

**EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF DISTRIBUTED WORK  
ARRANGEMENTS ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN  
THE NEW NORMAL WORK ENVIRONMENT**

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A Dissertation  
Submitted to  
the Temple University Graduate Board

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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by  
DuShawn R. King  
August 2024

Examining Committee Members:

Dr. Michael J. Rivera, Ph.D. in Business Administration, Associate Professor, Department of Management

Dr. Curtis J. Ph.D. in Business Administration, Associate Professor, Department of Marketing and Supply Chain Management

Dr. Amir Shoham, Ph.D. in Economics, Associate Professor, Department of Finance

Dr. Pallavi Chitturi, Ph.D. in Economics, Associate Professor, Department of Statistical Science

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic will significantly transform workplace dynamics, resulting in a notable surge in remote work environments. This qualitative grounded theory study aims to investigate the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement within the evolving work landscape. To accomplish this, the study will employ semi-structured interviews, a demographic survey, as well as research tools such as Zoom and NVivo. The research will be conducted within the United States, with a sample comprising human resources managers and employees representing diverse industries. The primary objective of this study will be to gain an in-depth understanding of how distributed work arrangements influence employee engagement, considering the unique circumstances and challenges that will arise in the evolving work landscape. By employing a qualitative grounded theory approach, the research aims to generate theories and conceptual frameworks that can inform organizational practices and policies related to remote work.

The study will employ purposive sampling techniques to recruit a diverse sample of HR managers and employees from various industries within the United States. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to gather rich and nuanced data, enabling participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to distributed work arrangements. Furthermore, a demographic survey will supplement the interview data, offering additional insights into the background characteristics of the participants. Zoom will serve as the primary platform for conducting semi-structured interviews, facilitating participation from individuals across the country and enabling them to engage effectively, regardless of geographical constraints. NVivo, a qualitative data

analysis software, will organize, code, and analyze the interview transcripts and survey data. This study will identify emerging themes, patterns, and relationships, contributing to developing a grounded theory.

The findings of this study are expected to shed light on the factors that will shape employee engagement and distributed work arrangements, including communication, collaboration, autonomy, work-life balance, and organizational support. These insights will inform organizations about strategies to enhance employee engagement in the future work environment, resulting in improved productivity, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. The study described in this research proposal seeks to make a substantial contribution to the body of knowledge on remote work by thoroughly examining the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement. The findings are expected to empower organizations to make well-informed decisions regarding their remote work policies and practices in the future. Dissemination of these findings will be accomplished through scholarly papers and presentations, ensuring that the insights reach a wide and relevant audience.

I express deep appreciation and love to my family: my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, and especially to my parents, Anthony and Novila King. Their consistent support has driven both my academic journey and personal development. I also want to acknowledge the encouragement of my siblings—DeJon, Jamile, David, and Rashida—who have continuously motivated me as a lively cheering squad throughout all my intellectual pursuits.

I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Elsie Harper Anderson, Dr. Lorenzo Woodson, and my Lincoln University family and HBCU peers for the valuable experiences we have shared. I would like to thank Kelley Lindsay, whose support greatly impacted my academic journey, and Shawnice Brockenbrough who played a crucial role in motivating me to return to Lincoln and pursue further education, as well as inspiring mentors like Dr. Oswald Richards, Dr. Chieke Ihejirika, Dr. Emmanuel Ihejirika, and Dr. Anthony Driggers for encouraging me to pursue a doctoral degree.

I am grateful to my Alpha Brothers Dr. Jeffrey Robinson, Ivan Crosling, and Philadelphia Councilman Wilson Goode, Jr., my long-time friend, frater, and mentor. His simple but impactful advice of “Yes, do that too!” has been a guiding light for me. I also want to acknowledge Gary Green, my dear friend with an unwavering belief in boundless potential, who inspires the scribe endlessly.

This dedication also goes to all those bold enough to attempt, those who rise and make it happen! —your bravery and unwavering pursuit of your aspirations motivate me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deep appreciation to Dr. Michael Rivera for his invaluable assistance, unwavering support, expert guidance, and insightful perspectives throughout the completion of this paper and my doctoral journey. His wisdom has been a beacon of light in navigating the complexities of my research.

Equally, I extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Curtis Gregory and Dr. Amir Shoham, whose involvement as members of my dissertation committee was critical to the formulation and execution of my research. Dr. Gregory's sharp analytical skills and Dr. Amir Shoham's profound understanding of the topic have significantly enriched my dissertation, by providing clarity and depth that were vital to my study.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my esteemed instructors, Drs. Lynne Anderson, Pallavi Chitturi, Vinod Venkatraman, Matt Wray, Yuexiao Dong, Ram Mudambi, Susan Mudambi, Min-Seok (Min) Pang, and T.L. Hill. Their wisdom and mentorship have been instrumental in my academic growth, offering me a foundation of knowledge and confidence to explore new intellectual territories.

Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge the Executive Doctorate in Business Administration (EDBA) team, returning residency lecturers, and my fellow doctoral student peers for their invaluable contributions and the sense of camaraderie that enriched my academic experience. This journey has been more than just an academic endeavor; it has been a collective journey with a group of individuals who are equally passionate about learning and growth.

To all who have supported my journey – from the faculty and staff at the university to the friends and family who have supported me emotionally and

intellectually – I am deeply grateful. Your belief in me and my work has been a constant source of motivation and resilience. Thank you for being part of this significant chapter of my life.

I am also thankful to the individuals who participated in this study. Without their involvement, I would not have been able to conduct this research. Their willingness to participate and share valuable perspectives has significantly enhanced the thoroughness and credibility of my discoveries. Most importantly, all my praise is to the most high for the blessing bestowed upon me to complete this academic journey.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH MOTIVATION

The COVID-19 pandemic instigated a significant transformation in how organizations operate, resulting in the widespread embrace of distributed work arrangements. This swift transition has posed challenges for managers as they navigate the complexities of managing a remote workforce. Drawing on the findings and insights from study one (RP III), this study further explores the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement.

This study unveiled three prominent themes during interviews with managers. These themes underscored the pandemic's influence on the human aspect of work, the notion of 'luxury' within distributed work setups, and the significance of organizational adaptation in response to disruptive occurrences. Building upon these themes, the future study (RP IV) will delve deeper into the effects of distributed work arrangements on organizational culture, performance, and employee well-being. Additionally, it will examine the leadership styles and strategies managers employ to effectively navigate the challenges and opportunities associated with distributed work arrangements.

To attain these research objectives, a qualitative methodology was employed. The research will entail semi-structured interviews with managers and employees who have undergone the shift to distributed work arrangements in the context of the pandemic. These interviews enabled a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences, viewpoints, and strategies. Participants were chosen from various industries to provide a variety of experiences. Alphanumeric codes protected participant privacy and confidentiality, and findings were reported anonymously.

The outcomes of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on distributed work arrangements and their impact on organizations and employees, with a specific focus on employee engagement. The insights from this research will provide valuable guidance to managers and organizations in effectively managing distributed work environments, fostering a positive organizational culture, and promoting employee well-being and performance. Additionally, this study will shed light on the crucial role of leadership in successfully navigating the challenges and opportunities inherent in distributed work arrangements.

In summary, the purpose of study is to delve deeper into the themes uncovered in study one and investigate the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement. Through the utilization of a qualitative research approach, this study seeks to generate valuable insights that can assist managers and organizations in successfully adapting to dynamic work environments and harnessing the benefits associated with distributed work arrangements in terms of enhancing employee engagement.

### **Research Background**

The realm of work has undergone rapid transformation driven by technological advancements and shifting societal expectations, resulting in a notable increase in the prevalence of distributed work arrangements (Allen et al., 2015). Distributed work arrangements, often referred to as remote work, teleworking, or telecommuting, entail carrying out work activities away from a central office, typically facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT) to maintain connectivity with colleagues and supervisors (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Businesses' widespread adoption of remote work to ensure business continuity during lockdowns and period of

social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated its acceptance (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020).

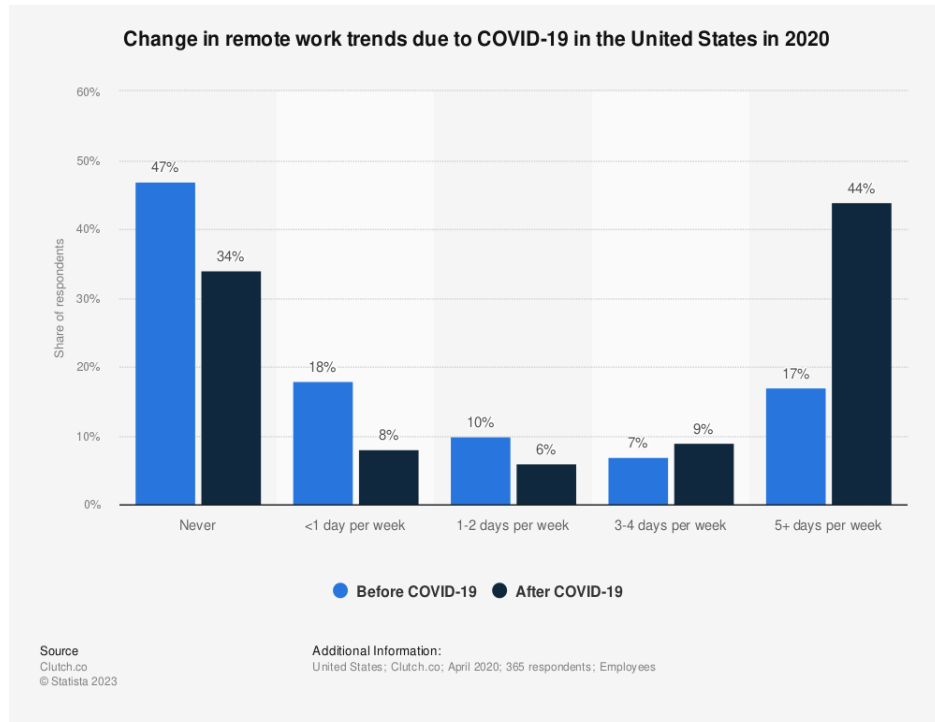


Figure 1. Change in remote work trends due to COVID-19 in the United States in 2020.

The following public opinion diagram illustrates the global public sentiment regarding remote work in 2022. During the survey, 45% of participants were engaged in full-time remote work, 29% had hybrid roles, and 26% worked from a physical office. Projections for the next six months indicated a decline in fully remote work to 36%, and an increase in hybrid work to 34%, signaling a shift towards adaptable, integrated working setups. When considering permanent employment arrangements, 36% foresaw adopting a hybrid model, while 34% expected to return to on-site offices. Meanwhile, only 29% believed they would persist with full-time remote work. These findings

suggested an ongoing transformation of workplace dynamics and indicate that remote work—whether entirely or as part of a blended approach—is poised to be a substantial component of future professional landscapes (Hofeditz et al., 2022).

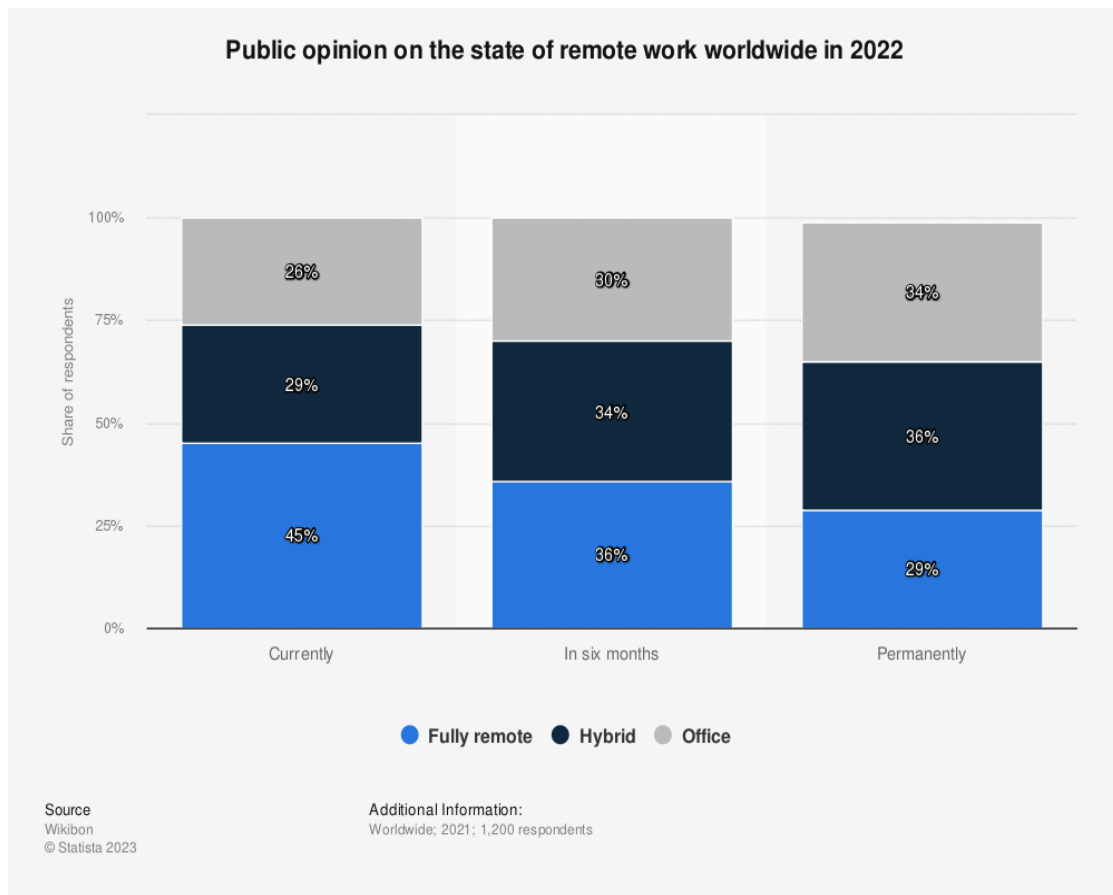


Figure 2. Public opinion on the state of remote work.

The second chart outlines the enduring modifications in workplace regulations resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak as of 2020, focusing on adjustments for remote work. A vast majority of survey participants (90%) project that allowing employees to work remotely part-time will continue even after widespread vaccination. Furthermore,

there is a strong preference for flexible work hours, with 65% of respondents expressing support for this policy. Around 44% anticipated the continuation of additional benefits, such as mental health and childcare assistance. There are smaller percentages indicating changes in productivity monitoring, flexibility in work hours, and compensation adjustments for remote workers. These findings signify a considerable shift towards adaptable work structures and a more comprehensive approach to employee perks, reflecting direct responses to the demands and insights gained during the pandemic period (Gartner, 2021).

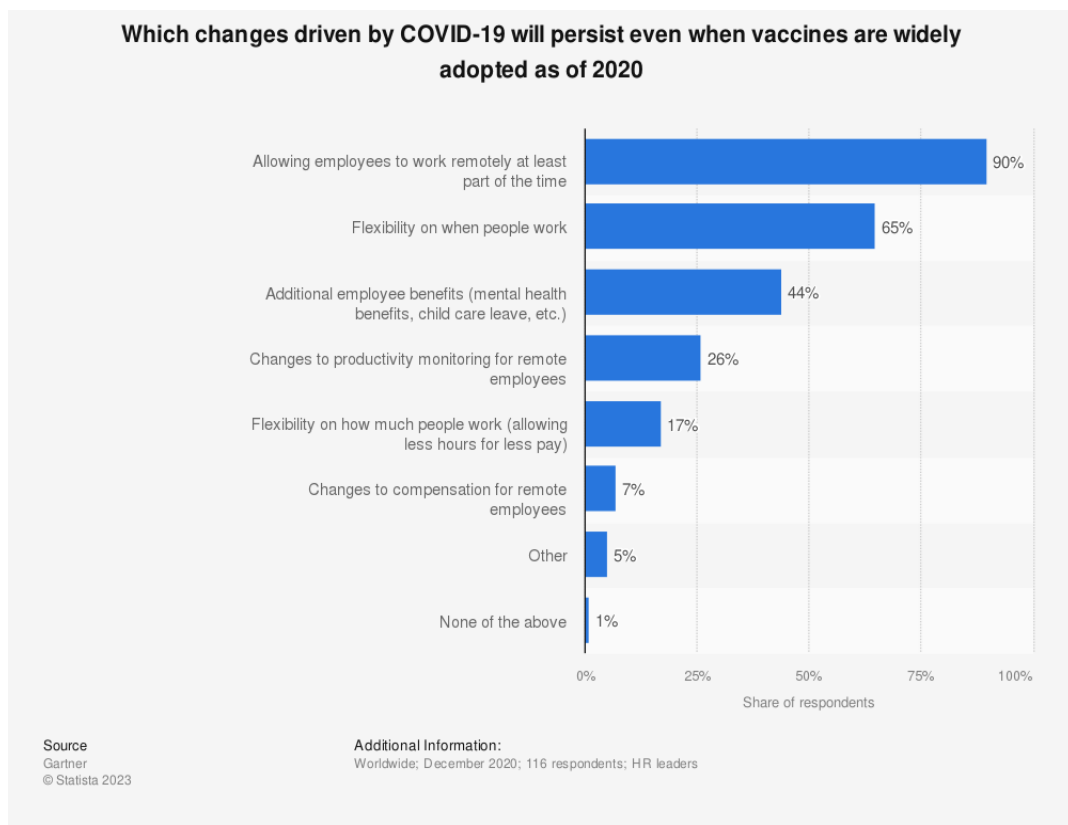


Figure 3. Expected persistent change.

The next diagram illustrates the forecast expansion of the collaboration software market from 2022 to 2032. Starting at an estimated \$16.1 billion in 2022, the market is expected to grow significantly over the next decade, reaching \$52.9 billion by 2032. This indicates an increasing dependence on digital collaboration solutions, potentially linked to the rising prevalence of remote work and the demand for effective communication and project management tools that facilitate efficient teamwork across various settings (GMI, 2023).

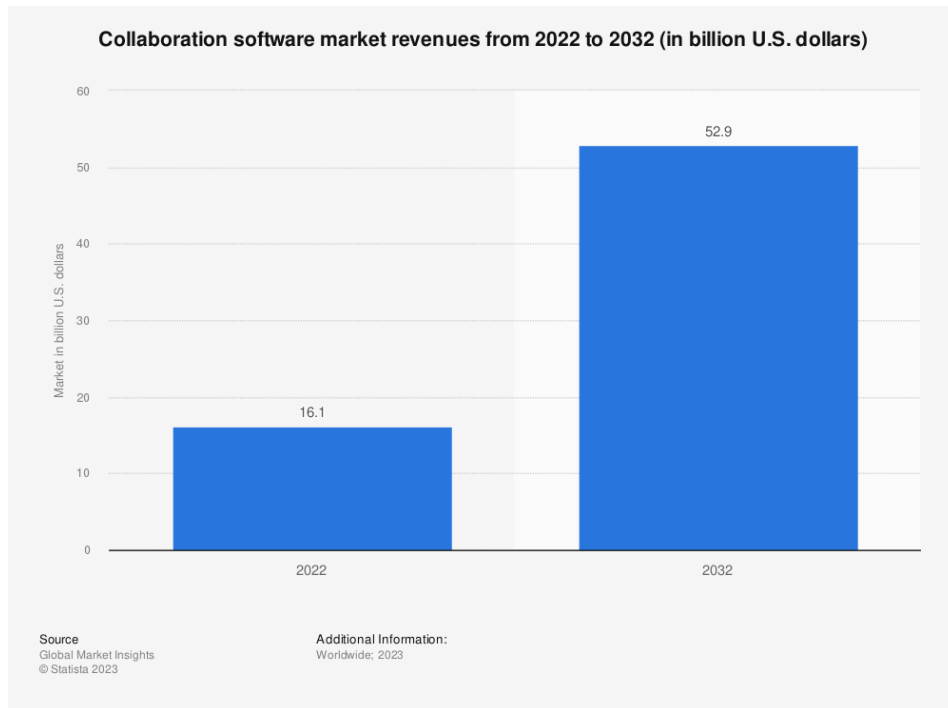


Figure 4. Collaboration software market projected revenues.

Executives expect remote work to increase even after the pandemic subsides.

According to a survey conducted by PwC, 55% of U.S. executives anticipated that remote work would become more common in their organizations post-pandemic (Sarkar

& Kedas, 2022). This trend is driven by several factors. Firstly, remote work has proven to be successful during the pandemic, with many businesses experiencing similar or even increased levels of productivity (Sun et al., 2022). Secondly, remote work offers flexibility and work-life balance for employees, which can improve satisfaction and retention rates (Blumberga & Berga, 2022). Lastly, remote work allows companies to access a wider talent pool by removing geographical constraints and potentially reducing costs associated with office spaces and overhead expenses (Langovska & Rozentale, 2021). Overall, the growing acceptance and positive outcomes of remote work during the pandemic have led to an expectation that it will continue to be embraced by organizations in the future (Adekoya et al., 2022).

Employee engagement has long been recognized as a critical factor influencing organizational performance, with engaged employees exhibiting higher levels of job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and lower turnover intentions (Harter et al., 2002; Rich et al., 2010). However, the relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement is complex and continues to be an area of ongoing research (Morganson et al., 2010; O'Neill et al., 2014).

As organizations navigate the post-pandemic era, marked by a steady increase in remote and flexible work arrangements, understanding the impact of these distributed work models on employee engagement becomes critical. The burgeoning collaboration software market reflects a permanent shift towards virtual workspaces, while employers continue to endorse flexible work policies, indicating a long-term transition to distributed work environments. This evolving work landscape necessitates a re-evaluation of engagement strategies to ensure that the intrinsic motivation, sense of belonging, and



performance of employees remain high despite the lack of traditional office settings. Consequently, exploring the dynamics of employee engagement within remote and hybrid work frameworks emerge as a critical and timely subject for scholarly research, promising valuable insights for driving organizational success in the 'new normal' (Swaroop & Sharma, 2021).

### **Problem Statement**

While a growing body of literature examines the effects of distributed work arrangements on various aspects of work and organizational life, the interaction between remote work and employee engagement remains inadequately explored (Allen et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Given the growing popularity of remote work, it is critical to understand how distributed work arrangements affect employee engagement and to identify factors that may facilitate or impede the development and maintenance of engagement among remote employees.

### **Research Objective**

The primary objective of this research proposal is to explore the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement using a qualitative methodology.

To achieve this objective, the study will:

1. Investigate the factors influencing employee engagement in distributed work arrangements, including individual characteristics, job resources, and organizational support.
2. Examine the potential moderating effects of the degree of remote work, individual preferences, and organizational support on the relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement.

3. Identify best practices and recommendations for organizations to foster and maintain employee engagement and distributed work settings.

### **Research Questions**

With organizations increasingly embracing distributed work arrangements to enhance performance and adjust to the ever-evolving work environment marked by shifting paradigms and unprecedented challenges, it becomes imperative to comprehend the complex relationship between distributed work setups and employee engagement. This qualitative study aims to shed light on the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement and identify the key factors shaping this relationship.

The overarching research question that will guide this proposed study is: How do distributed work arrangements influence employee engagement, and what factors shape this relationship?

The following sub-questions are proposed to address this research question:

1. What factors influence employee engagement in the context of distributed work arrangements?
2. How do individual preferences and organizational support moderate the relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement?
3. What strategies can organizations implement to foster and maintain employee engagement in distributed work settings?

These research inquiries will yield valuable insights into the dynamics between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement, furnishing guidance for

enterprises as they navigate the ever-changing workplace landscape and the emerging “new normal.” The qualitative nature of this study will facilitate thorough exploration and comprehension of these phenomena, resulting in intricate and nuanced insights regarding the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement.

By examining the experiences and perceptions of employees operating in distributed work settings, this study aims to provide valuable insights into how these arrangements will influence employee motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment. Additionally, by investigating variables such as organizational support, individual preferences, and other relevant factors, this study will uncover the key drivers and facilitators of successful distributed work arrangements, offering guidance to organizations seeking to optimize their approach.

Lastly, the study will identify effective strategies organizations that can implement to foster and maintain employee engagement and distributed work settings. By uncovering best practices and successful approaches, this research will contribute to developing practical recommendations for organizations aiming to create a supportive and engaging work environment and distributed work arrangements.

Through the examination of these research questions, this study aims to offer valuable insights into the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement, enriching the current understanding of optimizing work practices within the ever-evolving workplace context. The findings will hold relevance for organizations striving to refine their strategies for distributed work and sustain elevated levels of employee engagement. Additionally, they will guide the development of customized interventions and policies that align with individual preferences and organizational

support. In essence, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement and provide actionable recommendations for organizations aiming to navigate and excel in the new normal work environment.

### **Business Implications**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly accelerated trends such as digitalization, remote work, and increased employee autonomy, demanding adaptations, and new management approaches. With organizations continuing to adopt distributed work arrangements to enhance performance and adapt to the evolving work landscape, this proposed study aims to illuminate the intricate relationship between these arrangements and employee engagement.

This research carries several critical implications for businesses as it delves into the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement. Firstly, it will offer valuable insights to organizations looking to optimize their distributed work strategies. Gaining an understanding of how distributed work arrangements affect employee motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment will empower businesses to cultivate a conducive and effective remote working environment for their teams. Moreover, the study will highlight the key factors influencing employee engagement and the adoption of distributed work arrangements. Organizations can better understand what motivates successful distributed work practices by investigating variables such as organizational support and individual preferences. Equipped with this knowledge, companies can tailor their approaches to maximize the benefit of remote work and improve overall performance.

Moreover, through an exploration of how individual preferences and organizational support modulate the connections between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement, this research will assist organizations in tailoring their support and resources to align with individual needs. This personalized approach has the potential to enhance employee satisfaction and well-being, ultimately increasing productivity and fostering loyalty.

The findings from this study hold particular relevance as organizations navigate the “new normal” work environment, where remote and hybrid work models are likely to persist. An understanding of the dynamics between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement will enable businesses to successfully adapt their management styles to the evolving workplace landscape.

Furthermore, this research will underscore the significance of managerial engagement, benevolence, and support in cultivating a positive work culture. As employees grapple with challenges and uncertainties, the role of managers in providing meaning and trust becomes paramount. This study will elucidate the importance of supportive management styles characterized by active listening, adaptability, and empathy.

In summary, this proposed study is poised to usher in a profound transformation in the realm of work, challenging traditional management approaches and highlighting the necessity for a more collaborative, contextualized, and empathetic leadership style. By leveraging the insights gleaned from this research, organizations can harness the collective intelligence of their teams, address individual challenges, and create

meaningful work experiences that generate value for both internal and external stakeholders.

In conclusion, the business implications of this study underscore the importance of comprehending the intricate relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement. Organizations that embrace the insights derived from this research will be better equipped to cultivate a supportive and engaging work environment that promotes employee satisfaction, well-being, and productivity in the contemporary era of work.

**Table 1**

*Interview Questions.*

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**For Managers**

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**Adaptation and Transition: Investigates how employees have adjusted to remote work, highlighting challenges and successful strategies that influence engagement levels.**

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How have you observed your team adapting to distributed work arrangements?	The adaptation of teams to distributed work arrangements is multifaceted, heavily influenced by organizational and supervisory support, as well as workplace flexibility, as indicated by the research of Lee and Shin, 2023 and GP (2022). Longitudinal studies, like those by Saks, 2006 and Ganyang (2019), stress the importance of understanding the complex interplay of social exchange, organizational culture, and work environment in fostering employee engagement in these settings. Psychological factors, including meaningfulness, safety, and availability, as highlighted by May et al. (2004), along with the challenges of knowledge sharing identified by Choudhary & Mishra (2021), are critical in understanding how employees engage and collaborate in virtual work arrangements. These insights collectively underscore the necessity of comprehending a range of factors, from organizational support to psychological well-being, in order to effectively facilitate and manage team adaptation in distributed work environments.
What strategies have you implemented to support your team during this transition?	The research collectively underscores the efficacy of empowering teams and evolving work practices for enhancing engagement in distributed work environments, as highlighted by Kirkman et al. (2004) and Duque et al. (2020). The importance of ethical decision-making and the application of the 'CARE' model, emphasized by Judeh (2021) and Mani & Mishra (2021), further enriches this approach by focusing on ethical workplace dynamics and comprehensive engagement strategies. GP (2022)'s findings on the positive impact of workplace flexibility reinforce the need for adaptable strategies in supporting employee engagement during transitions. These studies together validate a multifaceted approach, integrating team empowerment, ethical practices, engagement models, and flexibility, as crucial for effectively supporting teams in the evolving landscape of distributed work.

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**Table 1**

*(continued)*

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Communication and Collaboration: Explores the impact of remote work on interpersonal and organizational communication, which is crucial for understanding engagement in a distributed setting.

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How have you adapted your communication and collaboration strategies in a distributed work environment?	The adaptation of communication and collaboration strategies in distributed work environments is critical for maintaining employee engagement, as studies by Gajendran and Harrison, 2007 and Lee and Shin, 2023 emphasize the need for clear boundaries and supportive organizational communication. Research by Anitha (2014) and Sunaryo et al. (2022) further highlights the importance of effective communication and adaptive collaboration in fostering engagement amid the flexibility of the new normal. Vigo (2021) and Choudhary & Mishra (2021) underscore the significance of communication in promoting emotional dedication and mitigating challenges like knowledge hiding in virtual workplaces. These insights collectively validate the need for refining communication and collaboration strategies to support employee engagement effectively in distributed work settings.
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What challenges and successes have you experienced in maintaining team cohesion remotely?	Maintaining team cohesion in remote work environments presents both challenges and successes, as identified in research by Anitha (2014) and Sunaryo et al. (2022), which emphasize the importance of effective communication and adaptive collaboration for employee engagement. Lee and Shin, 2023 highlight the crucial role of organizational and supervisory support, particularly in fostering engagement during transitions like the COVID-19 crisis. Challenges such as knowledge hiding, as noted by Choudhary & Mishra (2021), call for transparent and open communication strategies to promote collaboration in virtual settings. Ganotice et al. (2022) further illustrate the positive impact of team cohesiveness and efficacy, underscoring the need for psychological safety and effective strategies for successful outcomes in distributed team settings.
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**Table 1**

*(continued)*

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Managerial Support and Leadership: Investigates how leadership styles and managerial support have evolved and their impact on employee engagement in remote settings.

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How have you modified your leadership style to support remote employees effectively?	Adapting leadership styles to effectively support remote employees is essential, as indicated by Li et al. (2018), who link leadership behaviors with enhanced work engagement in remote settings. Transformational leadership, as discussed by Parveen & Adeinat (2019), emerges as particularly effective in reducing work-related stress and potentially mitigating employee burnout in distributed work environments. Wortler et al. (2022) highlight the significance of empowering leadership in improving perceptions of blended working effectiveness, emphasizing the role of empowerment in diverse work arrangements. Lundqvist et al. (2022) further underscore the importance of leadership in influencing employee well-being, particularly in remote work contexts, suggesting the need for leadership approaches that cater to the unique challenges of distributed teams.
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Can you share examples of how you've addressed challenges in employee engagement in this new setting?	Addressing challenges in employee engagement in distributed work environments, as highlighted by Sunaryo et al. (2022), necessitates adaptive communication and collaboration strategies, particularly in the face of flexible work arrangements. The insights from Choudhary & Mishra (2021) underscore the importance of transparent and open communication to overcome obstacles like knowledge hiding and to enhance collaboration in virtual settings. GP (2022)'s findings further reinforce the need for adaptable communication approaches in aligning with the dynamics of workplace flexibility to sustain employee engagement. These studies collectively emphasize the critical role of effective, adaptable, and transparent communication strategies in addressing the unique challenges of maintaining team cohesion and employee engagement in remote work contexts.
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**Table 1**

*(continued)*

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Organizational Culture and Values: Considers how shifts to remote work have influenced organizational culture and how this, in turn, affects employee engagement.

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How do you ensure that the organization's culture and values are upheld in a distributed work environment?	The research by Galanti et al. (2021) and Adisa et al. (2021) provides insights into the unique challenges and strategies for maintaining organizational culture and values in remote work settings, highlighting the importance of adapting to the nuances of distributed work environments. Gellert et al. (2022) emphasize the evolving nature of work arrangements, particularly the rise in employee empowerment and demand for flexibility, which are crucial for upholding organizational values in these settings. Mayer et al. (2023) offer a perspective on the role of shared leadership in virtual teams, underscoring its significance in sustaining team cohesion and organizational culture remotely. These studies collectively suggest that understanding the challenges of remote work, embracing flexible and empowering work practices, and fostering effective leadership are key to ensuring the organization's culture and values are consistently upheld in distributed work environments.
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What impact have you noticed on the team's engagement due to changes in organizational culture?	The studies by Galanti et al. (2021) and Adisa et al. (2021) highlight the challenges and necessary adaptations in remote work environments, particularly how these impact team engagement and the upholding of organizational culture and values. Gellert et al. (2022) emphasize the evolving work arrangements post-pandemic, including increased employee empowerment and flexibility, and their implications for maintaining organizational culture in distributed settings. Mayer et al. (2023) offer insights into the crucial role of leadership dynamics in virtual teams, particularly how shared leadership behaviors can influence team member satisfaction and productivity. Together, these studies underscore the interconnectedness of organizational culture changes, leadership dynamics, and flexible work practices with team engagement in remote work environments.
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**Table 1**

*(continued)*

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Future of Work: Explores long-term attitudes towards remote work and how these outlooks influence current engagement levels.

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What is your perspective on the long-term sustainability of distributed work arrangements?	The research by Dijkers et al. (2010) highlights the positive impact of flexible work-home arrangements on career success, indicating a strong foundation for the long-term sustainability of distributed work environments by enhancing employee engagement. Fjellfeldt (2022) sheds light on the complexities involved in sustaining long-term collaborations, especially in contexts where goals diverge, offering valuable insights for managing distributed work arrangements with a focus on employee well-being. Schiffmann et al. (2022) emphasize the necessity of inclusive and flexible work cultures for the sustainable employment of individuals with disabilities, underscoring the broader applicability of these principles in distributed work settings. These studies collectively suggest that the sustainability of distributed work arrangements hinges on their ability to offer flexibility, inclusivity, and adaptability, catering to diverse employee needs and fostering long-term engagement.
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How do you foresee these arrangements influencing employee engagement in the future?	Anitha (2014) highlights the critical roles of organizational commitment and creativity in driving employee engagement, suggesting these factors will be key in the effectiveness of distributed work arrangements in the future. Lee and Shin, 2023 underscore the importance of organizational and supervisory support, especially through work-life balance policies, as vital for enhancing engagement in these settings. Sunaryo et al. (2022) demonstrate that flexible work arrangements can positively impact job satisfaction and affective commitment, indicating a promising future for employee engagement in distributed environments. Lastly, Vigo (2021) points out the challenge of work-related stress, especially among millennials, emphasizing the need for strategies to manage stress in order to maintain engagement in future distributed work models.
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**Table 1**

*(continued)*

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For Employees

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Communication and Collaboration: Explores the impact of remote work on interpersonal and organizational communication, which is crucial for understanding engagement in a distributed setting.

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Can you discuss how technology has facilitated or hindered your work in a remote setting?	Wang and Lu, 2020 provide a balanced view of how technology affects remote work effectiveness, highlighting both the challenges and benefits from a work design perspective. Schoch (2023) delves into the complex interplay between technostress and remote working performance, indicating that while technology can enhance performance, it can also induce stress. An et al. (2023) shed light on the challenges of digital wellbeing in remote settings, emphasizing the anxiety and difficulties faced by individuals in adapting to technology-intensive remote work environments. Finally, Ugar (2023) underscores the transformative role of technological innovations in remote work, illustrating how advancements like satellite offices are reshaping the landscape of remote work practices.
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What additional resources or support do you feel would enhance your engagement?	Chanana & Sangeeta (2020) emphasize the need for recognition and meaningful work to enhance engagement in remote settings, highlighting the importance of employees feeling valued for their contributions. Lee and Shin, 2023 demonstrate the critical role of organizational and supervisory support, especially through work-life balance policies, in fostering employee engagement during challenging times. Harunavamwe et al. (2020) underline the significance of self-leadership strategies, psychological capital, and job embeddedness as essential factors for maintaining an engaged workforce in remote work environments. Jiang et al. Ng et al. (2022) provide context-specific insights, showing the necessity of understanding unique challenges and needs in different settings to effectively enhance engagement in remote work arrangements.
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**Table 1**

*(continued)*

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Employee Perspectives and Satisfaction: Gathers direct insights from employees about their satisfaction and perspectives on remote work, offering a direct measure of engagement.

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How satisfied are you with the current distributed work arrangements?	Garraio et al. (2023) emphasize the significance of working time arrangements in distributed settings, indicating that satisfaction with work schedules critically affects the balance between recovery and exhaustion. Sunaryo et al. (2022) highlight the positive impact of flexible work arrangements on job satisfaction and employee happiness, suggesting that flexibility is a key component of satisfaction in remote work environments. Vigo (2021) sheds light on the unique stressors and engagement factors for millennials in remote settings, pointing towards generational differences in satisfaction levels. Marumpe et al., 2023 underline the role of perceived organizational support and flexibility in enhancing employee engagement, thereby impacting overall satisfaction with distributed work arrangements.
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What aspects of remote work do you feel most and least engaged with?	Palumbo (2020) highlights the challenge of maintaining work-life balance in remote settings, suggesting that the blurring of work and personal life boundaries can negatively impact engagement. Bollestad et al. (2022) reveal that while remote work can increase work engagement, it also poses risks like increased feelings of loneliness and experiences of bullying. Wontorczyk & Rożnowski (2022) emphasize the impact of isolation and limited interaction with management and colleagues in remote and hybrid work settings, which can lead to decreased engagement and increased stress. Rahman et al. (2022) underline the importance of social factors such as recognition and interpersonal relationships, indicating their crucial role in fostering engagement in remote work environments.
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**Table 1**

*(continued)*

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Comparative Analysis: Provides a demographic analysis to understand how engagement in remote work settings varies across different groups, offering a more nuanced view.

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Have you noticed any differences in engagement levels among your colleagues based on demographic factors?	Fraysier et al. (2020) highlight how engagement indicators can vary based on individual and demographic risk factors, suggesting that engagement levels are not uniform across different groups. Giaouque et al. (2022) emphasize the differential impact of work autonomy and collaboration opportunities on employee engagement, indicating that these resources may affect various demographics differently. Conradie & Klerk (2019) shed light on the influence of flexible work arrangements on software developers, pointing to the possibility that such flexibility can lead to varying levels of engagement among professionals in different contexts. Lee and Shin, 2023 underscore the role of organizational and supervisory support in affecting employee engagement, suggesting that these factors can have diverse impacts based on employee demographics, particularly during challenging times like the COVID-19 crisis.
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How do these differences, if any, manifest in the work environment?	Waizenegger et al. (2020) demonstrate that remote working conditions, such as home environments, can vary significantly among employees, leading to differences in team collaboration and productivity levels. Giaouque et al. (2022) highlight how satisfaction with work schedules in distributed settings can differentially affect employee recovery and exhaustion, impacting overall work experience. Sunaryo et al. (2022) reveal that flexible work arrangements contribute to varied levels of affective commitment and job satisfaction, suggesting that employee responses to these arrangements are not uniform. These observations collectively suggest that differences in remote work environments, individual preferences for work schedules, and the flexibility of work arrangements can manifest in diverse ways in the work environment, influencing engagement, productivity, and well-being.
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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The emergence of the new normal work environment, characterized by increased resilience in distributed work arrangements, has prompted the need to investigate their influence on employee engagement. Globally, organizations have undergone a significant shift in work practices in recent years, with remote work, telecommuting, and flexible work arrangements becoming more prevalent (Bélanger & Watson-Manheim, 2021; Golden et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has further hastened this transition, forcing organizations to adopt remote work on an unprecedented scale (Kniffin et al., 2021).

#### **The Objectives of the Literature Review**

This literature review critically examines and synthesizes existing research on the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the new normal work environment. By exploring the current knowledge base, this review seeks to better comprehend the elements that shape employee engagement in distributed work settings and identify potential strategies for organizations to enhance engagement levels.

#### **Objectives**

1. Overview of distributed work arrangements in the new normal work environment.
2. Theoretical frameworks and models for understanding employee engagement in distributed work arrangements.

3. Factors influencing employee engagement in distributed work arrangements.
4. Outcomes and consequences of employee engagement in distributed work arrangements.
5. Gaps and future directions for research on employee engagement in distributed work arrangements.

### **Research Context and Significance**

Research on distributed work arrangements has gained traction in recent years, mainly due to advancements in communication technology and changing attitudes toward work-life balance (Bélanger & Watson-Manheim, 2021). Distributed work arrangements refer to work arrangements where employees are geographically dispersed and rely on technology to collaborate and communicate with colleagues and superiors (Golden et al., 2020). Such arrangements include telecommuting, virtual teams, and flexible work schedules (Bélanger & Watson-Manheim, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of distributed work arrangements, as organizations worldwide implemented remote work policies to ensure business continuity and employee safety (Kniffin et al., 2021). This sudden shift has offered a unique opportunity to examine the impact of distributed work on employee engagement, as organizations and employees have been compelled to navigate the challenges and benefits of remote work (Bélanger & Watson-Manheim, 2021).



## **Theoretical Frameworks and Influential Factors**

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The understanding of employee engagement in distributed work arrangements has been advanced through the utilization of various theoretical frameworks and models, drawing upon established theories in employee motivation, organizational behavior, and human resource management (Bélanger & Watson Manheim, 2021). One such framework is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which has been employed to analyze the demands and resources associated with remote work that influence employee engagement (Golden et al., 2020; Kossek et al., 2021). According to this model, job demands, such as workload and role ambiguity, have the potential to deplete employee resources and have a negative impact on engagement. Conversely, job resources, such as autonomy and social support, can enhance engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

### **Influential Factors**

Several factors have been identified as influential in shaping employee engagement in distributed work arrangements. Individual factors, such as personality traits and work-life balance preferences, can affect how individuals respond to remote work and engage with their tasks and colleagues (Golden et al., 2020; Kossek et al., 2021). Interpersonal factors, such as communication quality, trust, and social support, are crucial in facilitating collaboration and maintaining social connections among distributed teams (Golden et al., 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021). Organizational factors, including leadership support, organizational culture, and technological infrastructure, also contribute to employee engagement in distributed work arrangements (Bélanger & Watson-Manheim, 2021; Kossek et al., 2021).

## **Luxury In Distributed Teams**

### **Redefining Luxury in Distributed Teams**

Luxury in remote work is beyond its conventional definition and encompasses not only physical comforts but also digital sophistication and ergonomic improvements. As outlined by Wang et al (2020), contemporary luxury in distributed work entails a combination of technologies that streamline communication, personalized work environments promoting well-being, and policies that encourage a healthy balance between professional and personal life. Top-notch video conferencing platforms and uninterrupted connectivity are now deemed indispensable components of luxury in remote employment (David et al., 2024).

### **Framework for Luxury in Distributed Settings**

The model for comprehending luxury in remote work encompasses various aspects including technological resources, flexibility in scheduling, and personalized support systems. This model is crucial for companies seeking to improve employee satisfaction and retention by offering a deluxe distributed work environment that also enhances productivity.

### **Case Studies on Enhanced Luxury**

Illustrative examples from technology firms such as Google demonstrate that implementing luxury remote work strategies, including flexible hours and comprehensive health and wellness programs, can result in notable enhancements in employee engagement and job satisfaction. These examples showcase how redefining luxury within distributed work environments can yield concrete advantages for both employees and the organization (Farida et al., 2023).

## **Trust in Distributed Teams**

### **Defining and Understanding Trust**

Trust within distributed teams is intricate and has various aspects, encompassing factors like dependability, openness, and equity. The significance of trust is stressed as a fundamental element for effective remote team interactions and is viewed as an indicator of the proficiency of virtual teams (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021).

### **Building and Maintaining Trust**

Building trust in remote teams requires frequent and transparent communication, setting explicit expectations, and providing consistent leadership. It is essential to uphold transparency in decision-making and the consistent enforcement of policies to sustain trust. Regular virtual meetings and feedback sessions can further strengthen trust by ensuring team members are well-informed and aligned (Zeb et al., 2020).

### **Measuring Trust in Remote Settings**

Measurement of trust in distributed teams can be effectively conducted by using periodic surveys and feedback systems to evaluate employee attitudes and levels of trust. This information is crucial for organizations to comprehend the influence of their remote work strategies and make well-informed adaptations (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021).

### **Practical Applications and Case Studies**

Case studies from companies like IBM, which have executed effective trust-building measures such as virtual team-building exercises and open communication channels, illustrate the beneficial effects of well-implemented trust strategies on the engagement of remote employees and cohesion within an organization (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021).

## **Outcomes and Consequences**

The outcomes and consequences of employee engagement in distributed work arrangements extend beyond the individual level. Engaged employees in distributed work settings exhibit higher job performance, creativity, and innovation, leading to positive organizational outcomes (Golden et al., 2020). Moreover, organizations that effectively manage distributed work arrangements and promote employee engagement can reap benefits such as increased productivity, reduced turnover, and enhanced organizational reputation (Kossek et al., 2021; Saks, 2006).

## **Gaps and Future Research Directions**

While a growing body of literature explores the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement, gaps and limitations still need to be addressed. For instance, most existing studies have focused on quantitative approaches, relying on survey-based data collection methods, which may limit the depth of understanding of ‘employees’ underlying mechanisms and experiences in distributed work arrangements. Therefore, there is a need for qualitative research that delves into the subjective experiences, perceptions, and behaviors of individuals engaged in remote work (Bélanger & Watson-Manheim, 2021; Golden et al., 2020).

Most of the extant literature has primarily focused on how remote work affected employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the new normal work environment evolves, it is important to investigate the long-term effects of distributed work arrangements and how organizations can effectively sustain and enhance employee engagement in the post-pandemic era (Kniffin et al., 2021).

This qualitative study aims to delve into the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement, with a specific focus on the perspective of employees. Its goal is to address existing gaps in the literature and contribute to our understanding of employee engagement in the evolving “new normal” work environment. By employing qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing employee engagement in distributed work settings.

Additionally, this research endeavor aims to identify effective strategies and best practices that organizations can adopt to nurture employee engagement within the context of the “new normal” work environment. The findings of this study are expected to not only enrich the academic literature concerning distributed work arrangements and employee engagement but also offer practical insights and recommendations for organizations striving to cultivate productive and engaging work environments amid ongoing changes and uncertainties.

In conclusion, this literature review has offered a comprehensive overview of the subject, emphasizing the significance of examining the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement within the evolving “new normal” work environment. It has articulated the primary objectives of the literature review, including understanding the concept of distributed work arrangements, exploring relevant theoretical frameworks, investigating influencing factors, identifying outcomes, and addressing gaps in the existing body of literature. By diligently pursuing these objectives, this review aims to contribute to the knowledge base and provide valuable guidance to businesses aiming to enhance employee engagement in distributed work settings.

## **Conceptual Framework and Definitions**

Distributed work arrangements, commonly known as remote work or telework, encompass work arrangements where employees conduct their tasks and responsibilities outside the traditional office setting, utilizing technology to stay connected with colleagues and complete work remotely (Golden et al., 2020). In the new normal work environment, distributed work arrangements have gained prominence, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling organizations to maintain productivity while adhering to social distancing guidelines (Budhwar & Debrah, 2020).

### **Classification of Different Types of Distributed Work Arrangements**

Distributed work arrangements can be categorized into various types based on the level of remote work and the location from which work is performed. One classification system distinguishes between fully remote work, where employees exclusively work from home or other remote locations, and hybrid work, where employees can work remotely and in traditional office settings, depending on productivity and organizational requirements (Saks, 2006). Employee engagement is characterized by a positive emotional connection and a willingness to expend discretionary effort to contribute to the organization's success (Bakker et al., 2011).

### **Key Dimensions of Employee Engagement**

Several key dimensions have been identified in the conceptualization of employee engagement. One commonly acknowledged dimension is the emotional aspect, which captures employees' affective attachment and identification with their work and organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). This emotional dimension encompasses pride, loyalty, and satisfaction toward the organization (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Another

dimension is the cognitive aspect, which refers to employees' beliefs in the organization's goals, values, and mission (Macey and Schneider, 2008). This dimension reflects employees' understanding of the organization's strategic direction and alignment with its employees' challenges and organizations' strategies to enhance engagement. The findings will inform organizations about effective approaches and interventions that can be implemented to optimize employee engagement in distributed work settings.

In conclusion, the new normal work environment characterized by distributed work arrangements necessitate a qualitative study to explore the dynamics of employee engagement in this context. By conducting interviews or focus groups with employees, this study will provide valuable insights into their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to engagement. The study will also examine organizations' strategies and best practices to enhance engagement in distributed work settings. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of employee engagement factors and inform organizations about effective approaches to optimize engagement in the new normal work environment.

### **Methodological Considerations**

Various methodologies have been employed to shed light on this important topic in research examining the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement. This section reviews the methodologies used in previous studies and critically evaluates their strengths and limitations.

Numerous researchers have utilized qualitative methods to explore the relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement. For instance, Smithson and Lewis, 2019 conducted in-depth interviews with remote

employees to gain insights into their experiences and perceptions of engagement. The qualitative approach allowed for a rich understanding of participants' subjective experiences, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of distributed work arrangements.

In addition to qualitative methods, several studies have adopted quantitative approaches to investigate the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement. For example, Johnson et al., 2020 administered surveys to a large sample of employees across different organizations to measure their level of engagement and identify any correlations with remote work practices. The quantitative methodology employed in this study allowed for the collection of measurable data, facilitating statistical analysis and generalizability of findings to a larger population.

In prior research, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been employed; however, it is crucial to assess their respective strengths and limitations. Qualitative methods facilitate a deeper exploration of employees' experiences and perceptions, enabling a nuanced comprehension of the intricacies inherent in distributed work arrangements. However, qualitative studies often involve small sample sizes, limiting the generalizability of findings and potentially leading to bias in participant selection (Jones & Brown, 2018). On the other hand, quantitative methods enable researchers to collect data from more participants, increasing the generalizability of findings. Statistical analysis can provide objective insights into the relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement. However, quantitative studies may overlook contextual factors and fail to capture the subjective experiences of individuals (Smith & Johnson, 2021).



Moreover, it is worth noting that some studies have adopted mixed methods approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the topic by integrating the strengths of both approaches. For example, Adams et al., 2022 used a mixed-methods design, combining surveys with follow-up interviews, to explore the impact of remote work on employee engagement. In their study, integrating qualitative and quantitative data provided a more holistic understanding of the research topic.

In summary, previous studies investigating the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement have employed various methodological approaches. Qualitative methods offer rich insights into employees' experiences, while quantitative methods allow for generalizability and statistical analysis. The mixed methods approach offers a thorough understanding by integrating the advantages of qualitative and quantitative methods. It is crucial to consider each strategy's drawbacks, such as sample size restrictions and inherent biases. By addressing these methodological considerations, future research can enhance our understanding of the complex dynamics between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement.

### **Conclusion and Future Directions**

The literature review has provided valuable insights into the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the new normal work environment. The following main points have emerged from the reviewed studies.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly accelerated the adoption of distributed work arrangements, such as remote work and telecommuting. These arrangements have become essential for organizations to ensure business continuity and

employee safety. However, the shift to remote work has also raised concerns about its impact on employee engagement.

Second, the reviewed literature suggests various factors influence employee engagement in distributed work arrangements. One such factor is the availability and effectiveness of communication and collaboration tools. Studies have shown that organizations that provide remote employees with reliable and userfriendly technology platforms promote better engagement and productivity. Additionally, the presence of supportive leadership and a positive organizational culture has been found to foster employee engagement in the remote work setting.

Third, the literature highlighted the importance of work-life balance in the new normal work environment. Remote work offers flexibility but blurs the boundaries between work and personal life. Studies have shown that employees who can effectively manage their work and personal responsibilities experience higher levels of engagement. Hence, organizations should promote work-life balance initiatives and provide resources for employees to maintain healthy boundaries.

Addressing key areas for future research is essential to each arrangement's unique challenges and benefits. Furthermore, exploring the differences in engagement levels between different industries and job roles can offer practical implications for tailoring engagement strategies to specific contexts. Additionally, future research should investigate employee well-being's impact on engagement in distributed work arrangements. The new normal work environment has brought about increased levels of stress and burnout for many employees. Understanding the relationship between well-being, engagement, and remote work can guide organizations in implementing effective

support systems and interventions to foster employee engagement and mitigate potential negative effects.

Given the ever-evolving nature of work arrangements and the ongoing technological advancements, future research should also consider the impact of emerging trends such as virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and augmented reality on employee engagement in distributed work settings. Exploring the potential of these technologies to enhance communication, collaboration, and overall engagement can provide valuable insights for organizations preparing for the future of work.

In summary, employee engagement in the “new normal” work environment, marked by distributed work arrangements, represents a pivotal field of research and practical significance. It is imperative to gain a more profound understanding of the components that promote engagement, including effective communication, supportive leadership, work-life balance, and technological infrastructure.

Future research endeavors should further explore the underlying mechanisms, conduct comparative analyses, scrutinize the implications for employee wellbeing, and keep a keen eye on emerging trends to advance our comprehension of employee engagement within distributed work arrangements. By undertaking these efforts, organizations can develop evidence-based strategies to enhance not only employee engagement but also overall well-being and organizational performance within the ever-evolving “new normal” work environment. This chapter comprehensively reviewed the existing literature on distributor work arrangements and employee engagement, exploring key concepts and theories to establish a contextual foundation for the research problem and objectives. The review was organized into sections that covered the evolution of

distributed work arrangements, the factors influencing employee engagement, and the relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

#### **Introduction**

This study reflected on three critical aspects: the human element of work, the concept of ‘luxury’ within distributed work, and organizational agility in the face of disruptive events during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings underscored the significance of effective communication, collaboration, emotional support, and flexibility in remote work settings. They also brought attention to the notion of perceived ‘luxury’ elements, such as comfortable workspaces and flexible schedules, which can potentially boost job satisfaction and productivity but may also present challenges like social isolation and blurred work-life boundaries. Ultimately, the study emphasized the necessity of preparedness and prioritization of employee well-being when confronted with disruptive events.

These insights serve as a foundation for future study, which aims to conduct a deeper exploration into the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the ‘new normal’ work environment. To accomplish this, a predominantly qualitative research design was proposed, complemented by demographic data to provide contextual understanding. Semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of employees and managers will be conducted to extract nuanced experiences and perceptions regarding distributed work. These interviews will delve into various aspects, including lived experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges of remote work, understanding of the concept of ‘luxury,’ its impact on well-being, and perspectives on organizational responses to the pandemic.

A demographic survey will supplement the qualitative data, providing insights into the age, gender, job role, experience level, and duration of distributed work of the participants. This mixed-method approach will enable a richer understanding of distributed work and its influence on employee engagement while allowing the investigation of any potential demographic influences on these experiences. In essence, future study will aim to provide a comprehensive exploration of distributed work in the ‘new normal,’ building on the significant findings of this study.

### **Recap and Lessons Learned from Study One**

In the context of the themes identified, Study One offered critical insights into the pandemic’s profound impact on work and organizational dynamics, significantly emphasizing the human element in the workspace.

#### **Theme 1: The Impact of the Pandemic on the Human Element of Work**

Study One underscored the pandemic’s influence on workplace communication, collaboration, and social dynamics. The transition from physical to remote work arrangements exposed the inadequacies in companies, particularly in communication and collaboration procedures, resulting in altered schedules and increased personal discomfort. Simultaneously, it brought personal vulnerabilities and fears to the forefront, as evidenced by the Participant’s quote:

“...I tried to work with people at different places and advise leadership on how to work with that and how to lessen disruptions’ effects on space to be able to talk about this...” (P8).

Theoretical insights from the study emphasized the critical role of the human aspect in workplaces, including in-person communication and interactions for forging

strong bonds and boosting teamwork. Practical insights underscored the importance of fostering face-to-face interaction and verbal communication and supporting employee well-being. The need for future research focusing on the effects of the pandemic on interpersonal and group interactions, teamwork, and socialization is evident.

### **Theme 2: The Concept of ‘Luxury’ in the Adaptation to Distributed Work Arrangements in the Pandemic**

The second theme of ‘luxury’ highlighted employees’ unique perspectives on luxury in the new work environment, potentially linked to comfortable workspaces or flexibility in managing work schedules. One Participant noted:

“There’s no going to the office that 20-minute, 30-minute, 40-minute commute to work. You’re getting fresh air, and you’re getting UV rays. There’s no lunch break...” (P2). This response suggests a need for managers to address these perceptions and provide the necessary resources to foster a suitable home-office environment. Further research is required to comprehend how employees’ perceptions of ‘luxury’ in distributed work arrangements affect their well-being, motivation, and productivity and to investigate the efficacy of various approaches to address employee needs in this new work context.

### **Theme 3: Organizational Change in Response to Disruptive Events**

The third theme highlighted the importance of organizational agility and contingency planning in responding to disruptive events. Theoretical insights underscored the need for risk assessments and scenario planning to predict and prepare for future disruptions. In practical terms, the emphasis is on prioritizing employee safety and well-being, maintaining communication and coordination, and fostering flexibility in response

to changes. Future research opportunities may include exploring contingency plans' effectiveness, understanding disruptive events' impact on employee productivity and well-being, and studying leadership roles during such occurrences.

In summary, Study One illuminated the intricate dynamics of remote work and organizational response to disruptions, emphasizing the essential role of the human element, the nuanced concept of 'luxury' in a distributed work environment, and the need for agility and preparedness in the face of disruptive events. These lessons provide a significant foundation for further investigations in Study Two.

### **The Rationale for Study Two: Exploring the Influence of Distributed Work Arrangements on Employee Engagement**

Drawing from the findings of Study One, it became apparent that the profound transformations in workplace dynamics brought about by the pandemic warrant a more in-depth exploration of the complex facets of remote work and its effects on employee engagement. The three themes uncovered in Study One—The Impact of the Pandemic on the Human Element of Work, The Concept of 'Luxury' in Adapting to Distributed Work Arrangements During the Pandemic, and Organizational Change in Response to Disruptive Events—painted a comprehensive picture, thus prompting the need for further investigation.

The first theme underscored the impact of the pandemic on the human element of work, revealing both challenges and opportunities. The forced transition from a traditional office setting to distributed work arrangements disrupted interpersonal communication and team dynamics, increasing stress levels, and raising questions about productivity and well-being. Yet, it also sheds light on the potential for improved



flexibility, work-life balance, and employee empowerment. These dual facets illuminated the need to explore further how these new work arrangements influence employee engagement, motivation, and productivity, laying the groundwork for Study Two.

The second theme suggested the existence of a perceived 'luxury' in the new remote working conditions. It indicated that while remote work arrangements offered more flexibility, they posed challenges like isolation, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and varied access to resources. Understanding how these perceptions impact employee engagement became a focal point. It raises the question of how the sense of 'luxury' or freedom that comes with remote work affects engagement levels and, in turn, productivity and satisfaction.

Finally, the third theme underlined the necessity for organizational agility and adaptability in response to disruptive events. While organizations must strive to ensure business continuity, they must prioritize employee safety and well-being. It raised pertinent questions about leadership strategies, communication practices, and employee support systems in remote working contexts. Study Two, therefore, seeks to delve into the efficacy of these measures and their direct implications on employee engagement.

These themes collectively laid a comprehensive foundation for Study Two, aimed at understanding how distributed work arrangements influence employee engagement. The goal is to generate actionable insights that can help organizations devise effective strategies for managing remote work dynamics while maintaining high levels of engagement and productivity.

## **Proposed Methodology and Design for Study Two Research Design**

The research design employed in this study will strictly adhere to Grounded Theory principles. Grounded Theory is a systematic and iterative approach involving continuous data comparison and analysis, leading to theories directly derived from the data (Glaser & Mill Valley. Gratton, 1978). This method is particularly well-suited for investigating complex and dynamic phenomena that lack a robust theoretical foundation (Charmaz, 2006).

A qualitative research design will be employed, specifically utilizing a grounded theory approach, to accomplish the objectives of this study. Grounded Theory, an inductive research approach, involves the development of theories based on information gathered through interviews, observations, and other relevant sources (Charmaz, 2006). Given the intricate nature of exploring the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement, the grounded theory approach is highly suitable as it facilitates the creation of comprehensive and detailed explanations.

### **Sampling**

The selection of participants for this study will employ an intentional sampling method, specifically targeting individuals with experience in distributed work arrangements within the post-pandemic work environment (Palinkas et al., 2015). Data saturation will be utilized to determine the appropriate sample size. This point signifies the stage at which new information no longer significantly contributes to the emerging theory (Saunders et al., 2018). The inclusion criteria for participant selection may encompass individuals from diverse industries, job roles, and varying experience levels with distributed work arrangements.

## **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews will serve as the primary method of data collection (Creswell, 2013). To accurately portray the participants' comments, the interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim (Reissman, 2008). The interview questions will explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges concerning distributed work arrangements and employee engagement (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Probing and follow-up questions will obtain rich and detailed responses (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Moreover, field notes will be taken during and after the interviews to capture additional observations and insights (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

To gather information, in-depth interviews and surveys will be conducted with workers and businesses that have adopted and adapted distributed work arrangements. The sampling strategy will be purposive, selecting participants based on their experience with distributed work arrangements. This study aims to include a diverse range of participants, encompassing various industries, job roles, and levels of seniority.

Zoom and Otter audio-conferencing platforms will facilitate remote interviews or focus groups. Prior consent from participants will be obtained for audio recording of the focus groups and interviews. Semi-structured questions and prompts will guide the conversations during focus groups and interviews. The interviews will continue until no new themes or information can be derived from the data or until data saturation is achieved.

## **Data Analysis**

This study's data analysis will adhere strictly to the principles of Grounded Theory, which entails a systematic and iterative process of coding and categorizing data

(Strauss & Corbin, 2015). In the initial stage, open coding will identify and label key concepts and themes inherent in the data (Charmaz, 2006). The coding process necessitates a detailed line-by-line analysis, fostering comparisons between incidents and identifying recurring patterns and relationships (Saldana, 2015). Consistent subcategories will be discerned through constant comparison, constructing a robust coding framework (Creswell, 2013).

In the subsequent phase, axial coding will be implemented to delve into the relationships between categories, fostering the development of a theoretical understanding of the phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). The study's primary objective is to examine the connections, prevailing conditions, actions or interactions, and subsequent consequences associated with distributed work arrangements and employee engagement (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sampling may be invoked to broaden the scope of emerging concepts and validate and refine the evolving theory (Glaser & Mill Valley. Gratton, 1978).

The analysis of the interview data will employ a thematic analysis approach, a methodology widely recognized and utilized in qualitative research. Thematic analysis facilitates the systematic identification of patterns and themes within qualitative data, enabling an exhaustive dataset exploration (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). This approach proves especially valuable when the objective is to uncover implicit meaning across various data sources or probe into participants' subjective interpretations (Creswell, 2013).

The systematic process delineated by Braun and Clarke, 2006 will be adhered to in conducting the thematic analysis, encompassing stages such as data familiarization,

initial code generation, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and naming, report production, and a final review. The inherent flexibility and adaptability of the thematic analysis approach allow researchers to customize the analysis to address the distinct research question at hand (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Consequently, the chosen thematic analysis approach is cogently justified for the current research endeavor, as it facilitates the identification of significant themes and patterns inherent in participants' views. Thematic analysis will provide a comprehensive exploration of the participants' perspectives and experiences, leading to the identification of meaningful patterns and relationships within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013).

The data analysis phase will meticulously scrutinize the collected survey data to extract insights pertinent to the research questions. Any incomplete or inconsistent responses will be systematically eliminated to ensure data integrity. The remainder of the data will subsequently be carefully arranged for analysis. Descriptive statistics like means, medians, and standard deviations will summarize the respondents' viewpoints based on the combined survey results. A cross-tabulation analysis will also probe potential relationships between survey responses and demographic variables like age, gender, and job level. The procedure will aid in identifying patterns and variances among different respondent groups.

### **Trustworthiness**

Multiple techniques will be employed to ensure the robustness and credibility of this investigation. These methodological steps encompass member checking, pair debriefing, researcher reflexivity, and data triangulation.

Member checking, as proposed by Lincoln et al., 1985, will be implemented to strengthen the validity of this study. This approach allows participants to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts. Member checking enhances the trustworthiness of the findings by allowing participants to validate the representation of their intended meanings throughout the research process.

According to Creswell and Miller, 2000, pair debriefing and researcher reflexivity will address potential biases and promote objectivity in the analysis. Pair debriefing involves another knowledgeable individual independent of the research team to evaluate the findings and provide valuable insights critically. This collaborative process serves as a safeguard against subjective interpretations and increases the overall rigor of the analysis. Furthermore, researcher reflexivity, whereby the researchers engage in introspection and acknowledge their own biases and preconceptions, will be utilized to minimize personal biases and enhance the study's objectivity.

Additionally, data triangulation, as proposed by Denzin, 1978, will be adopted to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings. This technique involves gathering data from multiple sources, including interviews, observations, and documents. By triangulating data from diverse sources, the study aims to corroborate and validate the findings, thereby increasing the robustness of the research outcomes.

Moreover, this investigation places a strong emphasis on verifying the reliability of the collected data. As a result, a member verification process will be followed. A select group of participants will be consulted on the interpretations of the results based on Given, 2008 insights. Their valuable input will be sought to assess the accuracy and adequacy of the arrangements that correspond to their intended meanings throughout the

research process. This rigorous member verification approach ensures that the data collected accurately reflects the participants' perspectives and enhances the overall credibility of the study.

To further ensure the reliability of the data-gathering process, interviews will be transcribed. Two researchers will examine the transcripts, contributing to the trustworthiness and dependability of the data analysis. By involving multiple researchers in the examination of transcripts, the study aims to enhance the reliability of the findings and minimize potential errors or biases that could arise from a single researcher's perspective. The researchers will approach this task with careful consideration and impartiality.

In summary, this investigation employs various techniques to guarantee the validity and reliability of the research. These techniques include member checking, pair debriefing, researcher reflexivity, and data triangulation. By implementing these rigorous methodologies, the study seeks to strengthen the credibility of the findings and ensure a comprehensive and accurate exploration of the research topic.

### **Bracketing**

To mitigate the influence of preconceived notions and conscious or unconscious biases that could potentially compromise the integrity of the study, the researcher will employ the technique of bracketing during both data collection and analysis. As emphasized by Tufford and Newman, 2012, this methodological approach safeguards against the detrimental effects of assumptions.

Bracketing involves the researcher consciously setting aside their personal beliefs, assumptions, and biases throughout the research process. By adopting a position of

neutrality and suspending judgment, the researcher can maintain a more objective stance and minimize the potential distortion of findings due to personal predispositions. This practice ensures that the data collected and analyzed remain as free from subjective influences as possible, thus enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Moreover, to provide transparency and disclose any potential influences stemming from the researchers' life experiences and viewpoints, the investigators will document some of their professional and work-related thoughts and experiences. This disclosure aims to comprehensively understand the researchers' perspectives and potential biases, particularly concerning their involvement in society's public and private sectors. By acknowledging and documenting their background and experiences, the researchers establish a foundation of transparency and allow readers to consider these factors when interpreting the study's findings.

In summary, the researcher will employ bracketing techniques to mitigate the impact of preconceived notions and biases throughout the data collection and analysis processes. As Tufford and Newman, 2012 advocate, this approach is a protective measure against assumptions that could compromise the study's validity. Additionally, the researchers will openly chronicle their professional and work-related thoughts and experiences to ensure transparency and facilitate a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants were asked for their informed permission to guarantee their voluntary involvement and that they know the research's goals, methods, potential risks, and advantages. All participants were asked for their informed permission to guarantee



their voluntary involvement and that they know the research's goals, methods, potential risks, and advantages. Before their involvement, participants received detailed information about the study and asked questions and pursued clarification. By securing informed consent, the study ensured that participants have freely chosen to participate and are fully aware of the nature and purpose of their involvement.

Stringent measures will be implemented to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Any information collected from the participants will be treated with utmost care and held strictly confidential. Measures were taken to ensure that the participants' identities remain anonymous, and their personal information was de-identified during data analysis and reporting. This anonymity is a protective measure, preventing the disclosure of identifiable information that could compromise the participants' privacy or confidentiality. Furthermore, the research adhered to pertinent data protection regulations and guidelines. Any data collected was securely stored, and access was only restricted to authorized personnel. To prevent unauthorized disclosure, alteration, or misuse of data, appropriate safeguards were put in place. By following relevant data protection regulations, the study guaranteed the protection of the participants' data and respects their rights to privacy and confidentiality. A strong commitment to ethical principles and guidelines piloted this study. All participants were asked for their informed permission to guarantee their voluntary involvement and that they know the research's goals, methods, potential risks, and advantages. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect the participants' privacy and sensitive information. Moreover, the research adhered to relevant data protection regulations to ensure data's secure handling and storage. By upholding these ethical standards, the study

prioritized the participants' welfare and rights and maintained the research process's integrity and credibility.

### **Sources of Data**

To comprehensively address the research questions and achieve a profound understanding of distributed work arrangements and employee engagement, this study will draw upon four primary sources of data: published literature, interviews, a demographic survey, and document analysis.

**Published Literature:** The researchers extensively reviewed and analyzed relevant published literature from reputable sources, including the Temple University library system and renowned databases such as Google Scholar. By closely examining academic papers, journals, and other scholarly materials, valuable secondary information will be gathered to inform the research hypotheses and provide a solid foundation for further exploration.

**Interviews:** Industry professionals who have embraced distributed work arrangements and responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic were interviewed. These interviews will provide first-hand insights and perspectives, allowing participants to share their practical experiences, challenges, and successes. By targeting industry professionals, the study aims to ensure diverse experiences and expertise, thereby contributing valuable information to inform the research findings and address the research questions effectively.

**Demographic Survey:** A carefully designed demographic survey will gather quantitative data on employee perceptions, engagement, and the impact of distributed work arrangements. This survey will capture various variables related to employee

engagement and distributed work arrangements. Participants were selected from organizations that have implemented distributed work arrangements, providing a comprehensive dataset for analysis. The survey focused on gathering demographic information to provide additional context to the research findings. Document Analysis: Document analysis was conducted as an alternative to daily observations. This approach involves analyzing relevant documents such as company policies, internal reports, memos, email communications, and performance evaluations. By carefully examining these documents, valuable insights can be gained into organizational practices, policies, and the overall implementation of distributed work arrangements. Document analysis contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the topic and enrich the study's findings.

By utilizing these diverse data sources, including published literature, interviews, a demographic survey, and document analysis, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement. Integrating insights from these sources will contribute important insights into organizational behavior and management.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the proposed research methodology designed to explore the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the “new normal” work environment. Utilizing a qualitative research design, specifically the Grounded Theory approach, the study aims to gather and interpret data from both employees and employers as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of distributed work. The insights derived from this research will not only

augment the current understanding of distributed work arrangements but will also offer tangible recommendations for organizations striving to bolster employee engagement in this evolving work landscape. While the methods applied in this research are briefly summarized in this section, a more in-depth explanation, as well as any associated tools or questionnaires, can be found in the appendices.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from a qualitative study exploring the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement, utilizing semi structured interviews with HR managers and employees. Employing a grounded theory approach, the study analyzed data using NVivo software, enabling the systematic identification and categorization of themes and patterns. The use of visual illustrations—charts, tables, and diagrams—provides a comprehensive view of the thematic analysis, enhancing the interpretability of the complex data set.

This qualitative grounded theory research aimed to explore the viewpoints and experiences of twenty full-time employees in various human resource roles in the United States. The study aimed to understand how distributed work arrangements impact employee engagement in the new normal work environment. Participants were randomly selected from HR management associations and businesses, with prior experience working full-time in HR-related roles before the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals voluntarily agreed to take part in this research.

Chapter 4 presents findings obtained through data collected using a grounded theory approach and an interview questionnaire as a data collection tool, followed by ethical procedures for maintaining trustworthiness among the participants. The results revealed that engagement forms a reciprocal relationship between employers and employees based on bidirectional transactional foundations denoting that when something is given, something is returned. Furthermore, it identified low employee

engagement as a result of insufficient communication, trust, and respect from managers and supervisors.

This study could help managers and supervisors improve employee engagement in order to create a more robust organizational culture for better workplace environments in distributed work settings following COVID-19 transformations. Moreover, understanding these perspectives may serve as valuable insights for organizations' leaders seeking strategies to improve employee engagement amidst distributed work arrangements within today's professional landscape. Strategies such as incentives or healthy competition could be explored to positively influence productivity levels while fostering customer loyalty and retaining employees. The primary research question focused on identifying strategies to enhance knowledge of employee engagement within US companies resulting from distributed work arrangement scenarios.

Specific themes emerged from the data: namely engagement strategies; individual preferences; influential factors; and organizational supports - which may align with or diverge from previous literature findings.

### **Research Setting**

This research was conducted in a natural setting using interviews to capture the perspectives of participants employed in the human resources sector in the United States concerning the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement. Twenty participants, comprising nine managers and eleven employees, were eligible for this study. The researcher served as the primary data collection instrument, responsible for gathering information focused on understanding participants' responses. Purposive

sampling was employed to select participants, allowing the researcher to exert more control over the sample composition.

Glaser and Strauss underscored the importance of systematically collecting and analyzing data to construct theory in grounded theory studies (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Grounded theory aims to develop theory based on collected data rather than beginning with preconceived hypotheses or theoretical frameworks. It offers a rigorous and systematic approach to theory generation from empirical evidence, rendering it a valuable tool for qualitative research across disciplines like sociology, anthropology, and medicine.

In qualitative grounded theory studies, the determination of sample size is a complex and debated issue. While some researchers have suggested specific numerical guidelines for sample size determination (Starks & Trinidad, 2007), others have emphasized the importance of considering factors such as the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the quality of the data, the study design, and the use of shadowed data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Additionally, the concept of saturation, where data collection continues until no new information is obtained, is often considered crucial in qualitative research (Hedden et al., 2014).

The research setting was where the participants worked. The sample consisted of nine managers and eleven employees. The participants in the study had the freedom to choose the location for their interviews, reflecting the flexibility inherent in qualitative research methodologies. This approach aligns with the principles of grounded theory, which emphasizes the importance of allowing participants to express their experiences in familiar and comfortable settings, potentially enhancing the richness and depth of the data collected. Furthermore, the absence of personal or organizational influences on the

participants' involvement with the research or study results underscores the ethical considerations and integrity maintained throughout the study.

### **Demographics of Study Participants**

#### **Participant Demographics Contextualizing the Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

In this qualitative study on the impact of remote work setups on employee engagement, participant characteristics are presented not for statistical analysis but to demonstrate the diversity and depth of the firsthand information collected. Each participant offered a distinct viewpoint that enhanced the analysis.

- Employee ages ranged from mid-30s to over 65, reflecting a diverse workforce across various life and career stages, potentially influencing perceptions and approaches to distributed work.
- Positions held incorporated both managerial and staff roles, offering perspectives from policy-shapers as well as everyday impactees.
- Gender representation ensured a broad range of experiences across genders.
- Participants from Health-related Services, IT, and Workforce Development sectors offered insights into unique challenges and advantages in implementing DWA.
- Tenure durations varied, with some individuals having over ten years in their current positions, potentially influencing adaptability and perspectives on DWA.



- Participants' educational backgrounds ranged from high school diplomas to doctoral degrees, representing different levels of expertise that may have impacted their involvement with DWA.

The inclusion of diverse perspectives enriched the thematic analysis, enhancing understanding of factors influencing distributed work arrangements (Berger, 2020). While not the primary focus, these demographic factors provided a foundation for comprehending emerging patterns in the data. This contextual depth ensured that reflexive thematic analysis remained rooted in the varied experiences of participants, laying the groundwork for future studies exploring the intersection of demographics and distributed work arrangements. In this qualitative study, participant demographics are presented to offer context to the diverse range of perspectives and experiences regarding distributed work setups.

