVID-19 quarantine restrictions. The chapter begins with an overview of the research design and methodology, followed by the population, setting, sample descriptors, materials, and data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with a review of trustworthiness and credibility, ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, and a summary.

Research Design and Method

Qualitative research offers opportunities “to learn about people’s histories, experiences, motivations, opinions, perspectives, values, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, feelings, and so on...” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 146). Shufutinsky (2020) noted that organizations benefit from using qualitative research when designing effective change interventions because the stories shared allow exploration of specific details “necessary for understanding the dynamics that exist among and between groups and individuals, including leaders, employees, shareholders, and other stakeholders” (p. 50). Pinnegar and Daynes (2012) added that qualitative research “forms around assumptions about interpretation and human action” (p. 3). Since the intent of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of teleworking-resistant managers supervising teleworking employees under mandatory teleworking supervision conditions, I chose qualitative methodology to contribute specific details and add to the growing knowledge of ways to support teleworking-resistant managers.

Carlson (2020) pointed out that humans use narratives “to make sense of and make meaning of their experiences” (p. 1148). Narrative inquiry is “a way of inquiring into experience

that attends to individuals' lives but remains attentive to the larger contexts and relationships within which lives are nested" (Clandinin et al., 2017, p. 91). Narrative inquiry incorporates "the confluence of social influences on a person's inner life, social influences on his or her environment, and his or her unique personal history" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 599). Based on Dewey's notion that experiences from past and present both inform and shape current and future understanding (Clandinin, 2006), narrative inquiry explores participants' experiences and their stories about their experiences within the context of relationships, across time and locations (Caine et al., 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). By telling their stories, participants relive the experience, often recognizing changes within themselves and rescripting their narratives to incorporate them, thus "restorying" their narratives (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin et al., 2011).

Choosing a narrative inquiry ontology and methodology allowed me to reflect on and incorporate perspectives from my COVID-related teleworking experiences. Narrative inquirers practice relational methodology, "making meaning from these stories through collaboration between the researcher and participant" (Khwaja & Mahoney, 2019, p. 341) as stories are relayed. For narrative inquiry researchers, "composing our own narratives of experience is central to narrative inquiry," to more clearly recognize the tensions existing and emerging between boundaries of their own experiences, participant boundaries, and the emerging boundaries within the sensemaking relationship of the collaborators (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70).

Researcher Positionality

After living in a sprawling metropolitan community in Texas for 40 years, 5 years ago I moved to a small town to create and facilitate leadership training and development at the headquarters of a regional organization employing around 12,000 people across southcentral

Oklahoma. I looked forward to being responsible for only my own productivity after having supervisory responsibilities for others (as many as 30 people at a time) for almost two decades. In my new role, I researched and developed potential solutions for organizationally identified challenges like employee retention, wellness, and engagement.

Remote working emerged from my research as a potential solution for some of the recognized organizational challenges; however, it was rejected as a viable offering within the organization despite the well-documented benefits for both employees and organizations. I struggled to make sense of this rejection without any explanation from the mid-level managers to which I reported. Although I recognized the conflicting political influences and the extensive bureaucratic approval process in the rigidly traditional hierarchy of the organization, I could not comprehend rejecting a data-supported solution to overcome the organizations' own identified areas for growth.

Over the following months, I continued to wonder about influences on acceptance of remote working supervision. Soon, global pandemic conditions forced implementation of remote working and supervision conditions regardless of previous positions of support, resistance, or indifference in organizations. Though I did not supervise remotely working employees during the COVID-19 quarantine, study of effective leadership practices combined with my past supervisory experiences and my employee quarantine experiences with my direct supervisor to shape my reflections of challenges and opportunities managers face when supervising remotely.

Population, Setting, and Sample

I limited the research participants to U.S. residents to ensure consistency of organizational responses to governmental quarantine mandates. I avoided participants employed in public schools or healthcare in an attempt to narrow the number of organizational

stakeholders, and I chose participants with no prior remote supervision experience to avoid influences on self-efficacy based on previous experience.

Although I initially hoped to explore resistance to telecommunication usage influences while conducting in-person interviews, COVID-19 protocols required technology platform interviews (i.e., audio and video-recorded using Zoom). I decided against inviting current work colleagues to participate to avoid any organizational consequences (Maxwell, 2013). Instead, I employed snowball sampling methods (Terrell, 2016), asking my co-workers for referrals to potential participants who self-identified as telework-supervision resistant with no previous telework-supervisory experience prior to mandatory teleworking supervision conditions resulting from COVID-19 quarantine restrictions. I found no willing or eligible participants from referrals, so I posted a request for participants on two online community message boards (i.e., [leaders.givitas.com](https://www.leaders.givitas.com) and [pink.givitas.com](https://www.pink.givitas.com)). These two message boards supplied three qualifying participants.

To screen for eligibility, I asked potential participants to complete the four potential participant screening questions (see Appendix A). I selected participants who were moderately experienced managers (with 2–10 years of experience) to minimize the influence of initial adjustment experiences for newly appointed managers and allow for greater emphasis on exploring self-efficacy and role identity before and during mandatory telework supervision during COVID conditions. I also chose participants with experience supervising 3–9 employees simultaneously to narrow the focus on lack of trust perceptions within a reasonable span of managerial control (Harris, 2019; Knowledge@Wharton, 2006). Participants were compensated \$150 upon completing the final draft review of findings as appreciation for the time and effort invested in co-creating the research findings with me.

Materials/Instruments

Narrative inquiry research often begins with participants sharing aspects of their lives through interviews, but interviews are typically more conversational rather than guided by lists of predetermined questions (Clandinin, 2013). A conversational style supports more engaged interchanges between parties and encourages detailed exploration beyond early impressions and assumptions (Khwaja & Mahoney, 2019). I prepared a semistructured interview protocol with a broad outline of prompts (see Appendix B) but discovered all the participants required no prompts beyond the initial suggestion to “tell me about your experiences with remote supervision.”

Data Collection

Researchers actively co-construct meaning with participants in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006), allowing opportunities for engagement and collaborative participation from both parties throughout the study. I met with each participant for approximately an hour three separate times. I prepared the transcripts between the initial and second session (and the second and third session) and sent them to participants at least five days before the next session. In the final session, we debriefed about the collaborative research experience and discussed learning from the remote supervision experience.

I returned to the scholarly literature to explore emerging ideas from our discussions (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016), such as specific research on e-leadership and team leadership. I journaled as I composed field texts with participants to support my ongoing self-reflection and awareness (positionality) throughout the study (Khwaja & Mahoney, 2019; Shufutinsky, 2020). Reflexive journaling provided a way to examine the influence of my experiences creating the co-

narrative with participants (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin, 2018), particularly as we worked together to determine the meaning from the telling and retelling of the stories.

Analysis Procedures

Although qualitative researchers typically break apart field data and resort it into categories, narrative inquirers establish co-created meanings through recursive engagement with participants (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin, 2006). Maxwell (2013) maintained that “analysis strategies have to be compatible with the questions you are asking” (p. 115), so as the field texts developed, I formed notes to ponder “the temporal unfolding of people, places, and things within the inquiry: the personal and social aspects of inquirer’s [my] and participants’ lives: and the places in the inquiry” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 485). I then reviewed prior field texts with study participants at the beginning of the next session to reshape a more holistic narrative, one that identifies and includes the temporal and contextual milieu connections across the narrative text. Although somewhat laborious, gathering and exploring the narrative considering multiple perspectives combined with purposeful reflection results in rewarding insights into the stories people tell and live (Clandinin, 2018; Lewis, 2018).

Clandinin (2013) stated that narrative inquiry begins and ends “in the midst” of living (p. 43) and does not offer limiting, final truths (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Good narratives have “an explanatory and an invitational quality, authenticity, adequacy and plausibility” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 185). Rather than attempting to identify universal truths, I labored to give voice to the manager participants while inviting readers to engage in their own inquiry and to puzzle over “their own way[s] of being in the world” (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 17).

Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability serve as specific determinates of the trustworthiness of qualitative studies (Terrell, 2016). Using narrative inquiry methodology requires recursive collaboration with the participants to create and confirm meaning in the shared space (Clandinin, 2006) and serves to frame the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research. I employed the extensive use of participant review and discussion, eliciting ongoing feedback from participants to verify the accuracy of their input and bolster credibility (Terrell, 2016).

Narrative inquiry research texts are rich, detailed accounts of the lived and told experiences of the participants and researchers during the inquiry (Clandinin, 2013) and offer readers ample evidence of dependability, the determination of “whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data” (Amankwaa, 2016, p. 122). Terrell (2016) suggested that confirmability, described as the researcher's neutrality and the participants' uninfluenced responses, offers another means to determine trustworthiness, and Maxwell (2013) adds that researchers should explore reactivity to determine *how* their influence affects the study conclusions. Despite these recommendations, narrative inquiry is not “a study of the ‘other’—it’s always a study of [researchers] in relation with participants” (Clandinin, 2018, p. 20).

As an additional bolster for trustworthiness, Terrell (2016) maintains that thick description demonstrates transferability. Thick descriptions offer “sufficient detail [so] one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people” (Amankwaa, 2016, p. 122). Hampton et al. (2021) suggested that the thick descriptiveness of narrative inquiry bolsters trustworthiness through transparency. Transparency exposes the deeper meaning of events from the perspective of those who

experience them to make those meanings understandable to readers outside that world (Hartblay, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

In addition to strictly adhering to all ethical practices of the Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C), the relational ethics of narrative inquiry call for special consideration (Clandinin, 2013). Because narrative inquirers co-construct text and meaning collaboratively with participants, establishing and maintaining relationships of trust, empathy, and inclusivity are critical components for authentic narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Trust between researchers and participants can diminish if researchers lack an understanding of “how one’s positionality impacts interactions” (Hampton et al., 2021, p. 128).

To develop greater trust with participants and increased insight into the influences on the process of research brought by the participants and myself, I practiced critically reflexive journaling. Cunliffe (2016) pointed out that reflexive journaling “requires us to be attentive to our assumptions, our ways of being and acting, and our ways of relating” (p. 759). As stories are shared and explored collaboratively, Clandinin et al. (2010) recognized that tension often surfaces between what was, what is, and what is becoming and assert that ethical research relationships must support stories counter to the “dominant institutional, cultural and social narratives” (p. 89). Engaging in reflexive writing illuminated contradictions between my espoused values and behaviors and pushed me to question my assumptions.

Assumptions

Assumptions indicate influences on the study that are true yet cannot be verified (Terrell, 2016). The fundamental assumption for all participants (including the researcher) is honesty and

openness. Narrative inquiry rests within relationships that require honesty and openness to create the clear communication necessary to support finding meaning “in relational and participatory ways” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 13).

I also assumed my positionality influenced this study. Rather than being “people who study a world we did not help create,” narrative inquirers “make the world in which we [find] ourselves” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61). My remote working experiences influenced my thinking about the resistance others may hold to its’ implementation, and “because narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology, [I needed to] continually inquire into [my] experiences before, during, and after each inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 83). As a narrative inquirer into mandatory teleworking supervision during COVID-19 quarantine, I benefitted from in-depth critical reflection about my background experiences, multiple identities, power, privilege, and insider-outsider perceptions enhanced my contributions to the collaboration with participants (Fenge et al., 2019).

Limitations

Roberts (2010) observed that study limitations include influences that are out of the researcher’s control, and Terrell (2016) emphasized that limitations are “inherent to the actual study that could affect the generalizability of the results” (p. 42). By nature, narrative inquiries consist of evolving stories whose meanings change as they are told and retold. I believe thick descriptions and the other trustworthiness measures restrained most of the study limitations.

Clandinin (2013) stated that “there is no final telling, no final story, and no one singular story we can tell” (p. 205), and some may view this lack of finality or generalizability as a research limitation. From another vantage, the unfolding of meaning across time produces possibilities for stories to be reshaped and redefined, adding deeper and greater understanding.

This ongoing evolution enriches future opportunities for different or additional inquiries to be made (Downey & Clandinin, 2010).

