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Does Organization Sector Matter in Leading Teleworker Teams? A Comparative Case Study

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Abstract

Literature was reviewed to investigate the forces that are driving telework arrangements, the perceived benefits and drawbacks from teleworking, and the extent to which teleworking arrangements are utilized in the United States in both the private and public sectors. Results of a qualitative case analysis are presented, comparing the experiences of managers in both a large profit-seeking travel management corporation headquartered in a large Midwestern city in the United States and a large state governmental agency headquartered within 50 miles of that city. Organizational similarities and differences are identified in the skills and competencies which are considered key in managing teleworkers, unique challenges to supervising teleworkers, and approaches used by managers to develop self-reliance and the capacity for teamwork in teleworkers. Finally, conclusions regarding key telework manager skills and strategies which may be effective for organizations offering telework arrangements to employees are presented along with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: *teleworking, telecommuting, management strategies, for-profit, public agency*

1. Introduction

Teleworking utilizes communications technology as a means of substitution for work-related travel and enables team members to interact virtually with one another without having to be physically present at the office at the same time (Day and Burbach, 2011). Teleworkers are sometimes faced with time sensitive decisions that require action or the exercise of judgment in generating solutions when team interaction is not possible. The challenge for managers is to simultaneously develop self-reliance in individual teleworkers along with the capacity for teamwork.

2. Literature Review

Teleworking was introduced during the 1970s as a means to substitute communications technology for repetitive work-related travel (Niles, 1994). The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) (2006) defines telework as a "work arrangement in which an employee regularly performs officially assigned duties at home or at other work sites geographically convenient to the residence of the employee" (p.2). Teleworking enables workers to interact virtually without having to be present at the office. While the utilization of telework arrangements has become common in the private sector, teleworking initiatives have only recently been initiated in many public sector organizations in the United States.

Forces Driving Telework Arrangements

Day and Burbach (2011) suggested that telework decisions are driven by the nature of the work, the perceived convenience to the teleworker or other team members, travel related costs or demands,

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economic cost savings from not having to maintain office space, and the likelihood of business disruption during emergencies. However, this provides an incomplete view of the forces driving teleworking. A more complete view of the decision drivers would include global economic, social, political and environmental pressures, as well as the emergence of internet and remote communication technologies, education, and rapidly changing workplace demographics. (Agres, Edberg, and Igbaria, 1998; Kolman, 2008; Murray and Mohamed, 2010; Leung, 2004; Meister and Willyerd, 2010)

Since the late 1990s, internet commerce has moved people towards virtual information societies in which goods and services are provided without the need for direct face-to-face interaction with consumers (Agres et al., 1998). Leung (2004) suggested that much of the work in an information society can be performed by teleworkers. Factors which have transformed the way Americans work include public policies that encourage development of community and rural network infrastructures, increased computer literacy, a necessity to adapt to change in response to globalization, downsizing of jobs, trends toward self-service and automated delivery of goods and services. Today, many homes are equipped with technologies that integrate high speed internet (e.g. broadband cable, DSL or satellite), telephone (e.g. digital voice over internet protocol (VOIP), personal computers, laptops, electronic tablets, cellular devices, and entertainment receivers to deliver high quality sound, image, text, and data processing capabilities. At the same time, teleworkers have been empowered to make business decisions as organization structures have become flattened in response to economic and competitive pressures. For many, the prospect of working in a virtual environment is acceptable or even preferred to traditional office work settings.

Leung (2004) suggests that the shortage of talented workers and the desire to retain valued employees are factors driving telework. By offering telework as a work alternative, workers view telework as a means of enhancing their quality of life. There may be forces, however, that counter the drivers of telework. Meister and Willyerd (2010), for example, predict that by the year 2020, the American workforce will become more diverse with respect to culture, gender, and age. This increasingly diverse workforce will create additional strains on management as employers attempt to satisfy the training needs of teleworkers.

Potential Benefits of Teleworking

Teleworking benefits both workers and organizations, as work opportunities are expanded beyond traditional geographic boundaries. Teleworkers often realize savings on travel related expenditures, clothing, food, and dependent care (Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson and Andrey, 2008; Leung, 2004). The time savings from not having to commute and the ability to set a flexible work schedule may increase job satisfaction, enable one to reserve time for dependent care, reduce stress, and improve the teleworker's work-life balance (Day and Burbach, 2011; Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Leung, 2004; Major, Verive, and Joice, 2008). In addition, the ability to create a customized work environment may be accommodating to workers desiring greater privacy or with special needs or disabilities that limit their ability to relocate or commute to work on a sustained basis (Bricout, 2004; Collins and Moschler, 2009; Day and Burbach, 2011; West and Anderson, 2005).

