

FEDERAL WORKFORCE RETENTION

*THE PHENOMENA OF TELEWORK FOR MANAGERS AND AFRICAN
AMERICAN EMPLOYEES*

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Summary

In this paper, the author examines Federal Government African American employee retention through the use of telework schedules and perceived expectations for upward mobility for teleworkers General Schedule (GS) 11- 14 levels. The purpose of this study is to explore the influences of telework for retention. Additionally, this study will discover the implications of teleworking more than twice a week and the negative impact it may have on upward mobility for African Americans. Despite the amount of research on how telework positively impacts work-life-balance (WLB) for the public sector, little is known about how telework positively impacts the growing number of African Americans in managerial roles. Influxes of federal agencies are adopting the telework style for WLB; however, it is unknown whether or not the telework style actually promotes professional growth, specifically for minority African Americans. The research methodology that is used to examine this study is a social constructivist worldview with a phenomenological approach in qualitative analysis. A total of seven participants were recruited to participate in an interview with several open-ended questions. The researcher's analysis of the findings revealed that the quality of work does not necessarily change because of telework, however, the participants favored telework for the flexibility and freedom it offered. Several other factors were identified to impact upward mobility for African Americans, rather than their ethnicity. Further observations in the research study recommended that training focused on subtleties of discrimination should be provided to employees because of the findings.

Keywords: Employee retention, telework, flexible work schedule, management, professional growth, African Americans, federal government agencies, federal government benefits, subtleties of discrimination

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Introduction

The use of telework in the federal government is an effective recruitment strategy to attract diverse employees; however, the implications of telework on African American federal government employees may become a detriment to moving up the ladder. Though the amount of minorities and more specifically, African Americans, display lower numbers of employment in the federal workforce compared to non-minorities or Caucasian, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and its provisions of 1991, endorse diversity in the workplace and places strict policies around what substantiate as unlawful employment practices (Heneman, Judge, & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015, p. 66). Equality is more common; yet, there still seems to be unobtrusive barriers that challenge professional growth for African Americans. These challenges lessen the social-psychological basic needs that demonstrate aptitude for exponential growth. Krasner & Ullmann (1965) suggest, once a person encounters regulatory practices of discriminative stimuli by other people's behaviors, the learned behavior may alter both positive and negative behavior for the affected individual in the future (p. 311). According to Bolman and Deal (2008), *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, is a theory that explains specific emotional needs of psychological well-being, safety, social belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, to engender a sense of involvement both in self and organizations (pp. 124-125). When these needs are not met, a disruption to development within an organization may increase turnover with extremely low retention.

Statement of the Problem

Although there are commonly known perks of federal service employment for example, good benefit packages, job security, and flexible work schedules, this study attempts to uncover whether or not telework actually promotes professional growth for upward mobility, specifically for minority African Americans. An examination of several factors that may influence African American federal service workers and their perspective for upward mobility will be analyzed.

Retention rates may improve significantly as more telework days are allowed for federal employees; however, the negative impact of telework schedules with two or more days a week may cause more harm to African American federal workers who desire to grow professionally and who seek upward mobility. Employee Retention is an issue that affects both the employer and employee. There is a disconnect between understanding the negative implications of racism, segregation, and diversity among African Americans in the federal work environment, and recognizing the impact that increased telework days will have on their professional growth. It is important that federal employers remember that the need for job retention also lies in motivational factors to sustain the interest of

employees and their willingness to have the support of their manager to develop their skills while improving performance. If increased telework schedules are used to motivate staff and increase retention for good talent, it is equally important to increase staff development for every worker, and more specifically African Americans.

Objective

The purpose of this study is to explore the implications for telework schedules and the negative effects it has on African American federal workers. The researcher will develop recommendations to equip African American employees with effective strategies to embrace telework schedules, while building trust and equality with upper level management.

Research Questions

The research study will examine federal government managers' perception on their utilization of telework schedules for the purpose of retention. Additionally, this study will explore the relationship between telework schedules with two or more days a week for African American federal non-managers and managers between the GS 11-14. It will also focus on their professional growth or upward mobility challenges. Several research questions that will help guide this study are listed below.

Research question one

How do telework schedules positively impact employees and their willingness to adopt the working style? [Note: This question examines the experiences and perspectives of current managers]

Proposition one

Telework schedules are preferred by employees who desire work-life-balance and flexibility, thus making the working situation comfortable enough to stay within the organization and or agency for lengthy periods of time.

Research question two

To what extent has telework enhanced work quality? [Note: This question examines the experiences and perspectives of African American non-manager and manager with a GS 11-14 level]

Proposition two

Teleworking creates more time to preform work duties in the home environment where employees are willing to work beyond normal work hours to complete time pressing assignments.

Research question three

What challenges as it relates to access in the office setting have prevented you from professional growth and or upward mobility? [Note: This question examines the experiences and perspectives of African American non-manager and manager with a GS 11-14 level]

Proposition three

Visibility in the office setting is important to build relationships with hiring employers, mentors, networks with colleagues, and to cultivate personal growth; otherwise, to gain exclusive access to developmental opportunities that are not normally publicized.

Design

A qualitative inquiry will be used in this study. The phenomenological approach will allow for open-ended questions during several personal one-on-one interviews, field notes and observations. Phenomenology focuses on unique experiences that reveals inner truth or to bring meaning to something (Merriam, 2009, p. 26). The positive and negative impact of telework will be accessed as well as any factors with telework that promote retention rates by hiring managers. These elements will be identified by themes and coded for understanding. The coded data will be captured from African American federal employees at the GS11 thru GS 14 range. The findings from the interviews will be aggregated after coding and the results will be analyzed to inform this study of any connections between telework and retention and telework and upward mobility.

To conduct this study, perspective participants will receive a letter with what the study will be about in order to generate interest. Selected participants will be scheduled for an interview in advance and must sign an agreement and consent form that is approved by the Trinity Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB). While conducting the interview, each participant will be briefed to answer each question in their most natural self. The format of the questions will have less sensitive questions in the beginning and more sensitive questions towards the end. The participant will be informed of the conclusion of each interview. The participant will also be thanked for their participation and will learn of what they should expect after the survey is complete and data is analyzed.

Participants

A purposive sampling method will be used to select participants when conducting interviews for this study. A purposive sample allows for the research to gain insight or discovery for information-rich in depth studies (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). With the purposive sample selection, the maximum variation sample of African American federal government employees currently at or between the GS 11-14

level seeking upward mobility, but feel like it has been withheld from them, will be the target group of people to be recruited. The selected participants must have held at least two years in the position within the same organization and federal agency. In the event that it becomes more difficult to recruit using the maximum variation sampling, the snowball network sampling will be applied to make connections with friends of the original targeted group who fit a similar profile. To effectively analyze telework and retention several managers of any ethnic background, who served in the managerial role for at least 5 years will also be interviewed and observed to determine whether telework is viewed as a mechanism to retain quality workers.

Assumptions and Limitations

The limitations that present itself with a qualitative study according to Merriam (2009) are, questions of validity in the document sources of data for research purposes, the information gained from interview observations may be incongruent with recent findings, and the difficulty to determine unbiased information imbedded in the questions for authenticity (p. 154). These factors may determine a favorable or non-favorable outcome for the intent of the study. In addition to these limitations, the targeted group of people and the span of people that will be looked at in the federal government may also impact the study.

The targeted groups of people are African American men and woman, and managers of various ethnic backgrounds in the federal government. These groups of people limit the study because other minorities or race may be impacted by the negative implications of telework also. Further research might be conducted upon completion of this study to explore whether other groups of people may be equally impacted. Another limitation is that the public sector expands beyond the federal government into non-profit organizations, state and local government. This study will specifically look at federal agencies, and the findings will not lend itself to a strong argument for the impact that lies in telework and employee retention rates, or telework and upward mobility for other public sector organizations.

Theory

Although there are commonly known perks of federal service employment for example, good benefit packages, job security, and flexible work schedules, this study attempts to uncover whether or not the telework style actually promotes professional growth for upward mobility, specifically for minority African Americans. An examination of several factors that may influence African American federal service workers and their perspective for upward mobility will be analyzed. Additionally, insight on retention and management will follow, and finally, telework schedules will be explained to assist with determining whether or not the telework style actually promotes professional growth for minority African Americans federal service workers.

African American Federal Service Workers

President Barack Obama has proven to the American people that African Americans have what it takes to lead a country. Furthermore, his service in such an esteemed leadership position to be effective in winning for a second term in office is impeccable. Prior to President Obama's two terms in office, his elections generated a crusade of African American political figures wanting to become more ambitious about being elected into federal political offices (Johnson, Oppenheimer, & Selin, 2012, p. 387). Although President Obama's successes are notable, there still seems to be an obscured stigma that African American federal service workers have to display competency on a higher level to even be considered for a position of power. Johnson et al., (2012) designed a study that focused on the underrepresentation of African Americans in the House of Representatives, and a quote taken from Governor L. Douglas Wilder, an African American, supports the perception of African Americans in government.

It is not only important for the Black candidate to be as qualified as his White counterpart, but, as older generation Blacks like to say, in most cases, you have to be twice as good as your White competitor if you hope to stand a chance (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 389).

Despite working twice as hard to be considered for an opportunity to be placed in a position of power, obtaining respect by means of transparency and trust serve as important factors that often affects how comfortable African Americans are with displaying their skills and abilities. In the federal workforce, *trust* is usually earned in the employer-employee relationships regardless of ethnic background. Historically, occurrences of segregation, racism and discrimination, has psychologically altered "trust" for African Americans. When first placed into an estranged work environment, African Americans determine their level of trust with political affiliates by who they recognize to be the most

relatable with attention given to shared ethnicity (Mangum, 2012, p. 8). During performance appraisals, the quality of work performed is accessed. An African American federal employee may reflect on whether or not their ratings are reflective of the quality of their work or ethnic background. Racial disparities in the federal workforce for performance appraisals are often criticized with having race-biased ratings instead of work production (Baxter, 2012, p. 200). Trust of African American federal workers is deeply rooted in their experiences and is a significant component in this study. Further insight is provided to develop a clear understanding of the importance of retention.