Delimitations

On the other hand, delimitations are the influences within the researcher's control (Roberts, 2010). Narrative inquiries reject tendencies to find a single solution or to dissect data as an outside dispassionate observer. To do so, I focused on collaborative analysis. Collaboration requires establishing relationships, and in narrative inquiry, "there's no smoothness—it's always messy" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 20). Ethical narrative inquirers should accept the responsibility to attend to, be present in, and respond to their co-collaborators' lives outside of the research topic, and I have initiated efforts to maintain ongoing supportive relationships with participants.

Summary

I chose a narrative inquiry methodology to explore the lived experiences of teleworking supervision-resistant managers under mandatory teleworking supervision conditions resulting from COVID-19 quarantine restrictions. In a narrative inquiry, researchers engage with participants in the midst of life, with both parties contributing to the stories told and their meanings (Clandinin, 2013). Conversations and stories told and retold, along with collaborative meaning checking and revising field texts, formed the basis of data collection and supported the generation of emerging impressions and themes. Although narrative inquiries do not produce absolute or final conclusions (Clandinin, 2013), I established trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to invite readers "to enter their own inquiry, asking questions about their own practices..." (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 17).

Chapter 4: The Stories

Narrative inquiry presents stories co-composed by the participants and the researcher. This chapter introduces the remote working and supervision experiences of my co-composers Dorothy, Sally, and Wes. When considering multiple participants' experiences, deeper understanding can result from looking for dissonant or consistent threads and gaps across participants' accounts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), so this chapter also explores the identified threads of remote supervision resistance (i.e., managers' trust for employee productivity, managers' self-efficacy including technology self-efficacy, and managers' perceptions of organizational support/politics) and reflection on their influence.

Dorothy

Dorothy lives in a large university town in the upper Great Lakes region of the United States and leads a team of staff professionals who provide administrative support to the faculty at the University school of business. The level of support for each faculty member varies based on individuals' needs, and services provided range from photocopying and data entry into the online course content platform to proofreading and formatting text for publication. Although flex-time arrangements were fairly common based on staffing availability, work was performed on-site prior to pandemic quarantine restrictions. No formal remote work policy had been approved. Despite the increasing level of online work completed over the 12 years she has been a supervisor in faculty support administration, Dorothy maintained that "the faculty [still] expect us to be on site."

COVID-Related Remote Working Experience

When COVID-related quarantine conditions required remote working arrangements, the University provided faculty and staff with the necessary equipment and training to facilitate

working from home. Dorothy notes her team “pivoted pretty seamlessly,” and the “IT staff really went above and beyond and made sure that faculty, staff, everybody had what they needed and it was working properly.” In addition, despite the organization’s position that “we were not going to lay off anyone,” Dorothy admitted feeling very disconnected from her team due to the isolated working conditions. She reported establishing Teams chat channels and video meetings, making intentional efforts to support human connections on her team during the emotionally taxing transition of the lockdown period.

As quarantine restrictions eased, the University began reintroducing staff to the physical site to support ongoing faculty instruction in the hybridized environment required by pandemic conditions. Dorothy “wanted to make sure we [the support staff] had physical presence” on each floor of their building, even though remote working accommodations allowed staff members to perform tasks successfully while working remotely. Team members made schedule adjustments and compromises to produce a physical presence for each floor during business hours. However, neither of the sixth floor support team members felt comfortable returning on-site. Because the sixth floor faculty are among the most “high maintenance,” Dorothy sat on the sixth floor for two weeks to accommodate the need for support team presence. She reports that

I saw one faculty [member] a day, maybe. No one came to the office asking for any help. Everything was electronic with the off-site people, so I made the decision that we didn’t need to cover that office. Like, clearly, it’s ok. ‘You guys can remain remote.’

Interestingly, in the annual faculty survey completed just a couple of months later, responses revealed radically declining satisfaction for the support team, particularly from the sixth floor faculty members. Faculty comments included “they’re never here,” and “No one is ever here in the building.” Shocked by this feedback, Dorothy surmised:

it wasn't that they weren't getting any service, but the perception was that we were not available because they didn't see us. Even though they're in their office[s], emailing us and we're emailing them back...the fact that we're not doing that on-site really bothered them.

To understand at a deeper level, she dug into the data. After discussing the findings with her supervisor, Dorothy accepted the survey results as evidence of eroding trust between her team and the faculty members and shared the anonymized data with the entire team.

In a separate meeting, Dorothy collaborated with the two sixth-floor support team members. One team member was new to the university and had about six months of experience on the sixth floor before the COVID remote working quarantine, while the other employee had been a "superstar on a different floor," moving up to the sixth-floor team about 2 months before the COVID remote working quarantine. After forming an action plan designed specifically for their high-demand faculty stakeholders with both team members, Dorothy maintained support with each of them in one-on-one meetings. She was surprised to find her evaluation of the employees' trustworthiness and productivity began to shift as the weeks progressed and remote working conditions continued to evolve.

Dorothy perceived that the new university employee "was reeling, devastated by the data, by the feedback." Feeling the need to offer intense employee support, Dorothy met with the employee almost daily to provide suggestions and coach through the action plan to improve faculty support. The employee responded by applying all the recommendations, working proactively beyond expectations, and becoming "a productive worker in the eyes of a lot of the faculty."

In contrast, Dorothy's superstar employee "turned out not to be a superstar." As the weeks unfolded, Dorothy discovered that this employee had not been addressing the action plans at all. Professing to be working on websites for faculty that were "taking up a lot of time," the employee continued displaying an "I'll get to that" attitude. The employee appeared utterly baffled by the shift to different expectations for remote working, repeatedly stating, "I don't understand what's changed. What's changed from when I was on the other floor team?" Despite her repeated efforts to redirect job performance, Dorothy felt very disappointed the employee "just didn't see the gravity of the situation and didn't do anything to help fix it."

Experiences With Trust in Employees. Dorothy admitted her experience with these two employees surprised her. The unexpected performance efforts by her newer employee and the breach of trust expectations by her former "superstar" supported Dorothy's first takeaway about remote work supervision: "that some people really are not going to succeed working remotely. And I have to be aware of that. I have to change my mode of managing and supervising."

Performance Capability. Dorothy describes herself as "a people person...coachy and supportive." She connects with her team by doing "rounds. I pop into offices ... they're working on something and ...impromptu questions or conversations just happen. I get some information ...and then I ask questions." Initiating those "in the moment" conversations offers her a "natural way" to build relationships while gathering and exchanging information about productivity and expectations with employees. She admits remote leadership is challenging for her because she cannot pop in "to identify learning moments or particular patterns that need to be changed" when working remotely.

Dorothy notes that work transactions are generally only "visible between them [the staff member] and that one faculty member" *even when co-located* [emphasis mine]. She explains:

much of our work is one-off, transactional stuff. We don't have any standardization other than something that is a procedure needs to be done in a certain order. Everything else is whatever the faculty want. We do it their way...like Burger King, you know? Work flows directly from them to the faculty, and I'm not involved.

She describes grappling “for years” with ways she can “get the staff to make the invisible work that they're doing visible.”

Remote supervision conditions highlight the need to create a method of productivity evaluation beyond Dorothy's capability to “pop in.” She relied entirely on staff self-disclosure to “gauge whether they are really working to their capacity” when supervising remotely. She also suspected some of her staff were working

at a decreased capacity when they are remote because a lot of what happens during the day [on-site] are interruptions and interactions with other staff members or faculty. At home, that interruption part that's part of their job isn't there, but they don't have a lot to fill it, or they don't look for ways to fill their time. That's really hard to supervise and manage.

Employee Willingness to Prioritize Organizational Goals. In the wake of the disappointing faculty survey results during the pandemic, Dorothy recognized that some employees do not prioritize organizational goals the way she does. Her interpretation of the policy mandating “every department in the entire campus [to] provide 65% of staff coverage onsite per week” does not allow her to accommodate personal remote work preferences for the entire staff. Therefore, she assigned remote work schedules based on job function while considering the “faculty perception that staff must be on site to be providing support.” However, she still struggles to find ways to get those staff members who do not see faculty perception as a

legitimate determiner of their ability to work remotely to “buy in” to her interpretation of the organizational policy. Dorothy spends a lot of time and energy thinking about how to “keep the negatives controlled,” and observes that

either way, I have employees who are unhappy. If I do it by job role and everybody’s got to be here three days a week, I’ve got some staff who are upset because they think they can be remote 100% of the time. If I go with preferences, then I have others saying, ‘Oh, so I get stuck with all the crappy jobs and interruptions all the time because I happen to choose to be onsite.’

Experiences Influencing Self-Efficacy in Managerial Role. Dorothy described the technology efficacy challenges she and her staff faced while trying to support faculty stakeholders, noting:

COVID really pushed the envelope because we had to change. We had to all learn Zoom. Nobody... the faculty didn’t know Zoom. The staff didn’t know Zoom. Some faculty weren’t using Canvas prior to COVID... suddenly, that’s the only way for them to have class and get communication to their students.

We went from incremental to ‘Everything has changed and everybody’s gotta do it and it’s gotta happen now!’

And on top of that, you’re going to be isolated from everyone and everything, so you will have your own personal thing going on. I am trying to support you in a virtual environment so that you do get the training and support and skills you need.

It was a very painful time for most of my staff and the faculty...emotionally taxing for just about everybody.

Dorothy believes communicating via technology is a barrier for her, particularly when working with her team on sensitive issues. She described an interaction between two members of her staff (one Caucasian and one African American), which occurred while working remotely. The two staff members had a private exchange centering on racial perspectives of current social events, which went very poorly.

Instead of opening up dialogue between the two of them, it caused a really big gap where both of them felt like ... 'I don't want to have to be in an office with her.'

One of them felt like I'm being race baited, and the other one felt like I'm being discriminated against, she doesn't want to talk about race, and she wants to dismiss me. Had the conflict occurred while everyone was on site, Dorothy thinks she "would have known about it sooner, seeing, noticing something [that wasn't right] and I could then broach it and talk with them. The struggle was exacerbated because of the remoteness."

Role Identity, Ambiguity, and Conflict. Working under remote conditions, Dorothy struggled to identify herself as a successful manager. She felt she "was neglecting her responsibilities as supervisor, coach, and leader because [she wasn't] seeing them anymore except for scheduled one-on-one Zooms." Remote working decreased her ability to keep a constant "pulse on the work that staff were doing" and contributed to her feeling that her "personal best is not what's happening right now. That causes me a personal dilemma because then I'm feeling like I'm failing."

Ambiguous role expectations contributed to Dorothy's remote supervision struggles as well. The staff provides administrative support "very individually, according to what the faculty member wants. That has been a struggle because some faculty want us to do a bunch of stuff for them and other faculty are very self-sufficient." Although she knew that "faculty expect us to be

on site,” she believed electronic support off-site would be an effective accommodation during the pandemic. However, when faculty survey feedback indicated “the perception was that we were not available because they didn’t see us. Even though we were doing all their work, they didn’t see us. We weren’t here. That was a huge surprise to me.” To clarify role expectations and make sense of this data, Dorothy created the narrative that the faculty must “perceive” the staff is working by observing their physical presence “on site every day. That’s just how we’ve got to do it.”

Dorothy attempted to understand policy directives from senior leadership, accommodate employee preferences that reinforce her self-identity as a supportive leader and coach, and simultaneously meet the demands of perceived faculty stakeholders. She found she was constantly caught in the middle ground, attempting to integrate expectations that are often in direct conflict with one another. Her experience while remotely working consisted of fighting fires and “doing a bunch of triage” while trying to figure out how to “get the faculty what they want.” She reflected that “it’s not a ‘one size fits all’ anymore, so I have to totally change how I look at my group and our effectiveness.”

Perceptions of Organizational Support/Politics. Before COVID-related quarantine conditions, Dorothy’s organization had frozen technology spending for their fiscal year. Once employees were sent home, organizational leaders announced that “even though there were budget freezes, technology was going to be invested in.” Employees who did not already have laptops received them promptly, and she was surprised that “we actually pivoted pretty seamlessly.” The organization did make efforts to support employees emotionally as well, according to Dorothy. She credited the organization for doing “a lot of great things with COVID protocols as far as [building] safety” as essential personnel began returning on-site. Reassurances

that “we were not going to lay off anyone” supported the organizational efforts to “be compassionate... give people grace...and support our staff because they’re struggling.”

Dorothy especially appreciated the support of her supervisor and the organization at large when she was trying to navigate a racially influenced conflict that “flared up” between two team members. She felt

like I had the permission to not expect the same productivity out of my staff when this first all went down.