The study participants' age demographics were 15% between 50 and over, 50% between the ages of 40 and 49, and 35% between the ages of 29 and 39. The gender of study members was 75% female and 25% male. High school graduates were 25%, those with associate degrees comprised 10%, those with bachelor's degrees were 35%, and those with Master's degrees encompassed 30% of study participants. Sixty percent of study participants had been employed in their positions for five to 10 years, while 35% averaged between 11 and 15 years, and 5% had served in their positions for 20 years or more. Furthermore, 100% of study participants worked in the Human Resource (HR) sectors or sub-sectors. The study participants represented a diverse range of job titles that included 50% who were employed in administration, 20% working in HR directly, 20% in information technology, and 10% in workforce services.

Table 2 illustrates the demographics of each study participant, which included distributed work arrangement (DWA), age, position, gender, sector, tenure, and education level.

### **Recruitment Process**

The recruitment process for study participants began with a formal request to the Graduate Board at Temple University. Subsequently, data collection was initiated following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. Upon contact with each participant, the research objectives were explained, and informed consent forms were provided for voluntary participation in the study. To ensure confidentiality, participants and their employers' identities were anonymized, with participants being randomly identified as P1, P2, and so forth up to P20. Furthermore, all responses were coded and analyzed using NVivo 14 software, preserving the privacy and confidentiality of the participants' information.

### **Data Collection**

In this section, the data collection method employed for the study is detailed, focusing on the validation and types of semi-structured interview questions for managers and employees. The qualitative approach was chosen as the most suitable method for this study, with semi-structured interviews serving as the primary source of data. These interviews were conducted using Zoom and Otter audio features, widely used video and audio-conferencing platforms, and were recorded with the explicit consent of the participants, ensuring the preservation of their contributions and perspectives.

**Table 2***Demographics of Study Participants.*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>DWA</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Education</b>
P1	Majority remote work	45-54	Manager	Female	Healthrelated Services	5-10	Bachelor's degree
P2	Fulltime remote work	55-65	Manager	Male	IT	10+	Bachelor's degree
P3	Majority remote work	35-44	Employee	Male	Workforce Development	10+	Master's degree
P4	Majority remote work	35-44	Manager	Male	IT	10+	Doctorate degree
P5	Hybrid arrangement	55-65	Manager	Female	Workforce Development	10+	Bachelor's degree
P6	Hybrid arrangement	35-44	Employee	Female	Workforce Development	3-5	High school graduate
P7	Majority remote work	55-65	Manager	Male	Workforce Development	10+	Associate degree
P8	Minority remote work	45-54	Manager	Male	Healthrelated Services	3-5	Master's degree
P9	Majority remote work	45-54	Manager	Male	Workforce Development	10+	Associate degree
P10	Majority remote work	55-65	Manager	Female	Workforce Development	10+	Master's degree
P11	Hybrid arrangement	35-44	Employee	Female	Workforce Development	3-5	High school graduate

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**Table 2**

(continued)

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P12	Majority remote work	45-54	Employee	Female	Workforce Development	5-10	Associate degree
P13	Hybrid arrangement	45-54	Manager	Female	Workforce Development	10+	Bachelor's degree
P14	Majority remote work	45-54	Manager	Male	IT	5-10	Bachelor's degree
P15	Fulltime on-site work	55-65	Employee	Male	IT	3-5	Master's degree
P16	Majority remote work	45-54	Employee	Male	Workforce Development	5-10	Some college, no degree
P17	Majority remote work	55-65	Employee	Female	Workforce Development	10+	Bachelor's degree
P18	Minority remote work	45-54	Employee	Male	IT	10+	Master's degree
P19	Hybrid arrangement	55-65	Employee	Female	IT	10+	Master's degree
P20	Hybrid arrangement	45-54	Employee	Female	Workforce Development	10+	Master's degree

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Following the interviews, the data was transcribed using NVivo 14, a robust qualitative data analysis software, and subsequently coded for themes and patterns, allowing for a systematic and in-depth analysis of the collected information. The interview questions were meticulously designed to elicit rich and nuanced data, enabling participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to distributed work arrangements and employee engagement.

To ensure comprehensive coverage of the research objectives, the interview questions were divided into five categories: adaptation and transition, communication and collaboration, managerial support and leadership, organizational culture and values, and the future of work. Before the full-scale implementation of the interview questions, a pilot test was conducted with two participants, one manager and one employee, who provided valuable feedback on the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions. This iterative process of validation and refinement was instrumental in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the interview questions. Furthermore, the alignment of the interview questions with the research objectives and questions was carefully considered, ensuring that the data collected would address the research gaps and contribute to the development of a grounded theory.

The meticulous design and validation of the semi-structured interview questions underscore the rigorous and systematic approach adopted in this study, aiming to capture a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of managers and employees in the context of distributed work arrangements and employee engagement.

## **Data Analysis**

In the data analysis phase, a thematic analysis approach was employed to systematically identify and interpret patterns and themes within the semistructured interview data. This method, rooted in a qualitative approach, involved six key steps: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and producing the report (Bae et al., 2023). The thematic analysis was guided by the research questions, the theoretical framework of the study, and the interview questions tailored for managers, which were designed to explore the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement and the factors shaping this relationship (Brandt et al., 2020).

The interview questions were thoughtfully divided into five categories: adaptation and transition, communication and collaboration, managerial support and leadership, organizational culture and values, and the future of work, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of pertinent aspects related to the re-search objectives (Arifiani et al., 2021). These open-ended questions allowed for flexibility and in-depth responses, while following a predetermined thematic framework to ensure consistency and comparability across participants (Wulandari, 2022). Before full-scale implementation, a pilot test was conducted with a small sample of participants, and feedback from experts and peers was sought to validate the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions (Demirci & Yardan, 2023).

The iterative process of validation and refinement was instrumental in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the interview questions, ensuring that they effectively captured the nuanced experiences and perspectives of the participants. This rigorous

approach to data analysis aimed to uncover rich and meaningful insights into the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement, aligning with the qualitative nature of the research and the development of a grounded theory (Yauri et al., 2018).

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of the qualitative, grounded theory study was a critical consideration. The study aimed to explore the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the new normal work environment. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, it was essential to consider various aspects related to the data collection and analysis methods.

Vilka, 2022 emphasized that trustworthiness in qualitative research is intricately linked to the proficiency of the researcher, including investigation, and listening skills, attentiveness in capturing descriptive data obtained through data collection methods, and consistency in the coding of data DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006. This underscores the pivotal role of the researcher in ensuring the reliability and credibility of the study findings. Furthermore, trustworthiness in qualitative studies is associated with the demonstration of evidence for sound outcomes, particularly when arguments are based on results (Buhagiar & Sammut, 2023).

Safitri et al. 2023 suggested that qualitative data analysis should be conducted systematically, emphasizing its relative ease. This underscores the importance of a rigorous and systematic approach to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of study findings (Abbas et al., 2024). Additionally, credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability are commonly acknowledged by qualitative researchers as crucial elements in establishing trustworthiness (Forero et al., 2018).

In recent scholarly peer-reviewed literature, Grundy et al. (2010) outlined guidelines for grounded theory studies in information systems, stressing the importance of reinstating the 'theory' element in grounded theory to maintain research rigor and trustworthiness. They also examined how various researchers and approaches influence qualitative data analysis, highlighting the pluralism within qualitative research and its implications for trustworthiness. These insights contribute to the ongoing discourse and initiatives aimed at improving the trustworthiness of qualitative research, especially in the realm of grounded theory studies (Turner et al., 2021).

In summary, the trustworthiness of the qualitative, grounded theory study on exploring the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the new normal work environment was contingent upon the proficiency of the researcher, the systematic examination of qualitative data, and the demonstration of evidence for sound outcomes. These considerations align with the broader discourse in recent scholarly literature, emphasizing the importance of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Turner et al., 2021).

### **Credibility**

In the dissertation, ensuring the credibility of the qualitative grounded theory study investigating the impact of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the new normal work environment was essential. Credibility, as defined by Firth et al. (2011), refers to the evaluation of whether research findings represent a reliable conceptual interpretation of data drawn from participants. Researchers need to



establish a true picture of the phenomenon under analysis to ensure credibility (Scafuto et al., 2021). Furthermore, Valk, 2021 emphasized that credibility relies on establishing a match between the constructed realities of respondents and those represented by the researcher. Triangulation, involving the use of different sources such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, serves as a strategy to strengthen a study and improve credibility (Wasito et al., 2022).

To bolster credibility, strategies were employed in the study, which involved conducting in-depth interviews using open-ended questions to collect data from the lived experiences of 20 employees. These strategies included purposeful sampling to negate researcher bias, clarification of biases brought to the study, and providing adequate descriptions of data to transport readers to the research setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences (Benoot et al., 2016).

In summary, the credibility of the qualitative, grounded theory study was a crucial factor in establishing trustworthiness. The strategies employed to enhance credibility align with the broader discourse in recent scholarly literature, emphasizing the importance of establishing a true representation of the phenomenon under analysis and employing rigorous methods to strengthen the study and improve credibility.

### **Transferability**

In the context of our discussion and the dissertation topic on exploring the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the new normal work environment, transferability, or external validity in quantitative research, refers to the extent to which findings of a study can be generalized or applied to a wider population (Blank et al., 2023). In qualitative studies, transferability is primarily the

responsibility of individuals performing the generalizing (Blank et al., 2023). Since the findings of qualitative research studies are generally specific to a small number of research environments and participants, it is challenging to exhibit how they apply to other situations and populations (Kaur, n.d.). In addition, (Shanachilubwa et al., 2023) asserted that it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure sufficient background information related to the study is provided to enable readers to make the transfer.

Moreover, the qualitative researcher can improve transferability by comprehensively describing the research context and assumptions central to the research (Zelčāne & Pipere, 2023). The value of qualitative inquiry rests in the specific descriptions and themes developed, making particularity, rather than generalizability, one of its central attributes (Singh et al., 2020). To enhance transferability, the researcher carefully chose participants who all have potentially experienced the phenomenon in question to forge a common understanding.

In summary, the transferability of the qualitative, grounded theory study is a crucial factor in establishing trustworthiness. The strategies employed to enhance transferability align with the broader discourse in recent scholarly literature, emphasizing the importance of establishing a true representation of the phenomenon under analysis and employing rigorous methods to strengthen the study and improve transferability.

### **Dependability**

In the context of our discussion and the dissertation topic on exploring the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the new normal work environment, dependability, or reliability, in qualitative research refers to the techniques employed to demonstrate if the study was repeatable and consistent in the

same context, using identical methods, with the same participants. Thus, the results would be similar. To address dependability more directly, processes within the study should be reported in detail, enabling a future researcher to repeat the investigation, but not necessarily to gain similar outcomes. A detailed analysis allowed readers to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed to develop a thorough understanding of the methods used and their effectiveness. Moreover, the responses of study participants were clustered into meaningful units to form themes and coded using NVivo 14 software.

In summary, the dependability of the qualitative, grounded theory study is a crucial factor in establishing trustworthiness. The strategies employed to enhance dependability align with the broader discourse in recent scholarly literature, emphasizing the importance of establishing a true representation of the phenomenon under analysis and employing rigorous methods to strengthen the study and improve dependability.

### **Conformability**

In the context of our discussion and the dissertation topic on exploring the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the new normal work environment, the qualitative researcher's equal concern for objectivity, as seen in a quantitative study, is referred to as confirmability (Riratanaphong, 2013). An essential assumption of qualitative research is the tendency for each researcher to bring a unique perspective to the study (Moisey et al., 2022). Researchers ensure, to the degree possible, that the study's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of researchers by allowing participants to verify accuracy (Carnot et al., 2020).

## **Results of Study**

The analysis, conducted using NVivo 14, facilitated the organization, coding, and thematic breakdown of interview transcripts. This process allowed for the emergence of a substantive theory grounded in the participants' experiences and perceptions. Visual aids such as coding stripes and word frequency queries were instrumental in identifying key themes.

### **Theme Analysis: The Research Question**

The results for the Research Question, how do distributed work arrangements influence employee engagement, and what factors shape this relationship, are separated by responses below. They were generated from the responses of twenty study participants to Questions 3a, 3b, 3c, 3e, 3f, 3j and 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e and 4f respectively in the interview questionnaire. The responses were transcribed to Questions 3a, 3b, 3c, 3e, 3f, 3j and 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e and 4f from which each theme was developed. The NVivo 14 program allowed the use of color-coding categories and charts creating the source of word frequency that coded to nodes. The following codes surfaced from 14 of the 156 responses from participants including Support Strategies, Leadership Strategies, Communication and Collaboration Strategies, 'New Normal' Adaptation Strategies, Helpful Engagement Strategies, and Feelings Toward Distributed Aspects resulting in Engagement Strategies emerging as Theme 1. Additionally, Employee Satisfaction with Current DWA, Foresight of DWA on Engagement, and Perspectives on Long-Term DWA were codes that surfaced on 13 of 43 occasions resulting in Individual Preferences as Theme 2. Furthermore, DWA Technology Adaptation Experiences, Colleague Engagement Levels by Demographic, Notice of Engagement, DWA Cohesion Challenges

and Successes, and DWA Adaptation Observation, were codes that developed 14 of 74 times supported Influential Factors to emerge as Theme 3. Additionally, Resources and Supports for Greater Engagement, Observed Changes on Team Engagement, and Strategies for Culture and Values in DWA were codes that appeared 14 of 54 times, yielding Organizational Supports as Theme 4. All codes and categories were examined, and themes acknowledged for the Research Question, resulting from participants' responses as indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Thematic Occurrences*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Files</b>	<b>References</b>
Engagement Strategies	Engagement Strategies, Feelings Toward DWA	12	25
Individual Preferences	Employee Satisfaction, Foresight on Engagement	8	13
	Perspectives on DWA		
Influential Factors	DWA Tech Adaptation, Engagement Demographics, Cohesion Challenges	10	14
Organizational Supports	Resources for Engagement, Team Engagement Changes	9	14
	DWA Culture Strategies		

## Thematic Analysis

Grounded theory analysis revealed several core themes, each representing different facets of distributed work arrangements' influence on employee engagement.

### Theme 1: Employee Engagement Strategies

Figure 5 depicts a detailed analysis of the approaches that managers can use to promote a collaborative and flexible work environment. These approaches highlight the complex relationship between managerial foresight and evolving workplace requirements.

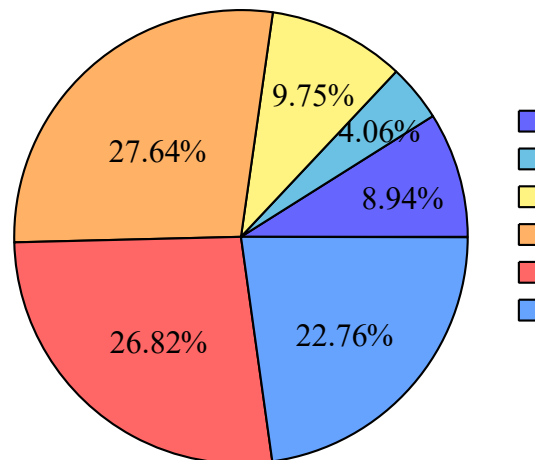


Figure 5. Theme 1: Engagement strategies. Illustrates different management strategies designed to promote employee involvement in remote and hybrid work environments.

Further exploring the illustrated approaches to involving employees, the analysis demonstrates the vital importance of effective communication and empathetic leadership in enhancing employee satisfaction and loyalty. The tactics, such as feedback mechanisms and flexible work policies, illustrate how employee engagement is evolving in today's technology-oriented era. This approach addresses current productivity challenges while laying a foundation for sustainable workforce development, urging

organizations to reassess and adjust their engagement strategies to correspond with emerging workplace trends. Engagement strategies emerged as a pivotal theme, highlighting how distributed work arrangements offer both opportunities and challenges for employee engagement. Table 4 summarizes the codes within employee engagement strategies, including quotes from participants that exemplify each sub-theme.

In the landscape of distributed work arrangements (DWA), the fabric of Engagement Strategies is meticulously woven into the experiences shared by employees and managers alike. Through an analysis enriched by participant excerpts, we gain insight into the multifaceted strategies deployed to foster engagement amidst the challenges and opportunities presented by distributed work arrangements. This narrative, grounded in the voices of those navigating the shift to DWA, underscores the dynamics of Support Strategies, Leadership Strategies, Communication and Collaboration Strategies, Managerial 'New Normal' Adaptation Strategies, Helpful Engagement Supports, and Feelings Towards Distributed work arrangements Aspects.

**Table 4**

*A table summarizing the codes within employee engagement strategies, including quotes from participants that exemplify each sub-theme.*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Participant Quote</b>
Employee Feelings Toward Remote Work Aspects	”What I’m most engaged with is my ability to manage my day how I see fit...the flexibility to determine how I want to manage my day is something that I enjoy,” (P12)
Employee Helpful Engagement Supports	” Everyone will cook at home and then we’ll all have lunch together via Zoom...We’ve also had meetings where we just talked about what was going on in general not always necessarily work,” (P11)
Managerial ‘New Normal’ Adaptation Strategies	”Initially everyone was told we were going to be permanently remote then...they wanted you to come in two to three days a week,” (P1)
Managerial Communication and Collaboration Strategies	” We had cadence calls...ensuring that people are on camera...having that visual eye contact and connectivity...helped my team remain engaged.” (P13)
Managerial Leadership Strategies	”You have to lead with trust...The adage ‘if I can’t see them, they must not be working’ doesn’t apply...You have to be more flexible,” (P7)
Managerial Support Strategies	” We had to order laptops for everyone to work from home...to continue with our leasing processes and receiving HUD funds...We had to switch over to be able to still work remotely.” (P6)



## **Engagement Strategies Through the Lens of Participant Experiences**

Support Strategies are foundational, with organizations rapidly adapting to meet the technical and logistical needs of DWA. Participant 6's recounting reveals the urgency of this adaptation: "We had to order laptops for everyone to work from home...to continue with our leasing processes and receiving HUD funds...We had to switch over to be able to still work remotely." This narrative, echoed by approximately 21.72% of references in Participant 6's transcript, illustrates the critical importance of equipping employees with the necessary tools and secure networks for effective distributed work arrangements.

Leadership Strategies have seen a significant evolution towards flexibility and empathy, recognizing the diverse needs and situations of employees in a remote setting. "You have to lead with trust...The adage 'if I can't see them, they must not be working' doesn't apply...You have to be more flexible," shares Participant 7, capturing the shift towards trust-based leadership that has been essential in navigating the distributed work arrangements era. This sentiment reflects 17.45% of the coded references within Participant 7's transcript, highlighting the transformation in leadership approaches.

Communication and Collaboration Strategies stand as pillars in sustaining team cohesion and connectivity. Participant 13 details their approach: "We had cadence calls...ensuring that people are on camera...having that visual eye contact and connectivity...helped my team remain engaged." Representing 14.25% of references in Participant 13's transcript, this strategy emphasizes the role of visual connectivity and regular communication in maintaining a sense of team unity and belonging.

Managerial 'New Normal' Adaptation Strategies reveal the agility required from managers to steer their teams through the transition to hybrid work models. Participant 1

recounts, “Initially everyone was told we were going to be permanently remote then...they wanted you to come in two to three days a week,” reflecting on the adjustments and challenges faced in adapting to a hybrid work environment. This account, forming 31.21% of the coverage in Participant 1’s references, showcases managerial adaptability in balancing organizational objectives with employee preferences.

Helpful Engagement Supports demonstrate creative means of fostering engagement in a remote context. “Everyone will cook at home and then we’ll all have lunch together via Zoom...We’ve also had meetings where we just talked about what was going on in general not always necessarily work,” Participant 11 shares, illustrating efforts to recreate a sense of community and camaraderie online. This engagement support, highlighted in 22.55% of Participant 11’s transcript references, underscores the importance of maintaining social connections despite physical separation.

Feelings Toward Distributed Work Arrangements Aspects highlight a spectrum of employee experiences with DWA. “What I’m most engaged with is my ability to manage my day how I see fit...the flexibility to determine how I want to manage my day is something that I enjoy,” expresses Participant 12. This sentiment, captured in 4.18% of the coverage in Participant 12’s references, emphasizes the value placed on autonomy and flexibility in work schedules.

Through these participant excerpts, a comprehensive picture of the engagement strategies employed by organizations in the era of DWA. From addressing logistical challenges to nurturing human connections, these strategies reflect a deep understanding of the complexities of distributed work arrangements. The percentages associated with

each participant's references illuminate the varying emphasis on different strategies across organizations, highlighting the tailored approaches to fostering engagement in a distributed world. As we continue to navigate this evolving landscape, the insights gleaned from these narratives offer valuable lessons on resilience, adaptability, and the critical importance of maintaining connectivity and culture in distributed work arrangement settings.

### **Key Findings and Connections**

**Support Strategies:** The need to equip employees with the necessary tools and secure networks for effective distributed work arrangements is critical. This urgency in adaptation reflects the foundational nature of support strategies. **Leadership Strategies:** A significant evolution towards flexibility and empathy in leadership approaches has been essential in navigating distributed work arrangements. This shift towards trust-based leadership previews the importance of trust and flexibility in fostering employee engagement.

**Communication and Collaboration Strategies:** Visual connectivity and regular communication have played a vital role in sustaining team cohesion and connectivity. These pillars of communication and collaboration are crucial for maintaining a sense of team unity and belonging, connecting to the next theme of 'New Normal' Adaptation Strategies.

**Managerial 'New Normal' Adaptation Strategies:** The agility required by managers to steer their teams through the transition to hybrid work models has been evident. The challenges and adjustments faced in adapting to a hybrid work environment

emphasize the need for managerial adaptability in balancing organizational objectives with employee preferences, setting the stage for Helpful Engagement Supports.

Helpful Engagement Supports: Creative means of fostering engagement in a remote context, such as virtual lunches and non-work-related meetings, are essential for maintaining social connections despite physical separation. This engagement support underscores the importance of nurturing human connections, leading to an understanding of the spectrum of employee experiences with Distributed Work Arrangements.

Feelings Toward Distributed Work Arrangements Aspects: The importance of autonomy and flexibility in work schedules is highlighted, showcasing a variety of employee experiences with DWA. This spectrum of experiences sets the stage for a comprehensive understanding of the engagement strategies employed by organizations in the era of DWA, emphasizing the tailored approaches to fostering engagement in a distributed world.

In summary, the key findings from the participant excerpts highlight the foundational role of Support Strategies, the evolution towards trust-based Leadership Strategies, the pillars of Communication and Collaboration, the adaptive nature of Managerial 'New Normal' Adaptation Strategies, the creative and helpful nature of Engagement Supports, and the spectrum of employee experiences with DWA. These insights provide valuable lessons on resilience, adaptability, and the critical importance of maintaining connectivity and culture in distributed work arrangement settings.

## Individual Preferences in DWA

### Theme 2: Individual Preferences

This illustration examines the range of personal preferences that influence strategies for adapting to the workplace, uncovering trends that guide customized managerial efforts to support a varied workforce.

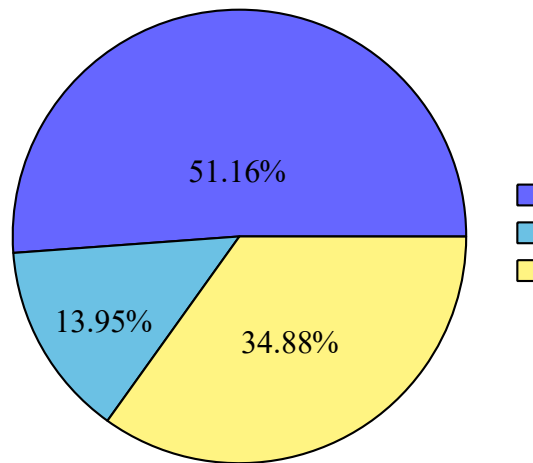


Figure 6. Theme 2: Individual preferences.  
The variety of employee requirements and preferences that impact engagement and productivity in remote work environments.

The examination of personal preferences reveals the wide range of individual needs and wants, encompassing a desire for predictable daily schedules to a requirement for adaptable work hours. This diversity highlights the difficulty that organizations encounter in developing a universal approach to employee involvement. Adapting methods to accommodate these varied preferences not only improves individual employee contentment but also fosters a more dynamic, inclusive, and dedicated workforce. This understanding necessitates a change in organizational tactics towards

personalized engagement and support structures, guaranteeing that each employee is appreciated and empathized with.

Building upon the findings related to Engagement Strategies in DWA, we next explored Individual Preferences in DWA, which addressed how user preferences impact engagement. Exploring these themes sheds light on understanding user behavior and offers insights into improving digital workplace adoption.

**Table 5**

*A table summarizing the codes within themes, including quotes from participants that exemplify each sub-theme.*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Participant Quote</b>
Satisfaction with Current DWA	"It seemed a little difficult for people to adjust to, having the hybrid model in place".
Foresight on Employee Engagement in DWA	"What I'm most engaged with is my ability to manage my day how I see fit" (P12)
Perspectives on Long-Term DWA	"I think they are very sustainable". (P1)

In dissecting the theme of Individual Preferences towards Distributed Work Arrangements (DWA), the discourse from various participants sheds light on the nuanced perspectives employees hold towards sustainability, engagement, and satisfaction within these models. The narrative that emerges, peppered with direct quotes and percentages, provides a textured understanding of the shifting work landscape.

### **The Hybrid Work Model: A New Normal**

The transition to hybrid work models encountered resistance initially, as noted by a participant: "It seemed a little difficult for people to adjust to, to having the hybrid

model in place.” Despite this, the sustainability of hybrid models gained acceptance, with another remarking on the inherent flexibility: “I think they are very sustainable.” This sentiment was echoed by 13.35% of references from P1, highlighting a growing appreciation for the balance between office and distributed work arrangements.

### **Employee Engagement in DWA Settings**

Engagement levels in remote settings were a focal point, with one participant sharing, “What I’m most engaged with is my ability to manage my day how I see fit”, illustrating the value of autonomy in work schedules. This preference for self-directed work, underscored by 7.24% of references from P12, pointed towards a broader trend of employees seeking greater control over their work-life balance.

### **Key Findings Summary**

The key findings under the theme of Individual Preferences in Distributed Work Arrangements reveal a nuanced perspective of employees toward sustainability, engagement, and satisfaction within hybrid work models. The transition to hybrid work encountered initial resistance but ultimately gained acceptance due to its perceived sustainability and flexibility. Additionally, the value of autonomy in work schedules emerged as a focal point, with employees expressing a strong preference for self-directed work and greater control over their work-life balance.

## **Influential Factors in DWA**

### **Theme 3: Influential Factors**

Figure 7 systematically illustrates the significant elements that contribute to the overall work environment, emphasizing areas requiring managerial focus and opportunities for development.

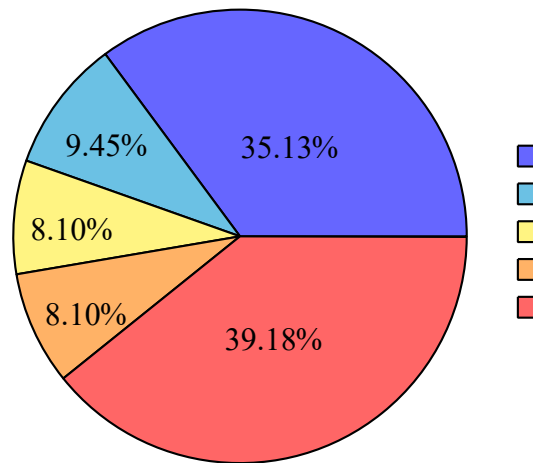


Figure 7. Theme 3: Influential factors. In distributed work settings, various internal and external elements influence the levels of employee engagement.

Upon analyzing the significant elements, it is clear that technological readiness, managerial backing, and the caliber of peer communication are fundamental for enhancing employee engagement in DWAs. The diagram underscores that simply providing tools is inadequate without corresponding cultural and interpersonal backing. This understanding emphasizes the comprehensive approach required to promote a truly engaging and supportive remote work setting. Hence, organizations are urged to invest not only in technology but also in cultivating a robust, unified culture and offering ongoing support to their remote workforce.

Building upon the findings related to Individual Preferences in DWA, we next explored Influential Factors in DWA. It is essential to recognize the interconnectedness between adaptation observations, cohesion, engagement, demographic considerations, and technology in distributed work arrangements in order to understand the importance of nurturing inclusive environments and shaping future work structures. Exploring



Influential Factors in DWA will offer insights into how organizations can foster a unified workforce in distributed work arrangements.

**Table 6**

*A table summarizing the codes within Influential Factors, including quotes from participants that exemplify each code.*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Participant Quote</b>
Team DWA Adaptation Observations	“Initially, everyone was told we were going to be permanently remote and then...they wanted you to come in two to three days a week...many people had a hard time”(P1)
Cohesion Challenges and Successes	“Where it was successful was it helped everybody think of other ways to come together...on the opposite side it was unsuccessful because it made them even more reluctant to return” (P6)
Notice of Engagement	“The adaptation with my team has been very favorable... the accountability that it holds and the freedom that it gives teammates to schedule their work” (P4)
Notice of Colleague Engagement Levels by Demographic	“The distributed work arrangements can inhibit your ability to form closer relationships with your teammates...especially if it’s, you know, you speak the same language, you may have the same cultural background” (P12)
Technology Adaptation Experiences	“We had to add additional software to our phones...we still had to get tenant signatures”

In the exploration of Influential Factors affecting distributed work arrangements (DWA), a comprehensive analysis revealed the multifaceted nature of remote and hybrid work environments. Through an examination of 74 references across 14 transcript files, this narrative delves into the challenges and successes encountered by organizations as they navigate the complexities of DWA, focusing on Team DWA Adaptation Observations, Cohesion Challenges and Successes, Notice of Engagement, Notice of

Colleague Engagement Levels by Demographic, and Technology Adaptation Experiences.

### **Team DWA Adaptation Observations**

The transition to DWA has been a journey of adaptation, marked by varying degrees of success and struggle. Participant 1's account sheds light on the initial challenges faced by employees adjusting to a hybrid model," Initially, everyone was told we were going to be permanently remote and then...they wanted you to come in two to three days a week...many people had a hard time" (16.91% Coverage). This notable change underscored the need for flexibility in management approaches to maintain team morale and engagement.

### **Cohesion Challenges and Successes**

The shift to distributed work arrangements has influenced team cohesion in nuanced ways. Participant 6 discusses the impact on personal relationships: "Where it was successful was it helped everybody think of other ways to come together...on the opposite side, it was unsuccessful because it made them even more reluctant to return" (10.47% Coverage). This duality highlights the importance of fostering connections while addressing the hesitancy to return to traditional office settings.

### **Notice of Engagement**

Engagement levels have fluctuated, with technology playing a pivotal role in bridging communication gaps. Participant 4 observed the positive outcomes of technological adaptation, "The adaptation with my team has been very favorable...the accountability that it holds and the freedom that it gives teammates to schedule their

work” (9.49% Coverage). This insight emphasizes the potential of technology to enhance engagement and productivity in DWA.

### **Notice of Colleague Engagement Levels by Demographic**

The analysis reveals variations in engagement across demographics, particularly influenced by cultural and linguistic differences. Participant 12 highlighted the challenges of forming close relationships in remote settings,” The distributed work arrangements can inhibit your ability to form closer relationships with your teammates...especially if it’s, you know, you speak the same language, you may have the same cultural background” (54.56% Coverage). This underscores the need for inclusive communication strategies to ensure all team members feel connected and engaged.

### **Technology Adaptation Experiences**

Rapid technological adaptations have been instrumental in the successful implementation of DWA. Participant 11 detailed the shift to digital processes,” We had to add additional software to our phones...we still had to get tenant signatures” (24.11% Coverage). These changes not only facilitated distributed work arrangements but also introduced new efficiencies that could redefine future work practices.

The Influential Factors narrative, enriched with participant excerpts and percentages, illustrated the complex landscape of DWA. From the initial adaptation to ongoing engagement, the influence of technology, and the importance of fostering team cohesion, these factors collectively shaped the distributed work arrangements experience. As organizations continue to navigate these waters, the insights derived from these narratives highlight the critical role of flexibility, technological readiness, and inclusive strategies in crafting effective DWA environments. This comprehensive analysis served

as a guide for optimizing distributed work arrangements, ensuring that despite the challenges, the potential for a cohesive, engaged, and productive workforce remains within reach.

## **Key Results**

### **Team DWA Adjustment Observations**

The shift to distributed work arrangements has brought about different levels of success and challenges. It has underscored the importance of adaptable management approaches to maintain team morale and involvement, shaping subsequent themes.

### **Cohesion Challenges and Achievements**

The move to distributed work setups has impacted team cohesion in subtle ways, influencing personal connections and employees' willingness to return to traditional office settings. Recognizing these obstacles and achievements provided a foundation for exploring how technology and inclusive communication strategies can bridge gaps and sustain involvement.

### **Engagement Observation**

Changes in engagement levels have been noted, with technological adaptation playing a vital role in enhancing participation and efficiency. This theme sets the stage for understanding the influence of technology on DWA practices and its potential impact on future work dynamics.

### **Notable Variations in Colleague Engagement Across Demographics**

Analysis revealed differences in engagement among demographics, influenced by cultural diversity and linguistic factors. This highlights the need for comprehensive

communication strategies that ensure all team members feel connected, paving the way for discussing the significance of nurturing inclusive environments.

### **Technology Integration Experiences**

Rapid technological adaptations have played a key role in effectively implementing DWA, introducing new efficiencies that could reshape future work structures. These insights shed light on the role of technology in forming the groundwork for discussions around crucial preparedness needed to optimize distributed work setups.

These findings from each theme emphasize how interconnected adaptation cohesion engagement demographic considerations, and technology are within distributed work arrangements. They illustrate that vital aspects organizations must comprehend to navigate through complexities fostering a unified involved productive workforce.

## **Organizational Supports in DWA**

### **Theme 4: Organizational Supports**

The diagram illustrates a wide variety of support mechanisms, encompassing both technological resources and cultural programs. It outlines the organization's responsibility in establishing a positive atmosphere that promotes employee well-being and motivation.

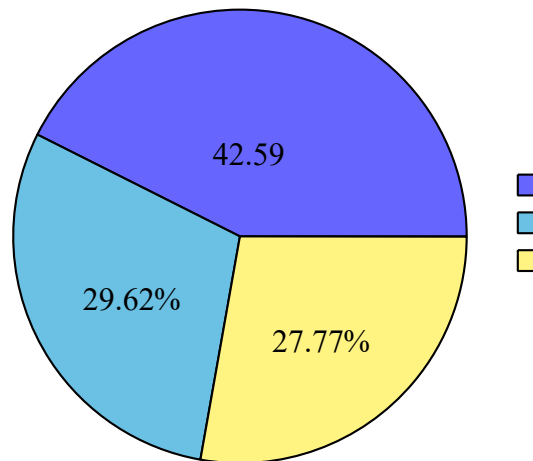


Figure 8. Supports for distributed work arrangements within organizations.

Highlights the array of organizational resources, policies, and cultural initiatives supporting the success of remote work.

The in-depth investigation of organizational support suggests a crucial understanding: the success of DWAs relies on a strong basis of support from the organization that goes beyond just providing technology. The incorporation of resources, policies, and particularly cultural programs into DWAs significantly contributes to improving employee involvement and efficiency. This examination emphasizes the need for organizations to create comprehensive support structures that cater to both the practical and emotional aspects of remote work, creating an environment where employees can excel and stay involved even when physically distant.

Building upon the findings related to Influential Factors in DWA, we next explored Organizational Supports in DWA. Understanding the organizational support necessary for effective distributed work arrangements is crucial for ensuring the success and well-being of employees. Research shows that organizational support plays a significant role in employee commitment and overall team performance (Carnevale et al.,

2021). Effective organizational support is essential for employees to thrive in distributed work arrangements (see Table 7 for summarized codes).

**Table 7**

*A table summarizing the codes within Organizational Supports, including quotes from participants that exemplify each code.*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Participant Quote</b>
Strategies for Culture and Values in DWA	“We teach the values we give examples of our values...we encourage people to not only live in the definition of the values but to assign meaning” (P4)
Observations of Organizational Changes on Team Engagement	“I think that one starts with leadership...it’s important that we share a message that every employee is important” (P10)
Resources and Supports Needed for Greater Engagement	“technology package” to ensure employees had all necessary tools for distributed work arrangements: “...they gave us laptops, monitors, keyboards, mice, any kind of ergonomic tools we needed...they made sure we had everything” (P15)
Long-Term Sustainability and Challenges	“I believe that it is sustainable when done right” (P7; P8)

The theme of Organizational Supports delves into the ways organizations have adapted to distributed work arrangements (DWA), focusing on the creation and reinforcement of culture and values, the impact of organizational changes on team engagement, and the identification of resources and supports needed for enhanced engagement. This analysis, derived from 54 references across 14 transcript files, unveils the strategic and supportive measures implemented by organizations to navigate the

complexities of distributed work arrangements while ensuring the engagement and well-being of their workforce.

### **Strategies for Culture and Values in DWA**

The adaptation of culture and values within DWA settings has been a focal point for organizations striving to maintain a cohesive and motivated workforce. Participant 4 emphasized the importance of encompassing the organization's values, "We teach the values we give examples of our values...we encourage people to not only live in the definition of the values but to assign meaning" (2.88% Coverage). This approach ensures that despite the physical distance, the core values of the organization remain a unifying force among employees.

### **Observations of Organizational Changes on Team Engagement**

Organizational changes have had a significant impact on team engagement, with leadership playing a crucial role in guiding these transitions. Participant 10 notes, "I think that one starts with leadership...it's important that we share a message that every employee is important" (9.42% Coverage). The emphasis on communication from the top-down highlights the need for clear and consistent messages that reinforce the value of each employee, fostering a sense of inclusivity and importance across the organization.

### **Resources and Supports Needed for Greater Engagement**

The provision of resources and support has been critical in facilitating the transition to and success of DWA. Participant 15 shares how their company offered a "technology package" to ensure employees had all necessary tools for distributed work arrangements: "...they gave us laptops, monitors, keyboards, mice, any kind of ergonomic tools we needed...they made sure we had everything" (9.98% Coverage). This



comprehensive support system not only equipped employees for distributed work arrangements but also demonstrated the organization's commitment to their comfort and productivity.

The narrative of Organizational Support underscores the importance of intentional and strategic efforts by organizations to support their workforce in the context of DWA. From embedding organizational values into the fabric of distributed work arrangements to adapting leadership communication strategies and providing essential resources, these efforts are pivotal in maintaining and enhancing team engagement and cohesion. The insights gleaned from participant experiences reveal that the success of DWA hinges on the organization's ability to foster a supportive and inclusive environment, where employees feel valued and equipped to navigate the challenges of distributed work arrangements. As organizations continue to evolve in their approach to DWA, the lessons learned from these narratives offer valuable guidance on the importance of organizational support in ensuring a resilient, engaged, and productive workforce.

### **Long-Term Sustainability and Challenges**

Looking towards the future, participants expressed mixed feelings about the long-term viability of DWA. One participant speculated on sustainability, stating, "I believe that it is sustainable when done right", capturing the conditional optimism that permeates the discussion around distributed work arrangements. Concerns about maintaining engagement and organizational culture in a remote-first world were also prevalent, with over 20.54% of references from participants P7 and P8 pondering the challenges of fostering connection and collaboration at a distance.

## **Key Findings**

The examination of Organizational Supports in Distributed Work Arrangements uncovered some significant discoveries:

### **Approaches for Culture and Values in DWA**

- Companies have prioritized adjusting their culture and values to uphold a unified and motivated workforce in distributed work environments.
- Stressing the significance of embodying the organization's values has been essential in uniting employees despite being physically distant.

### **Changes at the Organizational Level Affecting Team Engagement**

- Changes at the organizational level have had a notable impact on team engagement, with leadership playing an important role in guiding these changes.
- Clear and consistent communication from leadership reinforces each employee's value, promoting inclusivity across the organization.

### **Resources and Support Required for Increased Engagement**

- Providing comprehensive support such as technology packages and necessary tools has been crucial for facilitating transitions to distributed work arrangements.

This illustrates the organization's dedication to ensuring their workforce is comfortable and productive.

These findings underscore how intentional, strategic efforts by organizations are vital in supporting their workforce within DWA. It highlights the significant role that organizational support plays in enhancing team engagement and cohesion. The insights

gained from participant experiences provide valuable guidance on emphasizing organizational support to guarantee a resilient, engaged, and productive workforce when operating under distributed work arrangements.

### **Concluding Thoughts: A Call for Flexibility and Adaptation**

The collective insights culminate in a narrative that emphasizes the critical need for flexibility and adaptation within organizations. “Now people are looking overtly for flexibility. In their work schedule so that they can have more work-life balance”, encapsulates the shifting priorities among the workforces. This narrative, enriched with direct quotes, not only highlights individual preferences for DWA but also signals broader changes in the workplace.

In sum, the dialogue around individual preferences in DWA underscores a transformative shift towards flexibility, autonomy, and the need for innovative approaches to engagement and culture in remote settings. As organizations navigate this new terrain, the insights and quotes from participants offer valuable guideposts for adapting to the evolving expectations of the modern workforce.

### **Theoretical Connection: Distributed Work Arrangements (DWA) and Organizational Behavior Theories**

In the theoretical connections section of our reflexive thematic analysis, we aim to interweave our rich, data-driven findings with relevant theoretical perspectives to deepen our understanding of Distributed Work Arrangements (DWA). Our analysis, rooted in the meticulous examination of the data, uncovered themes that resonate with the principles of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, illustrating these theories’ application and relevance in the specific context of DWA. This

theoretical grounding is particularly evident in our identification of themes related to “Individual Preferences” and “Managerial Strategies for Culture and Values in DWA,” which reflect the dynamics of social exchanges and resource allocations as they unfold within the lived experiences of our participants.

Moreover, our data highlighted the dynamic process through which trust and commitment in distributed work arrangement settings evolve, transforming into a state characterized by trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment. This transformative journey aligns with the concepts of Psychological Contract Theory, reinforcing the notion that such developments are contingent upon the fulfillment of implicit agreements and expectations, as supported by Rousseau (1995). This finding not only corroborates the Psychological Contract Theory but also enriches our comprehension of the pathways through which trust and commitment manifest and evolve in DWA.

Additionally, the study sheds light on the multifaceted nature of engagement in distributed work arrangements environments, revealing that it emerges not only from transactional exchanges but also from the nurturing of social and emotional support. This aspect of our findings draws upon the JD-R model and SET, which argue that a balance between job demands and resources, coupled with positive social exchanges, leads to higher engagement and job satisfaction, thereby emphasizing the complex interplay of various factors in fostering a productive distributed work arrangements environment.

By integrating our empirical insights with these theoretical frameworks, this section endeavors to offer a layered understanding of the phenomenon of DWA, highlighting the intricate ways in which organizational culture, individual autonomy, and managerial strategies interact. Through this synthesis, we not only validate and extend

existing theoretical discourses but also pave the way for future investigations into the nuanced dynamics of DWA, emphasizing the importance of a grounded, reflexive approach to thematic analysis. This examination underscores the critical role of understanding the theoretical underpinnings that influence the effectiveness and satisfaction levels within DWA, setting a foundation for strategic improvements and policy formulations in the evolving landscape of work.

### **Summary**

This study, set within various organizational contexts, employed qualitative methods to explore the complex dynamics of employee engagement in the era of distributed work arrangements. Using in-depth, Zoom and Otter audio-recorded interviews, participants shared their candid experiences, providing invaluable insights into the multifaceted aspects of DWA. The analytical journey involved meticulously transcribing recorded responses, coding the data, and organizing them into coherent themes. This process culminated in the identification of key themes that are central to understanding the fabric of engagement strategies within DWA. These include Support Strategies, Leadership Strategies, Communication and Collaboration Strategies, Managerial 'New Normal' Adaptation Strategies, Helpful Engagement Supports, and Feelings Towards Distributed work arrangements Aspects. Each theme, drawn from the narratives of employees and managers alike, sheds light on the strategies deployed to foster engagement amidst the transition to distributed work arrangements.

Specifically, our research delved into the adaptation and challenges of DWA, reflecting on how organizations and individuals navigate this evolving landscape. For example, the importance of providing employees with the necessary tools and secure

networks for effective distributed work arrangements is highlighted by approximately 21.72% of references in one participant's transcript. Furthermore, the shift towards trust-based leadership, the role of visual connectivity and regular communication in maintaining team unity, and the managerial agility required to balance organizational objectives with employee preferences are highlighted as essential components of successful DWA implementation.

Our findings resonate with existing literature and theoretical frameworks, reinforcing the need for a nuanced understanding of engagement, flexibility, and organizational support in distributed work arrangements. The insights gleaned from participants' experiences underscore the critical need for flexibility, adaptability, and a supportive work environment to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by DWA.

In Chapter 5, we will interpret these findings in depth, discussing their implications, and limitations, and providing recommendations for future research and practice. This final chapter aims to contribute to positive social change by offering insights that organizations can use to enhance employee engagement, organizational efficacy, and adaptability in the face of evolving work arrangements.

### **Enhancing Employee Engagement in Distributed Work Environments**

The effectiveness of remote work setups greatly depends on the implementation of efficient employee engagement tactics (Zeier et al., 2023). Managers hold a crucial position in shaping a work environment that not only aligns with the organization's operational objectives but also caters to the individual and professional requirements of

their staff (Susanto et al., 2023). This part explores the main concepts highlighted in the research—engagement tactics, personal inclinations, influential elements, and organizational assistance—providing perspectives on their definitions, importance for managerial approaches, and real-world implementations.

### **Engagement Strategies**

Engagement strategies refer to the intentional actions taken by companies to increase employee participation and dedication (Pratomo et al., 2023). These strategies are essential for establishing a workplace where employees feel motivated and appreciated (Zacharias et al., 2021). For managers, implementing effective engagement strategies results in enhanced job satisfaction and productivity among their teams (Rogers et al., 2020). Some examples include offering flexible work hours to accommodate employees' life responsibilities, recognizing, and rewarding outstanding performance through awards programs, as well as providing opportunities for career advancement to support the professional growth of the staff.

### **Individual Preferences**

Understanding and accommodating individual preferences in the workplace are critical in distributed work settings (Berg et al., 2020). These preferences can vary widely, encompassing desired work hours, communication styles, and the need for autonomy. By recognizing and respecting these individual differences, managers can significantly enhance job satisfaction and retention rates. For instance, providing options for remote work or flexible start times allows employees to work in a manner that best suits their personal and professional life balance.

## **Influential Factors**

Employee engagement is influenced by a variety of factors that have a significant impact (Ismail et al., 2019). These factors encompass organizational culture, the accessibility, and excellence of technological resources, as well as the efficiency of managerial approaches. Recognizing and dealing with these influential elements enables managers to create work settings and conditions that promote engagement more effectively. For instance, an organizational culture that encourages transparency and openness is likely to boost trust and dedication among employees working remotely.

## **Organizational Supports**

Organizational support pertains to the resources and structures implemented to aid employees in effectively carrying out their job responsibilities with satisfaction (Samosir et al., 2022). For managers in distributed work environments, it is vital to ensure strong organizational support. This involves furnishing dependable IT assistance to prevent technical interruptions, providing access to mental health services to support employee wellness, and enabling ongoing professional growth for maintaining relevant and proficient skills. Instituting thorough health and wellness initiatives can demonstrate organizations' commitment to their employees' well-being, resulting in increased engagement and job contentment.

In summary, implementing these principles in practice not only promotes a favorable work environment but also supports the strategic objectives of the organization, resulting in a more committed and efficient workforce. Managers who skillfully utilize these concepts can better handle the challenges of remote work setups, enabling their teams to maintain resilience and adaptability within today's dynamic workplace.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

Building upon the findings from Chapter 4, this chapter delves into the implications of distributed work arrangements (DWAs) on employee engagement. The qualitative grounded theory approach has illuminated the complex interplay between organizational support, leadership strategies, communication practices, and individual preferences within the context of DWAs. This discussion integrates these findings with relevant theoretical frameworks, particularly the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, to deepen our understanding and propose actionable recommendations.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

##### **Engagement in Distributed Work Arrangements**

The study revealed engagement as a multifaceted phenomenon in DWAs, shaped by support strategies, leadership practices, and communication methods. The reciprocal relationship, central to SET, was evident as both employers and employees navigated the new norms of remote work. This aligns with findings that supportive environments significantly enhance engagement, resonating with the JD-R Model's emphasis on balancing job demands with resources.

Recent research by Lee and Shin, 2023 further corroborates the importance of organizational and supervisory support in directly influencing employee engagement, regardless of the employees' work setups. This underscores the critical role of support systems in nurturing engagement in the workplace (Lee & Shin, 2023). Additionally,

Marumpe et al. (2023) underlined the positive influence of flexible work arrangements on employee engagement, highlighting that employees with flexibility exhibit heightened levels of engagement. This emphasizes the significance of adaptable work structures in enhancing employee engagement.

In summary, the interaction between distributed work arrangements, organizational support, and flexibility in work setups significantly impacts employee engagement, aligning with Social Exchange Theory and stressing the significance of supportive environments in fostering engagement in contemporary workplaces.

### **The Role of Leadership and Managerial Support**

Effective leadership strategies that prioritize trust and flexibility are essential for maintaining engagement in DWAs. Leadership strategies that foster trust and flexibility emerged as crucial for sustaining engagement in DWAs. This finding underscores the transformation required in leadership approaches to adapt to remote work dynamics, highlighting the need for leaders to trust their employees and provide autonomy, a cornerstone of the Psychological Contract Theory.

Future research initiatives should concentrate on formulating and validating models tailored to the nuances of distributed work. These models should integrate components from Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model while considering the unique elements of remote work that influence employee engagement, such as the efficacy of virtual communication, digital collaboration tools, and strategies for remote leadership.

These results significantly enhance our understanding of the interaction between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement, anchored in the principles of

SET and the JD-R model. While aligning with these theories in various aspects, the distinctive features of distributed work present opportunities for theoretical expansion and refinement, providing a fertile ground for future research to explore and enrich our comprehension of how remote work influences employee engagement.

### **Communication and Collaboration**

Effective communication and collaboration strategies were identified as essential elements in maintaining connectivity and cohesion within remote teams. The adaptation of digital tools and platforms facilitated not only operational efficiency but also emotional and social support among team members, underscoring the significance of technology in enhancing engagement in DWAs. Future research should explore the enduring impacts of Distributed Work Arrangements (DWAs) on the psychological contract between employers and employees, considering the evolving expectations and perceived obligations on both sides. Additionally, investigating the convergence of technology and organizational culture in shaping the remote work experience presents a promising avenue for further exploration, particularly in understanding how technology can be leveraged to reinforce cultural norms and values in distributed teams.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The findings from this study contribute to the theoretical discourse by highlighting the practical application of SET and JD-R Model in the context of DWAs. Furthermore, the exploration of leadership strategies and communication practices in fostering engagement offers insights into the Psychological Contract Theory, suggesting an expanded framework that incorporates the nuances of remote work.

## **Practical Recommendations**

### **Enhancing Organizational Support**

Organizations should prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive support systems, including technology infrastructure and psychological support mechanisms, to facilitate effective DWAs.

### **Cultivating Trust-Based Leadership**

Leadership training programs should emphasize the importance of trust, autonomy, and flexibility, equipping managers with the skills necessary to lead remote teams effectively. Future research should explore the enduring impacts of Distributed Work Arrangements (DWAs) on the psychological contract between employers and employees, considering the evolving expectations and perceived obligations on both sides. Additionally, investigating the intersection of technology and organizational culture in shaping the remote work experience presents a promising avenue for further exploration, particularly in understanding how technology can be leveraged to reinforce cultural norms and values in distributed teams.

### **Promoting Effective Communication**

Investment in communication tools and platforms, along with training on for the best practices for digital collaboration, will be essential in maintaining team cohesion and engagement in distributed settings. Organizations should prioritize the implementation and effective utilization of communication tools that facilitate seamless interaction among team members in distributed work environments. This involves selecting platforms that support various communication modes (text, voice, video) and providing training to employees and managers on optimal usage practices. As highlighted by

Gouldner (1960), the quality of interactions between employers and employees significantly influences engagement levels, emphasizing the criticality of clear and continuous communication.

Future research should explore the enduring impacts of Distributed Work Arrangements (DWAs) on the psychological contract between employers and employees, considering the evolving expectations and perceived obligations on both sides. Additionally, investigating the convergence of technology and organizational culture in shaping the remote work experience presents a promising avenue for further exploration, particularly in understanding how technology can be leveraged to reinforce cultural norms and values in distributed teams.

### **Future Research Directions**

Future studies should explore the long-term impacts of DWAs on organizational culture and employee well-being, considering the evolving nature of work. Additionally, comparative research across different industries and cultural contexts can provide a broader understanding of DWAs' implications on employee engagement.

### **Conclusion**

This study has provided valuable insights into the dynamics of employee engagement within DWAs, offering a nuanced understanding that integrates theoretical perspectives with practical experiences. The recommendations proposed herein aim to assist organizations in navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by DWAs, ultimately fostering a more engaged, productive, and adaptable workforce.

## **Areas for Further Investigation**

The changing landscape of distributed work and its effects on the workforce necessitate continuous academic inquiry. The following areas present critical avenues for future exploration:

### ***Long-term Implications of Distributed Work on Employee Well-being***

Further research should delve into the enduring effects of distributed work on employee mental health and overall well-being. This includes examining the impact of prolonged remote work on feelings of isolation, stress levels, and job satisfaction.

### ***Influence of Distributed Work on Team Dynamics and Performance***

Exploring how distributed work setups affect team cohesion, dynamics, and performance over time can offer valuable insights into optimizing team structures and processes for remote environments.

### ***Comparative Studies Across Diverse Industries***

Conducting comparative studies across different sectors can shed light on industry-specific challenges and best practices in implementing distributed work arrangements. Such research could inform tailored strategies for enhancing engagement across varied organizational contexts.

Future research should focus on investigating the enduring effects of Distributed Work Arrangements (DWAs) on the psychological contract between employers and employees, considering the evolving expectations and perceived obligations on both sides. Additionally, exploring the intersection of technology and organizational culture in shaping the remote work experience presents a promising avenue for further exploration,

particularly in understanding how technology can be leveraged to reinforce cultural norms and values in distributed teams.

By following these suggestions and delving into the proposed areas for additional research, companies can more efficiently navigate the challenges of distributed work setups. Utilizing principles from the Social Exchange Theory and other applicable frameworks, coupled with proven best practices, can aid in establishing engaging, efficient, and nurturing work environments for employees regardless of where they are based on challenges and opportunities presented by this mode of work.

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## APPENDIX A

### RESEARCH PROPOSAL TIMELINE

The following appendix presents a carefully crafted timeline for the research study titled Exploring the Influence of Distributed Work Arrangements on Employee Engagement in the New Normal Work Environment. This comprehensive timeline outlines the essential milestones and activities in conducting the research, ensuring a systematic and efficient progression toward the final dissertation defense and graduation.

1. August 2023:

- Research Proposal Defense: Present the research proposal to the esteemed committee, elucidating the research's significance and rationale. Diligently address any constructive feedback and suggestions received during the defense, refining the proposal to enhance its scholarly merit.

2. September 2023:

- Research Plan Development: Craft a meticulously detailed research plan and timeline, delineating the various stages and intricacies of the research process. This strategic planning will be a robust foundation for the study's execution.

3. October 2023:

- Literature Review: Embark on an extensive literature review, meticulously analyzing existing scholarly works about distributed work arrangements and employee engagement. Identify gaps and unexplored avenues to guide the research's theoretical framework.



4. November 2023:
  - Research Design Finalization: Culminate the iterative process of refining the research design, encompassing the judicious selection of appropriate data collection methods and rigorous data analysis techniques.
5. December 2023:
  - Ethical Approvals: Pursue the necessary ethical approvals diligently, adhering rigorously to ethical guidelines and principles, thereby ensuring the ethical integrity of the research.
6. January 2024:
  - Data Collection Phase: Initiate the data collection process with unwavering dedication, employing well-designed surveys and insightful interviews to procure pertinent data on distributed work arrangements and employee engagement.
7. February 2024:
  - Data Collection Continuation: Continuously sustain the data collection process, attentively validating data quality and completeness to engender reliable research findings.
8. March 2024:
  - Data Analysis: Undertake exhaustive data analysis, employing appropriate statistical methodologies to discern pertinent patterns and trends contributing to the study's empirical foundation.
9. April 2024:

- Results Interpretation: Meticulously interpret the data analysis results, drawing robust and insightful conclusions addressing the research objectives.

10. Early April 2024:

- Dissertation Writing: Embark on the synthesis of the dissertation with meticulous attention to detail. Compose each essential section, including an engaging introduction, thorough literature review, rigorous methodology, insightful results, and reflective discussions.

11. Mid-April 2024:

- Final Dissertation Defense: Elegantly present the completed dissertation to the committee for the final defense. Proficiently articulate the research findings and defend the study's originality and valuable contribution to the business administration discipline.

12. May 2024:

- Graduation and Submission: Engage in the momentous graduation ceremony, celebrating the successful culmination of the esteemed Executive Doctorate in Business Administration program. Submit the approved and refined dissertation to the esteemed university, marking the formal completion of the scholarly endeavor.

This timeline is a roadmap, orchestrating a seamless and time-sensitive trajectory for conducting the research study. Throughout this scholarly journey, maintaining consistent and transparent communication with the academic advisor and esteemed

committee members will remain a hallmark, ensuring steadfast progress and successful realization of the research objectives.

**APPENDIX B**  
**INFORMED CONSENT**

Dear [Participant],

I am a doctoral student at the Fox School of Business at Temple University. My current research topic is *Exploring the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the new normal work environment*. This study analyzes how companies responded to the external shock of the pandemic, which necessitated social separation, in the context of rapid and sudden adaptation to distributed work. It was found that a qualitative explanatory study was the best approach for evaluating business leaders' preferences regarding their workplace layout.

Your participation will consist of a 30 to 45-minute interview. You will be asked specific questions about employee engagement in the context of distributed work arrangements in the new normal. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any point, you can do so without incurring any penalties or losing any benefits. The research study results will be published, but your identity and organization will remain anonymous and not be identified. There are no expected dangers to you in this study. Although there may be no direct advantage to you, your involvement may be utilized to fill the void and investigate factors influencing engagement in distributed work arrangements.

If you have any questions regarding the research study, don't hesitate to get in touch with me at:

As a volunteer in this investigation, you must comprehend the following:

You may withdraw from Participation or deny Participation at any moment without repercussions. If you would like to withdraw from the study, please get in touch with me at

1. Your identity will always be kept confidential.
2. DuShawn King, the student researcher, thoroughly explained the parameters of the research study, and all your questions and concerns will be addressed.
3. The interviews will be recorded digitally; you must grant permission for the student researcher, DuShawn King, to record the interview. You understand that the information from the recorded interviews will be transcribed. The student researcher will structure a coding process to protect your name's anonymity.
4. Data will be stored in a secure and locked area. The data will be held for at least seven years.
5. The results will be used for publication.

“By signing this form, you acknowledge that you understand the nature of the study, the potential risk to you as a participant, and how your identity will be kept confidential. Your signature on this form also indicates that you are 18 years old or older and give permission to participate in this study described voluntarily.”

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW CONSENT

#### Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

Protocol Number 31327

**Title of research:** Exploring the influence of distributed work arrangements on employee engagement in the ‘new normal’ work environment.

*Investigator and Department:*

Primary Investigator Dr. Michael Rivera

Fox School of Business Administration michael.rivera@temple.edu

215-204-8732

Student Investigator DuShawn King dushawn.king@temple.edu 484-316-0646

*Why am I being invited to take part in this research?*

We invite you to participate in a research study because you are an executive, director, manager or employee.

*What should I know about this research?*

- Someone will provide you with an explanation of this research.
- Participation is entirely up to you.
- You may opt not to participate.
- You may initially agree to participate, but then change your mind.
- Your preference will not result in a penalty.
- You may ask as many questions as you like before deciding.

*Who can I talk to about this research?*

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints or think this research has hurt or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who independently review research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or [irb@temple.edu](mailto:irb@temple.edu) if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

*Why is this research being done?*

This study examines the ramifications of distributed work arrangements before, during, and beyond the COVID-19 epidemic. I will investigate how companies operated in the face of lockdown mandates and how they responded to business challenges as they emerged into a new environment of hybrid workspaces.

*How long will I be in this research?*

The interview is expected to last between 30-45 minutes.

*What happens if I agree to be in this research?*

Respondents will be asked about their professional work experiences in the context of a distributed work landscape. The interview will run no more than one hour

and will be conducted by Zoom or in person. A written summary of the study will also be provided at the Participant's request.

*Will being in this research help me in any way?*

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others participating in this research. However, possible benefits may include Participation may offer the firm an impetus to reflect on the resiliency of their organization and, as a result, encourage a critical review of such practices. Additionally, participants may request a copy of the study findings.

*What happens to the information collected for this research?*

To the extent permissible by law, we restrict access to your personal information to those with a legitimate need to access it. We cannot guarantee total confidentiality.

Your information may be reviewed and copied by:

- The Institutional Review Board, Temple University.
- Temple University Health System, Inc., and its affiliates.
- And other members of these organizations.

Data will be stored in password-protected files via PC. It is anticipated that the data may be stored for at least seven years.



**APPENDIX D**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Introduction and Warm-up:

The interviewer will welcome the Participant and introduce themselves. The purpose of the interview will be explained, ensuring confidentiality. An overview of the interview process and approximate duration will be provided.

2. Participant Background:

Demographic information will be collected at the beginning of the interview for contextual understanding.

For Managers:

- (a) Could you please share the age group you belong to?
- (b) Would you mind telling me your gender?
- (c) Can you tell me about your current job title/position within the organization?
- (d) How long have you been performing your managerial role?
- (e) Can you share the duration of your association with this organization?
- (f) Could you please tell me about your highest academic achievement or level of education?
- (g) How long have you been working in a distributed environment, such as full-time remote, hybrid, etc.?

For Employees:

- (a) Could you please share the age group you belong to?
- (b) Would you mind telling me your gender?

- (c) Can you share details about your current job title/position?
- (d) How long have you been in your present role?
- (e) Can you tell me how long you have been associated with this organization?
- (f) Would you please tell me about your highest level of educational attainment?
- (g) How long have you been engaged in distributed work arrangements, like full-time remote work, hybrid arrangements, etc.?

3. Semi-Structured Questions for Managers:

- (a) Question: How have you observed your team adapting to distributed work arrangements?
- (b) Question: What strategies have you implemented to support your team during this transition?
- (c) Question: How have you adapted your communication and collaboration strategies in a distributed work environment?
- (d) Question: What challenges and successes have you experienced in maintaining team cohesion remotely?
- (e) Question: How have you modified your leadership style to support remote employees effectively?
- (f) Question: Can you share examples of how you've addressed challenges in employee engagement in this new setting?
- (g) How do you ensure that the organization's culture and values are upheld in a distributed work environment?

- (h) What impact have you noticed on the team's engagement due to changes in organizational culture?
- (i) What is your perspective on the long-term sustainability of distributed work arrangements?
- (j) How do you foresee these arrangements influencing employee engagement in the future?

4. Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Employees:

- (a) Question: Can you discuss how technology has facilitated or hindered your work in a remote setting?
- (b) Question: What additional resources or support do you feel would enhance your engagement?
- (c) Question: How satisfied are you with the current distributed work arrangements?
- (d) Question: What aspects of remote work do you feel most and least engaged with?
- (e) Question: Have you noticed any differences in engagement levels among your colleagues based on demographic factors?
- (f) Question: How do these differences, if any, manifest in the work environment?

5. Closing:

The interviewer will thank the Participants for their time and contribution.  
The researcher will allow participants to add any additional comments or thoughts.  
The Participant will be reminded of the confidentiality of information shared  
during the interview.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

#### **Protocol for Minimal Risk Studies not Regulated by FDA**

#### **Protocol 31327**

##### **Abstract of the study**

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially altered workplace dynamics, resulting in increased remote work arrangements. This qualitative grounded theory research investigates how distributed work arrangements may influence employee engagement in the future work environment. The study will focus on HR managers and employees from diverse industries within the United States.

The main goal is to comprehend the effects of remote work arrangements on employee engagement using semi-structured interviews, and research tools like Zoom and NVivo. The study seeks to generate theories and conceptual frameworks that can guide organizational practices and policies related to remote work.

Purposive sampling techniques will select a diverse sample of participants, enabling rich and nuanced data collection through interviews. Zoom will facilitate interviews, enabling participants from different locations to contribute actively. NVivo will organize, code, and analyze the data, identifying emerging themes and patterns to develop a grounded theory. The study's findings are expected to illuminate key factors influencing employee engagement in distributed work arrangements, such as communication, collaboration, autonomy, work-life balance, and organizational support. These insights will inform strategies for enhancing employee engagement, productivity,

job satisfaction, and well-being in the future work environment. By contributing valuable knowledge about remote work, this study will aid organizations in making informed decisions regarding policies and practices, ultimately disseminating its findings through scholarly papers and presentations.

### **Investigators**

Dr. Michael Rivera Principal Investigator michael.rivera@temple.edu

215-204-8528

DuShawn King

Student Investigator dushawn.king@temple.edu

484-316-0646

### **Objectives**

This exploratory study seeks to provide:

- (a) An Overview of Distributed Work Arrangements in the New Normal
- (b) Theoretical Frameworks and Models for Understanding Employee Engagement in Distributed Work Arrangements
- (c) Factors Influencing Employee Engagement in Distributed Work Arrangements
- (d) Outcomes and Consequences of Employee Engagement in Distributed Work Arrangements
- (e) Gaps and Future Directions for Research on Employee Engagement in Distributed Work Arrangements

The critical research question driving this study is:

How do distributed work arrangements influence employee engagement, and what factors shape this relationship?

The following sub-questions are proposed to address this research question:

- (a) What factors influence employee engagement in the context of distributed work arrangements?
- (b) How do individual preferences and organizational support moderate the relationship between distributed work arrangements and employee engagement?
- (c) What strategies can organizations implement to foster and maintain employee engagement in distributed work settings?

### **Rationale and Significance**

Research on distributed work arrangements has gained traction in recent years, mainly due to advancements in communication technology and changing attitudes toward work-life balance (Bélanger and Watson-Manheim, 2021). Distributed work arrangements refer to work arrangements where employees are geographically dispersed and rely on technology to collaborate and communicate with colleagues and superiors (Golden et al., 2020). Such arrangements integrate telecommuting, virtual teams, and flexible work schedules (Bélanger and Watson-Manheim, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of distributed work arrangements, as organizations worldwide implemented remote work policies to ensure business continuity and employee safety (Kniffin et al., 2021). This sudden shift has offered a unique opportunity to examine the impact of distributed work on employee engagement, as organizations and employees have been compelled to navigate the challenges and benefits of remote work (Golden et al., 2020).

## **Resources and Setting**

The study will adopt a relaxed approach, prioritizing the comfort and privacy of the participants to ensure a conducive research environment. Participants will not be compelled to answer any interview questions, and there will be no pressure to respond to any inquiries they find uncomfortable during the interview. However, the research data will be collected through Zoom video conferencing, providing a convenient and accessible platform for remote scheduling. Both the interviewer (Principal Investigator) and the interviewees will have the flexibility to participate from their respective locations, whether at home or in their offices, ensuring a comfortable and familiar setting for the engagement. The virtual nature of the interviews will allow for complete privacy, facilitating open and candid discussions on the subject of the study as participants respond to the open-ended questions during the sessions.

## **Study Design**

### **Recruitment Methods**

The researcher will email managers of multiple associations and telephone their secretaries to schedule an initial meeting with influential managers and acquire access to publicly accessible records and reports. The data will be collected from public and private organizations (e.g., Philadelphia Works, The National Association of African Americans in Human Resources, the Greater Philadelphia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (GPHCC), and the African American Chamber of Commerce (AACC)). Interviews will be conducted with managers, and personnel from various firms, including managers, and personnel. The interviews will be used to determine employee engagement in the



distributed work viewpoints of managers and employees. These interviews will explore the influence of employee engagement in distributed work settings.

**Table E.1**  
*Data Collection Sources*

<b>Firm</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Collection Method</b>	<b>Respondent Types</b>	<b>Type of Data</b>
# 1	Public Sector: HR Workforce Development Network	6	Semistructured Interviews	3 HR Managers and 3 Employee Interviews	Qualitative
# 2	Private Sector: HR Technology and ICT	7	Semistructured Interviews	3 HR Managers and 4 Employee Interviews	Qualitative
# 3	Private Sector: HR Healthcare Services	7	Semistructured Interviews	3 HR Managers and 4 Employee Interviews	Qualitative
<b>Employees</b>					
					20
					Qualitative

A semi-structured interview guide is shown in Table E.2 and will collect information from managers and employees of various firms having membership in associations listed herein. During formal interviews, specific inquiries will be asked to

help gather data along strategic dimensions (Cohen, D. (2006), and DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

**Table E.2***Semi-Structure Interview Guide*

Section	Semi-Structured Intake Questions
Introduction and Warm-up	The interviewer extends a warm welcome and introduces themselves and their role in the study. The purpose of the interview and the confidentiality of information are explained. The participant is provided with an overview of the interview process, its duration, and the freedom to opt-out at any point.
Participant Background – for Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Could you please share the age group you belong to?</li> <li>ii. Would you mind telling me your gender?</li> <li>iii. Can you tell me about your current job title/ position within the organization?</li> <li>iv. How long have you been performing your managerial role?</li> <li>v. Can you tell me how long you have been associated with this organization?</li> <li>vi. Could you please tell me about your highest academic achievement or level of education?</li> <li>vii. How long have you been working in a distributed environment such as full-time remote, hybrid, etc.?</li> </ul>
Participant Background – for Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Could you please share the age group you belong to?</li> <li>ii. Would you mind telling me your gender?</li> <li>iii. Can you tell me about your current job title/ position within the organization?</li> <li>iv. How long have you been in your present role?</li> <li>v. Can you tell me how long you have been associated with this organization?</li> <li>vi. Would you please tell me about your highest academic achievement or level of education?</li> <li>vii. How long have you been engaged in distributed work arrangements, like full-time remote work, hybrid arrangements, etc.?</li> </ul>

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Closing	The interviewer expresses gratitude for the participant's time and contribution. The participant is given time to add any additional comments or insights. The confidentiality and anonymity of the information are reemphasized, and the participant is briefed on the next steps, including any follow-up required.
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Interview candidates will be obtained through industry associations, networking, and emails that solicit answers from executives, managers, and employees. There will be no payment for participation in an interview as part of this study. Respondents can request a copy of the findings.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The researcher will inform participants of this study's inclusion and exclusion criteria (Sales et al.; Smith 2003) based on eligibility criteria, not availability or vulnerability status. This study will include executives and managers between the ages of 18 and 65 who were employed full-time in February before the pandemic lockdown in March 2020 and who are members of at least one of the following organizations: a chamber of commerce association, a human resource management association, or a workforce development network.

### **Study Timelines**

It is estimated that the interviewees will spend between 30 to 45 minutes answering the questions (listed above).

### **Study Procedures and Data Analysis**

- Who: managers and employees ages 18 to 65 who were employed full-time in February before the pandemic lockdown in March 2020 and with

membership in at least one of the following associations: a Chamber of Commerce Association, and Human Resource Management Association, or workforce development network.

- What: Otter and Zoom technology will be used in a semistructured interview. No identifying data (e.g., name) will be recorded in the interviews to ensure that Otter.ai will not receive any identifiable data. Only audio recordings will be sent to Otter.ai since the video is identifiable.
- When: After receiving IRB permission and receiving verbal, recorded informed consent per #10, conversations will start.
- Where: The PI will interview participants over the phone or with the recorded video. It will be up to the participants whether they want to be seen.
- How: email delivery using contact information gathered from the association membership database.

The researcher will start data analysis as soon as the first interview is over to capture the essence of the participant and when they are still remembering the interview. This procedure will enable them to include all the interview's supplementary data. The interview dictation may be supplemented with secondary information (e.g., policies, procedures, and performance metrics) and saved for later conversations. To assess the best data, "a comprehensive inductive and comparative study" will be conducted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The researcher will enter all the dictated interviews as a document in Microsoft Word® so that it is simple to read both during the interview process and after it is over. All the research project's documents, dictations, and ongoing work will be kept on a thumb drive as a backup precaution. The editing format will be secured to prevent anyone other than the researcher from altering, adding, or removing data. All committee members will have access to the transcripts of the papers and the taped interviews. The analysis will consider the opinions of the committee members, and additional data regarding the interviews and research questions will be examined after the finish and analysis process. Initial coding on each interview will be done offline using the transcription process. This study will be accomplished with NVivo, a product offered by QSR International, the leading software provider for qualitative research worldwide, based in Melbourne, Australia. In addition to the coding process, this tool will update themes, build codes, allow data study for depth, and give another view of data analysis. Initial coding tools will assist the researcher in providing a common thematic categorization for all the data collected. Each coding session and coder will have potential themes from each document. If overlap (synonyms), specific codes should appear as subjects will represent their discussion. The researcher will record on paper each topic they were discussing, which theme. Finding and interpreting these, combined with the final research procedure and results will be communicated to the researcher's committee members so they can offer any additional suggestions, criticisms, or guidance.

Taking the information provided by the members, the researcher will continue narrowing down themes to reflect the study on distributed work. As mentioned above, themes pulled from earlier accounts will guide the creation of more defined themes.

Aggregations of these themes will be placed in each assigned tab utilizing Microsoft Excel®. This procedure will allow for limited bias, forcing themes and judgments of the study. Themes will be checked for frequency in each interview.

The most frequent themes will be pulled and placed in a new tab on the spreadsheet, allowing final coding schemes to develop. The original and unique themes from the cumulative codes will be grouped to show the last themes. The researcher holds no bias to the study as the phenomenon of distributed work is a struggle for everyone. The study's interest developed from the researcher's investigation of the topic during enrollment in the DBA program. Overall, the researcher's goal will be to add to research about adaptation to distributed work before, during, and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data will be collected throughout this study with no bias.

### **Withdrawal of Subjects**

There are no legitimate grounds for expecting subjects to “drop out” of the study, if this happens, there are no problems.

### **Privacy & Confidentiality**

The only sensitive data gathered is the name, which will be changed to codes or synonyms to safeguard the subjects' identities. No medical information will be acquired for the study.

### **Risks to Subjects**

There are no risks to the interview participants. The interviews will be conducted whenever it is most convenient for the respondent, and a time window will be offered for data collection.

### **Potential Benefits to Subjects**

The interviews may prompt the participants and respondents to think about their company's adaptation methods, which could encourage careful consideration of their policies and practices regarding distributed work arrangements. The researcher will also make a copy of the study's findings available.

### **Costs to Subjects**

The respondents are not anticipated to incur any charges.

### **Informed Consent**

Participants will verbally volunteer to participate in the study with the understanding that their information will not be shared, and subjects may be encouraged to engage in follow-up interviews for a more in-depth discussion of study-related issues. The duration of the follow-up interview, which may be 30-45 minutes, will also be recorded. A third-party transcription provider certified to handle sensitive data may receive and transcribe the interviews.

Before the interview, participants will be given the consent form and urged to study it carefully. The PI will request permission to activate the 'Record' button during the interview. Then, after completion, the following will be stated: "We are recording this session with your permission, but feel free to let me know at any moment if you wish to stop the recording, as you are allowed to." There is a recording. "Now, I would like to discuss the permission document with you and the rationale for the consent." Please explain your knowledge of today's activities and their rationale. The PI will wait for the subject to accept that they are being questioned for a study exploring their experiences with remote work in the context of the epidemic or something comparable. "What



hazards are there, in your opinion, in taking part in this study?” “What do you know about the choices for participating willingly in this study?” They should clarify that they are not subject to any coercive influences and are free to discontinue at any time without repercussions. The PI will read this script word for word and will not proceed unless there is sufficient evidence that the individual has provided informed consent.

Before the semi-structured interview, it is requested that interviewees email their acceptance of the terms.