Retention

America has entrusted the federal government with tax dollars to improve the economy; therefore making it essential that federal government organizations thrive at the highest degree to serve the American people. In part, an agency's organization may exemplify prosperity by its retention rates. Lewis and Durst (1995) explained, "Federal civil service is one of many employers competing for the labor of a multitude of economically rational individuals" (p. 372). Typically, the employer recruits individuals equipped with institutional knowledge, skills, and abilities for future success (Heneman et al., 2015, p. 673). As a result of effective recruitment practices, federal government continues to attract hundreds of applicants because of its well-recognized benefit packages, good pay General Schedule (GS), and the flexibility of work schedules. Fortunately, these factors play into the favor of managers who strive to retain desirable employees.

In order to reduce turnover, the primary goal of employee retention is to sustain desirable employees who demonstrate knowledge of and prominent skills necessary to perform duties in a specific job (Ellett, Ellett, Ellis, & Lerner, 2009, p. 51). Retention helps employers maintain a cohort of individuals coming into the workforce to add substance to meeting the mission and goals of the organization. Retention also encourages employee development, mastery of specific skills and institutional knowledge over time—to also promote competitiveness for marketability. Retention often involves a method that promotes some form of extrinsic (tangible) and intrinsic (personal gratification) rewards for employees (Heneman et al., 2015, p. 694). Compensation is a common indicator of job satisfaction amongst employees who stay with an organization for a long period of time, and is a good example of an extrinsic reward because it impacts the likelihood of an employee to work harder for potential pay increases, promotions, and or year-end bonuses and awards.

Benefit packages are another example of extrinsic reward because life and health insurance are attractive to federal employees who serve as care-givers for themselves and others. Thus, it is from the standpoint of the employee to determine their satisfaction and or autonomy for the intrinsic rewards. Often times, the challenges of the work at hand and flow of satisfaction creates a need to

learn more, which intrinsically rewards individuals (Goleman, 1998, p. 106). Another way to understand this is recognizing what constitutes motivation. Motivation comes from the willingness to work hard for considerable high production (Thahier, Ridjal, & Risani, 2014, p. 118). Very often, it is the leadership approach to cultivating their staff for development that becomes the motivating factor for employees to achieve personal and professional growth.

Management

Effective leadership among managers and supervisors employs retention in the federal government because of the influences it holds over others. Leaders display creativity in the way they communicate and send emotional signs to their subordinates in order to be exceptional (Goleman, 1998, pg. 164). Although some managers focus more on the execution of a task, if they are effective leaders, they will often work towards purpose (Bolman, & Deal, 2008, p. 343). This may also be supported by neurological research of the brain. The dominance of either the left (logical and rational thinking) or right (creative and visual imagery) hemispheres in the brain may have a strong influence on managers with good emotional responses (Esmeray, 2016, p. 209). Therefore, leadership is not the same as management although the two is often used simultaneously. Park and Word (2012) suggest that managers often strive to enhance their leadership qualities to better motivate employees to work towards attainment, making the organization successful.

Work production is linked to how employees view an assignment and their actions taken to produce quality work. Since the managers are held responsible for the output of work in an organization, their ability to do good work will often become the motivation for non-managers to repeat their behavior, making them effective leaders (Park & Word, 2012, p. 707). Effective leaders also make it their responsibility to build relationships within their organizations to generate likeability and job satisfaction for employees so that moral is raised as well as retention. Dahlstrom (2013) suggests that employee job satisfaction may come as a result of the relationships developed in the organization and the employee's attitude about the work they do. An appreciation for work production has been related to telework. Further insight on telework will be explained to support why telework may negatively impact African American federal workers.

Telework

Working from home or other workstations that is furnished with necessary equipment for employees to complete official work assignments is essentially known as working remotely or telework (Dahlstrom, 2013, p. 439). Telework have become very desirable for employees because of the flexibility it provides through work-life-balance (WLB). Particularly, travel commuting time decreases, productivity increases since distractions are minimal, and telework schedules relieves conflicting

issues related to family care (Maruyama, & Tietze, 2012, p. 452). However, there are several challenges that may impact African American federal employees when they telework two or more times a week.

Working in an office setting, provides in-person access to co-workers and managers. The involvement of complex networks and groups establishes ties with friends and allies, which contribute to work that gets completed successfully (Bolman, & Deal, 2008, p. 204). Having access to co-workers and managers creates arbitrary opportunities for knowledge transference among colleagues and shared information on work production from previous experiences. The communication barriers increases greatly and could better be understood by in an excerpt taken from Dahlstrom's explanation.

The availability and selection of communication channels is important, because competent communication styles and channel selection consideration are related to key outcomes in the virtual team, such as trust, identification, and communication satisfaction (Dahlstrom, 2013, p. 443).

Unfortunately, telework schedules that allow federal employees two or more days out of the office setting may cause displacement from the culture of the organization to present these opportunities. The fears around "out-of-sight/out-of-mind" leading to relinquished opportunities for upward mobility (Dahlstrom, 2013, p. 441). This is detrimental for minority African American federal workers who are unable to build the relationships needed with upper management for personal and professional growth, or even career development opportunities. With the perceived notion that African American workers must work twice as hard to prove their competency, having visibility in the organization is necessary.

Working in office settings also builds on personal self-awareness for how employees interact with one another. However, telework reduces open communication, which relates to the social-psychological mental perception of work quality validation, and interpersonal views of self and others (Dahlstrom, 2013, p. 441). Teleworking more than two days a week may also enhance unfair treatment for monitored progress and the timeliness of work completion. A negative outlook on teleworking is working extra hours as a result of little to no visibility (Maruyama, & Tietze, 2012, p. 452). Furthermore, the challenges around telework disrupt the traditional work environment that well-seasoned senior level managers have grown accustomed to when monitoring the progression of the work employees produce. Consequently, regulatory practices are weakened to ensure reliability and high performance during work hours from all employees (Maruyama, & Tietze, 2012, p. 451). Depending on the manager leadership style, this may affect their power-control of authority over the employee.

Theoretical Construct

Social Cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), explores a variation of elements affecting the cognitive processors in the human mind. These processors generate behaviors that are often influenced by environmental factors to motivate and self-regulate personal engagement (Bandura, 2001, p. 5). The performance of an individual is influenced by their perception and the environment; however, people do have the ability to create a favorable outcome by exercising self-regulation and or self-efficacy (Wulfert, 2014). Self-regulation and self-efficacy, although similar, have varying differences. Goleman (1998) refers to self-regulation as a way of controlling emotional distress (p. 318). African American employees and their managers develop and maintain relationships in the workplace that often requires self-regulation. Accepting challenges, positive thinking in self potential and actually performing well, are concepts Bandura uses to describe self-efficacy (Goleman, D., 1998, p. 70). This study lends itself to understanding the neurological process of psychological barriers in the African American culture and how it has shaped their perception for growth in the federal work environment. Thus, the social cognitive theory will apply the construct of motivation and other self-regulatory factors to human development, adaptation, and change (Bandura, 2001, p. 5) by the environmental social influences of the office setting and telecommuting worksites.

For the purpose of this study, attention will be focused on African American employees and their cognitive ability to attain self-efficacy through collective-efficacy. Behavior and environment will also significantly impact cognitive collective efficacy causing one to impact the other in a continuous cycle. Each component is further explained below.

Cognitive: Collective efficacy

Cognition is the human approach to interpret messages and language impacted by the environment and behaviors (Gruber, 2011, p. 277). Collective efficacy refers to the shared belief and actions of people who functions as one in a social system (Esmeray, 2016, p. 210). The performance of the individuals with these shared beliefs incorporates strategic decision patterns of persistence and resistance for varying levels of attainment (Bruton, Mellalieu, & Shearer, 2014, p. 27). The historical challenges, barriers and setbacks impacted by socio-structural influences to gain trust and acquire professional growth for African Americans federal workers will be the focus of collective efficacy. While the idea of collective efficacy focuses on a group of people, self-efficacy will be considered to measure the level of efficacy (high to low) for African American federal workers collectively.

Behavior

Human behavior is demonstrated by positive and negative signals sent to the brain and interpreted into a response of perception or action (Oppong, 2014, p. 113). The right frontal region of the brain

impacts interpersonal communication and the ability to build social connections (Esmeray, 2016, p. 210). The behavioral factors of communication with African American federal employees and their relationships with their supervisors, peers, and senior executive leaders and mentors, are impacted by the frontal region of the brain. Antisocial behaviors associated with social skills, emotional control, and self-awareness may inhibit confidence in decision making (Esmeray, 2016, p. 210). Behavior patterns may be developed overtime as a result of human psychological perspectives to stimulate varying actions in an environment (Gruber, 2011, p. 276).

Environment

Environmental factors will cause people to create their own environments and actively work to change them because of varying behaviors they experience (Oppong, 2014, p. 113). The environmental factors in this study are the office setting and the telecommuting workplace. In addition to these external environments, micro-environments including the psychological variables such as family, peers, and work atmosphere may have different levels of impact on the behavior of a person (Oppong, 2014, p. 117). To further analyze the connection of the cognitive social theory to collective efficacy, behavior and environment, a model is provided below.