Knowing that I had the support of my leadership and our diversity, equity, and inclusion leadership gave me skills to be able to navigate that I didn’t have before, but also the permission to say, ‘Look, if you need to take some time off this afternoon—if you are in the middle of your workday and you are so frustrated or broken or upset that you really can’t function, just let me know and we’ll deal with it.’

If I hadn’t had that upper support, I would have still done that, but I would probably be in a lot of trouble.

Perceptions of organizational support decrease when Dorothy considers the organization’s hybrid work policy. Currently, the policy requires 65% of staff to work on-site each week, but the implementation and interpretation of that practice have been determined by each department differently. As staff members communicate with colleagues in other departments who follow different 65% guidelines, dissatisfaction emerges, diminishing morale and creating a “political mess. As middle managers, we’re just stuck dealing with it.”

She attributes ongoing problems with employee retention to the refusal to allow fully remote staff within her department, reporting that:

in our last job search, we had three open positions, and the top candidates dropped out because they wanted fully remote. Only two days a week remote wasn't going to work for them, so they turned us down. It is a real problem.

And I only got 13 resumes when, prior to COVID, I used to get 30-80 resumes for one position. Now I got 13 for three positions...and 5 of those were not even considered because of either skill set or expectations.

Dorothy wondered how to find ways to help the faculty “buy into the idea that ‘we don’t need staff on site in the same way [now] that we’ve had staff on-site,’” and considered that the solution to this organizational political dilemma would require a “culture change. We cannot look at employees and just say, ‘Well, this is just the way it is.’ We’re past that.”

Sally

Sally works in the division of institutional advancement at a private college of osteopathic medicine in a large historic city on the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Her primary responsibilities include leading the offices of alumni relations and fundraising. Although the organization has three different campuses in two states, all but one of Sally’s direct reports were co-located before the COVID-quarantine restriction. Sally has been a supervisor for 17 years and has worked in her current organization for over 6 years.

While many fundraising activities and functions may occur off-campus, Sally’s direct reports worked on-site before the pandemic quarantine restrictions. Although flex-time arrangements were common based on staffing availability, no formal remote working policies had been approved. Sally had been part of a workgroup tasked with formulating a flex-time policy to be presented to their executive leadership team, but the COVID lockdown halted their project completion.

COVID-Related Remote Working Experience

Initially, the organization sent employees home for two weeks, and Sally remembered, “it was such a scary thing.” She felt “very grateful that we had an organization that was trying to make sure that we figure things out,” particularly in contrast to her husband’s organization. Because the quarantine conditions prohibited performing manufacturing work on site, his organization instructed him to “go home and apply for unemployment,” creating frustration and a sense of abandonment that impacted them both.

Sally recalls scrambling to find activities she could give her staff to do at home for “just a couple of weeks” since most staff did not have laptops. She noted that “getting people computers and getting them shipped was sort of an ordeal,” and she “was initially very concerned that even once we got computers out to people, it’s like ‘Well, what *are* they doing all day?’” The team’s primary function is fundraising, and Sally acknowledged that “early on in the pandemic, there was some fear of asking people for money.” To adapt, the team shifted from fundraising to “well visits. For the first few weeks, let’s just call all the alumni in the world and say, ‘How are you doing? How are you coping?’ Just checking on people.” As the quarantine continued, Sally and the team created a student emergency fund to support “students who really need to get home because they or their family member had urgent needs related to COVID. And that went “really well.” Recognizing that “you can’t delay your work forever,” Sally and the team shifted into “creating Zoom meetings to see alumni across the country” because physical visits were impossible. She reports, “in some ways, it’s great, but it’s really hard to do virtual with people you don’t know at all.”

As employees began to return to on-site work, Sally realized her paradigm about employee productivity had shifted due to the necessary adaptations related to COVID-mandated

remote work. She petitioned for all frontline fundraising team members to be 100% fully remote, even though the official policy mandates that employees be in the office on Tuesday, Wednesday, and one additional day of their choice. She reasoned that “when we see them in the office, it means they’re not out visiting other people. So why bring them in?” Additionally, by making the frontline fundraising team 100% remote, private office space was freed up “so the people who had been in cubicles got put in offices. That way, at least with you coming into work, you could take your mask off.”

Experiences With Trust in Employees. During her remote supervision experience, Sally realized that successful performance while remotely working depends on who the person is. There are people working from home I never think twice about what they’re doing ‘cause they’re getting their work done. And then there’s other people...it’s like, ‘I sent an email this morning. They haven’t answered me. What are they doing?’ I can see peoples’ calendars, so I know they’re not in a meeting...

She noticed that “some employees who need to be supervised [may be] people who have just started out and haven’t learned accountability yet.” However, she also noted that others might lose focus when working at home, citing the experience of one of her direct reports who supervises an employee. Sally described the employee’s struggle to focus while working from home, noting that “there were times they were spacing out and not where they needed to be...even up to the point of missing meetings.” After determining that the struggling employee needed the more rigid framework created by on-site working conditions, Sally’s direct report returned to on-site work arrangements to provide strong supervisor support. As Sally observed this situation, she reflected on the need for personalized support for each employee,

acknowledging that “it’s very difficult because you want to be equitable [but] you want to give people what they need.”

Performance Capability. In the early stages of her remote supervision experience, Sally realized that results-based performance evaluation for most fundraising staff members was easy to track. The numbers of visits completed, proposals submitted, and dollars raised were concrete, but the work product for the support staff, “where it’s your job to support someone else,” was more challenging to quantify. She observes that remote working requires “a lot more accountability for people in positions where what they do is not directly measurable.” She intentionally established explicit expectations for remotely working employees in roles with less-than-directly measurable outputs, including response times for requests, engaged behavior in Zoom meetings (such as camera on), and proactive “check-in’s” throughout the day.

Although she knows that some managers think that “if I can’t see them [employees] doing their job, how can I be sure they’re doing their job?” Sally contends that competent managers

should be sure that someone is doing their job 100% of the time, whether they’re at work or at home. You should know whether the work is getting done. And if you can’t tell that, something is wrong. Either they don’t have enough work to do to begin with or it reveals a skills gap for the manager.

Sally believes that, overall, her team navigates remote working conditions successfully and declares that “if I was given the ability to do whatever I wanted with my staff, for the most part, I would not have a problem with anybody working from home.”

Employee Willingness to Prioritize Organizational Goals. Before establishing a hybrid work policy, Sally’s organization initially recalled “essential” employees back on-site and

allowed “more of a departmental determination of who comes in and when they come in.” She reported that

some departments decided the entire department can continue to work from home, [while] other departments were like, ‘I need someone in the office every day if we’re supposed to be back on site. I just want to make sure we are represented.’ But there were other departments where their supervisors wanted them all back, and they [employees] were very angry they didn’t get a hybrid opportunity ...and [there] was resentment.

Why wouldn’t [a leader] think about that? This is a sign of bad leadership. But there are leaders who didn’t think through, ‘Oh, the campus is back open—I need to make sure my department has a presence.’

Sally recalls “there was some blowback because of that,” and she ponders if “this may be one of the reasons the strict hybrid policy got put into place.”

The hybrid policy adopted by Sally’s organization established an on-site schedule of Tuesday, Wednesday, and one other “employee choice” in-office day, with the purpose of allowing teams to “have all your in-person meetings on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.” However, masking mandates and social distancing requiring all meetings to be conducted on Zoom and other physical barriers (cubicles rather than private office space) initially compounded the struggle to work effectively under those conditions. So, Sally and her team created ways to overcome these obstacles, and she proposed their adaptive solutions to organizational leadership. Adapted policies from the team approved included designating specific job roles as “fully remote” and reallocating private offices according to in-office needs rather than seniority. Sally declared that “I haven’t run into someone [on my team] asking for something outside the policy since.”

Experiences Influencing Self-Efficacy in Managerial Role. Sally's struggles with technology self-efficacy center on adapting traditional fundraising activities to be accomplished during quarantine conditions using remote technology. She and the team shifted to maintaining existing donor relationships via technology such as Zoom visits, but "it's really hard to do virtual with people you don't know at all." Sally's team tracks new fundraising contacts as part of their productivity goals. Before COVID quarantine conditions, new contacts and donor relationships often emerged from in-person networking during medical conferences. However, she noted that "we're hurting in that respect because we haven't done any conferences."

Sally recognized that "the model, development [fundraising] as a whole has to change under COVID quarantine mandates. For the team to continue moving toward their fundraising goals, they had to find some "workarounds." Sally collaborated with her team to brainstorm adaptations of their in-person methods to the medium of technology that remote working required. She decided to extend invitations beyond just her local staff to include the fundraising teams from all three campuses using Zoom meetings, and she reports that "Zooming has changed the relationship...I see people from the other campuses just as much as from my own campus. We are all working much better."

Role Identity, Ambiguity, and Conflict. Sally identified her responsibility as a manager to support her team in "successfully meeting specifically quantifiable fundraising goals." Because she views each team member as having the same team goals as herself, she enlisted their support and collaboration to find solutions for their common goals. Engaging with the group supported both her personal sensemaking and the sensegiving functions needed by the team to organize the changes imposed by COVID-19 quarantine mandates.

During her remote supervision experience, she also recognized a need to adapt her level of managerial support, mainly when working with employees in support roles. She found herself telling staff members to watch how she did things rather than letting them attempt things when learning to do something new. Sally realized that she needed to allow remotely working employees the opportunities to be autonomous just as she did when co-located. She intentionally made herself practice giving “it [assignments] to them and saying, ‘Bring it back to me’” to discuss together. She concluded that even if “they don’t have the knowledge that I have, they’re going to get the knowledge [better] if they do it.”

Although some managers wrestle with unclear expectations during organizational change, Sally pointed out that

in my fundraising world, it’s very measurable. You need to go on 120 visits, you need to submit X number of proposals, and I want you to raise X dollars every year...I can see on the quarter where you are in relation to your goal.

Because the team maintained such a clear picture of their purpose and annual goals, they maintained the identified performance targets despite COVID-related quarantine circumstances. Although “originally, we didn’t know what we were going to do,” Sally and the team soon acknowledged that “you can’t delay your work forever.” Since they realized the performance targets remained the same—only the available activities to reach them changed, they brainstormed ways to adapt their activities to existing restrictions.

Sally also believes that COVID-related conditions allowed people “to think about [the] practical. What’s more practical now?” rather than the traditional hierarchical decision-making process of the past. She willingly petitioned the organization for COVID policy exceptions on behalf of her staff members because the creative work arrangement proposed “made sense.”

Although it is challenging as a leader to balance conflicting needs and expectations, Sally stated that “sometimes you just have to do what needs to be done.”

Perceptions of Organizational Support/Politics. Although the initial stages of the quarantine period were hectic as the organization scrambled to provide staff with the necessary remote working technology, Sally stated that “our organization did an excellent job. We really have a good organization.” Tangible supports offered for the first time from the organization included a \$1000 bonus for every full-time and \$500 for every part-time employee, an opportunity for a “cash out” of surplus vacation days (over two weeks’ worth), and annual pay increases “bumped” forward 4 months.

The organization offered additional emotional supports as well, Sally acknowledged. One of the supports during the early days of the quarantine was

Zoom Free Fridays. It was a nice break, like, ‘Oh, I don’t have to get myself dressed and look decent to be on a Zoom call.’ It gave that day to clean up email and clean house the same day. It really took some pressure off. Essentially, it was giving people [some time off], at least partly.

She stated that the executive leadership has “done a lot of work around making us feel valued. [They] understood that ... this COVID world doesn’t look the same for everybody and acknowledged that” through supportive messages to staff from senior leaders. The HR team added “mental health things” and provided “constant reminders of all of the services that [were] available to employees.”

Sally described the “ongoing argument with the higher ups” around the hybrid remote working arrangements as “definitely a thing of it [organizational politics].” Some executive

leaders support “the argument that people are comfortable from home ... and getting their work done,” but other executive leaders are

totally concerned because they are old school...if people are not in the office, they are not working. The head of our organization, the President, and our Provost, the two largest positions in the institution, [are] here every single day. If they had their druthers, all of us would be back to work 100% because that’s how they like to operate.