Teleworking promotes development of improved management skills in allocating tasks, planning, facilitating mediated communication, and in monitoring work (Leung, 2004). It may improve productivity by eliminating absenteeism, commute time, idle time spent socializing, and office distractions (Collins and Moschler, 2009; Day and Burbach, 2011). Teleworking can enable the organization to continue or restore its operations following a disaster, as the organization is not as dependent upon having employees on-site at its offices. (Collins and Moschler, 2009; Day and Burbach, 2011) The organization may realize savings from not having to provide office space, parking, and supplies for employees (Day and Burbach, 2011; Leung, 2004). Teleworking also benefits society in reducing commuter traffic, fuel consumption, air pollution, crowding in cities, and wear and tear on transportation systems (Day and Burbach, 2011; Leung, 2004).

Potential Drawbacks of Teleworking

Teleworkers may feel socially isolated, or may miss coffee breaks and discussions about organizational news (Leung, 2004; Collins and

Moschler, 2009). They may prefer face-to-face meetings to computer mediated discussions or conference calls (Leung, 2004). Distractions at home may make teleworking infeasible (Leung, 2004). Teleworkers may not have the discipline to adhere to established work hours or to work independently to meet deadlines, and may be tempted to put personal priorities ahead of work. Individual contributions are not as noticeable, and may not be recognized by supervisors and co-workers. This could hinder career advancement. In addition, the teleworker may incur costs in establishing internet access, network connectivity, personal computing equipment and software which are not reimbursed.

It is desirable to assemble a team of teleworkers with complementary skills; however, assessment of skills can be a challenge without some direct supervision (Day and Burbach, 2011). New employees may require time to acquire and assimilate organizational information and to establish work relationships. Younger workers, in particular, may excel in the use of technology, but may struggle in developing interpersonal relationships with team members without some initial face-to-face interaction (Day and Burbach, 2011).

It may be more difficult to develop trust between supervisor and teleworkers (Leung, 2004). Telework requires skills such as listening, verbal and written communication, conflict resolution, team support, and productivity monitoring, which some supervisors may lack. (Day and Burbach, 2011; Leung, 2004). Telework may reduce team collaboration and disrupt team unity if teleworkers are treated unequally, are excluded from important meetings, or if the communication infrastructure or facilitation skills are lacking (Day and Burbach, 2011; Harbert, 2008). Feelings of disconnectedness from the organization, lack of identity with the organization's culture, and the absence of team spirit may limit teamwork (Day & Burbach, 2011). It is important for supervisors to possess or develop strong interpersonal and conflict resolution skills to ensure that team unity is maintained. Telework may reduce creativity and productivity if expectations are not set, technology tools are not provided to teleworkers, or monitoring capabilities are not in place (Day and Burbach, 2011; Schindler, 2007).

There may be an increased risk of information security breaches due to sensitive information being transmitted over public networks and stored in unencrypted form. This is considered to be one significant drawback to the use of teleworking by government agencies (Collins and Moschler, 2009; Day and Burbach, 2011). Also, organizations have less control over the maintenance of computer equipment (Day and Burbach, 2011). Opposition to teleworking arrangements from unions, the IRS, and OSHA may also be issues, as workplace compliance standards may be extended to the teleworker's home (Ford and Butts, 1991).

Growth in Utilization of Teleworking

The number of teleworkers in the United States increased from 4 million in 1990 to more than 19.6 million in 1999, with up to 27% of employers offering telework arrangements by 1998 (Leung, 2004). By 2011, the number of people estimated to telework in the United States at least one day per week had risen, but was estimated at under 30 million by the Telework Research Network (2011). In the Federal government, 25% of telework eligible employees participated in some capacity of telework in 2011, up from roughly 21% the year before (US Office of Personnel Management, 2012). Day and Burbach (2011) noted that many government managers resist teleworking; a few exceptions were noted in states that have established telework initiatives, such as Virginia, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Minnesota, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Rhode Island. In a survey of adult workers in Michigan, nearly one in five reported working from home instead of commuting, and 28% reported willingness to telework if given the opportunity by their employers. A few cities that have telework initiatives include Dallas-Ft. Worth, Phoenix, and San Diego (RIDA, 2002).