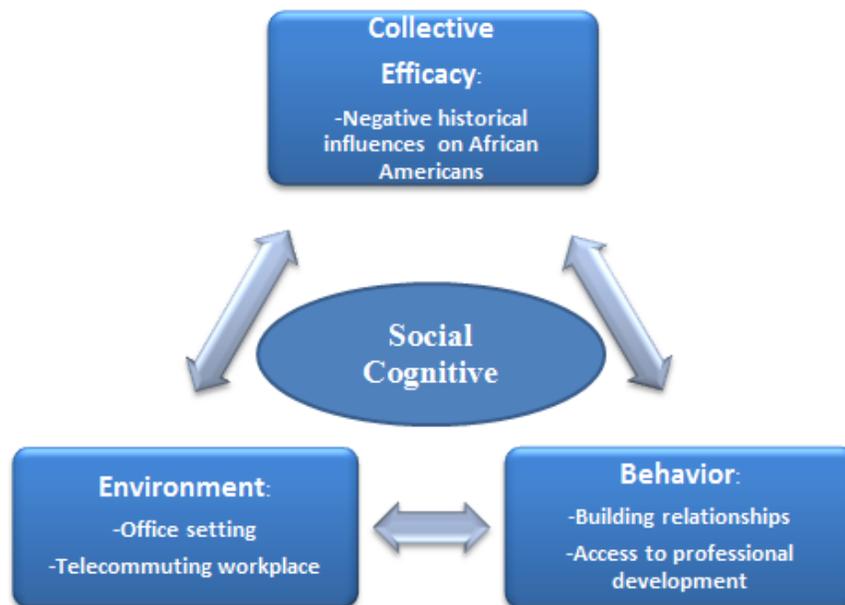


Figure 1. The theoretical construct of implications for telework schedules and the effects on African American federal workers.

Analysis

The intent for this chapter is to provide an overview of the way in which information was collected, interpreted, and analyzed to be coded for a complete understanding, and inform the field of study. To begin, a discussion of how the data will be analyzed is explained. Then, a description of the population will provide insight to the demographic of people interviewed in the study. Following the description of the population, the data obtained during the interviews will be coded into themes to better interpret the findings.

Data Analysis Strategy

In order to make sense of the data gained from conducting interviews for this study, a three phase process coding will be conducted. Coding is a method used to create patterns, classifications and categorical groupings with words or phrases within datasets, to further be analyzed and reassessed (Saldana, 2011, p. 95). Another way to understand coding is to make meaning of a subset of information. Creswell (2014) explained that coding allows for the ability to bracket segments of information to represent one clear-cut term based on the language of the participants.

In the first phase of the coding process, in-vivo coding will occur. According to Saldana (2011), in-vivo coding refers to the extraction of direct quotes in the language of a participant (p. 99). This process will help to decode all of the data gathered. Decoding information allows for a reflection on the data and interprets its meaning (Saldana, 2009, p. 4). In the second phase, analytic memos will be applied to comprehend how the data should be interpreted. An analytic memo represents a written reflection to bring complex meaning to data sets (Saldana, 2009, p. 32). Prompts will also be constructed to develop complex meaning of the data. The third phase of this coding process will reflect triangulation. In triangulation coding, the goal is to take what is learned from the first level coding to what is learned in second level coding, and create new meaning (Wood, 2016). Upon concluding the coding process, a summary will outline the overall process and highlight significant findings.

Discussion of the Population

Snowball sampling was applied when friends of friends who received the initial email invitation to participate in the study, passed along the recruitment information to others. Commitments for participation in the research study gained the most traction with the targeted Dance Ministry group. According to Schensul & LeCompte (2013), research occurs in a more collaborative way when there is an equal exchange within the relationship and the rapport is reciprocal. The reciprocity of other

informal relationships with friends, associates, and affinity groups allowed for a wide range of potential participants from varying federal agencies (p. 197).

A total of 7 participants were interviewed for this research study. While working to secure interviews, five participants committed to an in-person interview and two participants were not able to meet in person. As a result, the interview questions were emailed to the two participants and telephone conversations were conducted for clarification and understanding purposes. Additionally, one participant that originally agreed to participate dropped out and a new volunteer offered to participate but did not fit the GS level requirement of 12-14 to participate. The researcher’s supervisor approved of the participant to conduct the interview with the changes being noted in the findings to widen the pool of recruitment to include GS 11 federal employee. Moreover, the former participant who was not originally able to participate was able to participate again. As a result, more data was collected from the added participant to enhance the findings. A brief demographic profile for each participant is also provided below.

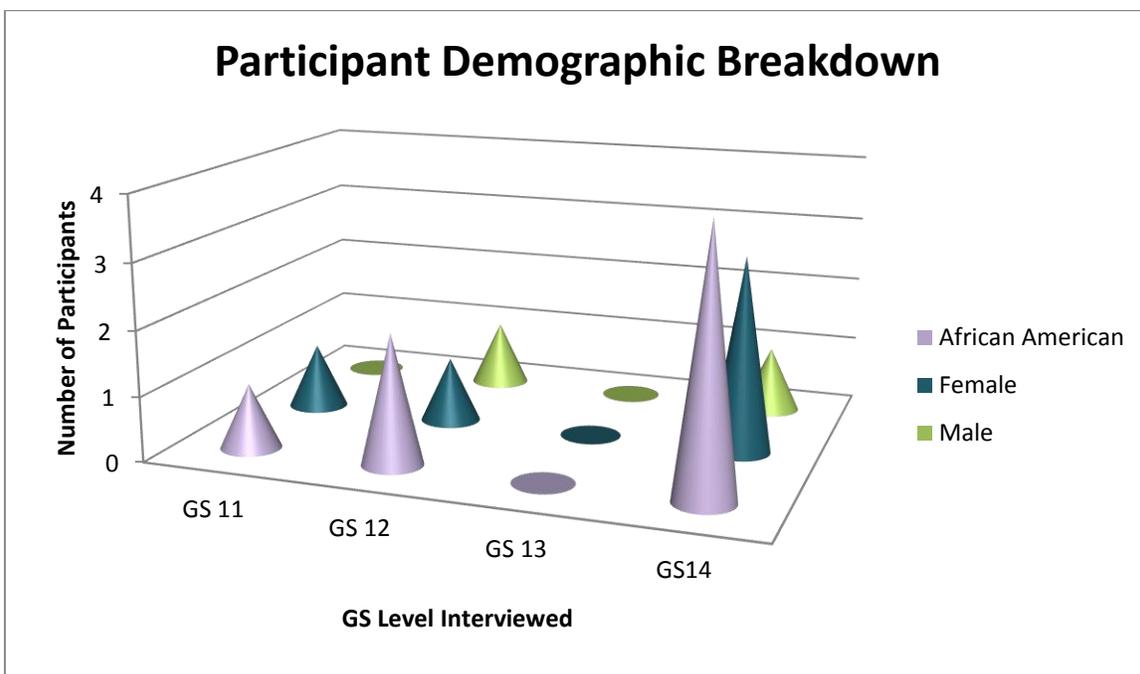


Figure 2. The general schedule (GS) level, gender, and ethnicity of participants.

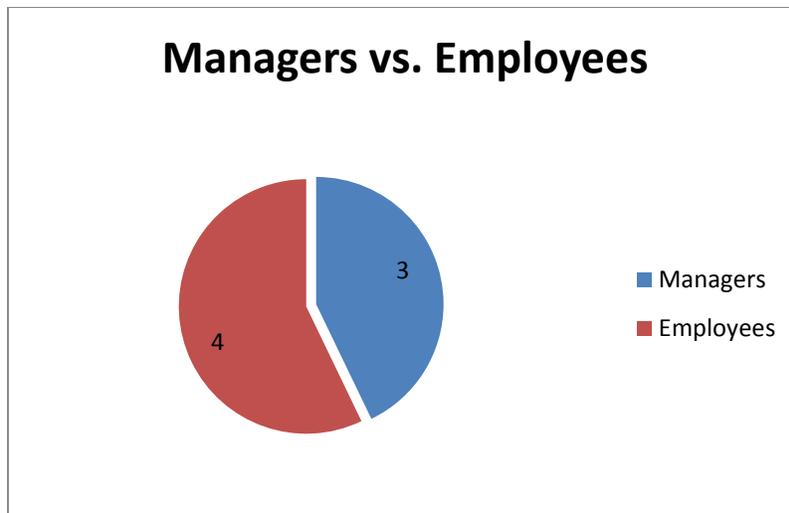


Figure 3. Managers and employees interviewed in the study.

Background of participants

In-person Interviews

Participant One: Is an African American female in middle management at the GS 14 level. She has served in management for five years, and has been in her current role for two years. Her role at the Department of State is a Deputy Executive Director. Although she loves her position, and what it offers her by managing a larger team of people, she is not certain of how long she will remain in her job due to the limited opportunities to move into a grooming program that will prepare her to obtain a Senior Executive Service (SES) position.

Participant Two: Is an African American male also in middle management at the GS 14 level. His role is a General Administrative Officer. With an extensive amount of years in the military, he is used to serving in leadership. His outlook on management comes from being a senior manager to now junior manager in the federal service. Serving in his position for 3+ years, his goal is to get back into a senior leadership position such as the SES within a couple of years. He is actively searching for other opportunities for growth and development.

Participant Three: Is also an African American female at the GS 14 level within the Department of Housing Development. Her role as a technical support specialist involves writing policy, but she is not currently in a managerial role. She has been with her department for 10+ years and really likes her field of work. She is not actively looking for other job opportunities.