She noted that hybrid working arrangements initially served to “ease people back to work, [but] you can’t put the genie back in the bottle.” Sally predicted:

unless you can show, from a financial or some tangible way, that we didn’t do as well because people weren’t physically here in the office, it’s [gonna be] a hard argument to make. I think what they’re going to find is if they said, ‘OK, everybody needs to be back to work full time,’ we would start to see a lot more people leaving for jobs where they could be hybrid.

Wes

Wes lives on the East Coast of the United States and has been a software developer and project manager for about 15 years. He frequently leads teams of 4-6 people to complete assigned projects, though he does not directly supervise all project team members according to traditional organizational chart hierarchy. Before the pandemic quarantine, he “always worked in an office, so I’ve never worked at home full time or anything like that. And most of my immediate team would be in the office with me.”

Although Wes’s organization employs over 8,000 people globally, his role required relatively limited use of video conferencing before the pandemic and more frequently involved audio phone calls or “traveling to go visit people in other locations.” The organization had no

official remote working policy. In fact, Wes maintained that “the idea of working primarily remotely ... was looked down upon ... only doled out for specific situations ... and definitely wasn’t the norm.” When asked if he considered himself resistant to working or supervising others remotely, Wes stated that he “didn’t really have feelings one way or another. If COVID hadn’t forced me, I probably wouldn’t have actively pursued it.”

Wes worked remotely as a project manager with this global organization for about a year after the pandemic began. As quarantine conditions continued, in November 2021, Wes accepted a new position as the director of technology with a small nonprofit organization in the United States. His new role requires working as a remote supervisor of remotely working direct reports in a growing nonprofit organization that “actually want(s) to hire everyone remote. There’s about 16 of us full time and then there’s a bunch of other people who are kind of contractors. Everyone is kind of everywhere but in the U.S. only.” For the past few months, Wes has been working to initiate and develop relationships with direct reports using technology under remote working conditions.

COVID-Related Remote Working Experience

When the quarantine began, all employees in Wes’s global organization took laptops and worked from home. After about 6 months, senior leaders determined that “fully remote ... is going to be the new norm” for the entire organization. Wes noted that he “had no intention of leaving” the global organization, particularly in the middle of a pandemic. However, the CEO of the nonprofit organization had been a client of Wes’s about 6 years ago and approached him to determine his interest in the newly created role. Although he was “being treated very well” at the global organization, Wes held concerns about a perceived shift in the type of future work he

would be doing based on recent organizational acquisitions, and “there was a compensation aspect, too. The offer was a little too good to pass up!”

Experiences With Trust in Employees. Wes said he remembered thinking intentionally very early in his leadership career about how he wanted his direct reports to feel. He wanted employees to realize “the trust I have in them that they’re actually getting the job done.” He recognized that many of the leaders he has worked with throughout his career focused on deadlines rather than “watching over their employees.” He considered that those experiences “probably trained me in essence to be less of a micromanager. Micromanagers would struggle very, very hard in this [remote] environment,” he observed.

Performance Capability. Calling himself “the opposite of a micromanager,” Wes explained that even when co-located with his direct reports, he is not one of those people that walks around and checks that this person is there and they’re working on that. Instead of, ‘Are they at their desk at this moment and are they doing X, Y, and Z at this moment?’, I’m much more about, ‘Hey, can you have them by this date or that time?’

Since he focuses on output and deadlines rather than physical presence at certain times, he realizes that “if they have to go do some things in the middle of the day and then get it done at night, that’s totally fine as long as they get the task done.”

Even though he had not supervised remotely working employees before the pandemic, Wes credited his successful remote supervision experience to the foundation of systems and framework established by his organizational role as a software development project manager. When the global organization mandated working remotely, no workflow tracking needed adaptations because the technology to support those tasks was already in place. These systems

allowed Wes to continue focusing on supporting work/life balance, maintaining, and proactively problem-solving with the team rather than scrambling to make productivity measurement adaptations.

Employee Willingness to Prioritize Organizational Goals. Wes recognized that making connections and establishing trusting work relationships without being co-located posed his “first challenge” when moving to his new organization. Since he did not know any of his direct reports, Wes utilized “group meetings as well as one-on-ones to see how ... they’ve worked in the past before I got here, ... see what they like to do, and then who they are personally. I think that makes a big difference.” As relationships built between Wes and his new team, he recognized that his direct reports “are three very hard-working people. I don’t worry about that.” Though he did not change how he monitored productivity, Wes felt he also needed a sense of their work pace, style, and ability to prioritize. To reinforce his support for work/life balance, Wes intentionally used a “more of a next day, ‘How much did you get through?’ and ‘What kinds of things did you get through?’” approach. Instead of tracking them daily, he preferred to explore “how they are balancing out their day...[and] how they’re managing the time toward outcomes across the entire week.”

Particularly during the COVID-related quarantine, Wes prioritized his support for employees’ healthy work/life balance and its’ benefit for the organization. He realized that people clearly “have different levels of awareness on this” because some employees “don’t create work/life balance for themselves if I’m not creating that environment for them.” He said,

one of the things I do when I first take over a team is tell them I don’t want any of you to work overtime on a regular basis. If you have a doctor’s appointment, just put it on your

calendar and go. Don't tell me—just go do it. Do the things you have to do. Pick up your kid. Walk the dogs. Exercise.

It's not about how many hours you put in...and not about whether it's remote and you're physically at your computer versus in office. It's more about getting a manageable amount of work done right and making outcomes.

Experiences Influencing Self-Efficacy in Managerial Role. Although he was not supervising his direct reports remotely before the pandemic, Wes had used Zoom video conferencing technology periodically as a software development project manager to communicate and coordinate with globally distributed teammates across multiple time zones. He reflected that “it was almost like I was being prepped in a way for what was coming” and observed that “unless you were someone like me who worked in that type of environment, the whole COVID thing would be much more of a shock.”

When reflecting on his first experience working remotely as a supervisor, Wes commented that “this is a perfect example of where technology has actually been an enabler.” He maintained that

I can sit in front of 10 people and have a discussion or brainstorm, I can chat over Teams even better than email. I can get someone's attention right away and then pop up a video call and talk real quick—just like stopping by their desk.

Even over the past five years, technology is so much better now. I can do basically all the things I would do [in the office].

Role Identity, Ambiguity, and Conflict. When Wes changed organizations, he realized that his “biggest challenge” would be the need to establish his identity as a remotely supervising leader. He observed that

it's not like I can sit down in the office or go have coffee with the person [to] form the relationship. I've had to do that over video. That hasn't always been the norm for me. Typically [they] would be sitting next to me, and I could have banter with them throughout the day.

To facilitate relationship development, Wes intentionally expanded the use of Teams. His new organization used Teams "very sparingly and really just for video meetings," so he set up additional structures to use the technology more fully. He modeled and encouraged company-wide participation from everyone by sharing "things. If I read an article or a book or something like that, I like to share those things that are relevant to the people I work with."

Interestingly, Wes realized his fully remote environment made identifying daily patterns, preferences, habits, and expectations of new coworkers more difficult. He explained that when you start a new job in an office, you're figuring out peoples' personal space, the people that like to have their quiet times and when those are In an office space, you can visually see those cues, and it's maybe a little bit easier ...to know when and how to interact with people. I don't have that luxury of looking around the office [to do that].

He realized he would "have to be a little bit more forward to learn those things about them, because how else would I know?" and attributed the successful creation of colleague relationships in the organization to the thorough use of Teams.

Since the leaders at his global organization determined that remote working conditions would be "the new normal," Wes did not experience the middle manager role conflicts that the hybrid "return to work" conditions imposed on Dorothy and Sally. As he reflected on the struggle centering around organizational hybrid work policies, Wes acknowledged that

we can't go back to the days when our employees didn't know they could be successful at home. People's mentality needs to change. [Organizations] have to change the way that they set goals or measurements on peoples' performance. It can't be just time sheets [and] counting the number of heads at their desks.

Perceptions of Organizational Support/Politics. Employees and organizational leaders often have conflicting expectations, and Wes appreciated his global organization's employee-supportive responses. He praised the executive leadership for establishing "the precedent that you need to do what you need to do for your family first." Noting that because the senior leaders set these expectations, Wes proposed that managers were better able to follow them to support employees successfully. In contrast, he pointed out that his wife's organization

was not very flexible. The owners of the company constantly had this message of 'This business is our life. If I work this hard, everyone else needs to.' That's great-that's how they live. But it's a job for everyone else, right? And people have to be treated respectfully. They need to be given freedom to meet their needs too. It starts from the top down.

He also credited his global organizations' successful shift to fully remote working to their earlier organizational agile transformation. Even their software development processes shifted, and Wes believed "that made it a lot easier for leaders to keep track of what was being worked on by the product teams and tech teams." The workflow processes, combined with his experiences leading globally distributed teams, led Wes to observe that "essentially, even when we switched to fully remote during a pandemic, I still [did] the exact same thing."

Wes speculated that multiple political components contributed to his global organization's successful transition to making remote working "the new normal." He noted that

in the previous three years, the company survived a merger, new management, and had gone public with stock offerings. Technology and workflow processes compatible with remote working were already established when the pandemic quarantine began, so the initial transition occurred relatively easily. As pandemic conditions were extended,

they knew that this was going to be a long-term thing, so they offered a stipend for equipment like desks, extra monitors, chairs, making sure everyone had an appropriate work environment at home. They ended up closing a bunch of offices. Originally there were like 60-70 offices, and they left globally about 10-20 offices open. So, they were saving money on rent and stuff.

Wes reported that the organization rolled all of these changes into their “new sustainability program, doing a really good job” messaging the environmental, diversity, equity and inclusion, and financial benefits to employees. Because the communication with employees was “very open,” Wes believed employees were very supportive of the decisions made by the organizational leaders.

The supervision experiences and stories of my co-composers Dorothy, Sally and Wes combine with my experiences and research to form the foundation for exploring similarities and differences among them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although the identified threads of remote supervision resistance (i.e., managers’ trust for employee productivity, managers’ self-efficacy including technology self-efficacy, and managers’ perceptions of organizational support/politics) influence each story told, their influence varies between participants as well as over time. The next chapter presents reflections of the participants’ experiences framed within identified research themes from literature.

Chapter 5: Reflections on Emerging Themes

Despite the advantages of teleworking practice for both organizations and employees, many managers have denied teleworking arrangements for employees. Without developing a greater understanding of managers' resistance to supervising teleworking employees, the full range of potential benefits from teleworking will be impossible to capture. This narrative inquiry study explored the lived experiences of managers mandated to teleworking supervision practices during COVID-19 quarantine conditions. Though narrative inquiry stories change as they are told and retold and do not present "one singular story we can tell," enhanced trustworthiness and more profound understanding emerge from their thick descriptions and rich details (Clandinin, 2013, p. 205). This chapter compares the stories told to literature findings, presents reflections on emerging themes, and proposes recommendations for practice and future research.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature

Prior to COVID-19 conditions, extant literature illustrated that managers might choose to restrict teleworking based on a lack of trust for employee productivity, decreased self-efficacy and increasing role conflicts, and uncertainty resulting from perceptions of organizational support or politics. Managers made decisions and could avoid actual trials of teleworking supervision. However, once COVID-19 related quarantines were mandated, most midlevel managers could no longer accept or reject remote supervision. The research participants discussed their involuntary teleworking supervision condition experiences with specific consideration of the earlier literature indications about their trust in employees, self-efficacy, and perceptions of organizational support and politics.

Managers' Trust in Employees

Trust, the “willingness to be vulnerable,” forms the foundation of effective leadership (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Kim et al., 2018; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Schoorman et al., 2007). Managers' perception of trust for employees combines one's individual tendency to trust (dispositional trust) with perceptions of employee trustworthiness (Mayer et al., 1995). Research reveals that managers' trust for employees emerges from perceptions about an employee's performance capability combined with perceptions about employees' willingness to prioritize organizational goals or needs above self-centered needs (Martinez-Tur et al., 2019; Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2015).