Significance of the Problem

There is a need to better understand the experiences of managers in developing self-reliance and the capacity for teamwork in tele-workers. Lepsinger and DeRosa (2010) reported that 27% of virtual projects failed or were non-performing, despite established use of virtual teams in the private sector (Day and Burbach, 2011). In light of the preponderance of studies from the private sector, Day and Burbach (2011) suggested that the application of telework

arrangements in public organizations calls for more perspective from public organizations. The unique challenge for these managers is in developing team members who may have different motivational needs, so that they are able to work independently, and at the same time are willing to collaborate and focus on accomplishing team goals (Wright 2004, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to compare the telework experiences of managers in a private sector firm and a state governmental agency in order to improve our understanding of telework. Specifically, we aim to identify, organizational differences in managerial skills and competencies, identify challenges to developing and managing teleworkers, and identify approaches used to develop self-reliance and the capacity for teamwork in teleworkers in a corporate travel agency and a state wildlife agency. The central research question for this study was: How do governmental and corporate managers of teleworker teams interpret their leadership experiences?

3. Research Methodology

Data analysis was conducted on interview data from eleven corporate travel managers or supervisors and nine state wildlife management officials. The sample of corporate travel participants consisted of two males and nine females, including two directors, six managers, and three supervisors. The sample of state wildlife management participants consisted of eight males and one female, including two Fisheries Assistant Division Administrators, one Wildlife Outdoor Education Specialist, one Fisheries District Manager, and five Wildlife District Managers. All participants had been employed by their current organizations for more than one year, were responsible for the supervision of at least two teleworkers, and had at least five years of professional working experience.

A qualitative case study approach was utilized to address the research problem. Because little is known about the differences in experiences of corporate verses public managers of teleworkers, and because the researchers seek to understand the participants' experiences, a qualitative design was appropriate (Creswell, 2008). Separate participant pools were selected with the assistance of two gatekeepers, both employed within their organization to provide access to participants. Both gatekeepers had a professional working relationship with the individuals within their participant pool, and both prospective participants held a telework management or supervisory position within their organization. Each gatekeeper provided a list of telework managers or supervisors to choose from. Of the thirteen names provided within the for-profit corporate travel management organization, eleven were chosen for the study based upon the participant criteria and availability. Also, of the thirteen participant names provided within the state wildlife management department, nine were chosen for the study based upon participant criteria and availability.

The interviews were semi-structured and designed to explore the participants' thoughts and feelings about their experiences in managing teleworker teams. The interview process was guided by an interview protocol containing four open-ended questions. The questions were focused on participant perceptions about technical and interpersonal skills and competencies that are imperative to managing teleworkers, the unique challenges to developing and managing teleworkers, and the approaches used to simultaneously developing self-reliance and the capacity for teamwork in teleworkers. Initial responses to questions were probed by the interviewer to ignite more thorough responses.

Participants were interviewed at a mutually agreed upon day and time via telephone to ensure privacy, and interviews were recorded in a secluded office using a speaker phone and digital recording device. The interview analysis consisted of organizing and transcribing the text. A preliminary data analysis was conducted to gain a general feel of the data through detailed readings of the participants' perspectives. Then data was coded and organized by interview question, theme, organization and participant using a simple spreadsheet to compare and contrast organization differences. It is through this process that units of data, words, sentences or data chunks were compared in order to inductively develop thematic categories. To ensure the validity of the findings, a member checking process was incorporated where participants were asked to check the accuracy of the account (Creswell,

2008). In addition, samples of interview transcripts were subjected to an external expert audit to ensure validity of findings. Once the interview was transcribed, a copy of the summary analysis was provided to the participants along with feedback on themes concerning experiential factors noted during the interview. Because the participants did not indicate inaccuracy of the results, the interpretations were found to be fair and accurate, resulting in findings that are deemed to be grounded in the data, logical, and appropriate (Creswell, 2008).

4. Findings

This section presents themes drawn from the key telework management issues described by participants. Thirteen themes are common to both organizations; however, there are two themes unique to the private for-profit corporation and there is one theme unique to the state governmental agency. Interpretive comments that follow each story seek to illuminate ontological understandings of themes.

Themes Common to Both Organizations

Proficiency in the use of communication tools*:* Ten of eleven corporate participants cited the use of communication tools (i.e. PC, the Internet, email, messaging, and telephone communications) as key in managing teleworkers; similarly, eight of nine state government participants cited the use of communication tools as key. In both organizations, participants commented on their reliance on the e-mail and the telephone for routine communications with teleworkers. Some differences were noted, however. Corporate participants indicated a preference for instant messaging and other collaboration tools to encourage teamwork, while state government participants did not utilize these tools at all. In the state government organization, less collaboration among wildlife agency teleworkers was required, and funding for collaboration tools was not viewed as a high priority. The following response from a corporate participant illustrates this theme:

They need their development tools to be able to program. We have voice over IP options for them to be able to talk on the phone and then participate in conference calls. We are about 90 to 95% email; we don't get a lot of call volume.