Participant four (Ravi): Is an African American male at the GS 12 level. He has served in his current role as a Management and Program Analyst for 3 years and has been at his agency for 7+ years. Although he has not yet serve in a managerial role, he is looking forward to a promotion to the

next GS level so that he could begin developing his leadership skills. Outside of work, he spends most of his time volunteering for organizations such as the National Black MBA Urban League

Participant Five: Is an African American female at the GS 12 level. She is a tax examiner and has been in her role for 9+ years. She is ready for something new and has reached the highest promotional level her organization offers in her line of work.

Non-in-person Interviews

Participant Six: Is an African American female at the GS 14 level who is seasoned in the federal government with over 15 years. As an Audit Manager, she likes her career path and enjoys the flexibility and benefits it brings. Outside of work, she enjoys dancing with her church dance ministry.

Participant Seven: Is an African American female at the GS 11 level. As a financial specialist with years of military background, this participant is also seasoned in age and enjoys her role at the Department of the Air Force. Outside of work, she enjoys dancing with her church dance ministry and singing on the choir.

In vivo and taxonomy coding

After reviewing each interview audio recording, field notes captured during the interview helped to identify keywords and phrases. These keywords and phrases represented the emotions, thoughts, values and belief of the participants. First, the words and phrases were lumped together in one large category. They were all then moved into a second column to be organized into groups. After the initial groupings of these words and phrases, a new term was used as a theme for each group to represent category labels. Another way to look at the first phase of coding is by thinking in terms of taxonomy. Prat, Comyn-Wattiau, and Akoka (2015) described taxonomy as a set of dimensions for several items, and having one characteristic identifying each entity (p. 236). The tables and graphs that follow will provide a visual of the data processing conducted to better understand the findings.

Table 1. *In Vivo* and taxonomy mapping.

Extraction of Key Words/Phrases *Note: "listed words/phrases are quotes"	Taxonomy
Political (organization) savvy, thoughtful planning, promotional growth is equal, equal opportunity, enjoy career journey, positive outlook, enhanced quality of life, high level work, be my own boss, set the mark for my children and grandchildren, peace in my home	Liberation
Effective leadership, technical competent, sponsorship, hindrance for growth, white male hires are more prevalent, varying outlook, mobility with telework schedules, being able to submit yourself to those in leadership above you, apply yourself to the study, understand people's temperaments (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and he melancholy)	Influence
Timing, telework is a stress reliever, recharge, employees work on managing personal productivity, emotional stability, telework is a management tool, not an incentive, flexibility and comfort, equal workload and production, must maintain work logs when teleworking	Balance
Building relationships, network expansion, preparation, understand staff needs, acknowledgement and vocal appreciation, leverage technology, stressed with no access to paper files, management/staff personality differences, less in-person interactions influence to cultural changes, building rapport with new employees, people person, mutual respect, body language is approximately 60% of conversations, isolation can be a problem	Communication
Interpreting information, multi-generational challenges for telework, telework management, effective management practices, difficult to build team culture, team player, team cohesiveness is damaged with telework	Collaboration
Career Development, expectations, efficiency with webinars and trainings, telework does not promote staff development, professional development since there is no money for promotions, new assignments/project, detail opportunities for staff, visibility is moderately important, promotion aligned with timing, work production, go over and beyond to push yourself, continued professional education certificate program	Growth
Telework honesty, institute fairness in policy, work harder to show productivity, supervisor support, advocacy for staff, continued telework is a reward with good staff performance, cyber security threats, support manager, merit based promotion, job positions tailored for someone specific, lead by example, work independently, integrity, relying on God	Trust

The researcher's interpretation of the in vivo and taxonomy coding led to this meta-memo of reflections incorporates the researchers understanding of this coding phase thus far.

Assortments of the in vivo language were labeled and re-labeled to achieve conceptually the *best fit* code (Saldana, 2009, p. 160). The words and phrases were used to develop themes so that the words and phrases could be categorized for an analysis to determine whether teleworking two days or more had an impact on African Americans upward mobility, and whether or not telework was viewed as a method to retain employees.

Several keywords and phrases stood out during the interviews of each participant describing their telework experiences, management styles for leadership, employee retention strategies, and self-efficacy and past experiences of hindered growth. Several themes identified as a result of the extracted information in phase 1 taxonomy coding included: liberation, influence, balance, communication, collaboration, growth and trust. These terms are a good representation of the *in vivo* extracted words and phrases and are a good representation of each category.

Axial coding

During phase 2, a comparison of the categories was analyzed to develop axial coding. Axial coding occurs when categories are linked on an axis in order to formulate meaningful grounded theory (Saldana, 2009, p. 42). Each axis has a different meaning in understanding the relationship between the two categories. Saldana (2011) explains grounded theory as an analytical process of repeatedly linking small data units over several coding cycles to further decode each category and its properties (p. 115). Short memos are constructed to elaborate on the established meaning for the categorical relationships. This process is also referred to as *theming the data*.

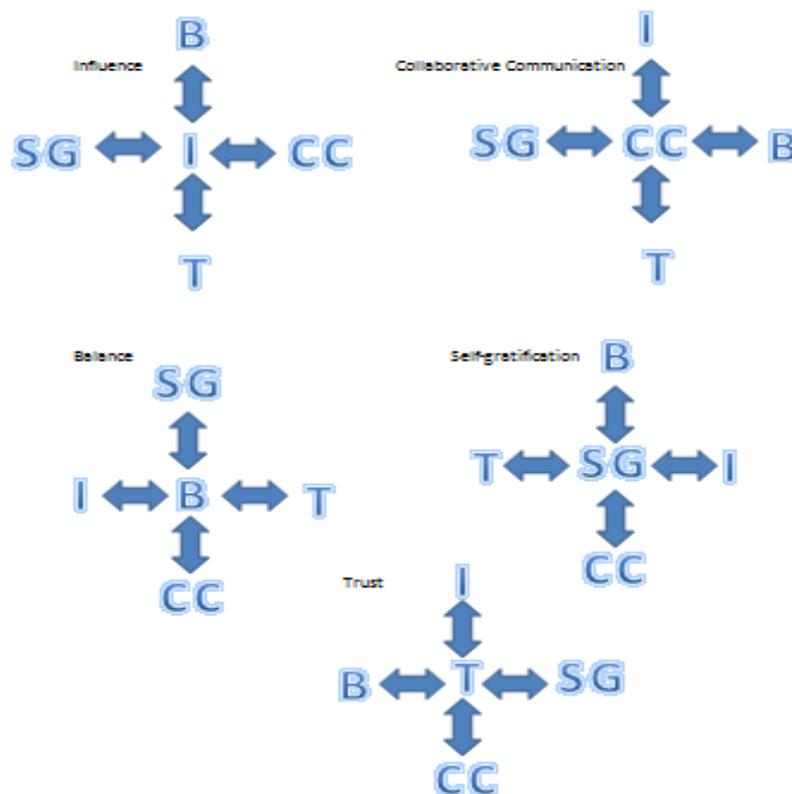


Figure 4. Axial coding sequences.

Analytic memos

During the first level coding, key words and phrases were extracted from participants' responses and combined into one taxonomy chart. Much like the figure above, the analytic memos below provide an overview of the participants' responses in the interview and show the themed axial relationships for each category. These relationships assisted in making sense of the findings as they relate to whether telework schedules with two or more days a week affect African Americans and their upward mobility. Additionally, the findings will also provide insight on how telework is perceived by managers and non-manager employees to determine if telework is used as method to retain employees.

Influence

Influence and balance

The participants shared that overall, their wellbeing is influenced by many factors including people, personal outlook on life and the environment. People in the role of a superior, or peers will sometimes cause work related stress when there is pressure to complete a project. Their influences will impact the way information is internalized and transformed into the participant's work production. As a result, telework schedules allow for the participants to spend days outside of the office, and be more relaxed. Participants revealed that telework serve in the capacity of being a stress reliever because fewer eyes are on them to be pressured to perform rapidly. Participants also shared that telework schedules offer flexibility and time to recharge from the hustle and bustle required during their morning and afternoon commutes. Whether in the office or telecommuting, their ability to produce quality work does not change.

Influence and collaborative communication

The participants revealed that effective managers should have an understanding of their staff need to perform well. Managers work to build a team of folks who are able to develop sound relationships with one another, and by expanding their networks. Some of the managers believe that greater management of schedules is necessary for them to account for their staff telework schedules. This increases their responsibility of knowing the status of their team's members at all times. Other managers felt that managing telework schedules is not difficult when they simply leverage technology by using office communicator for online presence, conference calls for meetings and or webinars to assist with building technical competence in the day to day work. As telework schedules increase across different agencies, there is an influential shift on the organization's ability to maintain team culture. Although there may be various outlooks on telework when with multi-generational employees, it is the responsibility of leadership to acknowledge the best practices and challenges, in order to be effective leaders.

Influence and trust

The participants shared that it is important to understand people's temperaments and personalities (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholy). The personalities of people changes from person to person whether it is a manager or colleague. The many moods that someone may experience will have negative and positives influence on the working relationship. Participants shared that building relationships on a team is a key factor in developing a culture of trust. Additionally, having integrity, telework honesty, support from managers, and instituting fairness in policy all influence a culture of trust.

Influence and self-gratification

The participants shared their outlook on personal growth and what motivates their need to be successful. Although many of the participants did not reveal hindrances for growth in the workplace due to their race, one participant revealed that they did experience witnessing that white males were being hired more frequently in their agency. As a result, they tried not to focus on this issue from a negative lens, and instead believed in the merit based system of doing quality work. Many of the participants agreed that visibility is moderately to very important in order to be recognized for promotions, receive high level work and take advantage of career developmental trainings and certificate programs.

Collaborative communication

Collaborative communication and influence

Although there were mixed feelings on how much participants like their telework schedules, participants revealed that communication, whether verbal, written, or in a presentation style, is essential in their work. Focus was drawn to the information communicated in written communication correspondence or emails, and how one may sometimes incorrectly interpret the message. One participant shared that body language is approximately 60% of conversations and that fewer in-person interactions influence the culture changes within an environment. For the staff that prefers to work independently, isolation can be problematic when seeking out sponsorship from mentors and supervisors.

Collaborative communication and balance

Some participants shared that it may be stressful to access paper files, and not have access to a double monitor screen when reviewing work. The balance of time and applying thoughtful planning while working in the office to prepare for the next telework day is a method many of the participants, both managers and employees have adopted. Employees work on managing their personal productivity as well as managers. Additionally, managers shared that it is their responsibility to better

manage telework schedules with their staff to maintain their team dynamic. Furthermore, one particular manager did feel strongly about team cohesiveness being damaged with increased telework days in a week.

Collaborative communication and trust

Participants shared that more telework days in a week creates less in-person interactions for team cohesiveness. More reliance is placed on the fairness of the telework policy for telework honesty. Participants who are managers indicated that when work performance and product quality is high among their staff, they are okay with their staff continuing with their telework schedules, as they recognize that they will still receive quality production and good work. Non-managerial employees reflected on the thought that they work hard both in the office and when they telework, even if it is after hours or on weekends to maintain quality work production, is necessary.

Collaborative communication and self-gratification

Participants indicated that it is important to be a team player and build rapport with team members and most importantly, the new hired employees. Although this may be challenging to do with increased telework days in a week, participants shared how they were able to still build on their personal and professional growth while teleworking. Managers indicated that they not only promote to their staff how to utilize their telework days as opportunities to focus on their career development, enroll in and complete online continued professional education certificate programs, and understand the politics of their organization and the agency, but they practice this as well. Many of the participants also reflected on how giving attention to their personal and professional growth enhances their quality of life.

Balance

Balance and self-gratification

Participants alloted to the fact that telework days provided them the opportunity to recharge for a day outside of the office. With an opportunity to recharge through telework days, participants shared that they enjoyed their careers more. For the participants who are seeking higher level positions in the Senior Executive Service (SES), or are setting goals to be their own boss by establishing their business, telework schedules allow for them to hone the skills necessary to manage their time and productivity while they work independently.

Balance and trust

Participants shared that timing for upward mobility was dependent upon who you know and who knows you. Along with timing, the support of the supervisor and their advocacy for their staff in high level Senior Leadership meetings, is also increases their chances for upward mobility. Participants

agreed that it is important for staff to work hard to show their productivity whether in the office or when they are telecommuting. Additionally, attention is given to how much the supervisor can trust in their staff with good work ethic while teleworking. Almost, if not all the participants agreed that the ultimate determining factor of this notion is whether or not employees are meeting deadlines. Moreover, there are some instances where unjust decisions are made about promotions. Three of the seven participants agreed that they have recognized job positions to be tailored for someone specific. This has diminished some trust in merit based promotions, but most participants agree that they try to focus on the benefits of their job and the flexibility it provides with telework while considering their future career endeavors.

Balance and collaborative communication

Participants agreed that telework days allowed them to manage their personal productivity. While maintaining an equal workload and production both in the office and during telework, participants had different views on how focusing on personal productivity could result in a constant practice of isolation with other staff while in the office. One participant explained that there are multi-generational challenges for telework practices. Participants who identified more with generation Y, born after 1980 (Pitt-Catsouphes, & Matz-Costa, 2009, p. 16), are comfortable being in isolation. They felt that they could be among groups of people in the office when necessary, but it wasn't something that excited them. Participants who identified more with the young generation X'ers, born between 1962 and 1980 (Pitt-Catsouphes, & Matz-Costa, 2009, p. 16), preferred more face to face interactions with their teams. The telework schedule did not appeal to them because they often feel isolated. The participants who identified with the younger baby boomers generation, born between 1955 and 1964 (Pitt-Catsouphes, & Matz-Costa, 2009, p. 16), did not like having telework days. They were uncomfortable with their staff teleworking many days in a week and would often request that staff meetings be conducted in-person.

Balance and influence

Participants agreed that telework should not be looked upon as an incentive or reward. As it promotes flexibility, participants shared their thoughts on how telework days increased mobility for where work could be completed. Some participants discussed their experiences with the government building closing on snow days and how telework schedules allowed them an ease of mind and comfort, knowing that they were able to get essential work completed.

Trust

Trust and self-gratification

Participants agreed that telework honesty is necessary to show that telework schedules do build on work-life-balance for the employees who desire to telework. The work ethic practices that are displayed in the office for the participants were usually displayed while they teleworked. Some participants expressed that they often go above and beyond to push themselves to work longer hours to complete assignments where they could control how little to no distractions that would prevail. Participants also shared their experiences of how working independently has helped to develop their critical thinking and analytical skills.

Trust and balance

The participants who are managers agreed that instituting fairness in policy is the best way for them to address their staff concerns around workload for upward mobility. Some participants who are non-managerial employees felt that they should manage their personal productivity by outlining a plan of action for the work that needed to be addressed by an early deadline. Some participants recognized that their work assignments is high level work, and that there needed to be equal work production in the office as well as during a telework day, to ensure they maintain the support of their supervisor in getting it done. By focusing on their plan of action, participants shared that they are able to build on their competencies and work portfolio. All of the participants felt that maintaining a good relationship with their supervisor and colleagues is their priority for building trust; and could avail other opportunities for their professional career growth.

Trust and collaborative communication

The participants felt that their supervisor would advocate for their upward mobility as they gained and maintained their supervisor's trust; however, visibility in the office setting promoted more in-person interactions with the Senior Leadership who are the decision makers. With fewer in-person interactions, the opportunity to be vocally recognized for hard work or considered for training opportunities becomes limited. The participants who are managers shared that money for promotions and new hires are very scarce at their respective agency—required them to be creative when recognizing their staff for their hard work. Much attention and effort must be given to their staff needs and goals, as several of the managers shared. Supervising a large team becomes challenging for a manager to remember each of their staff personal goals—on top of their day to day work. This is why visibility for the employee is that much more important.

Trust and influence

One participant who is a manager felt that continued telework is a reward with good staff performance because the employee would be able to maintain a solid telework schedule. Other participants that are managers felt that telework schedules have been forced upon them because of the need to operate and function in the necessary capacity regardless of being in the office or telecommuting. All of the participants shared that their willingness to stay at their job has been driven by compensation, flexibility and benefits; however, they all shared the same outlook that managers who are effective leaders also make them want to stay with their organization.

Self-gratification

Self-gratification and collaborative communication

The participants' desire for visibility varied. Some felt that they have enough visibility with their telework days of two days a week and others believed that they would not want more telework days to be added to their current work schedule. Regardless of when social interactions occurred, weekly in-person interactions with colleagues are desired by the participants.

Self-gratification and balance

The participants equally shared in similar experiences that upward mobility required initiative to take on new assignments, working hard because there is equal opportunity, and taking advantage of career developmental trainings and certificate programs when the opportunity presented itself. Although telework schedules with multiple days out of the office have its challenges and positives, it is the thoughtfulness of the participants' planning that determines how much they would grow. Several participants shared that their personal growth is equally important as their professional growth. One participant expressed that they have worked hard to be in the position they are in, and they find happiness knowing that they have set the mark for their children and grandchildren.

Self-gratification and influence

The participants unanimously agreed that their racial background did not influence their ability to be promoted. Other factors such as timing, money for promotions, and technical competency in their role, equated to their upward mobility. Many of the participants reflected on what motivated them in the work place and they all had similar responses such as happiness, comfort and flexibility, and money for an enhanced quality of life. Their outlook helped them to perceive a fair work environment when considering their race.

Self-gratification and trust

The participants viewed professional development and upward mobility as a personal responsibility first. It was their responsibility to develop good work ethic, maintain good relationships with their

managers and peers, and do what is necessary for their growth. Some participants relied on their faith in God to assist them with staying focused on their personal, professional and spiritual growth. Their ability to trust the process it takes to further their careers allowed them to enjoy their career journey thus far.

The researcher's interpretation of the axial coding led to this meta-memo of reflections incorporates the researchers understanding of this coding phase thus far.

A second review of the raw data provided the opportunity to re-evaluate the themed data categories. Four of the seven categories were combined into two separate categories, for a total of five categories. Both *collaboration* and *communication* overlapped *in vivo* language. A new name emerged into *collaborative communications*. Additionally, liberation and growth were also viewed similarly and are also combined into one category. The new themed category is self-gratification. The five themed categories include: influence (I), balance (B), collaborative communications (CC), trust (T) and self-gratification (SG). Each of these categories impacted the other category while interpreting key inferences from the participants' response for a more complete understanding of the data.

The axial coding for influence, collaborative communication, balance, trust and self-gratification uncovered in-depth understanding of linkage for how each theme connects to relationships. All of the participants provided insight on whether or not teleworking fewer or more days than two days a week had any bearing on their potential for upward mobility. Additionally, the axial coding did not show any implications that African Americans were not being promoted because of their ethnicity.

Triangulation

The third phase focused on triangulation coding. During triangulation coding, the original interviews are reviewed to analyze how well the coding categories fit. Several questions will be used to determine validity of the coding method. Wood (2016) included the following questions for validity that follow:

- 1) *Do the data sets accurately reflect the meta-memos created?*
- 2) *Does the language accurately reflect in vivo?*
- 3) *What are the variances for fit?*
- 4) *Has any new information emerged that may have been missed during the initial coding cycle?*
- 5) *Should there be any changes made to further understand the interpreted script?*
- 6) *What is now known about the final coded information?*

During triangulation, a second look at the primary data and the raw data was analyzed. The second review of the data, allowed the researcher to identify key information that may have been overlooked. For example, participant 3 expressed themes of confidence and positive culture from their perspective of their organization. It was understood by the participant that management utilized a merit based system to promote staff according to their standard policy. Additionally, the participant further explained that, people should be respectful regardless of their opinions of the policy in place.