Dorothy's Experiences. Though Dorothy developed trust perceptions based on employees' performance when co-located, she had to trust her team to rebuild faculty support under remote working conditions. After the negative faculty survey results emerged, Dorothy initiated trust-rebuilding activity plans, but she worried about one inexperienced employee's capability to perform, fretting that the employee did not “really know the faculty ...or what to anticipate because [the employee] hasn't been there for a full year of work [yet].” She also worried the employee would be less motivated without being co-located due to fewer “interactions with either other staff members or faculty.” She began holding activity update meetings with employees and found that the employee did “all the things that we talked about,” asking Dorothy almost daily for three months, “Can you give me more ideas? This is what I've tried. This is how I've addressed this. They're still not coming to me. What next?” Her employee's proactive approach and conscientiousness through the process conducted entirely remotely genuinely surprised Dorothy.

On the other hand, in her meetings with an employee Dorothy perceived as a “superstar,” the responses to her inquiries about trust-building activity were vague and general. Despite the ambiguity, based on past outstanding performance, she trusted that the employee was working toward improvement. After several months of working remotely, Dorothy received “some anonymous information that [the employee] was not working for us, but ... [doing] personal website work.” Dorothy was horrified to discover that “for the entire year that we were mostly remote... [the employee] had done like 36 hours of work!” This experience definitely supported research findings that reduced levels of direct oversight allow teleworking employees to engage in more work irrelevant behavior (Holland et al., 2016) and compounded her fears about employee conscientiousness when face-to-face contacts decrease (Golden & Eddleston, 2020; Holland et al., 2016; Kaplan et al., 2018; Laulie et al., 2019; van der Lippe & Lippenyi, 2019).

As Dorothy struggled to adapt the relational leadership coaching activities she performed in person (like “pop-in’s” for spontaneous training opportunities) to the remote work setting, she reported she did not “feel connected to my group or my team anymore. [Feelings of isolation] were front of mind for me...sitting at my home with my two cats.” Although she successfully supported her inexperienced employee, she maintained that “it feels like I’m not doing my job.” She reported worrying about the impact of her reduced effectiveness on the overall productivity of the entire team (Lembrechts et al., 2019). I suspected feeling “emotionally taxed” combined with the painful “superstar” experience reduced her willingness to be vulnerable and trust others and contributed to “negative evaluations of [her] own effectiveness” (Kaplan et al., 2018, p. 366).

Dorothy stated that before working remotely, her trust for employees and their productivity centered on her observations rather than a documentable workflow process. When

co-located observation opportunities disappeared, she discovered she had to rely on employee self-reporting for determining productivity. I wondered if Dorothy's dissatisfaction with her remote working performance resulted from feeling forced to subordinate relational coaching activities to identifying productivity without co-located observation. Birkinshaw et al. (2021) proposed that because remote working conditions expose challenging aspects of their work, managers struggling in the remote environment tend to become "more task focused at the expense of relationship building" (p. 6). Dorothy's time and energy could have been invested in building, maintaining, and strengthening the trust and coaching relationships with remotely working employees if another system for determining productivity existed.

Navigating organizational hybrid remote working policies and guidelines presented additional challenges for Dorothy. Laurie et al. (2019) noted that managers who report intense awareness and consideration for maintaining fairness and justice between team members struggle to adapt to personalized remote working policies based on concerns about how individualized agreements can impact the team as a whole. Dorothy reported that she still struggles to find the balance with her team. She wants to "meet people's needs, preferably the way they need [me] to meet them, but I also am [responsible for] setting boundaries and setting up expectations." She noted that

I do have enough staff to allow some to work fully remote while others work fully onsite, but either way, I have employees that are unhappy.... My challenge is in keeping the negative controlled. That negativity can really start to spread, so I'm aware of that and I'm trying to make sure the staff are OK and not causing issues. A lot of my time is spent thinking about it.

As she mulled over her COVID-19 quarantine experience, she identified feeling “like I’m doing a bunch of triage...looking at [the staff as a unit] as this individual with this individual situation and managing these individual faculty members. That’s not satisfying to me as a manager.” When she summarized her leadership takeaway about trust from this remote supervisory experience, she emphatically stated, “I have to change my mode of managing and supervising,” and reflected that maybe leadership has to become more individualized in a hybrid environment. As she observed, “There’s not a ‘one size fits all’ anymore.” Although Dorothy mused about individualized arrangements in a hybrid environment, I wonder if the organizational effort to “individualize” remote work options increased her struggle. She worked so hard to satisfy all the stakeholders, but with the ambiguous remote option, Dorothy found herself in an ongoing negotiating position with employees, increasing the demands on her energy resources. With a clearer organizational hybrid working policy (such as Sally’s), remote working option decisions could rest directly with employees, bypassing Dorothy and eliminating that ongoing demand.

Sally’s Experiences. Sally indicated that she was “initially very concerned” about employees’ productivity and conscientiousness at the early stages of the COVID-19 quarantine. Like Dorothy, she based her expectations about remote performance for her previously co-located employees on her direct observations of their in-person productivity. However, Sally soon recognized her own “paradigm shift.” She realized that assuming employees are working because they can be seen sitting at a desk is an illusion, acknowledging that

I could be sitting [there] watching Netflix...[or] just playing solitaire.” Now I’m like, ‘I don’t know why I was thinking about what they are doing [when working remotely]

because what are they doing all day when they're sitting in an office [where I can see them]?'

She determined that a remote working environment allows “some flexibility but then that also means you need to be accountable as an employee. When there are [job roles] that are not so measurable, how do we make sure things are getting done?” Sally accomplished shifting “from managing face time to managing performance [activities]” by addressing the need for support staff output accountability and documentation during remote working (Kim & Lee, 2021, p. 269). Sally and her team worked together to outline specific communication expectations for remote working conditions, including email response times, meeting protocols, and more detailed data on calendar entries.

I pondered Sally's successful incorporation of increased technology usage. Henderikx and Stoffers (2022) proposed that to successfully adapt to digital transformation, “middle managers must become digitally intelligent,” understanding and making use of the power of technology “beyond just computer skills” (p. 13). Sally saw that implementing additional technology increased their success. Replacing conference phone calls with Zoom video calls “changed the [collaborative] relationships, so we are all working much better.” The increased usage of technology to establish improved productivity measurability did not appear to intensify perceptions of excessive monitoring leading to decreasing job satisfaction, despite Dolce et al.'s (2020) suggestion that technology-enabled excessive monitoring (e.g., Zoom meetings or Teams communication channels) contributes to employees' increased exhaustion and decreasing well-being/job satisfaction. I suspected that Sally's team-inclusive approach to finding solutions, combined with clearly identified purposes for implementing practices, provided the support needed to overcome any increase in employee dissatisfaction.

Navigating organizational hybrid remote working policies and guidelines also presented additional challenges for Sally. Like Dorothy, Sally acknowledged, “it’s very difficult. You want to be equitable. You want to give people what they need.” As Laurie et al. (2019) noted, managers strongly concerned with fairness and justice between team members grapple with tailoring remote working policies based on concerns about their impact on the team as a whole, but Sally managed the struggle differently than Dorothy. Dorothy’s vague organizational remote policy resulted in broad inconsistencies in implementation, contributing to increased employee perceptions of inequity, while Sally’s organizational remote policy offered less latitude and greater implementation consistency. While Dorothy focused on finding solutions for individual employees’ preferences, Sally concentrated on potential team benefits that necessitated advocating for personal changes.

For example, she requested that fundraisers be permitted to work fully remotely after considering the job functions required for the donation solicitor role, justifying the need based on established organizational priorities rather than employee preferences. Sally pointed out that while she prefers to operate within the hybrid policy of 3 days/week or entirely onsite, she willingly fights for other requests that clearly illustrate a need. As long as employees can justify a variance request, “I will go to HR and make the argument as to why we need to operate outside of policy.”

By engaging her staff as her teammates in brainstorming solutions to meet the identified goals instead of breaking into more siloed sub-teams putting herself as the central hub, Sally made herself vulnerable to the team. However, by increasing the frequency of social exchanges for everyone, she expanded trust-building opportunities across the entire team (Colquitt et al., 2007; Hanna et al., 2019). As the team worked together through increased levels of social

exchange to pursue their pre-COVID quarantine fundraising goals, Sally's level of trust for her team and their performance continued to grow (Alarcon et al., 2018; Bande et al., 2019; Gill et al., 2005). I considered the possibility that Sally's preference for collaborative problem-solving may also have supported team members' increased risk-taking during COVID-19 conditions, further facilitating increasing trust-building opportunities between all team members.

Wes's Experiences. In contrast to Dorothy and Sally, Wes reported he had no concerns about employee productivity or conscientiousness when shifting to remote working supervision. Although he had no prior experience supervising his direct reports remotely, his role as a project manager helped him establish ways to communicate and monitor productivity with coworkers who were not co-located. Wes reflected that when he and his team began working remotely, "there was already technology in place. We already used Teams. Everybody had a laptop. We had ticketing software. We were all using that already, so that part was already in place and fortunate for us."

However, about a year and a half after the pandemic quarantine began, Wes accepted a position with a new organization whose employees were all working remotely. He recognized that he needed to focus on gaining the trust of his new direct reports differently in a remote environment, and he would need to find ways to trust his direct reports differently as well (Brower et al., 2009). To establish new working relationships in a fully remote environment, Wes intentionally initiated social exchanges via technology communication tools such as Teams and Slack. He reported that

in the beginning, I did a lot of just listening. I listened to how they [my direct reports] got along. I tried to pick up on what types of jokes, how much can humor come in play because I think that's really important to the work. How can I inject that into chat

conversation? I tried to look for those cues, and then once I kind of felt comfortable, I started interjecting myself into their conversations. I think that was very helpful.

Wes's risk-taking willingness and vulnerability influenced his decision to intentionally build trust with his employees and others through social exchanges (Alarcon et al., 2018; Bande et al., 2019; Gill et al., 2005). He reported that "when I first got here, I didn't see chat or areas where you could ask immediate questions for projects or tasks. It was really quiet. I had to leverage Teams to create that banter." As the social exchanges between Wes and his direct reports increased, he noted that

over time, they [started] coming to me and saying, 'Hey, I was thinking of doing this.

This is the way we always did it in the past. Now that you're our leader, what would you recommend that we do if we are looking to change it?' Once they started asking me for help, I knew the trust had been put there.

Wes's experiences illustrate that increased social exchanges allow for increased opportunities for the display of trustworthy behavior (Hanna et al., 2019) and increased efforts by employees to reciprocate the trust extended by the manager (Gill et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018; Skiba & Wildman, 2018). He recognized improved communication, information sharing, and increasing engagement on his team (Martinez-Tur et al., 2019), contrasting with Dolce et al.'s (2020) suggestion that managers who engage in technology-enabled excessive monitoring (e.g., Zoom meetings or Teams communication channels) contribute to employees' increased exhaustion and decreasing well-being/job satisfaction. I wonder how employee exhaustion and job satisfaction would be influenced if organizations trained managers to use technology-enabled communication such as Teams channels specifically for trust and relationship-building opportunities rather than productivity monitoring.

Trust as a Job Resource

Employee trustworthiness and conscientiousness serve as managers' job resources. Dorothy's experience revealed her dependency on direct observation of co-located employees to supply the job resource of trust for employee productivity (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015; Laulie et al., 2019; van der Lippe & Lippenyi, 2019), while Sally was able to make the shift "from managing face time to managing [employee] performance" using results-based performance evaluation during remote working conditions (Kim & Lee, 2021). Wes developed trust for new employees entirely remotely, without any prior direct observation.

As I thought about each participant's COVID-19 remote supervision experience and considered job demands and resources, I contemplated Wes's existing resources for tracking productivity. Since the existing systems were technology-driven, Wes's ability to evaluate employee productivity remained unchanged during remote supervision conditions. Without additional demands to adapt the existing resource for remote supervision conditions, he was able to apply his efforts and energy to continue extending trust with employees through enhanced social relationships.

While Sally utilized results-based productivity systems with her fundraising staff prior to shifting to remote supervision, she faced the challenge of adapting productivity activities to mandated COVID-19 protocols. She noted that after the initial check-in calls to alumni, their team "moved more into the virtual visit space." Although virtual visits are cost-effective, "it's really hard to do virtual with people you don't know at all...so [we are] looking for adaptations, like seeing faculty and staff, taking them out to lunch and making sure they're in commitments [to donate]." Sally recognized that she and her team were in a much better position to continue meeting their productivity goals "because we count. We count numbers for everything like how

many visits, how many proposals...we're a counting group." Sally's team's goals remained unchanged—only the activities to reach them needed changing.