Verbal communication skills: Ten of eleven corporate participants and seven of nine state government participants considered good verbal communication skills key for telework supervisors. Participants from both organizations commented on the potential for miscommunications to occur due to inherent limitations of e-mail. The following response from a state government participant illustrates this theme:

I've had an instance where, in a report I asked for one thing, and I got something else. And, it just is a matter to me of picking up the phone and saying, okay, so what you did was great, but here's what I actually need. Or, sometimes I will send them an example of what I would like to see.

Facilitate periodic face-to-face meetings: Seven of eleven corporate participants and five of nine state government participants considered good face-to-face meeting facilitation skills key for telework supervisors. Meeting face-to-face periodically permits teleworkers to interact with one another and with the supervisor to help in developing a team identity. However, because teleworkers are dispersed and often work remotely from home, supervisors sometimes find it challenging or impossible to schedule face-to-face meetings when all team members can meet. The following response from a corporate participant illustrates this theme:

I have them come in once a month for staff meetings. Without it, I think it would be more a bunch of individuals instead of a team.

Openness, honesty, and approachability: Ten of eleven corporate participants and seven of nine state government participants considered displaying openness, honesty, and approachability key for telework supervisors. These characteristics were seen as crucial in enabling supervisors to gain the teleworkers' trust. Likewise, openness, honesty, and approachability are viewed as beneficial in developing commitment and trust among team members. The following response from a state government participant illustrates this theme:

It comes down to respect basically, and that's how you gain someone's trust; you have to earn their respect by being honest in the good times, honest in the bad times. Being transparent, honest, and then being clear on expectations.

Active listening: Eight of eleven corporate participants and five of nine state government participants considered good active listening skills used to prevent conflicts or detect and clear up misunderstandings as key for telework supervisors. Active listening is crucial because of the remote nature of team interactions and the likelihood that verbal communications among teleworkers and supervisor will be misunderstood. Through active listening, the supervisor is better able to avoid or respond to conflicts among teleworkers. The following response from a corporate participant illustrates this theme:

Basically I've got to have good listening skills...I have to be able to decipher how they're explaining things to me in order to make the quickest judgment call I can.

Team unity: Four of eleven corporate participants and five of nine state government participants considered it key for telework supervisors to facilitate team unity by:

Getting to know team members personally Social activities involving the supervisor and team members can help in building team unity, which in turn facilitates the building of work relationships and trust between teleworkers and the supervisor. People have social needs, and like to feel like they are more than just a resource. The following response from a state government participant illustrates this theme:

One of the guys that I have working for me is an extremely avid birder. He also happens to be a fan of kayaking and fording the rivers in the area and that sort of stuff. We had to do his annual review, and we just needed to have some discussion about where things were going, how they were going, that sort of stuff. I knew that he had a kayak, and I've got one myself. We went down and forded a stretch of the North Platte River, and basically spent the day chatting about work.

Promoting social interaction among team members Social activities that encourage interactions among teleworkers help to develop team unity by facilitating the building of work relationships among team members. This in turn encourages trust, commitment, and accountability to other team members. The following response from a state government participant illustrates this theme:

Once a year, we try to have a little get-together on a Friday afternoon, where families are all invited. You'll cook hotdogs or something, there'll be soft drinks, there might be some beer, but everybody's pretty behaved, and families are invited, wives, kids, etc. And, I think that's really important.

Lack of technical or interpersonal skills: Four of eleven corporate participants and seven of nine state government participants considered teleworkers who lack technical or interpersonal skills a challenge for supervisors. In the case of the corporate travel agency, specialized travel industry knowledge and experience was considered essential before an agent could even be considered for telework opportunities. In the case of the wildlife agency, specialized knowledge of natural resources and agency experience is considered essential for one to be considered for a permanent full-time telework position. It is especially critical for new state government hires to possess strong technical and interpersonal skills, due to restrictions in terminating state government employees once hired. Therefore, full-time permanent telework positions in the wildlife agency are often filled from a pool of candidates who have held temporary positions within the wildlife agency. The following response from a state government participant illustrates this theme:

Typically if somebody has problems in this field, it's because they don't relate to land owners very well, and they don't communicate with landowners very well. So there are occasionally problems.