The participant continued to explain that their outlook and personal perspectives differed from other staff because of their positivity. Surprisingly, the participant experienced hindrance where they were denied approval of an emerging leaders program by their African American male supervisor several years ago. Though the participant delivered quality work ethic and produce merit base quality work, their manager still denied the approval without good reasoning. When the supervisor retired, the participant felt liberated because they no longer needed to deal with being held back.

Summary

The axial coding shaped the researchers understanding of the impact telework schedules with two or more days had on African American employees seeking upward mobility. Participants viewed telework with mixed feelings for both its pros and cons. During in vivo coding, a long list of key words and phrases became apparent in its influence on the participants' perspectives of telework and their personal and professional growth. The participants' reflections revealed that they did not perceive a connection of obtaining upward mobility to their ethnicity (African Americans), because there were other factors that are seemingly greater in impact that would determine growth in their organization. These factors include, time, money, merit based promotional potential, institutional knowledge and competency. Moreover, there was very little evidence that associated being African American as a prime factor for hindrance in professional growth. Participants reflected on growth as a personal responsibility for someone to seek out the desired mentorship, professional development opportunities, and craft an individual developmental plan in order to track their growth over time.

Making connections

The taxonomy themes formed are also connected to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. The connections were determined during the axial coding process, and these connections helped to illustrate how behavioral, environmental and collective efficacy could influence the individual's response to or within any given situation. For this study, the themes of influence, balance, collaborative communications, trust, and self-gratification, helped to show the relationship of each category and the impact each element in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory had on the individual category.

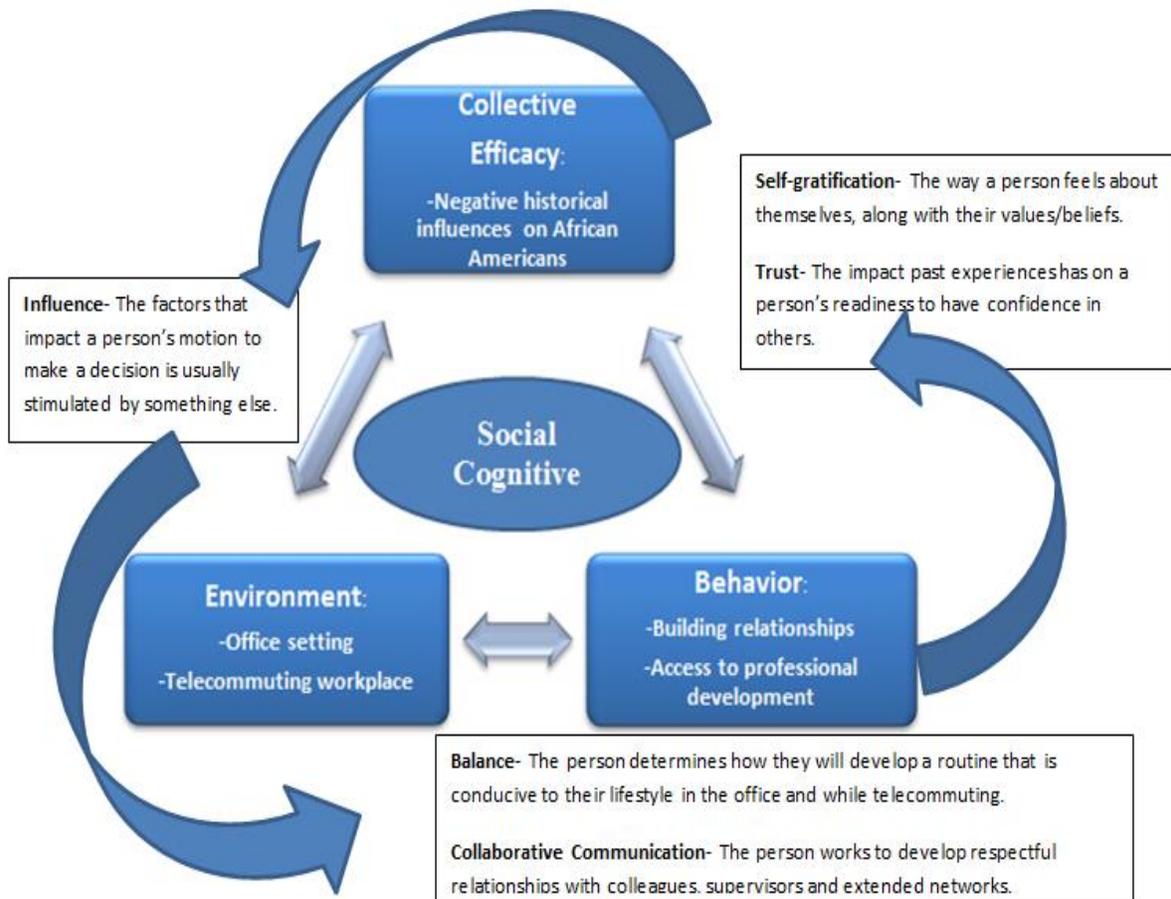


Figure 5. Taxonomy categorical connections to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory.

Each theme had some relevance to each element in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. Collective Efficacy was best associated with self-gratification and trust. While balance and collaborative communication was best associated with Bandura's behavior component. The environmental element was best associated with influence.

Post-fieldwork notes

Saldana (2011) describes the post-fieldwork period as a time where continued reflection and analysis of data occurs post interview, allowing a more cognitive understanding for the researcher to synthesize the information gained. During the post-fieldwork period, information about what the researcher observes may be noted to make significant connections and or inferences by conducting deduction, induction or abduction of information. Saldana (2011) further explains that deduction of information is the ability to arrive at a conclusion with factual evidence; induction of information is making an inference for understanding data after examining facts; and abduction of information

explains the likelihood of occurrences based on clues. During the researcher's recruitment process, and after the completion of the third interview, deduction of information was captured in field notes.

Findings at a glance

The recruiter noted that there was some *apprehension* from people wanting to participate in the research study because the targeted group of people, African Americans, who are being recognized to be most affected by multiple days to telework, is rather difficult to detect. As more information was provided about the root cause of why African Americans were selected to be the focus of this study as it relates to oppression and even the days of when segregation occurred, there seemed to be more of a connection made, according to the notes recorded. Potential participants delivered nonverbal cues of deep thought and suddenly a widening of the eyes with a gasp in an understanding. Recognizing that there are stigmas of unfair treatment on different sexual or racial ethnic groups, there seemed to be a disconnection of belief that racial discrimination still occurs. Additionally, the title of the study generated curiosity with whether or not there was actually a correlation to be made for the African American community and their upward mobility with regards to telework schedules with two or more days a week. Although, the study generated curiosity, the potential participants would repeatedly share that they could not see how that connection could be made, and would opt out of participating. Furthermore, the individual would suggest that someone else would be more fitting for the study in the Blacks in Government affinity group.

Interview questions

In one particular interview, after the final question designated for the managers was asked and the audio recording had been turned off, the participant mentioned that the questions answered really did not depict any ethnic barriers for the African American community and that they really could not understand how the connection would be made to the research topic. An explanation was made to the participant about the connection of managers using telework schedules to retain employees because this participant self-identified as a manager for the research study. The participant recognized that different questions were asked of managers and employees, and proceeded to share experience that focused on hindrances in growth for African Americans. When asked if the remarks made could be captured for the purpose of the research study, the participant expressed that what was shared was off the record and could not be audio-recorded.

Field observations

Several notes were captured from what was observed in the field. This included group discussions that were totally unrelated to the research study, interpersonal conversations and mental notes made as a result of the topics discussed, and environmental observations. Observations were made

during a *Cultural Differences in the Workplace* department-wide workshop. During this in-person workshop, employees at various GS levels and Senior Executive Service Leadership attended the workshop to discuss the results generated from an employee viewpoint survey that was distributed a year earlier to employees throughout the department. One of the topics discussed revealed that a high percentage of the department felt that they did not receive accurate performance evaluation ratings from their supervisors because they believed their ratings were impacted by their racial background. Employees also expressed multiple experiences of discrimination in age, race, sexual orientation, and from being a minority.

In another observation, a conversation with a colleague revealed that their belief in a specific professional appearance for moving up to the next GS level as an African American employee required a lot of strategic effort and focused planning. When asked about their choice of hairstyle, the colleague shared that their hair must be worn straight and never in its curly natural state, in order to be viewed as a prospective manager and or supervisor. The colleague proceeded to share examples of other work associates that had received promotions in the past five to seven years and counted the few African Americans that are amongst the group of GS level 14. A total of three of ten employees were non-white.

Discussion

This chapter will review the research questions and provide an answer to the proposed hypothesis. Additionally, details of how the findings illustrate the need for further research to be conducted will be explained. The researcher will also review this research study in totality and explain necessary recommendations a summary of understanding in the conclusions will complete this study.

Research Questions

In this section, the researcher responds to the research questions from the perspectives gained through the coding and analysis with the intent of furthering her understanding of the research problem and her working hypothesis. Does the preference for telework negatively affect the promotion or advancement of African American's in public service?

Research question one

How do telework schedules positively impact employees and their willingness to adopt the working style?

Telework is a way to improve work-life-balance. According to the findings in this study, telework schedules positively impact the employee's ability to have flexible schedules. Several of the participants explained that the flexibility promotes peace of mind and freedom. Additionally, some participants agreed that telework also saves time and money. Specifically, participant 4 explained that telework saves time during commuting hours to and from work. For some employees, the commute time may be several hours to and from work and employees expressed delight in having the ability to sleep in longer before beginning work during their normal commute time. Money is also being saved when considering the expenses that are naturally used to fund either transportation or food while being out of the house. Employees who telework, are more likely to eat from home rather than go out and purchase food during their lunch hour.

Telework schedules are preferred by employees who desire work-life-balance and flexibility, thus making the working situation comfortable enough to stay within the organization and or agency for lengthy periods of time. The research study findings from the participants who are managers revealed that telework also build independence. The independence permits some employees to focus more on their work and complete timely assignments, without experiencing office distractions, for example socializing with colleagues. For some employees, telework helps to relieve stress from being in the office setting and having to experience pressure from a supervisor or colleagues.

Similarly, telework also allows the employee to recharge in the comfort of their own home, to later be more refreshed for the next day of work.

With regard to Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory, telework verses the office setting relates to the environment element the most. Depending on the environment of work for the employee, whether at home or in the office setting, the employee prepares in advance for how he/she will adapt to the work situation. Adjustments are made accordingly for the employee to be most comfortable to perform their daily work duties.

Research question two

To what extent has telework enhanced work quality?

The data revealed that telework does not necessarily enhance work quality. Participants shared that the work responsibilities are the same whether the employee is in the office or telecommuting. However, the behavior of the employee is affected. For example, participant five explained that her environment is a little more relaxed when she is teleworking at home because she does not feel the pressures of being in the office around colleagues who are waiting for her to complete an assignment. Typically, the work assignments and due dates remain the same no matter what the employee schedule is, thus, the work quality is not greater or less when the employee is in the office or teleworking at home. Some employees even configure a home office where they actually replicate the feeling of being in their office. Therefore, the environment is different geographically, but the feeling associated with being in an office is mutual.

The data also supports the claim that telework provides employees the time to focus on independent work. Some employees find it best to work independently so that they are able take advantage of online trainings. For example, the employee could actually work on their independent work assignments, webinar training materials, independent development plans, and develop their institutional knowledge about their agency or program office center. The data also discovered that employees who are encouraged to increase their professional growth usually apply focused attention with limited office distractions to their personal and professional career development.

With regard to Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory, telework enhancing work quality relates to the environment and behavior elements most. The behavior of the employee may change their feeling of comfort more in their home verses being in the office. However, the work quality produced does not change. The employee will develop the habit necessary to perform work independently according to the findings. Essentially, the major behavior changes that occur for the employee is in their willingness to actively work to focus on personal development while teleworking at home compared to when they are in the office setting.

Research question three

What challenges as it relates to access in the office setting have prevented you from professional growth and or upward mobility?

Several challenges that impact upward mobility were identified by the participants. For example participants' one, two and six, expressed that timing of when the positions were announced and whether the employee met the requirement of being in their position or in their existing GS level for at least 12 months, was a factor that impact upward mobility. Another example that many of the participants who were managers shared is the availability of funds to support a promotion within an organization. The data revealed that some of the employee participants were often told that the budget did not allow for more opportunities to offer staff developmental trainings and award promotions. Furthermore, technical competency and or having a specialized skill that makes the employee an expert in a particular area impacted their upward mobility.

Interestingly enough, when participants were directly asked to share whether or not they felt that their ethnic origin of African American decent affected their upward mobility, all of the participants expressed that they did not *believe* it did. The most significant frame of thought for all the participants was their *belief* in the policies and laws in place within their organizations that prevents racial discrimination. The data revealed that in one of the participant's interview around the area of hindered growth, a supervisor prevented the employee from taking a training that would support the participant's track for upward mobility. Despite the participant's display of good work ethic, good time management and their production of quality work, the supervisor completely disregarded what they knew about the participant's work performance and refused to approve the participant the opportunity to even submit an application for the program each time the employee attempted to apply. The supervisor's reason for not approving the employee to apply for the program was simply because the supervisor did not want to lose out on a quality worker.

With regard to Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory, the experiences of African American employees encountering challenges for upward mobility and visibility focuses on behavior and collective efficacy. Participants were asked to share past experiences that may have impacted their growth over time and the participants needed to think about the psychological impact of their experiences and determine if they were challenges that affected their growth. The participants also had to distinguish what other factors may have impacted their ability for upward mobility, other than their ethnicity or behavior, to demonstrate promotional potential.

Conclusions

The research study explored telework schedules with two or more days and the impact it has on upward mobility for African Americans. The study also explored if managers considered using telework as a means to retain employees. The key factors that lend itself for further understanding is the focus on African Americans, and why this group of people would experience hindrances in upward mobility, retention practices, management styles and approaches, and telework pros and cons. Exploring these key elements helped to determine the research that is already available and the limited research that is still needed to discover other avenues which can also bring meaning to themes that align. The findings served as evidence to support the preference toward telework schedules for African Americans, as well as any aversions to why some participants preferred working in the office over telecommuting. The managers in the study also shared, in their approaches, the use of telework schedules as a method to promote work-life-balance and flexibility, and not necessarily to retain employees.

The association of ethnicity in the African American community to upward mobility with two or more telework days did not explicitly reveal a negative connection in the participants' experiences. According to the findings associated with research question one for the positive impact telework has on employees, telework schedules offer employees flexibility and peace of mind from being in the office work environment. Research question two focused on the enhancement of work quality that is a result of telework schedules, and the findings revealed that the work quality of employees did not increase or decrease because it stayed the same whether the employee was in the office or at home telecommuting. Research question three focused on the challenges of growth and upward mobility African Americans may encounter in the office setting with regard to them having access to resources or people. The findings revealed that there were not any challenges associated with the participants being African Americans, but other factors impacted their growth such as timing, money and technical competency. However, after carefully considering the researcher's observations, a new assumption in this study revealed that an even deeper connection to subtleties of discriminatory practices in the federal work environment may be prevalent.

After thorough understand the researcher's observations, and the information shared throughout the interviews became more apparent. It is not the idea that telework schedules with two or more days a week impact upward mobility for African Americans, but there are subtle displays of discriminatory acts that occurs in the office. Often, the display of unjust discrimination is unrecognized by employees within these federal agencies because they choose to believe in the laws that support non-racial discriminatory practices in the workforce. According to Robinson, Dryden, & Gomez (2011), common workplace oppressions is felt most when little attention is given to the

central importance of race, ethnicity and immigration status as an organizing focus (p. 187). Examples of oppression, for African Americans who choose to believe in an equal or just system working for them, were captured through observations in this study. In some instances, there were subtleties of discrimination but the participants did not recognize it to be discrimination because it was within the same ethnic group. Subtleties of discrimination are not often the issues discussed in the federal workforce because of the sensitivity of the issues that lies within its themes. More attention should be given to address what it means for minorities to simply adapt to a system to help them understand when a situation may become borderline discrimination.

Recommendations

Further discussions should be implemented as a result of this study in federal agencies to assist with bringing more attention to what substantiate as subtleties of discrimination. In order to avoid institutionalized bias of discrimination there is a strong need to have ongoing conversations surrounding these sensitive topics. Beginning at the Senior Executive Service level and down to the program office center organizational level, routine discussions with staff are necessary. Further assistance may be provided to employees at the ground route level by providing counseling, materials, and other supporting information to help people recognize discrimination and how to best discuss it with their teams.

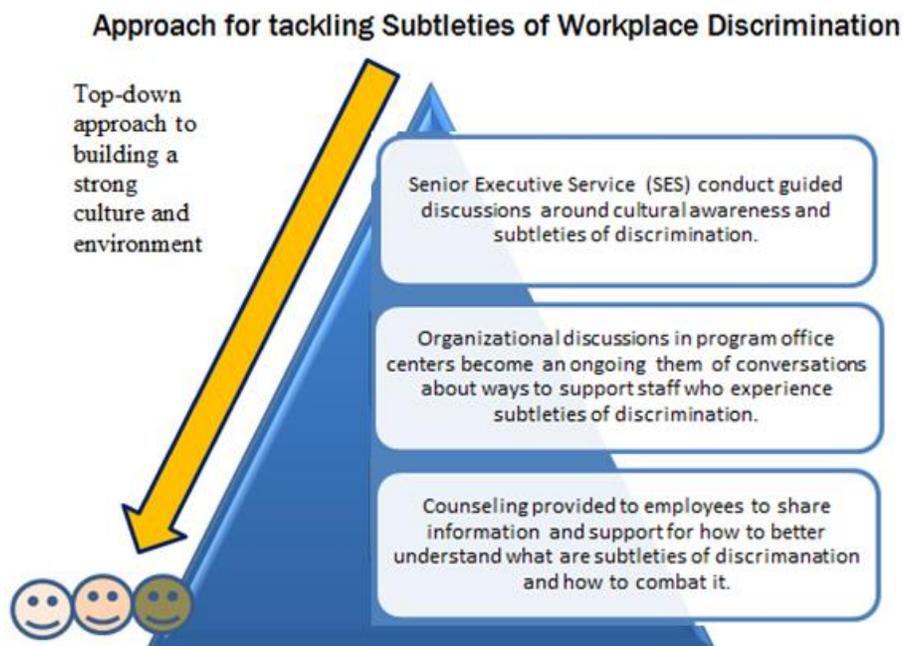


Figure 6. Institution of Senior Executive Service and leadership for a top-down approach to build a strong organizational culture.

In addition to the routine discussions lead by Senior Executives Service and other leadership, and much like this research study, further research should be conducted to explore people's experiences in order to see if more people of other ethnicity experience subtleties of racism are in the workplace. People of different sexual orientation and ageism should also be explored. Furthermore, there are some people in power (managers and supervisors) who abuse the law and policies by adding their own inferences to what is already in written policy when making a decision. This may also lend itself to further research.