Thinking about Dorothy's remote supervision difficulties made me wonder if her struggle was exacerbated by the lack of a transparent, previously established, results-based accountability process for determining employee productivity. Dorothy's staff did not use systematic tracking or documentation processes when co-located to document productivity. Without a work product tracking system, she had to depend exclusively on self-reporting from her staff without documentation expectations or training when her resource (i.e., the ability to observe the activity of her staff directly) to document productivity dried up. The resulting demand created by the lack of her previous resource, coupled with the intense isolation she experienced during quarantine conditions, left Dorothy feeling frustrated, disengaged, and exhausted, "like I'm on the hamster wheel just keeping the thing going and we don't have time or bandwidth to ... look at this and sort of figure it out."

Contreras et al. (2020) proposed that "leadership transforms when interacting with [technologies]" (p. 4) and "...effective face-to-face communication may not be enough to lead in virtual environments, where these characteristics must be complemented with the skills to manage various virtual communications platforms" (p. 5). Dorothy willingly acknowledged her technology deficit at the outbreak of the COVID-19 quarantine, which compounded her inability to create an alternative productivity verification system with the team while working remotely. I wondered if she could have experienced a more successful adaptation to remote supervision if she had been able to replace her observational productivity evaluation practices and embrace the available technology platforms as tools for validating employee productivity, resulting in verifiable employee trustworthiness.

Managers' Self-Efficacy

Disruptive events affect managers' job self-efficacy, belief about one's "ability to exercise control over difficult job situations and successfully perform" (Schreurs et al., 2010, p. 61). Research indicates that the ease of use and perceived usefulness of technology influence managers' technology self-efficacy and impact managers' willingness to implement teleworking supervision (Kim & Lee, 2021; Molino et al., 2020; Prodanova & Kocarev, 2021; Silva et al., 2019). Carillo et al. (2020) proposed that managers' technology self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of successful adjustment to remote teleworking supervision when COVID-19 quarantine conditions made remote supervision mandatory. The study participants' experiences discussed the influence of technology self-efficacy.

Dorothy's Experiences. Dorothy recognized that she needed to improve technical skills on the team as technology continues to change, but "COVID really pushed the envelope on that because we had to change. It went from incremental learning and change to 'Oh, my gosh, everything has changed and everybody's gotta do it and it's gotta happen now!'" Although she was surprised, she "didn't get resistance from some technology averse people on [her] team," she confirmed that trying to support skills training for her staff "through the virtual environment [was] was emotionally taxing for everybody," illustrating that lower levels of technology self-efficacy and confidence increase levels of emotional fatigue (Almonacid-Nieto et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2021). Though Dorothy did not identify specific concerns about adverse outcomes resulting from technology usage (Prodanova & Kocarev, 2021), she confirmed that the "difficult transition" was compounded by the added stress of her feelings of isolation from her team (Kim & Lee, 2021; Molino et al., 2020; Prodanova & Kocarev, 2021).

Sally's Experiences. Although Sally acknowledged that she was initially concerned about what her staff would do when working remotely, she and the team worked hard to find opportunities to adapt their activity to quarantine restrictions while progressing toward their fundraising goals. She reported that the team successfully contacted existing donors, but it was “really hard” to make brand new fundraising contacts because

usually we can do that around conferences. We're hurting in that respect because we haven't done any [conferences]. At the medical convention held during the pandemic, we had some Zoom parties and reception things planned, and the Dean got on and said, ‘I don't want to upset you guys, but I doubt anybody's gonna come to this cause we're all Zoomed out from the classes all day.’ So that was like, ‘Oh yeah, this does not translate.

The on-site, in-person event does not translate to Zoom. We learned that.

Despite the COVID-19 quarantine, Sally and the team adapted to technology usage capably enough to meet their fundraising goals, supporting Carillo et al.'s (2020) finding that technology self-efficacy served as the strongest predictor of managers' successful adjustment to remote teleworking supervision.

Wes's Experiences. As he reflected, Wes acknowledged that even though he was not supervising his direct reports remotely prior to COVID-19 quarantine conditions, his role as a software development project manager required extensive communication and coordination with globally distributed teammates across multiple time zones. Wes did not have to focus on adapting workflow or monitoring employee output using technology during the COVID-19 related quarantine because electronic task management systems were already in place when the organization mandated working remotely. He observed that “unless you were someone like me who worked in that type of environment, the whole [remote] thing would be much more of a

shock.” Wes’s experience demonstrated that technology self-efficacy supported his remote supervision proficiency (Doargajudhur & Dell, 2020).

After moving to a new, fully remote position, Wes worked with operations in the new organization to set up more structures within Teams, like a company-wide water cooler area and various chat channels so people could “know what it is and know why to use it.” Wes’s experience “at his previous place” using technology to meet his needs positively influenced his self-perception of his performance capability (Doargajudhur & Dell, 2020) and supported his risk-taking willingness to leverage Teams capability in his new organization “to create relationships where you could have banter throughout the day or ask questions for immediate needs” (Jokisch et al., 2020).

Managers’ Role Identity/Ambiguity/Conflict

People use narratives to provide a framework to scaffold their concept of identity. Change disrupts existing narratives, so people use sensemaking to form new narratives that incorporate ongoing events into creating the new narrative (Vough et al., 2020). In organizations, managers often use sensemaking to clarify ambiguous or conflicting expectations accompanying organizational change. The three study participants described their sensemaking efforts as managers adapting to changes in their roles during COVID-19 quarantine conditions.

Dorothy. Dorothy explained that she “loves to talk to people. I like to help remove obstacles and help people be their best.” She affirmed that

in a perfect scenario, I’m in the office and they’re working on something and a lot of times, impromptu questions or conversations happen. It’s easier to see the invisible stuff when I’m on-site because I’m stopping in and talking to people. When we are remote, the staff don’t have obvious resources because they don’t see their coworker. Being remote,

they're like, 'Who do I ask? I don't want to look like a dummy,' so they struggle and spin their wheels.

Dorothy admitted she “was not at my best when it comes to being that leader. I feel like I was neglecting my responsibilities...failing because I'm not seeing [staff] anymore.” As a supervisor of remotely working employees, she fought to make sense of the disruptive changes and reorganize her identity as a successful coach and leader.

Ambiguous organizational expectations compounded Dorothy's struggle to make sense of and incorporate new remote supervision responsibilities (Evans, 2017). The organizational hybrid work policy of “65% staff coverage on site weekly” placed Dorothy in the role of policy implementer without a clear understanding of the policy's purpose. Inconsistent application across the organization created confusion and “crushed morale,” resulting in a relatively unsuccessful transmission to subordinates (Kieran et al., 2019).

As a part of her role as a middle manager, Dorothy experienced role conflicts resulting from inconsistent stakeholder expectations (Azambuja & Islam, 2019). She interpreted faculty survey responses to their perceptions that the support staff members “were unavailable and not doing their jobs” if they were not observable on site, which led her to her decision to offset that perception by determining that all staff members in faculty support staff roles were allowed to work remotely only three days per week. However, support staff members reported that “they don't ever need me when I'm there. Why do I have to be here on-site? I still do everything remotely, even from my office.” Dorothy herself sat on-site “for two weeks. Saw one faculty member a day. No one came to the office asking for any help [but] everything was [being done] electronic with the off-site people.” She revealed that the conflicting expectations and desires between faculty members and support staff present an ongoing unresolved struggle (Bolander et

al., 2019), yet she did not report considering any actions to clarify or reshape the faculty expectations when hybrid working practices were formed. How would her struggles have shifted if she had taken the remote/hybrid working conditions opportunity to create and communicate standardized expectations of available faculty support to employees and faculty stakeholders? Dorothy definitely agreed with findings by Shin et al. (2020), illustrating that conflicting stakeholder expectations lead to emotional exhaustion for managers, stating that “all my emotional reserves are being depleted.”

Sally. When navigating the changes demanded by COVID-19 quarantine conditions, Sally recognized that fundraising activities are “very measurable.” Though she is “super competitive” about reaching targeted outcomes, no one “knew what we were going to do” to address the challenges presented by COVID-19 quarantine restrictions. To make sense of the changes and rewrite her new narrative, Sally chose to collaborate with her team to find solutions. She treated the team members as partners and assets (“I have a great team and they’re just such good players that they don’t tend to fuss”), continuously acknowledging that “we did this” rather than “I did this. As a “sort of a hands-off person” who would rather ask, “What can I help you with?,” Sally supported her team’s creation and ownership of their solutions rather than creating solutions by herself and then issuing them to the team.

Sally faced little role ambiguity as the fundraising team leader because the organization identified measurable fundraising objectives. Even in the face of COVID-19 quarantine conditions, fundraising aims remained specific and transparent—only the methods to reach the targets had to change. Sally also benefitted from the “very strict” hybrid work policy enacted by her organization. She recalled that

before the policy came out about the hybrid situation of three days, it was more of a departmental determination of who comes in and when they come in. What was happening is that there were some departments that [decided] the entire department can continue to work from home. There were other departments where their supervisors wanted them all back, and they were very angry they didn't get this hybrid opportunity. That was the only blowback I remember hearing. In hindsight, that [blowback] may be one of the reasons the very strict policy got put into place.

After the organization-wide policy was implemented, Sally did not have to spend emotional energy making personalized or individual remote working decisions which reduced her level of emotional exhaustion (Shin et al., 2020).

Wes. Wes recognized himself as a capable project manager, adeptly using technology as an on-site supervisor. Once remote supervision of his reports became mandatory while working with his global organization, he found himself surprised that “it’s [still] very much about outcomes and task completion. I still do the exact same thing.” However, when Wes shifted to the nonprofit organization, he realized he needed to find new ways to build his identity in his new role in a fully remote environment. He leveraged the use of Teams by expanding the available channels for his immediate team and the entire company. He wanted to help coworkers understand his

perspective on things, where I come from, the things that interest me, and the things that I’m trying to bring to the organization. Sort of like, ‘Well, why did we hire Wes? Oh, *this* is the reason, because he’s bringing these other types of transformations within the company.’

Even though the position of director of technology was new for the nonprofit organization Wes joined, he had a clear picture of how he wanted to shape his role. He described being aware of using video technology to introduce himself to his coworkers, observing coworkers' existing relationships with each other, and identifying strengths and weaknesses in his team. He mentioned being aware of "something that was very different for me." He observed that when starting a new job in an office,

you're trying to figure out people's personal space, you know? Like the people that really like to have quiet time and when that is and who is in a meeting at 9:00 o'clock every day. Visually, you kind of subconsciously pick up on all those cues and it makes it easier, then, to know when and how to interact.

Wes realized that in his new, fully remote environment, he would need to "basically ask, 'Hey, when do you like to actually have conversations versus work time?'" to be aware of things like this he would otherwise learn from visual cues when co-located. By making intentional choices to shape his role, Wes avoided some of the negative impacts of role ambiguity.

While disparate expectations between organizational guidelines and employee preferences about hybrid work preferences resulted in role conflicts for Dorothy and Sally (to a lesser degree), Wes avoided this struggle altogether because both of his organizations opted to maintain entirely remote work environments. He acknowledged that the fully remote work environment supports his "strong belief in work/life balance" and allows him to model its' practice for his employees. Although it is difficult to establish,

it has to start at the top down by coaching leadership and managers. When employees are not burnt out about trying to manage work and life, they actually work better. Little

things build up and if you let your employees feel like that, then they're not going to be as close to 100% that you want them to be during the hours they're working.

Managers' Self-Efficacy, Role Identity, Ambiguity, and Conflict as Job Resources/Demands

A manager's level of awareness and understanding of self-efficacy, role identity, role ambiguity, and conflicting role priorities serve as both job resources and job demands. For Dorothy, her level of technology self-efficacy was less than adequate to serve as a resource to meet the job demands she perceived in remote supervision. Since Dorothy's resource of self-efficacy was lacking, her perception of her identity as an effective supervisor under remote conditions suffered, which contributed to her uncertainty of what to do (role ambiguity) under these unfamiliar circumstances. Clashing expectations of supervisors, direct reports, and organizational directives combined with self-insecurity, leading Dorothy to experience emotional exhaustion (Shin et al., 2020) from job energy demands that exceed available job energy resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Even before the COVID-19 mandated remote working quarantine began, Sally's and Wes's technology self-efficacy exceeded Dorothy's. As the job demands of remote working unfolded, Sally and Wes drew from their resources of technology self-efficacy and still maintained resource reservoirs. Dorothy's resource reservoir was rapidly fully depleted and created actual demands as remote conditions continued. I wondered if this single factor (technology self-efficacy) spilled over to influence role expectations (identity, ambiguity, and conflicts) enough to diminish their contributions as resources.