Cultural and personality fit: Four of eleven corporate participants and five of nine state government participants considered having team members who are not a good cultural or personality fit a challenge to developing and managing teleworkers. For example, a number of state government participants commented on team conflicts that occurred due to strong feminist or chauvinist attitudes of new hires. In these situations, it was noted that the individuals who were a disruptive influence eventually terminated their employment. The following response from a corporate participant illustrates this theme:

I think you really need to get to learn each individual person's personality. That's key, especially when you're working with a remote agent because of how you might address things,

express things, and how each individual interprets it.

Self-starters or goal-driven team members: Eight of eleven corporate participants and five of nine state government participants considered having team members who are not self-starters or goal-driven is a challenge to developing and managing teleworkers. One of the challenges that teleworkers have is managing their own time, separating their personal life from their work responsibilities, and committing to work according to a schedule. The following sample corporate participant response illustrates this theme:

There were a couple of people who stood out, where their productivity really suffered when they went home. One agent was not as productive, because they were getting sidetracked, because they were in their household. You know like, oh I'm sitting here, well I've got some laundry to do, you know. And so we had to really hone in on that and find the root cause, and really address it on an individual basis.

Setting expectations: Ten of eleven corporate participants and six of nine state government participants considered it important to set expectations to motivate teleworkers. Because teleworkers tend to be self-starters and are goal driven, it is important to set expectations to achieve desired work performance. For the corporate participants, this meant setting individual and team transaction volume goals; for the state government participants this means establishing agreed upon budgets and annual goals. The following sample corporate participant response illustrates this theme:

During the hiring process, I really hone in on the fact that they really need to be a top notch employee. They need to have high transactions, their monitors need to come in strong, they have to be volunteering, and they need to be flexible on their schedule.

Empowerment: Eight of eleven corporate participants and nine of nine state government participants considered it important to empower and hold teleworkers accountable so they can learn from mistakes and develop self-confidence. This is especially true in developing self-reliance in the teleworkers, to prepare them for situations in which other team members may not be available to assist in decision-making. The following response from a state government participant illustrates this theme:

Many times there's more than one way to accomplish a certain task or a certain project. So, there are many times when I don't step in on that. I don't want to be a micro manager, because they may have a different way of accomplishing it.

Active supervisory leadership: Six of eleven corporate participants and four of nine state government participants considered it important for supervisors to lead by example and to be able and willing to assist teleworkers in completing work during times of high work volume or stress. By being aware of work performed by team members and by assisting with team workload, supervisors are respected as coworkers who can be called on for assistance. The following response from a corporate participant illustrates this theme:

They do have respect for us, because they see that, not only will we coordinate the workload and gather the information they need for their projects, but when we're in a crunch time, we will actually get involved and become a working manager. We may roll up our sleeves and do some coding if we're in a timeline.

Face-to-face development opportunities: Ten of eleven corporate participants and nine of nine state government participants considered it important to provide face-to-face training, mentoring, and support to teleworkers to help them to become productive. Because teleworkers may not interact with one another or with their supervisor for extended periods, it is critical that supervisors assess the developmental needs of team members. This is especially true with respect to newly hired teleworkers who may lack needed technical skills or knowledge. The following response from a state government participant illustrates this theme:

A young man started to work with us, and when he and I drove down the road the first morning he was there and he made the comment, or he asked a question. As we're driving down the road he said, "what's out there in that field?" And, I said, I don't see what you're looking at. I was expecting, you know, that there was an animal or something out there. I said I don't see what you're looking at. Well he says "that plant that's growing out there". And I said is there something a little different out

there? And we're driving down the road. No, no, he says, that whole field, the green things out there, what is that? And I said, oh, gosh that's alfalfa. And he said well what do you use alfalfa for? And I thought oh my! We've got a long ways to go here. He did well, but we had to start from square one.

Monitor performance: Ten of eleven corporate participants and seven of nine state government participants considered it important to monitor teleworkers' performance and to help address their shortcomings. The corporate supervisors who participated commented on the requirements that teleworkers meet average daily, weekly, monthly, and annual volume quotas; this necessitates close monitoring of teleworker performance. State government participants indicated their team's work is driven by annual budgets and goals rather than volume quotas. However, state government teleworkers interact less frequently with each other and with supervisors; therefore it is essential that supervisors monitor performance to ensure plans and goals are achieved. The following response from a corporate participant illustrates this theme:

We had a relatively new agent who was hard to reach at the end of the night via phone or email. We came to the conclusion, or were suspicious, that agent was walking away from her desk and doing things at home instead of staying on the phones and being available for business. The people that we have on are expected to be there and focus on work. So, in that case we coached the agent, let her know what our expectations are, and really started leaning on phone reports to make sure she was working.