Implications

It is understood that racism is not dead and people choose to adapt to "*the system*" to better themselves, but the more conversations about the issues that employees experience that make it challenging to recognize subtleties of discrimination is important to discuss. For example, when people have water cooler chats, or when promotions are made and it is obvious that there are very few non-white employees serving in these roles, a conversation with Senior Executive Service and other leadership should be mandated to address these apparent differences that are not openly discussed. Ever too often, people want to be in an environment where race is not of a major concern. However, that does not mean that people should shelve these problems surrounding around race until a personal issue surfaces. If attention to and discussion of the issues is not a regular practice the subtleties of racism become socially accepted. There is much information that is frequently left unsaid and little approaches to tackle these issues.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to use the phenomenological qualitative approach to investigate the connection between African Americans in the federal government at the GS 11-14 level, and whether or not their telework schedules, of two or more days a week, affect their upward mobility. Additionally, in the study, the researcher explored whether managers used telework schedules to retain employees. The researcher asked three questions to bring more insight to these phenomena: (1) How do telework schedules positively impact employees and their willingness to adopt the working style?, (2) To what extent has telework enhanced work quality?, and (3) What challenges as it relates to access in the office setting have prevented you from professional growth and or upward mobility?

The targeted population of participants included GS 11-14 African American employees and managers of any ethnicity. Participants were initially approached by purposive sample selection of members from the Blacks in Government and Greater Mount Calvary Holy Church Liturgical Dance Ministry. Further recruitment methods included the snowball network sampling approach. Data was

collected using open-ended questions. An analysis of the findings from *in vivo*, taxonomy, and axial coding highlighted five themes: Influence, collaborative communication, self-gratification, balance, and trust.

The findings revealed that telework schedules improve work-life-balance, and is not necessarily used as an approach to retain employees, but to increase independent working skills and build professional development. Additionally, African American employees did not share that they believed their ethnicity impacted their upward mobility; therefore, the connection of telework two or more days a week did not impact their growth. However, new findings revealed a deeper understanding of the current findings. It is now understand that the participants did not believe there were barriers and challenges of racism but there are barriers with subtle acts of racism that occurs in the workplace. People choose not to recognize it or believe that it is happening to them.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Recruitment will occur through word of mouth. My association with Blacks in Government will grant me access to African American federal employees at multiple agencies and various GS levels. My affiliation with Toastmasters and my church dance ministry will also grant me access to many more African American federal employees. Though my focus will be on managers and employees at the GS 12 level thru the GS 14 level, the recruitment message below will help generate leads on potential participants by using a snowball effect.

Script: Federal agency employees through the BIG organization and Dance Ministry

Hello _____, I am conducting a phenomenological qualitative research study to better understand the impact teleworking more than two days a week has on African American employees in the federal government. The goal of this study is to determine if there is an influence on upward mobility by teleworking schedules for African American federal employees at the GS 12 level thru GS 14 level. Recognizing that working in the office setting generates visibility, this study attempts to understand if teleworking outside of the office setting has a negative influence, if at all, on African American employees seeking professional growth.

This study will also look at telework from a managerial perspective and the impact it may have on promoting employee retention. In the event that telework is used to promote retention, the interview will help determine if telework schedules with two or more days actually hinders the growth of African American federal employees. Do you know anyone who might fit the criteria of who I am looking for to be interviewed?

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Federal Workforce Retention: The Telework Phenomenology for Manager with African American Employees

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study examining African American federal employees and the impact telework schedules has on their upward mobility. My name is Shavonney White, and the data collected in this interview will help fulfill the requirements for a Master of Science in Administration in Organizational Development at Trinity Washington University. I am under the supervision of my faculty advisor Dr. Kelley Wood.

Participation Requires of You: To read and sign your consent form, coordinate with researcher to schedule an interview appointment, conduct interview in a comfortable environment for participant to feel their most natural self, obtain instructions from the researcher of what to do upon completion of the study. There is no planned use of deception involved in this study.

Your Privacy: Your participation in this study and your responses will be kept confidential. Any reference to you will be by pseudonym, including any direct quotes from your responses. This document and any notes or recordings that might personally identify you as a participant in this study will be kept in a locked place that only the researcher will have access to. Only the researcher and the research supervisor might know who has participated in this study. Three years after the completion of this research study all personally identifying information will be destroyed.

Risks to you: There are five acknowledged risks generally associated with participation in research studies such as this one: Physical, psychological, social, economic, and legal. The researcher foresees minimal risk for those who choose to participate in this study. There are no foreseen physical risks associated with this study; other risks might include the following:

You might experience anxiety, discomfort, or negative emotions as a result of responding to the questions asked of them in this research study. If you experience a negative reaction, you may choose to skip the question, to withdraw from the study, or you may contact my faculty advisor or the BGS Institutional Review Board, especially if your discomfort continues after the study. See the contact information on the page below.

You might experience social, economic, or legal implications if you share your responses or your participation in this study with others. If you choose to participate in this study, you are encouraged to keep your participation in this study and your responses confidential. The researcher will maintain your confidentiality throughout the study, and will destroy the records of your participation three years after the study is complete.

Benefits to You: There are not foreseen direct benefits to you regarding participation in this study beyond the general knowledge that you are assisting in furthering the knowledge related to this research topic, and assisting the researcher in completing the MSA degree requirements. There is no compensation associated with participation in this study.

Informed Consent Form, page 2Federal Workforce Retention: The Telework Phenomenology for Manager with African American Employees

This document acknowledges I understand my rights as a participant in this study, which the researcher has explained to me prior to signing this document.

I acknowledge that the researcher has explained my rights, the requirements of this study, and the potential risks involved in participating in this study. I understand there is no compensation for, or direct benefit of participating in this study. By signing below and providing my contact information I am indicating that I consent to participate in this study, that I am at least 18 years of age, and I am eligible to participate in this study.

I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying the researcher by email. If I have any concerns regarding my participation in this research study I may contact the research supervisor, Dr. Kelley Wood, or the BGS Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees the ethical practice of student research at the Trinity Washington University School of Business and Graduate Studies. I may ask for a copy of this document for my own records.

Signed Name: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Phone Number, Email Address, or Postal Address: _____

Thank you for your participation,

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Dr. Kelley Wood
MSA Program Chair
Trinity Washington University
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(202) 884-9640

BGS Institutional Review Board Committee
(202) 884-9640, or
Email BGS@trinitydc.edu with BGS IRB in the subject line.

Appendix C: Data Collection Instrument

Qualification questions for respondent participation in this study.

Qualification Statements:	Indicate: YES, NO or not applicable (NA)
I am an African American federal employee.	YES NO (NA)
I have held my current position for at least 2 or more years.	YES NO (NA)
I am currently a manager or supervisor who has been in this position level for 5 years or more.	YES NO (NA)
I am currently eligible for and am seeking upward mobility.	YES NO (NA)
My job encourages telework, where I currently telework at least two or more times a week.	YES NO (NA)

Prompt: This interview will be divided into three sections that look at your personal outlook on success, professional outlook on success and a few position specific questions. I would like to begin the interview by asking you to share with me your outlook on success and your efforts to work towards your goals in order to be successful. This will allow me to understand what motivates you to strive for success in the work environment and personally. It will also target your desires for leadership or more responsibility in a professional setting. This will help me comprehend what drives you in your lenses.

Next, we will discuss your professional outlook on the role of telework in meeting your department or team’s mission or objectives. And how do you make use of telework to meet your goals or needs? For example, is telework worth your effort? Does it benefit your organization, team, or you? Does it present challenges or obstacles to maintaining a positive culture, the development of individual members, or efficiency? Has it improved your work life balance, or your ability to meet your responsibilities, and grow professionally? Finally, you will be asked a few questions pertaining to your position as a manager or non-manager employee.

Please share with me your perspectives, as naturally and comfortably as you wish.

Interview questions African American federal employees:

Personal Outlook on Success:

- 1) When do you find yourself to be most productive?

Probe: How do you spend that time wisely?

- 2) What do you consider to be your most important skill in performing the task for your job?

Probe: How about in your overall career field?

- 3) What are some most important attributes necessary to move into a leadership position?

- 4) What developmental resources are available in order for you to be successful in your career?

Probe: How are you taking advantage of these opportunities?

- 5) What does success look like for you in your job?

Probe: How about in the next 5 years?

- 6) How do you evaluate your career success?

- 7) What motivates you to be successful on the job?

Professional Outlook on Success:

1. How do you feel about your work ethic and or performance in the office compared to when you telecommute?

Probe: If there is a significant difference, how so?

2. How important compensation in comparison to you enjoying what you do at work?
3. What are your overall thoughts on telework schedules?
4. Does the idea of telework present any challenges or obstacles to maintaining a positive culture in your organization?
5. From your perspectives, how does telework promote opportunities for staff development and or efficiency?
6. Has telework improved your work life balance, or your ability to meet your responsibilities, and grow professionally?

Manager only:

1. What strategies do you have in place to retain your staff and how would telework support your strategies?
2. What are your likes and dislikes about telework schedules?

3. How do you recognize/reward your staff for quality work performance?

Non-management employees only:

1. How important is it for you to have visibility in your organization?
2. Compared to your peers of other racial ethnic backgrounds, how do you feel about the opportunities you have available for your growth and development to the next GS level?
Probe: How apparent, if any, are the differences?
3. Can you describe your experiences, if any, of hindrances for growth?

Probe: Have you ever felt that opportunities were withheld from you for any reason at all? Do you ever experience working twice as hard to prove your capability to produce quality work? Please explain.

This concludes our interview session. Thank you for your participation!