Managers' Perceptions of Organizational Support

When managers perceive that their organizations are supportive, they may feel obligated to "help the organization achieve its' goals and objectives" (Kurtessis et al., 2017, p. 1855) and

more successful change implementation results (Gigliotti et al., 2019). Many organizations and their managers faced COVID-19 quarantine mandated teleworking supervision implementation with little or no preparation. As organizations responded under those conditions, opportunities for employees to perceive support and organizational politics moved to the forefront. Each participant expressed the influence of organizational support and political practices on their implementation of remote supervision.

Dorothy. Initially, Dorothy expressed her appreciation for the organization's provision of any needed hardware while working at home, along with the confirmation from leaders that "we were not going to lay off anyone." She indicated that the IT department "went above and beyond" to support anyone with technical needs. She also praised the building services staff for establishing outstanding COVID safety protocols across the university as employees and students began to return to the physical site. These organizational efforts constituted the foundation of Dorothy's felt obligation to the organization during COVID-19 conditions.

However, as Dorothy began to navigate the return-to-work hybrid conditions, the isolation and strain of "trying to support our staff and our team [while] being forced to work remote was difficult on [her] mental health and ability to stay focused." She described feeling as though "all my emotional reserves were being depleted over that [first] year." Despite the organizational provision of necessary technology and building safety support, I noted that Dorothy's description of her experience illustrates a psychological contract breach (PCB) which occurs when managers believe the organization has not sufficiently met its obligations to incorporate change (Griep et al., 2020; Probst et al., 2020; Shi & Gordon, 2020). I credited the ambiguous 65% on-site staffing hybrid work policy as the tipping point leading to PCB, noting that her experience demonstrated support for meta-analysis research indicating reduced job

satisfaction (Zhao et al., 2007), mental health complaints (Griep et al., 2020), and lowered levels of engagement (Probst et al., 2020; Shi & Gordon, 2020) as a result of PCB.

Sally. Sally praised her organization, saying that “the leaders have done a lot of work around making us feel valued.” Specifically, the organization paid a bonus for the first time to all employees in addition to regular annual raises. The president recognized peoples’ financial hardships and acknowledged that “inflation was real, offering a one-time, cash out for [banked] vacation days” beyond two weeks’ worth. Sally especially appreciated hearing the “‘I appreciate you’s’ and the ‘We know you guys are doing a lot,’ especially from the executive leadership team to the other leaders.” She also felt that the HR team was very proactive, “putting out constant reminders of all of the services available so that people knew and understood that if you’re having trouble or if you can’t cope, there is help.”

These examples of organizational support may have increased Sally’s sense of felt obligation to the organization. Her feelings of obligation then fueled her efforts to support employee performance (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Shi & Gordon, 2020; Woznyj et al., 2017), as seen in the modifications she made to the on-site physical worksite spaces, such as redirecting on-site employees from common area cubicles to private offices formerly occupied by fundraisers who were assigned fully remote work conditions. Although Frear et al. (2018) theorized that managers may believe their felt obligations to the organization’s success require them to “be tough and demanding of subordinates” (p. 65), I believe Sally’s own admission of her “super competitive” nature contributed more than felt obligations toward her constant focus on “meeting the numbers, even during COVID [conditions].” When considering the increased performance documentation implemented by fundraising support employees working under remote conditions, Sally’s demands could stem from her recognition that “a lot more

accountability [is needed] for people in positions where what they do is not directly measurable” rather than from felt obligation to meet organizational goals as proposed by Zafari et al. (2019).

Wes. Wes described the organizational support he perceived from his global organization at the beginning of COVID-mandated remote conditions. He noted that he “was lucky. The organization ...already had Teams in place, everybody had a laptop, and we had ticketing tools. We were all using that already.” Wes reported that he felt the organization was “very open in their communication about things like ‘you don’t have to be at your desk from 9 to 5—just attend your meetings, get your work done, meet your goals. However, you do is up to you because you are in this new situation.” The organization also extended extra mental health support programs both through internal HR and third-party services and provided any necessary hardware for effective working at home. However, as Wes pointed out, “when they said this [remote working] is going to be the new norm, I still do the exact same thing.” In his experience, felt obligations for organizational support around remote working circumstances did not influence his treatment of his subordinates.

Managers’ Perceptions of Organizational Politics

Perceptions of organizational politics (POP) refer to employees’ subjective opinions about self-serving behaviors exhibited by other employees (Ferris et al., 2019). Landells and Albrecht (2019) identified “abuse of relationships, communication channels, resources, reputation, and decision-making” as behaviors that could be perceived as politically motivated and directly contributing to conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity in the workplace (p. 8). In this research, POP centered on the participants’ impressions of hybrid working conditions established by their organizations after the COVID-19 quarantines were lifted.

Dorothy. Dorothy admitted feeling frustrated and stressed when she attempted to determine reasonable remote working arrangements for her team within the ambiguous guidelines of the organization's "ridiculous 65% staffing on site" policy. She knew that "some people want to work five days remotely," but that desire was "not possible right now because we are a customer service organization and we found that faculty perceptions of us being available is very real." She acknowledged that she struggled to find a way to "meet people's needs, preferably the way they need [them met]," but settled on determining employees' "remote schedules by role, not necessarily by person or seniority." While most of her staff members "see the value of being on site for the faculty perception of us being available" and adapted well to the hybrid working expectations, some customer service staff members continued to petition to work fully remotely despite their role requirements. Dorothy reported that she still spends time rebutting staff justifications of "they don't ever need me when I'm there" and "I'm doing things remotely in my office, so why can't I just keep working at home as my remote location?"

Dorothy considered that the ambiguous organizational directive of "65% coverage" added to her struggle to get "buy in" from staff members who do not perceive the faculty perspective of on-site presence as relevant to their job responsibilities. She recognized that she wants staff to find the role and schedule that meets their needs, but another part of her feels pressure to say,

I want you to stay here, but if it's not working, the solution isn't for me to change and let you work five days a week from home. The solution for you personally is you need to make a hard decision. Are you willing to work three days on-site here, or are you going to look for another position somewhere that you can be five days remote?

For Dorothy, the political decision made for “65% on-site staff coverage per week” by the organization intensified the unpredictability of on-site staffing coverage and the ambiguity of staff performance, leading to her increasing levels of stress and anxiety (Cho & Yang, 2018; Haider et al., 2020; Landells & Albrecht, 2019; Webster et al., 2018). I wondered if the ongoing complaints by some of her staff (additional negative POP behaviors), even after Dorothy determined their team’s hybrid work schedules, might be a result of frustration and anger generated by the influence of POP on the original organizational decision, as proposed by Chinelato et al. (2020).

Sally. Though there was some pre-COVID discussion considering flex working scenarios, Sally noted that an organizational decision “never got signed off on before COVID hit.” Both the President and the Provost of the institution worked on site daily throughout quarantine conditions “because that’s how they like to operate.” Sally suspected that “if they had their druthers, all of us would be back to work [on-site] 100%” and proposed that the hybrid work policy is intended to gradually “ease people back to work [on-site].” According to her, claiming on-site employees are necessary to maintain productivity is “a hard argument to make because for two years I operated from home and got my job done.”

Although several organizational leaders recognize that “some people are comfortable from home and they’re doing their jobs,” Sally predicted that if top leaders did require all employees to be back on-site full-time, employees would perceive that directive as pursuing goals for personal gain in place of those that benefit the organization (political behavior), according to Hochwarter et al. (2020). She predicted those POP would lead to increased feelings of hostility (Meisler et al., 2020), and “we would start to see a lot more people leaving for jobs where they could be hybrid.”

Wes. Neither of Wes's organizations (the global one or the nonprofit one) established hybrid working arrangements in response to COVID-19 quarantine conditions. Leaders of the global organization sent all employees home during the initial lockdown period and then determined to remain fully remote as quarantines began lifting. The leadership of the nonprofit organization Wes joined about a year after the COVID lockdown began established fully remote working conditions intentionally from the beginning. Wes did not have any personal experience with POP around establishing hybrid work arrangements as an organizational participant.

Organizational Support and Politics as Job Resources and Demands

Some supports provided by the organization during COVID-19 mandated remote working conditions served as job resources for the managers. All study participants praised their organizations for providing technology hardware and software needed for remote working, along with increased wellness support and mental health offerings. Sally and Wes also mentioned noticing increased expressions of gratitude and appreciation for employees' efforts from the senior organizational leadership. Sadly, Dorothy did not report recognizing any expressions of employee appreciation from her organization's top leaders.

All three managers indicated they felt their organizations encouraged their efforts to be supportive of subordinates (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Shi & Gordon, 2020; Woznyj et al., 2017); however, as hybrid work arrangements developed and were implemented in the organizations, at least one managers' POS changed (Arneguy et al., 2018; Gigliotti et al., 2019). For Dorothy, the hybrid work arrangements intended as a job resource offered by the organization morphed into an energy-draining job demand for her as her employees continued to press for changes in decisions about the hybrid work schedules she was forced to make. She considered the "65%" decision a "political" one because top leaders failed to apply or enforce

the policy uniformly across the organization, resulting in grumbling, unhappy employees and increasing energy demands from her to contain “the negatives.”

As hybrid working conditions (a job demand for Dorothy) continued, Dorothy’s POS and job resources became overstretched and then depleted. According to COR theory, Hobfoll et al. (2018) proposed that when managers’ resources are overstretched or exhausted, they may display aggressive or irrational behaviors, and Liu and Liu (2018) reported that during times of uncertainty and change, some managers engage in abusive behavior toward subordinates as part of efforts to reacquire resources, power, or control. Although her responses to decreased resources and POP never led her to display “deviant behaviors unfavorable to the organization” (Crawford et al., 2019, p. 95), Dorothy expressed that the “energy drain from managing COVID-required conditions left me done. I’m just done.”

Sally also viewed the hybrid work policy in her organization as political, but her POS remained intact. Despite the top leaders’ preferences for a fully on-site workforce, Sally expressed confidence that “there are several [leaders] who will say we need to survey folks [before just going back to normal]. There’s enough scientists here and we have enough psychology folks to make the argument [for data gathering].” I wondered if the more specific hybrid work arrangement of Tuesday and Wednesday plus one more day in the office minimized stress and uncertainty for Sally in contrast to the “65%” hybrid work arrangement adopted in Dorothy’s organization which she credited with amplifying her struggles and job demands.

Neither of Wes’s organizations implemented hybrid working practices, choosing instead to convert to fully remote worksite conditions. Wes reflected that he was unaware of anyone who preferred working on-site within either of his organizations, and he mused that “anyone who preferred working fully on site would probably have just found another job. That would be pretty

easy to do.” I thought about his point and wondered how employees who desired on-site work but were required to continue remotely working adapted to those circumstances.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is the small sample size of three participants, two of which are in the same higher education sector. A broader range of industries would enhance understanding of industry-specific remote working challenges. Additionally, gender and racial-based influences remain unaddressed by the study. Thirdly, although none of the three had previous experience supervising employees remotely prior to mandatory COVID-19 conditions, only one participant had the opportunity to refuse remote supervision practice voluntarily. Exploring the experiences of managers who willingly resisted the choice of remote supervision prior to being forced to implement it would add additional insights into managers’ resistance. Furthermore, the stories and experiences shared are unique to these three research participants and me, framed by COVID-19-induced specific circumstances.

Implications

Before the 2020 pandemic, many managers avoided supervising remotely working employees despite evidence of benefits to organizations and employees (Kazekami, 2020; Wang et al., 2019). Reasons managers voluntarily resist supervising teleworking employees include a lack of trust in employee productivity (Kaplan et al., 2018), managers’ technology self-efficacy (Carillo et al., 2020), and perceptions of organizational support and politics (Gigliotti et al., 2019; Haider et al., 2020). However, COVID-19-mandated quarantine conditions eliminated managers’ voluntary implementation of remote supervision, forcing unwilling implementation for many. This study explored managers’ mandatory remote supervision experiences to

contribute toward a greater understanding of the influence and impact of the reasons for resistance.