Several minor themes were detected for both corporate and state government supervisors. It is important for supervisors to facilitate team conference calls in order to deliver *consistent communications*. Also, it is important for supervisors to possess *experience and proficiency in their field or industry* so that they can assess performance, mentor less experienced teleworkers, and assist teleworkers with their work as needed. Another minor theme detected was that supervisors may not have *sufficient time available to mentor new employees* due to other administrative duties such as attending meetings, completing department reports, etc. Corporate and state government participants indicated a preference towards hiring teleworkers who are *self-starters and are goal driven*.

Team building is complicated due to the dispersed nature of teams, logistical difficulties in bringing teleworkers together face-to-face, and challenges in building trust and relationships. However, a number of participants commented on the positive team building effects of socializing and bringing teleworkers and their families together face-to-face for company sponsored events. Another minor theme was the importance of teleworkers sharing knowledge to build trust and develop skills and competencies within teams. It is beneficial for supervisors to share knowledge with teleworkers and to encourage teleworkers to share knowledge by responding to requests for assistance and by documenting best practices for team reference. Five participants also commented on the increased productivity of teleworkers due to the absence of office distractions.

Private For-profit Corporation Themes

Workflow monitoring and tracking: Ten of eleven corporate participants cited the use of workflow monitoring and tracking tools as key in maintaining high productivity in teleworker teams. This is because profitability of the travel management corporation is driven by achieving transaction volume quotas. This was not a theme for state government participants, because their work is driven more by budgets and not quotas. The following corporate participant response illustrates this theme:

We can track our outbound calls as well as our inbound calls to see how often agents are having to go out to vendors and to follow up on reservations to make sure that everything is handled in the way that the company expects it to be. I don't think we could do what we do without those phone reports.

Feelings of isolation: Six of eleven corporate participants, but just one of nine state government participants, considered helping teleworkers to overcome feelings of isolation a challenge. Individuals who are extroverted and have strong social needs can have difficulty working in a virtual environment without direct interpersonal contact with coworkers. The following response from a corporate participant illustrates this theme:

I had an employee that it didn't work out for them; they got too depressed. They felt too isolated, and

they lived in a small apartment, was new to the area he was living in, so I think he felt isolated. Was home way too much, and had some anxiety and some different issues that resulted in that, and kind of led to not being a good working environment.

Several minor themes were noted for corporate supervisors. A few of the corporate participants commented on teleworkers' *feelings of disconnectedness* from the organization which arise due to inconsistent corporate communications of organization news; changes in strategies, markets, policies, and benefits; and career growth opportunities, etc. This was not a theme for the state government organization, whose participants commented on regular monthly face-to-face regional meetings, attended by supervisors and field employees, where inter-divisional activities, projects, and organizational changes and opportunities are discussed.

Difficulties in *supporting different learning preferences* were cited by corporate participants in relation to training provided by the corporate training department. This was not cited as a challenge by state government participants as a strong state government agency commitment to continuing education was noted. A few corporate participants mentioned lack of *direct critical feedback* from teleworkers as a challenge. One important difference between the corporate and state government participants in this study was that corporate supervisors interact more frequently with teleworkers in monitoring productivity than do state supervisors. Therefore more frequent feedback from teleworkers is sought from corporate supervisors, as compared to state government supervisors. Corporate participants also expressed some concern for *eliminating distractions* from the teleworkers' work environment, whereas state government participants expressed no such concerns.

A few corporate participants mentioned that it may be beneficial to *allow employees with special needs or a desire to work flexible hours to telework*; these employees could customize their work environment and schedule to meet their needs without disrupting other team members. Absent unique job requirements that would preclude individuals with special needs from teleworking, presumably the same benefits would apply to state government teleworkers. Finally, a number of corporate participants noted their use of *positive reinforcement to motivate*, with incentives offered for exceeding goals.

The use of positive reinforcement and incentives for exceeding goals has the effect of intensifying the internal motivation of teleworkers. While the use of positive reinforcement was not noted in responses from state government supervisors, their preference towards hiring self-starters suggests that positive reinforcement would be effective in motivating teleworkers. It is unknown if the use of performance incentives is permitted under the state government participants' compensation system, but the use of incentives for exceeding goals could result in teleworkers working harder to achieve goals.

State Governmental Agency Themes

Limited compensation and advancement: Five of nine state government participants considered limited compensation and advancement challenges to recruiting and retaining teleworkers. The wages offered to teleworkers, many of whom have Master's degrees, is often below the wages that someone without a university degree can earn in the private sector. Fortunately, the wildlife agency has been able to hire employees who are passionate about nature and their role in protecting wildlife. However, improvements in compensation and advancement opportunities may be necessary to attract talent to these positions. The following two responses from a state government participant illustrate this theme:

For the most part, we're hiring people that, at the very least have a Bachelor's, in most cases have gone through and gotten their Master's degree, and that they're applying for and getting jobs that are paying upper $20K's to low $30K's per year to start. And, not tremendous amounts for raises or anything like that.

They're doing what they love, and that's perfectly fine. They are definitely in it because of their passion for the field and not the monetary (compensation). It is just kind of accepted that that's what they wanted to do, and that's what it's going to be.

A minor theme noted by state government supervisors' is the need for *strong organizational skills*. It is important for state government

supervisors to possess strong organizational skills because the focus is on managing wildlife agency programs and providing resources needed for teleworkers to fulfill their mission and achieve goals rather than on monitoring production quotas as corporate participants do. Another minor theme identified by state government supervisors is that supervisors may lack *formal training on managing teleworkers*. This is due to limitations in training available to supervisors; also, teleworking has not been utilized in state government to the extent it has been used in the private sector.

5. Discussion

There were thirteen major themes common to corporate travel agency and state wildlife agency telework supervisors in explaining their leadership experiences. A number of corporate and state government participants suggested that overall teleworkers tend to be more productive than office workers, but they also identified unique challenges and skills needed in developing and managing teleworkers. Key technical skills identified by both corporate and state government participants included proficiency in using the PC, the internet, email, and the telephone. Possessing technical knowledge, experience, and proficiency in the field or industry was also seen as beneficial to supervisors of less experienced teleworkers. For corporate travel agency supervisors who are accountable for their teams achieving transaction volume goals, proficiency in the use of automated productivity and workflow tracking tools was viewed as essential. In addition, proficiency in the use of team collaboration tools was viewed by a few corporate participants as a valuable skill for supervisors. State wildlife agency supervisors, however, suggested that they are primarily accountable for achieving annual program goals and budgets, but not accountable for their teams achieving transactional goals. In addition, remote employees who work for the state wildlife agency collaborate less frequently than do their corporate counterparts. Therefore the ability of agency supervisors to organize and manage resources is seen as more important than using productivity tracking or collaboration tools.

In terms of key interpersonal skills and competencies needed to manage teleworkers, no significant differences were identified in the corporate travel agency and state wildlife agency supervisors. The interpersonal skills that were identified as most important were verbal communication skills, active listening skills, meeting and conference call facilitation skills, openness, honesty and approachability, and the ability to facilitate social team activities designed to establish camaraderie. There was a strong indication that openness, honesty and approachability are crucial in supervisors gaining the trust of teleworkers.

Challenges common to both corporate travel agency and state wildlife agency supervisors in developing and managing teleworkers included individual teleworkers who are seen as cultural or personality misfits, team members who are not self-starters, miscommunications via e-mail or telephone, and difficulties in finding times and places for periodic face-to-face team meetings. To a lesser extent, insufficient time for mentoring is also seen as a challenge.

Corporate supervisors identified the need to help teleworkers in dealing with feelings of isolation as a unique challenge, while state government supervisors noted that their remote workers generally interact face-to-face with ranchers and landowners on an ongoing basis. Feelings of isolation among remote state government teleworkers was not seen as a unique challenge. A few corporate participants identified distractions or lack of attentiveness on conference calls, different learning preferences, and lack of critical feedback from teleworkers as challenges.

State government supervisors identified low compensation and a lack of advancement as challenges to recruiting and retaining teleworkers. Lack of technical and interpersonal skills possessed by remote workers was seen as a challenge, due to restrictions in terminating employees who do not perform up to expectations. Lack of formal management training and lack of access to collaborative technology were viewed as challenges by a few state government participants.

In developing self-reliance and capacity for teamwork in teleworkers, some common themes are shared by corporate and state government supervisors. These qualities are developed by empowering teleworkers, while at the same time setting clear expectations, actively monitoring

team performance, mentoring and providing face-to-face training opportunities to help teleworkers in satisfying their development needs. Many of the study participants stressed the need for sharing of information with teleworkers, as well as the need for teleworkers to share information with one another, to ensure team success. This can be accomplished by encouraging teleworkers to help one another, and by rewarding individuals for unselfish behaviors that promote teamwork and contribute to team success. However, it is essential that supervisors actively monitor teleworker interactions so that they are aware when conflicts arise, and that they possess and utilize highly developed interpersonal skills to resolve conflicts directly and timely. Supervisors also need to exercise leadership in assisting teleworkers as needed in making decisions regarding unusual situations, and in providing expert technical support. Corporate supervisors, in particular, indicated a willingness to accept a share of the teleworkers' responsibilities during times of heavy workload.

Limited compensation and opportunities for advancement was a major theme of state government wildlife supervisors. Several supervisors suggested an approach to offset this limitation to recruiting and retaining high quality teleworkers is to hire teleworkers who are passionate about their work.

6. Suggestions for Future Study

A number of studies have focused on the benefits of teleworking (e.g., Major et al., 2008). A few studies have focused on the impact of individual teleworker and work characteristics on work output (e.g., Turetken, Jain, Quesenberry, and Ngwenyama, 2011), but relatively little research has been focused on the impact of workflow monitoring and tracking on transactional work output. This research suggests that for transactional work processes there is a positive relationship between passive workflow monitoring and tracking and productivity. Another topic for future study is the impact of offering performance-based incentives and rewards to teleworkers for exceeding individual and team goals. This might include, for example, studying the impact of offering incentives such as additional vacation time, leadership roles on important projects, or advanced developmental training as an additional form of compensation to state government teleworkers. Finally, research to develop a success predictive instrument to measure personal attributes such as passion towards work, ability to work in isolation, unselfishness, self-motivation, and drive to achieve goals would be beneficial to organization leaders responsible for recruiting, developing, and retaining teleworkers.

The challenge of limited compensation and advancement opportunities in the state wildlife agency appears to be addressed, at least in part and perhaps indirectly, by the hiring of "self-starters" and those who are "passionate" about nature and their role in protecting wildlife. These employees may be exhibiting a public service motivation where the challenge to telework is countered by a strong personal alignment with the mission of the public agency resulting in job satisfaction and commitment to the agency despite the challenges of telework (Moynihan and Pandey, 2007; Wright 2007, Wright and Pandey, 2008). The influence of public service motivation on telework arrangements should be investigated.

Getting to know team members personally and promoting social interaction among team members were mentioned as important to facilitating team unity in both organizations. Adults need social interaction so they can see things from different perspectives, construct knowledge, and acquire knowledge (Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Tweedell, 2000). Also, engaging adult learners in active learning methods improves motivation, leads to rich knowledge, and promotes higher levels of engagement with the educational material (e.g., Wlodkowski, 2008). Reviews of empirical research in active learning consistently identify the importance of providing direct and active learning experiences for adult learners (Prince, 2004; Taylor, 2007). The effects of novel and traditional social interactions and active learning experiences on teleworkers team unity and performance should be investigated.

7. Conclusions

For organizations offering telework arrangements to employees, this research suggests that the use of automated workflow monitoring and tracking tools

is essential for maintaining productivity for transactional work processes. Other technical skills or competencies that supervisors should possess, whether employed in a corporate or public organization, are proficiency in using telephones, PCs, e-mail, messaging, and internet browsers; technical knowledge and experience in the field or industry; and familiarity with team collaboration tools.

Supervisors should consider ways to improve interpersonal skills in interacting with teleworkers face-to-face or through verbal communications, in actively listening to team discussions to know when intervention or assistance is needed, in facilitating meetings and conference calls, and in presenting one's self in an open, honest, and approachable manner. It is very important for the supervisor of teleworkers to share information, and to be open, honest and approachable in order to earn the teleworkers' trust.

Organization leaders, managers, and supervisors should consider employing strategies to address the challenges of teleworking noted in this study. For example, managers should consider the cultural and personality fit of the teleworking team in making hiring decisions. Personality clashes can destroy team chemistry, and render the team ineffective in fulfilling its mission. Organizations should provide compensation and advancement opportunities comparable to those offered to traditional workers to make teleworking opportunities more attractive. Human resources professionals should recruit teleworkers who are passionate about their work, are self-starters, and are motivated to achieve goals. Supervisors should provide face-to-face training, mentoring, and support to team members to ensure development of skills needed for telework. Leading by example and functioning as a working supervisor may enable supervisors to gain the respect of teleworkers. Managers and supervisors should empower their teams, and encourage the sharing of information among teleworkers to develop teamwork. They should also set expectations, monitor performance, and help teleworkers to address developmental needs. Supervisors should reward individual contributions to teamwork and team successes through recognition and celebrations to reinforce team behaviors. Supervisors should avoid and resolve conflicts through active listening and communication. They should also promote team unity by encouraging camaraderie among teleworkers outside of the work setting.

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