
1-18-2016

Trusting Telework in the Federal Government

Courtney Brown

University of Phoenix Online

Pearl R. Smith PhD

University of Phoenix Online, pearl@pearlofwisdom.org

Nancy Arduengo

University of Phoenix Online

Martha Taylor

University of Phoenix Online

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Brown, C., Smith, P. R., Arduengo, N., & Taylor, M. (2016). Trusting Telework in the Federal Government. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(1), 87-101. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Trusting Telework in the Federal Government

Abstract

Despite an Executive Office mandate to permit federal workers to telework, federal managers still deny employees this benefit. Several factors have been attributed to their aversion, including lack of trust. Findings from a hermeneutic phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of 12 federal government managers who prohibit their employees from teleworking (Brown, 2013) was analyzed to identify themes related to trust. Of the eight themes Brown identified, five focused on lack of trust. This paper discusses those five trust-related themes and recommends success factors for enabling leaders' trust of telework are discussed.

Keywords

Telework, Trust, Federal Government, Telecommuting

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Trusting Telework in the Federal Government

Courtney Brown, Pearl Smith, Nancy Arduengo, and Martha Taylor
University of Phoenix, Tempe, Arizona, USA

Despite an Executive Office mandate to permit federal workers to telework, federal managers still deny employees this benefit. Several factors have been attributed to their aversion, including lack of trust. Findings from a hermeneutic phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of 12 federal government managers who prohibit their employees from teleworking (Brown, 2013) was analyzed to identify themes related to trust. Of the eight themes Brown identified, five focused on lack of trust. This paper discusses those five trust-related themes and recommends success factors for enabling leaders' trust of telework are discussed. Keywords: Telework, Trust, Federal Government, Telecommuting

Melissa Mayer's decision in February 2013 to ban telework at Yahoo surprised many. The iconic company was renowned for its non-traditional work practices that helped it earn the reputation as a fun place to work and a place on Forbes 100 Best Companies to Work for 3 years. However, Mayer believes, "To become the absolute best place to work, communication and collaboration will be important, so we need to be working side-by-side. That is why it is critical that we are all present in our offices" (quoted by Guynn, 2013, para. 7). A week later news that Best Buy had decided to join Yahoo in banning telework was publicized. Since these events, leadership practitioners and thinkers continue to debate the effectiveness of telework. Further, the proportion of teleworkers has not increased significantly from the mid-1990's to the mid-2000's (Noonan & Glass, 2012).

The start of telework (also called telecommuting) is generally attributed to advances in telecommunications (Peters, Tijdens, & Wetzels, 2004). However, Mokhtarian (1991) argued telework must meet two criteria: it is conducted remotely from direct supervision and it entails a shorter commute. Hence, the use of telecommunications is not a prerequisite. Telecommuting removes boundaries of time and space and puts the focus on activity rather than location (Kurland & Egan, 1999). Telecommuters work away from the office some or all of the time, and Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found most telecommuters work at home part time.

A study conducted by the United States Census Bureau revealed in 2013 20% of wage and salary workers worked from home at least part of the time. Espoused benefits of telework include reduced costs and improved productivity, recruitment, retention, job satisfaction, and work-life balance (Irby, 2014). However, teleworkers have reported challenges including isolation, inability to separate work from home responsibilities (McNaughton, Rackensperger, Dorn, & Wilson, 2014). Although studies on its effectiveness have produced mixed results, telework advocates generally consider it an effective business practice (Dahlstrom, 2013; Kurland & Egan, 1999; McNaughton, Rackensperger, Dorn, & Wilson, 2014). Yet, implementing telework entails a degree of trust (Baker, Avery, & Crawford, 2006; Kowalski & Swanson, 2005).

It appears Mayer lost trust in the ability of Yahooers to enhance their productivity and buoy the declining company while working from home. She believes creativity and innovation have suffered because of teleworking. Yahoo and Best Buy leaders are not alone in their distrust of telework. Although the federal government's use of telework exceeds that of private companies (Caillier, 2011) not all federal managers have embraced this work design (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2013).

Some federal government managers still prohibit employees from teleworking even after President Obama passed the Federal Telework Enhancement Act of 2010. Shoop (2012) reported John Berry, Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), attributed the federal government's slow adoption of telework to managers' lack of confidence in workers who are not visible. Shoop opined technology issues and inability to nurture creativity and innovation are also limitations to teleworking success. In September 2012 OPM reported 684,589 of the 2 million plus federal government workers were eligible to participate in telework and 168,588 were participating (Billingsley, 2013). Subsequently, in its report to congress on the 2013 status of telework in the federal government, (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2013) reported although many federal agencies were experiencing the benefits of telework some leaders were resistant. Some refused to implement the program and others refused to establish participation goals. While the report indicated the federal government has made significant progress in implementing telework, the data gathered and measures used are not always consistent or valid. Further, Dahlstrom (2013) maintained the supervisor-employee telework relationship requires further investigation.

In this article, we examine the role of trust in the employee-supervisor relationship to understand how it might influence leadership's reluctance to approve telework. First, literature on trust including how authors define trust, antecedents to trust, types of trust, supervisors' trust in subordinates, and how trust influences telework are discussed. Telework in the federal government and the influence of IT on telework are also addressed. Further, the findings of Brown (2013) are examined. The aim of the study was to explore the experiences and perceptions influencing federal government leaders to prohibit telework. Brown's study produced eight themes explaining the prohibition. This paper analyzes the themes to identify those with trust-related implications. Five were identified and are discussed. Finally, guidance for managing telework found in literature since 2010 are offered.

Definition of Trust

Although many definitions of trust exist in the literature, a definition germane to this paper is, "the capacity to voluntarily depend on each other's words and actions" (Newstrom, 2011, p. 277). Trust is an essential ingredient in a symbiotic manager-employee relationship (Newstrom, 2011). Widely touted as essential for organizational effectiveness, trust is regarded as cognitive (Caldwell & Davis, 2009; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), affective (Caldwell & Davis, 2009; Harrington & Ruppel, 1999), relationship based (Gajendran & Harrison (2007), and part of a social contract (Atkins, 2007).

A key element in trust is accepting risk (Guthrie, 1997; Nelson & Quick, 2004; Levering, 1992; Robbins & Judge, 2007). However, to Mayer et al. (1995) whose work on trust is highly regarded, trust is not risk-taking but "the willingness to take a risk" (p. 724). Further, to Krot and Lewicka (2012), trust can resolve risk issues between individuals, because trust is an attitude that promotes risk-taking. Table 1 depicts antecedents of trust.

Table 1. Antecedents of Trust

| Butler (1991) | Dubrin (2004) | Mayer et. al (1995) | Werbel & Henriques (2009) |
|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Availability | Accessibility | Ability | Availability |
| Competence | Availability | Benevolence | Discreteness |
| Discreteness | Predictability | Integrity | Receptivity |
| Fairness | Loyalty | | |
| Integrity | Honesty | | |
| Loyalty | | | |
| Openness | | | |
| Promise fulfillment | | | |

Types of Trust

There are varying dimensions of trust. To Kramer (1999) individuals make a rational choice to trust, and he described six types of trust:

- Dispositional trust is based on a predisposition to trust;
- History-based trust is based on past experience with the trustee;
- Third Parties as conduits of trust is based on information from a third party;
- Category-based trust is based on the trustee's membership in a social or organizational category;
- Role-based trust is based on a role held by the individual; and
- Rule-based trust is based on understanding of systems of rules regarding appropriate behavior.

Similarly, Robbins and Judge's (2007) categories of trust included deterrence-based trust, knowledge-based trust, and identification based trust. Deterrence-based trust is found in most new relationships. This type of trust is fragile and one violation or inconsistency can damage it. Knowledge-based trust reflects most manager-employee relationships and is based on predictability based on past events. Identification based trust entails an emotional connection between the parties, where one party can act as an agent for the other in interpersonal transactions.

Supervisor's Trust in Subordinates

Employees grow when their supervisor trusts them (Offermann, 1998). However, researchers acknowledge there is a paucity of literature on supervisor-employee trust. Several studies have examined supervisors' trust of subordinates based on the conditions of trust in Mayer et al.'s (1995) integrative model (i.e., ability, benevolence, integrity). Krot and Lewicka (2012) found employees must demonstrate integrity to earn their supervisor's trust. Further, benevolence also influenced manager's trust in employees. Amogbokpa (2010) confirmed all three conditions influence trust in both supervisor to employee and employee to supervisor trust. Lester and Brower (2003) concluded when juxtaposed, feeling trusted by the manager has a greater influence on employee performance and attitude than feeling the manager is trustworthy. A later study (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009) demonstrated managers who trust subordinates produce productive, benevolent, and loyal employees.

Trust and Telework

Supervisor's trust of subordinates is essential for telework implementation (Harrington & Ruppel, 1999). Kowalski and Swanson (2005) maintained trust is of paramount importance for a successful telework program. Further, Cascio (2002) argued no single factor for telework success is as critical as trust. However, Dahlstrom (2013) wrote teleworkers often sense a lack of trust from their manager who is unable to see them work. A 2009 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics study produced two findings indicating trust is a factor in implementing or approving telework (Stout, Awad, & Guzman, 2013). The study indicated managers are more apt to approve telework for employees who have demonstrated high performance. Further, managers are likely to view telework programs negatively if they believe their employees are lazy and

would like abuse the benefit. Findings from a study involving federal agencies (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2013) revealed managers view the ability to manage and monitor employees as a telework-related challenge.

Peters and den Dulk (2003) posited the willingness to implement telework may vary across cultures and be linked to power distance and uncertainty avoidance, which are two cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede (<http://geert-hofstede.com>) that influence work-related behavior. A study involving 300 managers including government leaders revealed managers are unwilling to adopt telework if they are anxious about the outcome (Watad & Will, 2003). The authors elucidated implementing telework is an organizational change intervention that entails widespread changes to the nature of a manager's job relative to communication, performance management, and supervisor-employee relationships. Fear that home-related issues would distract teleworking employees is also a factor that influences a manager's willingness to trust employees to work at home (Greer & Payne, 2014). Leaders who establish clear expectations and clearly identified rewards for achievement are more likely to adopt telecommuting policies (Giberson & Miklos, 2013). Finally, some managers resist telework because they are not certain employees working at home will seek help when needed (Golden & Schoenleber, 2014).

Telework and the Federal Government

President Barak Obama signed into law The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-292; The Act) on December 9, 2010. The Act has four goals:

- a) foster continuity of service during an emergency,
- b) reduce costs, and
- c) promote work-life balance,
- d) increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

However, the first mandate, (§359 of Public Law 106-346) was implemented in 2000. The Act defines telework as, a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of such employee's position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work. (Sec. 6501). This legislation is significant and affords government managers greater flexibility and efficiency in carrying out their agency's mission.

When Pope Francis visited Washington, DC in October 2015, the Office of Personnel Management issued a memo asking agencies to permit employees to use flexible work arrangements to alleviate traffic and safety concerns while fostering employee productivity (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2105). Hurricane Irene, which affected the east coast of the United States, caused the federal government to offer government employees the option of using unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework according to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) (Government Executive, 2011). The procedure put in place required employees to contact their supervisor or manager to notify them of their working location and status. Employees were required to communicate the tasks or projects they would be working on from an alternate location to their managers if they chose to telework. Employees already scheduled to telework on the days following the hurricane were required to report to work on their usual time or take unscheduled leave.

Performing work responsibilities from various locations outside of the daily operations location is a concern for some managers (Hunton & Norman, 2010). Joice, Major, and Verive (2008) conducted a study to explore the influences of common telework practices on employee dependent care responsibilities, job performance, and work experience. Quantitative and

qualitative data were collected in the study from 863 teleworking federal government employees. The study revealed that teleworking positively influenced increased job performance and the intention to remain with the federal government organization. Joice et al. concluded improving managerial strategies is a goal for many managers operating in teleworking environments. Smith (2012) examined five barriers to telework in the federal workforce: office coverage, organizational culture, management resistance, information technology security, and information technology funding. In 2012, the Office of Personnel Management conducted a study to report to Congress progress and problems implementing telework in the federal government (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2013). Ninety federal agencies participated in the study and they cited technology as the second greatest barrier to telework, following managerial resistance.

Information Technology and Telework

Government agencies such as the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) must invest in infrastructure to support teleworkers (Long, 2011). However, the lack of information technology equipment should not be an excuse that will prevent employees from working remotely (Long, 2011). Technology enables employees to work away from the office as teleworkers, increasing the flexibility to manage better their work and personal lives (Golden, 2009). Yet, Offstein, Morwick, and Koskinen (2010) found that while technology enhances the ability for employees to telecommute, leadership attitude and flexibility contribute more to telework success than technology. Greenhill and Wilson (2006) discussed the advantage managers realize when telework is approved such as extended employee workdays, reduced resource requirement, and increased productivity measures. However, employees become more concerned with meeting the managers' teleworking requirements than using the optional work location to become more productive through working independently.

The learning curve managers face in learning teleworking technology reduces the rate government organizations attempt to create a decentralized workplace (Gill, 2006). Telework is viewed as a way of saving space in the office with the use of technology, but the resistance of employers learning to use the technology to manage and communicate with the employees teleworking causes the advancement of telework to slow down (van der Linden, 2008). Telework group members use communication technologies to address their most apparent needs and concerns despite the reliability of some of the technological tools provided to them (Allport & Bélanger, 2008).

Telecommunication technology allows teleworking employees to communicate effectively with their managers and other employees in real-time (Alizadeh, 2009). The study performed by Alizadeh (2009) identified how future technological solutions can be designed to match the lifestyle of the teleworker, making the task of communicating outside the office more natural. Barker, Moon, and Ward (2006) discussed the capabilities of effectively integrating the functionalities provided by technology into the processes performed by teleworkers. For example, telecommunication software allows teleworkers to collaborate more efficiently than in the office environment.

Technology solutions provide teleworkers the ability to hold meetings and other work sessions normally requiring less travel (Ruth, 2011). The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) provides its teleworkers with technology such as computers, faxes, and the access to agency systems to perform their required duties (Cohen, 2010). New modes of information and communication technologies have proven to increase the level of productivity among teleworkers (Najem, Paquet, & Tremblay, 2006). Managers are able to track the productivity of their employees through technological solutions aimed at measuring the productivity of teleworking employees (Newell, 2010).

Methodology

Brown (2013) employed Heidegger's (2002) hermeneutic phenomenology to explore the lived experience and perceptions of 12 federal government managers who prohibit telework. Phenomenology is the study of human experience and individuals perceive it. Heidegger's approach reflects an interpretive rather than descriptive approach to phenomenology. He sought to explore everyday experience believing these experiences are intentional. Hermeneutics, which suspends the need for bracketing, is suited for this study because Pearl, Courtney, and Nancy have federal government experience.

Phenomenology is appropriate for studying human-related issues in management because it enables exploration into human experiences (Echrich, 2005). The phenomenological research design enabled investigation of perceptions to probe the participants' experiences and feelings that influenced their refusal to implement telework for their employees. Two research questions guided Brown's (2013) study:

- a) What perceptions of telework exist among federal managers who do not permit telework in their workforce? and
- b) What factors influence federal managers' decision to prohibit teleworking?

A protocol comprising open-ended interview questions is the primary data gathering tool for phenomenological research.

Participants. To develop a purposive sample of 12 participants, Courtney e-mailed a letter of inquiry to 30 prospective participants serving in federal managerial positions at a single organization. He had access to the managers' email address because of his working relationship with them. The prospective participants who responded to the e-mail and agreed to participate in the study indicated their dates and times of availability. Courtney re-contacted federal managers who did not respond to the letter of inquiry within 2 weeks of the initial e-mail until 15 managers agreed to participate. He assigned twelve participants to participate in the main study and three to participate in the pilot study. The levels of management ranged from shift supervisor to the director of the organization. The number of employees managed by the study participants ranged from six to 27. Each study participant had at least one director report. Table 2 depicts the demographic data of the 12 main study participants.

Table 2. *Demographic Data for Main Study Participants*

| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Range of Number of Employees Managed</i> |
|--------------------|---|
| P01 | 10 - 15 |
| P02 | 25 - 30 |
| P03 | 10 -15 |
| P04 | 10 - 15 |
| P05 | 5- 10 |
| P06 | 10 - 15 |
| P07 | 1 - 6 |
| P08 | 20 -25 |
| P09 | 5- 10 |
| P10 | 20 - 25 |
| P11 | 10 -15 |
| P12 | 5 - 10 |

Pilot Study. To ensure the effectiveness of the interview questions, Courtney conducted a pilot study prior to the formal study. Courtney held phone interviews with the three pilot study participants over a 5-day period. Participants responded to the entire set of

interview questions and Courtney asked them to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the questions during the interview session. Pilot studies can reveal deficiencies in the research design that can be addressed before time and resources are implemented upon an initial research (Gibson, Martin, Sibbald, Singer, & Upshur, 2010). He did not include the pilot study participants or data in the formal study. Based on the feedback from the pilot study, he did not modify the interview questions. Table 3 depicts key demographic features of the three pilot study participants.

Table 3. Demographic Data for Pilot Study Participants

| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Title</i> | <i>Number of Employees Managed</i> |
|--------------------|------------------------|--|
| <i>PL01</i> | <i>Program Manager</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>PL02</i> | <i>Project Manager</i> | <i>5</i> |
| <i>PL03</i> | <i>Division Chief</i> | <i>10</i> |

Data Collection. For the formal study, Courtney conducted all interviews face-to-face and recorded the responses on paper. He conducted interviews in a conference room away from the participants' worksite. He allotted 1 hour for each interview, with a predicted average interview of 30 minutes. Courtney offered study participants an opportunity to clarify responses. He made additional time available if a study participant wanted to expand on his or her perception or experience to offer a more precise response. After each interview, Courtney read a summary of the responses to the participant for concurrence. Consistent with phenomenology, the responses enabled identification of essential themes that portrayed the thought process behind federal managers resisting to incorporate telework among their employees (Bruce, Clare, Downs, Rowlands, & Surr, 2008; Brackley, Queen, & Williams, 2009).

Data Analysis. Courtney thematically analyzed the study participants' statements using three stages of coding: open, axial, and selective coding (Cornwell, Fleming, Ownsworth, & Turner, 2009). Open coding involves conceptualizing the data and noting patterns, themes, or both. Axial coding entails relating categories to subcategories, making connections between these themes and codes. Selective coding uses a higher level of specificity and abstraction than axial coding. Themes and codes are unified to identify the key issues emerging from the data during selective coding.

The first step of the coding process involved thoroughly reading all interview transcripts (Cornwell et al., 2009). The second step involved rereading the transcripts and highlighting key words and phrases. The third step entailed generating a list of descriptors based on the key words or phrases. Grouping descriptors with common meanings to create categories was the fourth step. The fifth step used consensus coding through the categories created. The sixth step involved modifying the list of categories and descriptors according to the results of the consensus coding process. The seventh step entailed coding all interview transcripts using the revised list of categories and descriptors. The eighth and final step involved an in-depth reflection of the completed coding process to identify overarching themes that emerged from the data.

Courtney also used NVivo 10 qualitative software to assist in the data analysis process. He analyzed and coded unstructured data received from randomly selected sample participants using the software. NVivo enabled data management, shaping, classification, and analysis of information gathered from study participants. Further, NVivo 10 automatically coded themes and patterns.

Courtney uploaded participant interview responses into NVivo 10 to identify information about keyword prevalence. The NVivo 10 software analyzes the word frequency

to help in the data analysis process and uses the word frequency as the unit of analysis. Courtney compared each participant's response to the interview questions for keyword prevalence to define theoretical saturation of the data. After defining the saturation within each interview question through word prevalence analysis, the analysis for node identification and theme materialization took place for all the interviews. Data saturation for each interview question occurred after 12 participants.

Courtney identified themes through keyword frequencies and selective coding that developed from the analysis of the interview responses. The developed themes are a generated list of descriptors consolidated from common key words or phrases. He grouped the descriptors with common meanings to create categories. He used NVivo 10 software to develop Nodes. He then composed the nodes into a hierarchical structure, creating subcategories that emerged from the data. Courtney identified themes after the analysis of the primary and child nodes.

Findings

Brown's (2013) study revealed eight themes.

- Theme #1: Past experience
- Theme #2: Employee disappointment and understanding
- Theme #3: Productivity sustainment, accountability, and increased cohesiveness among team
- Theme #4: More flexible work environment and increases the security risks
- Theme #5: Required trainings and better organized policy
- Theme #6: Trust and job duty requirements
- Theme #7: Manager symposium and online webinar
- Theme #8: Discussions with other managers

Analysis for Trust-related Themes

The purpose of this paper is to ascertain which themes from Brown's (2013) findings are trust-related. For that assessment, Pearl analyzed the eight themes by searching Brown's data for key words or ideas found in the trust literature. She found five themes identified by Brown (2013) have trust-related factors: themes 1, 3, 5, 6, and 8.

Theme #1: Past experiences. All participants identified past experiences as a factor influencing their decision to prohibit telework. One participant said, "I did less work and was distracted with family events when I tried to work." Another said, "Telework is associated with accountability, and in my past experience as a manager, I have witnessed other managers having issues with employees who teleworked. Employees would always use technology as their reason why task and projects were not delivered on time."

Theme # 2: Mentors play a large role in the decision federal managers make to prohibit telework for employees. Each participant identified at least one mentor who influenced his decision to prohibit teleworking. According to Brown (2013), these mentors dissuaded others from teleworking based on their personal experience as a teleworking employee and as a manager of teleworkers. One participant said a former CIO who served as his mentor told him telework was a process that did not work. Another participant stated that division chiefs from whom he sought guidance told him implementing telework would make the employees' job more difficult. Finally, one participant said he decided not to approve telework when his mentor told him it would increase his workload.

Theme #3: Employees maintain an acceptable level of productivity and accountability through the manager's decision to prohibit telework. One participant

attributed increase productivity to his decision not to implement telework. Another said he believes employees feel a heightened sense of accountability when required to work onsite. Another participant stated telework would negatively influence the training of new employees if they were not working side-by-side senior employees.

Theme #4: The federal teleworking program has unclear requirements that leave the policy open for question and multiple interpretations. One participant said, "The teleworking program is too vague and leaves too much room for interpretation where the employees feel they can provide clarification to the manager regarding how they are required to telework."

Theme #5: Federal managers prohibit their employees from teleworking due to a lack of trust, reliable security, and a reduced level of productivity. One participant stated, "Honestly, I just don't trust the employees who are working for me right now. It's a primarily young group of employees that have been unable to meet deadlines while at work. I already know the level of productivity will drop even further if I approve telework." Another stated, he did not trust employees working at home to have a safe and reliable internet service provider (ISP). Another said, "Prohibiting telework allows me to provide better oversight and assistance to my team."

Discussion

Brown's (2013) findings suggest telework involves five types of trust described earlier: history-based, third-party as conduit of trust, and rules-based (Kramer, 1999) as well as deterrence-based and knowledge-based trust (Robbins & Judge's (2007). Factors that influenced the leaders' decision to prohibit telework included past experiences, recommendation of mentor, desire to maintain current high level of productivity, unclear and ambiguous guidelines, and technology and productivity concerns.

Their own past counter-productive behavior and that of other employees influenced participants in Brown's (2013) study. Participants who had slacked off prior to entering management seemed to adopt a Theory X mindset (McGregor, 1987) that led them to assume other employees would behave likewise. Further, the past behaviors of other employees influenced the leaders. Past experiences affects one's decision-making and loyalty (Chen, Chien, Wu, & Tsai, 2010). However, leaders must be cautious to treat employees on an individual basis as it relates to approving telework. Generational differences might explain the leaders' lack of trust. Most accounts indicate the 21st century workforce comprises four generations, and each has a different set of values regarding work. Such divergence requires leaders to be flexible and adaptable. Prohibiting telework based on negative experience indicates a failure to employ situational leadership and to make decisions based on the maturity of the individual employee (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995).

A plethora of literature exists on the role mentors play in leadership development and the mentor-protégé relationship. The mentor's purpose is to provide guidance and install confidence (Parker Brown, 2001). Effective mentors enable their protégé develop transformational leadership competencies that empower employees (Bass, 1995). Mentoring takes place formally and informally. According to Kahle-Piasecki (2011) both types can be counter-productive, and informal mentoring often lacks a focus on organizational goals. Further, Nayman (2013) explicated to government leaders a good mentor is rational and encourages the protégé to consider multiple perspectives and to embrace creativity. Participants in this Brown's (2013) study did not indicate which is applicable in their case. However, informal mentoring is more common in the agency where the participants work. Viewing mentoring from a social learning theory suggests the leaders in Brown's (2013) study mirrored the behavior they deemed successful in senior managers.

Maintaining productivity is foundational to a manager's job, and federal government supervisors face undue pressure to ensure their employees perform to standard (Stewart, 2015). Participants in Brown's (2013) study supervised front line employees, who generally perform the mission critical tasks of their respective unit. These managers are likely to shun anything that might hinder productivity. Front line managers depend on the performance of their employees not only for the effective operation of the unit but also for their personal performance rating. Articles published in the *Government Executive* since Brown's study revealed two agencies that are struggling in this area: US Patent and Trademark Office (Clark, 2014) and General Services Administration (Clarke, 2015). These accounts indicate managers of teleworkers must be more vigilant in managing how they assign and how employees complete the tasks and accounted for time.

Some of Brown's (2013) participants stressed telework would mean additional work for them. Interviewees in Richardson's (2010) Canada-based study acknowledged successfully managing teleworkers requires extra effort in three areas: enhancing communications, balancing autonomy with micromanaging, and increasing trust. Richardson maintained the latter two are closely associated because micromanaging employees implies a lack of trust, which studies reveal can impair productivity.

Written guidelines and training exist for federal managers and employees. The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 provides agencies authority to implement telework programs. The website telework.gov provides guidance for managing teleworkers, including a copy of *The Guide to Telework in the Federal Government*, published by OPM in 2011. However, managers have the discretion to establish telework rules for their respective unit. Because employee unions cover many front line employees, managers may be reluctant to establish and enforce rules for fear receiving an employee grievance. Author #1 experienced this as a manager at a federal agency when telework first entered the federal government. Many of her colleagues were reluctant to put themselves in a position they believed would result in employee grievances filed against them. Federal managers realize responding to grievances is time consuming and frustrating, and most strive to avoid it.

Reliance on technology is de facto in telework. Fear regarding its availability, security, and operability is commonplace among federal leaders. Their view that technology is a potential threat to the productivity of teleworkers is documented (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2013). Depending on the nature of the work, something as simple as ensuring employees have access to a reliable internet service provider could have a significant effect on productivity. Further, Deloitte Touche (2013) warned federal managers that while telework could result in significant cost savings in some areas but the telecommunication costs could be exorbitant.

As it relates to telework, the lack of trust among the participants in Brown's (2013) study was pervasive and multifaceted. They reportedly did not trust their employees, organizational written guidance, or technology. Harvey (2002) concluded supervisors determine the reliability of trusting based on experiences. However, one could argue Brown's participants did not trust themselves to manage in an environment over which they felt they had little control. Extant leadership literature elucidates managers maintain the status quo via planning, organizing, directing, and controlling organizational resources. The participants may believe allowing employees to work out of sight would impede their ability to perform these tasks effectively. Thus, they may deem a threat to their personal career this benefit designed to enhance employee and organizational well-being. Absence credible evidence or validation from a trusted source that telecommuting enhances productivity, managers who are skeptical of telework may not be likely to employ integrative theory of leadership that involves mentoring, nurturing, trusting, and growing together (Chemer, 1997).

Recommendations

According to Billingsley (2013), managers should set appropriate and effective ways to measure teleworking performance because means of measuring onsite performance may not be effective. Employees should communicate with their managers about how their performance has not changed and make a conscious effort to demonstrate productivity. The findings from a study involving supervisor-employee dyads, including teleworkers and non-teleworkers showed a benefit in monitoring teleworkers and non-teleworkers similarly. However, teleworkers benefited from increased information sharing with their supervisor and increased help with maintaining work-life balance (Lautsch, Kossek, & Eaton (2009). Harrington and Ruppel's (1999) study also revealed the need for a new management style to implement effectively telework, which requires enhanced employee communication and interaction. They also stressed the important role of trust, security, and culture in the implementation of virtual work arrangements.

Offstein, Morwick, and Koskinen (2010) determined from their study leadership is the most important factor in a successful telework program and managers of teleworkers must adopt a leadership style commensurate with the nature of telework. This entails exhibiting a trusting and results-oriented work style in which productivity is measured based on work product rather than work practices. Further, they concluded organizations must recruit and hire managers whose style is commensurate with telework.

Finally, Kowalski and Swanson (2005) found successful implementation of telework requires a multi-faceted approach. Based on benchmarking successful telework programs, the authors proposed critical success factors at the organizational, manager, and employee level as reflected in the Table 4.

Table 4. *Critical Success Factors for Implementing Telework*

| | Support | Communication | Trust |
|--------------|--|---|---|
| Organization | Top management Support Technology & Tools | Formal Policy | Results-based performance management system Culture based on trust |
| Manager | Supervisor support Managerial training | Formal and informal communication skills | Managerial trust |
| Employee | Family support Set work/family boundaries Employee training | Social interaction | Employee trust |

The authors explicated these factors are not isolated but work symbiotically to enhance productivity in a telework environment.

Participants in Brown's (2013) study discussed every factor noted by Kowalski & Swanson (2005) except culture. However, the federal government has a reputation for red tape and ineffectiveness (Billingsley, 2013). Consequently, this may have been an unconscious factor or related to the experiences cited by all of the participants. Brown's participants indicated leaders needed more training to maintain effectively a telework program. Smith (2012) concluded federal government leaders need better training to overcome their fear resulting in a barrier to telework.

Famed educator and author, Booker T. Washington wrote, "Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him, and to let him know that you trust him"

(Washington, 1901). Holtshouse's (2010) study of public and private sector organizations in three countries revealed a leading recruitment strategy for workers up through age 40 would be telework/telecommuting. Hence, it is in the best interest of organizations to establish or maintain a successful telework program. Findings from recent studies provide guidance. Although Brown's (2013) findings are not generalizable beyond the organization studied, they reflect prevailing thoughts regarding the role of trust in telework. Organizational development interventions to promote adherence to telework friendly leadership practices, resolution of technology issues, and adoption of clear policies can help organizations build and sustain a culture of trust needed for a successful telework program.

References

- Amogbokpa, T. G. (2010). *The connection between the two facets of trust (supervisor trust and subordinate trust) and leader-member exchange relationship in two manufacturing organizations* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3423169).
- Atkins, C. (2007). Trust and the psychological contract. *Employee Relations*, 29(3), 227-246. doi 10.1108/01425450710741720
- Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Billingsley, K. (2013). The telework generation gap. *Government Executive*. Retrieved from <http://www.govexec.com/excellence/promising-practices/2013/05/telework-generation-gap/62975/>
- Brackley, M., Queen, J., & Williams, G. (2009). Being emotionally abused: A phenomenological study of adult women's experiences of emotionally abusive intimate partner relationships. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 30(4), 237-245. doi:10.1080/01612840802701257
- Brower, H. H., Lester, S. W., Korsgaard, M. A., & Dineen, B. R. (2009). A closer look at trust between managers and subordinates: Understanding the effects of both trusting and being trusted on subordinate outcomes. *Journal of Management*, 35(2), 327-347.
- Brown C. (2013). *Exploring the perception of managers regarding telework in the federal government* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Phoenix, Tempe, AZ.
- Brown, K. P. (2001). Mentors and role models: Are they important? *Leadership & Management In Engineering*, 1(4), 49.
- Bruce, E., Clare, L., Downs, M., Rowlands, J., & Surr, C. (2008). The experience of living with dementia in residential care: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *The Gerontologist*, 48(6), 711-720.
- Butler, J. K. (1991). Toward understanding and measuring conditions of trust: Evolution of a condition of trust inventory. *Journal of Management*, 17(3), 643.
- Chen, Y., Chien, S., Wu, J., & Tsai, P. (2010). Impact of signals and experience on trust and trusting behavior. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior And Social Networking*, 13(5), 539-546. doi:10.1089/cyber.2009.0188
- Chemer, M. (1997). *An integrative theory of leadership*. Retrieved from <https://www.questia.com/read/27754262/an-integrative-theory-of-leadership>
- Clark, C. (2014). Patent office telework abuses raise fear of wider crackdown. Retrieved from <http://www.govexec.com/oversight/2014/11/patent-office-telework-abuses-raise-fear-wider-crackdown/99386/>
- Clark, C. (2015). *Model telework program runs into problems of its own*. Retrieved from <http://www.govexec.com/management/2015/01/model-telework-program-runs-problems-its-own/103419/>

- Cornwell, P., Fleming, J., Ownsworth, T., & Turner, B. (2009). Reengagement in meaningful occupations during the transition from hospital to home for people with acquired brain injury and their family caregivers. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 63(5), 609-620.
- Dahlstrom, T. (2014). Telecommuting and leadership style. *Public Personnel Management Journal*, 42(3), 438-451. doi; I O.I 177/0091026013495731
- Deloitte Touch. (2013). *Telework and the federal government*. Retrieved from <http://deloitte.wsj.com/cio/2013/04/11/telework-and-the-federal-government/>
- Gajendran, R. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2007). The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: Meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(6), 1524.
- Giberson, T., & Miklos, S. (2013). Weighing in on telecommuting. *The Industrial Organizational Psychologist*, 51(2), 164-166.
- Golden, T. D. (2009). Applying technology to work: Toward a better understanding of telework. *Organization Management Journal (Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.)*, 6(4), 241-250. doi:10.1057/omj.2009.33
- Golden, T., & Schoenleber, A. (2014). Toward a deeper understanding of the willingness to seek help: The case of teleworkers. *Work*, 48, 83-90. doi: 10.3233/WOR-131818
- Greenhill, A., & Wilson, M. (2006). Haven or hell? Telework, flexibility and family in the e-society: A Marxist analysis. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 15(4), 379-388. doi:10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000632
- Greer, T., & Payne, S. (2014). Overcoming telework challenges: outcomes of successful telework strategies. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 17(2), 87-111.
- Guynn, J. (2013). Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer causes uproar with telecommuting ban. *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com>
- Harrington, S. J., & Ruppel, C. P. (1999). Telecommuting: A test of trust, competing values, and relative advantage. *Professional Communication, IEEE Transactions On*, 42(4), 223-239.
- Harvey, J. S. (2002). On the reliability of trusting. *Rationality and Society*, 14(2), 229-256.
- Heidegger, M. (2002). The fundamental discoveries of phenomenology, its principle, and the clarification of its name. In D. Moran & T. Mooney (Eds.), *The phenomenology reader* (pp. 257-277). New York, NY: Routledge
- Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. (1995). Situational leadership. In J. Thomas Wren (Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages* (pp. 207-211). New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Holtshuse, D. (2010). Knowledge work 2020: Thinking ahead about knowledge work. *On the Horizon*, 18(3), 198-203.
- Irby, C (2014). All in a day's work: overcoming telework challenges. *U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Monthly Labor Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2014/beyond-bls/pdf/all-in-a-days-work-overcoming-telework-challenges.pdf>
- Kahle-Piasecki, L. (2011). Making a mentoring relationship work: What is required for organizational success. *The Journal of Applied Business and Economics*, 12(1), 46-56.
- Kowalski, K. B., & Swanson, J. A. (2005). Critical success factors in developing teleworking programs. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 12(3), 236-249. doi 10.1108/14635770510600357
- Krot, K., & Lewicka, D. (2012). The importance of trust in manager-employee relationships. *International Journal of Electronic Business Management*, 10(3), 224-233.
- Kurland, N. B., & Egan, T. D. (1999). Telecommuting: Justice and control in the virtual organization. *Organization Science*, 10(4), 500-513.

- Lautsch, B. A., Kossek, E. E., & Eaton, S. C. (2009). Supervisory approaches and paradoxes in managing telecommuting implementation. *Human Relations* 62(6), 795–827. doi: 10.1177/0018726709104543
- Lester, S. W., & Brower, H. H. (2003). In the eyes of the beholder: The relationship between subordinates' felt trustworthiness and their work attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 10(2), 17-33.
- Levering, R. (1992). Can companies trust their employees? *Business & Society Review*, 81.
- McGregor, D. (1987). The human side of enterprise. In L. Boone & D. D. Bowen (Eds.), *The great writings in management and organizational behavior* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Random House.
- McNaughton, D., Rackensperger, T., Dorn, D., & Wilson, N. (2014). Home is at work and work is at home: Telework and individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication. *Work*, 48, 117-126. doi:10.3233/WOR-141860
- Mokhtarian, P. L. (1991). *Defining telecommuting*. Retrieved from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/35c4q71r>
- Nayman, S. (2013). 6 characteristics the best mentors have in common. *Government Executive*. Retrieved from <http://www.govexec.com/excellence/promising-practices/2013/04/6-characteristics-best-mentors-have-common/62445/>
- Newstrom, J. W. (2011). *Organizational behavior: Human behavior at work* (13th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Noonan, M., & Glass, J. (2012). The hard truth about telecommuting. *Monthly Labor Review*, 38-45. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2012/06/art3full.pdf>
- Offermann, L. R. (1998). Leading and empowering diverse followers. In G. R. Hickman (Ed.), *Leading organizations: Perspectives for a new era* (pp. 397-403). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Offstein, E. H., Morwick, J. M., & Koskinen, L. (2010). Making telework work: Leading people and leveraging technology for competitive advantage. *Strategic HR Review*, 9(2), 32-37. doi 10.1108/14754391011022244
- Peters, P., & den Dulk, L. (2003). Cross-cultural differences in managers' support for home-based telework: A theoretical elaboration. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management: CCM*, 3(3), 329-346.
- Peters, P., Tijdens, K. G., & Wetzels, C. (2004). Employees' opportunities, preferences, and practices in telecommuting adoption. *Information & Management*, 41(4), 469-482.
- Public Law 111-292. (2010). *The telework enhancement act of 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ292/pdf/PLAW-111publ292.pdf>
- Richardson, J. (2010). Managing flexworkers: Holding on and letting go. *Journal of Management Development*, 29(2), 137-147. doi 10.1108/02621711011019279
- Smith, F. D. (2012). *Telework in the federal government: Identifying solutions for telework barriers* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 1287847886).
- Stewart, L. (2015). *Low productivity? Redesign your team so everyone is the leader*. Retrieved from <http://www.govexec.com/excellence/promising-practices/2015/06/low-productivity-redesign-your-team-so-everyone-leader/114526/>
- Stout, M. S., Awad, G., & Guzmán, M. (2013). Exploring managers' attitudes toward work/family programs in the private sector. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 16(3), 176-195. doi:10.1037/mgr0000005
- Shoop, T. (2012). Trust and telework. *Government Executive*, 44(4), 4.
- U. S. Office of Personnel Management. (2013). *2013 status of telework in the federal government: Report to Congress*. Retrieved from

[http://www.telework.gov/Reports and Studies/Annual Reports/2013teleworkreport.pdf](http://www.telework.gov/Reports_and_Studies/Annual_Reports/2013teleworkreport.pdf)

U. S. Office of Personnel Management. (2015). *Impact of 2015 visit of his holiness Pope Francis on Washington, DC, commuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.chcoc.gov/content/impact-2015-visit-his-holiness-pope-francis-washington-dc-commuters>

Washington, B. T. (1901). *Up from slavery*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Watad, M., & Will, P. (2003). Telecommuting and organizational change: A middle-managers' prospective. *Business Process Management Journal*, 9(4), 459-472. doi:10.1108/14637150310484517

Werbel, J. D., & Henriques, P. L. (2009). Different views of trust and relational leadership: Supervisor and subordinate perspectives. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 24(8), 780-796. doi 10.1108/02683940910996798

Author Note

Courtney Brown is a senior security specialist and project manager. He specializes in providing information technology services to federal agencies.

Pearl Smith is an independent consultant and trainer specializing in leadership development. She has held staff and leadership positions within the federal government. She currently serves as associate faculty with University of Phoenix. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: Pearl Smith at, pearl@pearlofwisdom.org.

Nancy Arduengo is a senior organization development consultant at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. She also has worked as a federal government contractor. She currently serves as associate faculty with University of Phoenix.

Martha Taylor is a retired educator who currently works as an education consultant. She also serves as associate faculty with University of Phoenix.

Copyright 2016: Courtney Brown, Pearl Smith, Nancy Arduengo, Martha Taylor, and Nova Southeastern University.

Article Citation

Brown, C., Smith, P., Arduengo, N., & Taylor M. (2016). Trusting telework in the federal government. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(1), 87-101. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss1/8>