Lack of Trust in Employee Productivity

One reason frequently cited for managers' voluntary remote supervision resistance includes the lack of trust for employee productivity when working remotely. When Wes reflected on remote working employee trustworthiness, he indicated that because the organization's workflow "ticketing system" provided more measurable evidence of employee trustworthiness than his co-located observations could offer, he felt no concerns about the trustworthiness of remotely working compared to co-located employees. Sally acknowledged that determining the productivity of remote employees with measurable performance indicators (e.g., fundraisers) was much easier than identifying productive output from the administrative support staff's less quantifiable roles. She added that "you have to adapt your management support for [support staff employees] since they're someone in a role where someone has to give them work. But good managers always know what their employees [remotely working or co-located] are working on."

Dorothy did not express having concerns about remotely working employees' trustworthiness prior to mandatory COVID-19 remote conditions. However, her unpleasant experience with her "superstar" revealed her almost exclusive reliance on direct observation to determine employee productivity, and she found herself unable to establish an effective alternative way to track or determine employee productivity. Combined with all the other energy demands required by remote employee supervision, Dorothy became overwhelmed and determined that leaving the organization was the best decision for herself, the staff, and the organization. These participant experiences demonstrate that resistant managers can overcome

their perceptions of lack of trust in remotely working employees' productivity by implementing explicitly documented workflows, performance expectations, and productivity measures.

Self-Efficacy

Literature also suggests that self-efficacy concerns, particularly technology self-efficacy, can increase managers' resistance to supervising remotely working employees. Dorothy confessed to not fully using the technology capabilities to which the team had access (e.g., Zoom and the Google suite of products for educators) even prior to beginning remote working conditions and recognized this significant technology gap that compounded the obstacles of remote working and reinforced her decreasing self-efficacy.

In contrast, Sally's and Wes's technology self-efficacy elevated from serving as a tool in their quivers as co-located managers to a vital resource for successful remote supervision. Sally fought to convert face-to-face fundraising activities to technology platforms effectively during the mandatory COVID-19 quarantine. However, she used the technology application obstacle as an opportunity for the team to find a collaborative solution, which in turn supported Sally's self-efficacy as a technology solution facilitator. Wes employed technology self-efficacy as an unexpected remote supervision resource. After joining the new organization, he realized he needed to initiate, develop, and maintain all of his new work relationships remotely, so he applied his mastery of Teams capabilities. He enhanced technology efficacy in the entire organization by modeling new ways to use Teams for coworkers. These participant experiences align with previous research findings that managers' technology proficiency and self-efficacy support successful remote supervision practice.

Perceptions of Organizational Support and Politics

Research findings point to perceptions of organizational support or politics as influences on managers' voluntary resistance to supervising teleworking employees, but these research participant experiences suggest that clearly defined and communicated organizational policies and practices significantly impact organizational performance. Wes's organization pivoted to remote working conditions almost seamlessly. After about 6 months under quarantine conditions, the leadership team determined that remote working was profitable and declared it the "new normal" for everyone moving forward.

In contrast, Dorothy's organization failed to clearly define, establish, or communicate organizational remote/hybrid policies and practices, leaving her struggling to make sense of the ambiguous "65%" organizational hybrid working conditions policy. The ongoing demands to renegotiate remote working arrangements by some staff members continue to siphon time and energy from Dorothy and the employees, illustrating one impact of inadequate organizational support on remote working supervision success. These experiences imply that managers struggle during remote/hybrid supervision practice without the organizational support of the well-defined and consistent application of remote/hybrid working organizational policies.

Recommendations for Practical Application

Measurable productivity accountability, such as Wes's ticketing system and Sally's goal for fundraisers, can replace managers' reliance on co-located observation of employees to determine productivity while supplying documentable evidence of employees' productivity and performance trustworthiness. Wes credited the ticketing system with his successful transition to remote supervision. He observed that because the system was already in place when the employees were co-located, activities to determine employee productivity "did not change when

working remotely,” providing additional stability during changing conditions. Sally’s realization that the support staff needed more structure led to collaborative suggestions made by the staff that established expectations of productivity, like email response time boundaries and enhanced calendar documentation visible to the entire team. She noted that not only did the staff benefit from the stronger communication from collaborative solution-finding under remote supervision conditions, but her energy depletion was minimized. Organizations and managers should strongly consider establishing documentable productivity measures to support successful remote working experiences for all employees.

Managers also need the organizational support of the well-defined and consistent application of remote/hybrid working organizational policies for successful remote supervision. Dorothy’s experience illustrates the importance of clear organizational policy universally applied. She battled conflicting expectations from all sides as she attempted to support the productivity, engagement, and retention of individual employees who preferred working entirely remotely while feeling the obligation to distribute on-site staffing assignments equitably across her team and remain in compliance with organizational policies. As she pointed out, “trying to please everybody pleases nobody and exhausts me!”

In Sally’s organization, the initial remote/hybrid working policy of “two days per week” created some “blowback,” complaints within various departments, so the organization quickly adjusted to adopt an across-the-board, very specific policy allowing “everybody on-site Tuesday, Wednesday, and one other day of your choice.” Organizational leaders then communicated that any requested exceptions to the policy would be evaluated and approved through an HR committee on a case-by-case basis. Sally reported that after this policy was established, she heard no more complaints about remote working options across the organization.

Wes's organization supported the transition to remote working most successfully. He indicated that within a few months of the mandated quarantine conditions, leaders determined that employees would remain working exclusively remotely in the organization's "new normal." Wes remembered that leaders gave extra effort to communicate transparently and consistently with employees throughout the conversion process, sharing with employees details like the organization owned very little real property (most location offices were leased) and federal government assistance provided equipment purchases for employees' home office needs. When leaders ultimately announced the permanent shift, Wes indicated that employees easily "bought in." Many employees even interpreted the decision as part of organizational efforts toward improved policy alignment with sustainability values. After reflecting on the successful integration of remote working supervision for both Sally and Wes compared to the struggles faced by Dorothy, I heartily recommend creating a clearly defined and consistent application of remote/hybrid working organizational policies along with their consistent application across the organization to strengthen the success of remote supervision for managers.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research about managers' voluntary resistance to remote supervision indicated a lack of trust in employees' productivity as the strongest contributor to their refusal to supervise remotely. However, under COVID-19 quarantine conditions, many managers involuntarily supervised remotely. Participants in this study revealed that their perspectives of employee trustworthiness changed during their mandated remote supervision experience, so additional exploration of managers' perceptions of obstacles to successful remote supervision *after* their mandated experience supervising remotely would offer further understanding of enhanced supports needed for reluctant managers. Exploring effective trust-establishing and building

practices under remote supervision conditions could offer additional training and preparatory support for resistant managers. Closely affiliated with managers' perceptions of employee trust, exploring effective methods of determining employee productivity without direct observation by managers could enhance effective supervision practices for reluctant managers while concurrently supporting managers' leadership and technology self-efficacy.

Additional studies focused on variables influencing managers' technology self-efficacy, such as the amount of leadership experience or amount/type of technology usage required by various industries, may identify ways to strengthen technology efficacy for reluctant remote supervisors. Other leadership self-efficacy studies could explore gender influences on managers' resistance to supervising remote employees. Study data implied that remote supervision resistance and self-efficacy influence managers' well-being and employee retention, so future studies considering the interplay between well-being, self-efficacy, and employee retention for remote supervisors offer organizations the opportunity to strengthen employee wellness and subsequent organizational effectiveness.

From a broader organizational view, additional studies exploring resistance to remote supervision at other supervisory levels (e.g., front-line supervisors or senior managers), in various industries (e.g., public education, retail, hospitality, manufacturing, and healthcare), and in countries other than the United States will offer organizations additional suggestions for successful implementation of remote working arrangements. Future research exploring the influences of employees' perceptions of frequency and purpose for technology-enabled communication on employee engagement could benefit organizational productivity. Further examination of organizational structure and hierarchy, as well as organizational politics surrounding remote working practices, also offers opportunities for a deeper understanding of

managers' reluctance to supervise remotely working employees. As the post-COVID-19 restrictions continue to diffuse, leaving some evidence of remote working success in their wake, organizations must continue to cultivate a deeper understanding of the range of supports necessary for optimal employee performance in remote working conditions.

Summary

The initial purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to explore factors contributing to managers' voluntary resistance to supervising remotely working employees further. However, before the research was conducted, the COVID-19 global pandemic conditions made remote supervision mandatory for most managers. In what felt like "the blink of an eye," managers no longer had the choice to resist remote supervision. Previously identified influences on managers' voluntary resistance to remote supervision included perceptions of employee trustworthiness, leadership identity influenced by technology self-esteem, and organizational support and culture influences. I wanted to know how managers experienced these objectionable factors under these suddenly involuntary remote supervision conditions.

Using the job demands-resources model and the conservation of resources theory framework, I conceptualized the identified resistance factors (i.e., perceptions of employee trustworthiness, leadership identity influenced by technology self-esteem, and perceptions of organizational support/politics) as resource depletions (job demands) and/or job resources. As I explored each participant's mandatory remote/hybrid working experience, we discussed and then re-discussed events. I discovered that participants' identification and awareness of job demands and resources often shifted depending on the lenses used and across time.

For example, Dorothy perceived her staff as trustworthy (a job resource) until her unfortunate experience with the "superstar." The resource of that employee's performance

trustworthiness shifted to a job demand, requiring additional tasks and effort from Dorothy to reassure herself of the employee's trustworthiness. Shifting to view the "superstar" experience through the lens of technology self-efficacy, Dorothy regarded the use of technology as a job demand. She did not have enough technology self-efficacy to use it as a resource to meet the new job demand of reassuring herself of the "superstar's" trustworthiness, revealing the impact of the technology self-efficacy demand on the demand for employee productivity trustworthiness.

As I reflected on the three participants' experiences, I recognized that the identified resistance factors were deeply intertwined instead of independently influential. I believe this study exploring the identified factors influencing managers' voluntary resistance *under involuntary conditions* offers organizations and managers trustworthy evidence that overcoming resistance to supervising remotely working employees requires effort and change from organizations and managers combined. Working collaboratively, everyone benefits.

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Appendix A: Potential Participant Screening Questionnaire

1. Have you been a manager of at least three people for at least 2 years?
2. Are you currently a manager of at least three people but no more than nine people directly reporting to you?
3. Prior to your experience with supervision of remotely working employees during mandatory COVID-19 quarantine conditions, had you ever supervised remote working employees before?
4. Do you prefer not to supervise employees who work remotely?

Appendix B: Semistructured Interview Topics

Session One

Introductory Remarks, Informed Consent questions

1. Identify some frustrations you encountered early in your management experience.
2. Tell about the most surprising/unexpected discovery you made about working with employees after you became a manager.
3. After agreeing on a definition of an FWA, how would/do FWAs impact you as an employee?
As a manager?
4. What about the specific FWA of teleworking? Impact you as employee? As a manager?

Session Two

Trusting Employees

1. Talk about the ways you evaluate an employee's productivity/conscientiousness. How does your evaluation of that employee influence your teleworking decisions?
2. Talk about the ways team productivity influences your teleworking decisions?
3. How does the perception of fairness for the team influence your teleworking decisions?
4. How does team conflict influence your teleworking decisions?

Personal Propensity to Trust

1. What benefits could you see for yourself if you allowed employees to telework? What would make you willing to supervise teleworking employees?
2. What would it cost you?

Session Three

Self-Efficacy

1. Talk about your capabilities and growth as a manager.

2. How does technology impact your leadership of your employees?

Role Conflicts/Ambiguity

1. Tell about what it's like to be a manager and employee at the same time.
2. Tell about how you decide/make sense out of what's expected of you.
3. Talk about how you juggle what your boss expects, what you expect of yourself, and what your direct reports expect from you.

Session Four

Perceptions of Organizational Influences

1. Discuss the political condition in your work environment. How does that influence your decisions about teleworking supervision?
2. Talk about the ways the organization supports you. How does that support influence your decisions about teleworking supervision?

Appendix C: IRB Consent Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



Dear Jan,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

(IRB# 22-005) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs