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A Phenomenological Study on How University Employees Experienced Working  
from Home During a Pandemic

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A dissertation  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership  
Higher Education Leadership Concentration

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by  
Amy K. Hill  
August 2022

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Dr. Susan Epps, Chair  
Dr. Jill Channing  
Dr. Michael Hoff

Key Words: Employee Satisfaction, Employee Productivity, Work-from-Home

## ABSTRACT

### A Phenomenological Study on How University Employees Experienced Working from Home During a Pandemic

by

Amy Hill

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how employees at a mid-sized public university in the South experienced working from home during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-2021. Most employees in higher education settings were affected in some way by the coronavirus pandemic that hit the United States in the spring of 2020. Administrative, and clerical and support staff had to determine how to continue to provide the university with services while coordinating working from home. Now that we have experienced working from home, will that experience change the future of how staff work in higher education? For many, this was a first-time experience working from home, and it created a new set of challenges to completing everyday work tasks.

Most participants found that working from home did not increase their overall productivity or job satisfaction, and few participants felt lonely or isolated when working from home. Overall, the negative aspects and benefits seemed to balance out in a series of trade-offs. The majority of participants would want to work from home again or at least be given the option to work from home part-time or on a hybrid schedule.

Recommendations for further research include (1) performing quantitative research to develop scales of productivity and employee satisfaction when working from home, (2) determining how

participants' responses would have been different if they had not been dealing with a pandemic, (3) interviewing the same participants from this study who were still working from home in the future to determine if their feelings about the experience changed, (4) asking more in-depth questions on whether the supervisors' style changed to accommodate the circumstances of working from home, (5) pursuing questions on worker engagement that were not asked in this study, (6) interviewing more males for the study to see if their responses showed a trend that was different from the female responses.

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## DEDICATION

I would, first, like to dedicate this dissertation to the Lord, who has guided me and shown me His provision time and again in my life. I also thank my beautiful daughters, Kirsten and Lyndsie, who have always been my source of motivation. I hope I've inspired them to pursue their dreams. I also thank my family for their encouragement and support.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Most employees in higher education settings were affected in some way by the coronavirus pandemic that the United States experienced in the spring of 2020. While faculty were attempting to move in-person classes online with little notice, housing office staff were emptying residence halls and shifting remaining students into new living arrangements, and Information Technology (IT) units were working long hours to provide the technology needed for remote instruction and access. Administrative, and clerical and support staff were determining how to continue to provide the university with services while coordinating working from home three to four months or more. The participants in this study were also recovering from the effects of a storm that occurred in the spring before the pandemic struck. This also could have affected how they experienced working from home during the pandemic. Now that the nation has experienced working from home, will that experience change the future of how staff work in higher education? Will concerns about motivation and productivity be valid, or will colleges and universities decide that they might want their employees working at home to reduce overhead costs and loss of talent to other positions that allow work-from-home opportunities (Zackal, 2021)? What will it mean for higher education employees who may face the potential of working from home again, and how will less co-worker engagement in telecommuting work environments affect satisfaction among university employees?

### **Background**

Nilles and Gray (1975) first coined the term “telecommuting” when they studied ways to reduce home-to-work journeys. As the concept of telecommuting developed, a stereotype developed that teleworkers were primarily married women with children to care for and with no sights on a promotion (Crossan & Burton, 1993). Crossan and Burton (1993) compared the

literature on teleworking stereotypes with what they found in a teleworking case study. Unlike other researchers, Crossan and Burton (1993) found that the group of telecommuting employees might not be as homogeneous as they had been described.

Two decades later, Allen et al. (2015) asserted that telecommuting was becoming an increasingly popular topic of public discussion. The public became more aware of telecommuting as a controversy in February 2013 when Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer banned Yahoo employees from working from home, causing a media frenzy (Guynn, 2013). Mayer stated that the ban was necessary to foster a collaborative, inventive environment, but some considered the move a step back and thought Mayer was out of touch with current trends (Goudreau, 2013). Not long after that, Best Buy CEO Hubert Joly followed suit by ending the company's Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE) program which allowed employees to work from anywhere and anytime as long as the employees got their work done (Schafer, 2013). Some had thought the program was flawed from a leadership standpoint and that employees would not be productive and stay focused if they were only monitored based on the results, rather than the process it took to get those results. Wright (2018) said that some companies may move away from telecommuting because of lack of communication and mismanagement. The revocation of the option to telecommute within these prominent organizations started national conversations concerning the merits of the practice (Guynn, 2013).

According to Merrefield (2020), the concerns about distancing and spread of the coronavirus led to telecommuting becoming the standard for anyone who could do so. However, employers may have difficulty managing employees who are telecommuting because there is no one standard for everyone. There are some jobs and people more suitable for working at home

than others (Merrefield, 2020). A constant, however, has been that the type of work matters when it comes to determining how successful teleworking arrangements will be.

Dubrin (1991) found that telecommuting tended to increase satisfaction under certain work arrangements, and telecommuters were likely to be more productive on repetitive tasks. Abrams (2019) concurred, saying that well-done teleworking can increase employee productivity, creativity, and morale. However, Felstead and Henseke (2017) argued that even though working from home has been associated with higher organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job-related well-being, the downside would come in the costs of work intensification and employees not being able to switch from their work to home environments. It seems that the concept of telecommuting has yet to be understood, especially the implications on productivity and employee satisfaction.

It is not surprising that there was controversy over telecommuting because it represents such a fundamental change in how organizations have historically worked (Allen et al., 2015). Because it also has implications for global issues, such as work-life balance, greenhouse emissions, and the expansion of work opportunities, coming to a comprehensive understanding of telecommuting may be difficult. Further complicating the complete picture of telecommuting is the fact that research on the topic comes from a variety of fields, including psychology, management, transportation, communication, and information systems, and the results can be conflicting.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The coronavirus pandemic forced many adjustments in the way that we do life, but probably the most profound was the effect it had on how we work. Employers had to juggle the changing circumstances with meeting the tripartite needs of employees, company, or institution.

It will be important to determine why, despite the mostly positive findings on how telecommuting can benefit institutions, only 7% of American companies offered the option to their employees prior to the coronavirus pandemic (Abrams, 2019). In 1990, Goodrich reported that about 350 U.S. firms had a telecommuting work opportunity for their employees. Parker et al. (2020) said that prior to the pandemic, only 20% of employees were working from home even if their job responsibilities allowed them to do so. But, since the pandemic, 71% of those workers are working from home all or most of the time.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how employees at a mid-sized public university in the South experienced working from home during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-2021. For many, this was a first-time experience working from home, and it created a new set of challenges in terms of completing everyday work tasks.

### **Research Question**

The following research question guided this study:

How did administrative, and clerical and support staff at a university experience working from home during the pandemic?

### **Significance of the Study**

With the recent shift in employee work location from a traditional office setting to a home environment during the coronavirus pandemic, this study is especially timely. Although the results may not be applicable to a larger population or other institutions, the findings could provide a starting point for others in higher education who will have to address questions about working from home in the future. As other industries are considering work-from-home options, higher education systems have not followed suit. Exploring how work-from-home opportunities



can work in a higher education system is important in keeping current with emerging trends in the workforce. This study will shed light on the challenges and benefits several administrative, and clerical and support staff of a single university experienced when working from home during the pandemic. From this, future decision makers could be informed in their decisions of whether work-from-home opportunities can be provided for jobs whose duties lend themselves to that setting and what factors may contribute to productivity and job satisfaction.

### **Definitions**

For the purposes of this study, these terms are defined as follows:

**Teleworking:** According to Haddon and Brynin (2005), teleworking is hard to define, because there are so many different settings through which telecommuting could be classified. For this research, I define teleworking as that type of work environment in which employees are doing a majority of their work from a home setting instead of a typical office setting, regardless of the access to technology. Much of the literature uses “teleworking” or “telework” instead of “work from home” (WFH) or “working remotely.” I will use these terms interchangeably.

**Work-Life Balance:** The term “work-life balance” originated in the United Kingdom as part of the Women’s Liberation movement that was advocating for more flexible working conditions and maternity leave (Kumanu, 2021). According to Kalliath and Brough (2008), the term is now widely used but is hard to define. For this work, work-life balance will refer to a state in which the demands of a person’s personal life equal that of their jobs (Work-Life Balance, 2020).

### **Delimitations and/or Limitations**

Delimitations define study boundaries. For this project, I only interviewed staff within Grades 42-55 of the administrative salary ranges and Grades 1-13 of the clerical and support salary ranges at a single mid-sized public institution in the Southeast. These grades relate to the

staff skill levels and are specific to this institution. Grades 42-55 range from a low of \$35,718 to a high of \$189,765 pay scales. Grades 1-13 range from a low of \$15,220 to a high of \$70,462 pay scales. These administrative, and clerical and support personnel report to department chairs, deans, or higher-level university administrators. Custodial; grounds and facilities; and senior administrators, including vice presidents and deans; health personnel; and environmental safety personnel were not included in this study as they were not eligible to work from home. I did not interview faculty as they may have already had experience teaching online, and their working from home experiences may have been markedly different from those of the administrative, and clerical and support staff.

The limitations of this study include possible personal bias among the interviewees in terms of attitude toward their jobs or supervisors that might frame their responses. Another limitation is that the experiences of the employees at this single institution may not be reflective of those at other institutions.

### **Overview of the Study**

Chapter 1 included an introduction to the study, a description of the problem, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the delimitations and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 presents the literature review. Chapter 3 includes the research methods. The findings are in Chapter 4 and the summary of the research, conclusions, and the recommendations for further research are in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

Teleworkers were working from home long before laptops, cell phones, and other technology helped transform hotel lobbies and airport lounges into mobile offices (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). In fact, telework became popular in the 1970s for more practical reasons than anything else because, during that time, there was an oil shortage that made people more aware of conserving energy and reducing long commutes and traffic jams in large cities.

Bick et al. (2020) reported that teleworking increased greatly after the COVID-19 outbreak; and according to Bouziri et al. (2020), possibly millions of workers were telecommuting globally as of Spring 2020. COVID-19 dramatically affected workers and organizations across the world (Kniffin et al., 2021). Some organizations would find that, just as in historic influenza pandemics, their ability to implement work-from-home options per pandemic mitigation requirements would be restricted by their employees' inability to work from home and a lack of paid sick leave (Blake et al., 2010).

According to Dubey and Tripathi (2020), the sentiments toward working from home ranged from being excited to feeling hopeless, but, overall, the work-from-home concept was taken positively. Some researchers believe this will eventually lead to working from home being more permanent in some fields and a reshaping of the concepts of work and occupations, especially perspectives on working from home (Bick et al., 2020; Kaushik & Guleria, 2020; Kramer & Kramer, 2020).

In their literature review, Bailey and Kurland (2002) tried to determine who telecommutes, why they do it, and what happens when they do. But because there are so many factors in defining telecommuting, researchers would find it difficult to classify any employee solely as a telecommuter (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Mokhtarian, 1991).

## **Nontraditional Work Environments**

Picu and Dinu (2016) analyzed current trends of telecommuting in the United States and the European Union, finding that there were many mutations to the traditional work environment, including distributed work and flexible and compressed work weeks. They also asserted that globalization of businesses and increases in technology would continue to provide even more opportunities for flexible work schedules and for employees to work from anywhere but also the increased likelihood of issues with cybersecurity (Picu & Dinu, 2016; Pranggono & Arabo, 2021). Hinds et al. (2002) spoke to the benefits of the distributed work model, which allows employees to work from several different locations, suggesting that distributed work can be successful and lead to innovation and flexibility of a company. In these types of work environments, employees rethought how they communicated, arranged their work schedules, remained focused on common goals, and sometimes, even how they lived (Hinds et al., 2002; Moon & Sproull, 2010).

Other extensions of the hybrid work environment include flexible and compressed work weeks. Flextime work allows a schedule in which employees can determine what time of day they will arrive at or leave from work, and compressed workweeks are those in which the workdays are condensed into fewer than five days and number of hours worked per day are increased (Baltes et al., 1999; Lambert et al., 2008). Researchers have studied the effects of hybrid techniques like flexible and compressed workweek schedules on productivity and performance, job satisfaction, absenteeism, motivation, reduction in stress, and satisfaction with work schedules (Baltes et al., 1999; Solanki, 2013). Generally, those two approaches had positive effects on the stated work-related criteria (Baltes et al., 1999; McNall et al., 2009; Solanki, 2013). However, Baltes et al. (1999) found, even with compressed workweeks,

employee absenteeism remained unchanged by any statistically significant degree, and several different variables determined effectiveness of flexible work schedules. For example, flexible work schedules were less effective than more strict work schedules and tended not to be a factor in employee motivation as evidenced by unchanging absentee rates among employees with flexible schedules (Baltes et al., 1999; Solanki, 2013). Mas and Pallais (2017) said that while irregular work schedules may improve work-life balance, workers are frustrated if they cannot anticipate their work schedules, and they may find themselves working more in the evenings and on weekends. The benefits of flexible workweeks also tended to fade over time (Baltes et al., 1999; Solanki, 2013). Therefore, the impact of either work schedule seemed to vary (Baltes et al., 1999; Solanki, 2013).

### **Characteristics of Teleworking and Teleworkers**

Di Martino and Wirth (1990) predicted that telecommuting would provide great potential for organizations, but they warned that policy-makers, employers, and employees should be prepared legally and organizationally for this new form of work and its potential consequences. Wang et al. (2021) would later find through their interviews of telecommuters that some of these consequences would include work-home interference, ineffective communication, procrastination, and loneliness, combined with the fact that prior to COVID-19, neither the employees nor the employers had much experience with telecommuting.

In defining the characteristics of a telecommuting nontraditional work environment, each worker's situation might be different; for example, one employee's travel to the work site might be eliminated completely in that the employee works entirely from home while another employee's might just be reduced if telecommuting only occurs for overtime work (Mokhtarian, 1991). At-home workers are found in a wide range of occupations and industries, and

technology innovations have even further increased the opportunities to work from home (Felstead & Jewson, 2002; Shamir & Salomon, 1985). However, DeSilver (2020) purported that teleworking is found more often in the private sector than in state and local governments, and some jobs cannot be done outside the traditional work site, such as those of restaurant servers, hair stylists, police officers, or construction workers. Baker (2020) found that 25% of the U.S. workforce is comprised of jobs that can be accomplished at home. Research also showed that lower paid workers were less likely to telecommute than higher paid workers, and the larger the corporation, the more likely there are telecommuting opportunities (DeSilver, 2020; He & Hu, 2015).

In terms of valuation of a telecommuting work environment, an average worker will be willing to earn 20% less to avoid an employer-set work schedule, and they are willing to earn 8% less for a telecommuting option (Mas & Pallais, 2017). The use of telecommunications tools like computers and phones might also differ depending on each telecommuter's experience. For example, computers might be a necessary part of telecommuting, with about 50% of employees checking their work emails even when not on company time, while noncomputer-based work, like caregiving, might be involved in the telecommuting experience as well (Madden & Jones, 2008; Mokhtarian, 1991).

When telecommuting practices first emerged, full-time employees took advantage of it most frequently (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Bélanger, 1999; Mokhtarian, 1991). However, ironically, full-time telecommuting seemed to have the most drawbacks, leading researchers to believe that part-time telecommuting would be the form most adopted (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Mokhtarian, 1991). This would prove to be true as eventually more employees who worked on a contract basis, rather than full-time employees, would take advantage of telecommuting (Bailey

& Kurland, 2002; Mokhtarian, 1991). Salomon and Salomon (1984) asserted that despite the availability of telecommuting technology, the fact that telecommuting may create more burdens than benefits would discourage a wide-scale transition to a telecommuting work arrangement. However, by 2008, Madden and Jones found that 45% of employed respondents worked from home at least some amount of time, but only 19% worked from home every day or almost every day. This lends support to Bailey and Kurland's (2002) suggestion that since most individuals who telecommute do so infrequently, it is unlikely that those employees identify as telecommuters.

In considering an option for telework, there are several factors that impact the decision to choose a telework option, including the advantages of increased autonomy and job flexibility for the employee and savings in direct expenses for the employer (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Harpaz, 2002). However, the benefits of a telecommuting environment might be outweighed by the potential disadvantages of isolation, lack of distinction between work and home duties, and costs involved with converting to telecommuting (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Harpaz, 2002).

A factor in determining those who will telecommute is whether their job is suitable for telecommuting (Belanger, 1999; Bailey & Kurland, 2002). However, job suitability might not always be in line with permission to telework; for example, managers of clerical and support personnel might not approve their requests to do so.

Bélanger (1999) considered skills, identification with the organization, and job category as motivations for an employee to choose to telecommute if telecommuting was not a required part of their job. Those who did not telecommute cited such reasons as telecommuting not being an option, lack of a home office and appropriate equipment, and the feeling that they were more productive at the office (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Belanger, 1999; Nakrosiene et al., 2019).

However, some of those who did choose to telecommute, especially women with small children to care for at home, found motivation from the desire to balance work and home life duties but found that working from home was challenging (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Kaur & Sharma, 2020; Nakrosiene et al., 2019; Yap & Tng, 1990). According to Aldossari and Chaudhry (2021) women especially used techniques like disengaging from home or work responsibilities, practicing denial, and conserving energy to deal with working from home during the pandemic.

Even among international telecommuters, motivations toward telecommuting appear to be the same. Yap and Tng (1990) surveyed female professionals who worked in the computing industry in Singapore and found that 73% would prefer working from home if they had the opportunity, but only one to three days a week and expressed concern about the lack of communication with co-workers if they did telecommute. Employees considered the best telecommuting opportunities as those in which the job was conducive to telecommuting, supported a home life, and those that the supervisor supported (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Yap & Tng, 1990).

Gajendran and Harrison (2007) studied the effects of telecommuting on perceived autonomy and work-family conflict and why employees might choose it as an option and found small, but mainly beneficial, effects. Telecommuting is also positively correlated with job satisfaction, performance, and productivity in relation to reduced communication among employees (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Nakrosiene et al., 2019). Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that telecommuting only negatively affected the quality of the workplace relationships if the employees telecommuted more than 2.5 days per week (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Heiden et al. (2021) later specifically studied frequency of telecommuting in educational settings and its effect on health, stress, work-life balance, and motivation. They



found that the number of teleworking hours per week did not statistically affect those traits except for stress, which they found to be higher among teleworkers who telecommuted frequently (Heiden et al., 2021). These findings contrasted with earlier findings of Tustin (2014) who reported that those university personnel who telecommuted had lower levels of stress.

Besides employee motivations for telecommuting, employers might find further motivation for benefits beyond the institution because telecommuting possibly provides positive environmental effects. The Global Workforce (2017) report stated that telecommuting would be like taking more than 600,000 cars off the road per year, resulting in reduced greenhouse gas emissions and half-time telecommuters gaining an extra 11 days a year just in the amount of time they would have spent commuting. However, O'Brien and Aliabadi (2020) found that determining whether telecommuting really saves energy is complicated. Some studies show that teleworking reduces energy consumption, but others find that energy use increases among teleworkers through home-office energy use (O'Brien & Aliabadi, 2020). The authors did not provide details on this, but one could speculate that teleworkers used more energy by being at home and using electricity for stoves, laptops, and other office equipment. Walls and Safirova (2004) said that the question of emissions reduction depends on the total number of people telecommuting and how often and how long they do it even though individual telecommuters may see a sharp decrease in vehicle miles traveled.

Telecommuting might also lead to creative uses of office space that is made available by employees working at a distance, those working in the office on some days, and those using their homes for work. Robèrt and Börjesson (2006) suggested turning current office spaces into flexible ones in which employees use any desk they want in a large open office space. Employers could also return to their employees some of the savings from employees donating their homes

as offices, rent free (Robèrt and Börjesson, 2006). Piskurich (1996) suggested that employees could be saving their employers an average of \$8,000 on office space per telecommuting worker.

### **Worker Engagement and Isolation**

While characteristics of teleworkers and teleworking environments vary, the concepts of worker engagement and isolation are common factors in studying any teleworker and teleworking setting. Fritz et al. (1998) and Golden and Raghuram (2010) studied levels of communication and knowledge sharing in telecommuting work environments, especially considering how certain factors like job characteristics, IT support, trust, personal bonds, and commitment affect knowledge sharing among teleworkers. Fritz et al. (1998) found that telecommuters reported a higher satisfaction with communication opportunities than non-telecommuters. Fritz et al. (1998) did not elaborate on what those communication opportunities were. Golden and Raghuram (2010) argued that knowledge-sharing helps ensure that work-related interactions occur and that trust, interpersonal bonds, and organizational commitment among the co-workers were positively associated with knowledge-sharing, meaning that as those qualities increased, so did knowledge-sharing among the employees. Better technology support and asynchronous media, rather than increased face-to-face interactions, also increased knowledge sharing among teleworkers (Golden & Raghuram, 2010; Van Der Meulen et al., 2019).

Van Der Meulen et al. (2019) proposed that today, there is still little known about the effect telecommuting has on an organization's knowledge base and proposed a study to determine how electronic communication media factored in knowledge sharing among workers who were temporarily separated from each other in telecommuting environments. They found that while workers who were not in close proximity shared knowledge less frequently, being

separated for different amounts of time also resulted in lower job performance (Van Der Meulen et al., 2019). Through qualitative interviews, Kilpi (2020) studied knowledge sharing as one of the factors of effective telecommuting. The respondents from that study reported that knowledge sharing and communicating were harder while telecommuting. Most of the organizations had not considered the decreased amount of information flow among co-workers in telecommuting (Kilpi, 2020).

Onken-Menke et al. (2018) found that when employees are physically absent from each other in telecommuting work environments, their feeling of connection and engagement with their co-workers is limited, and they begin to see their job as unimportant to the institution. In other empirical studies of the overall effect of flexible work practices on worker engagement, the results have been conflicting (Onken-Menke et al., 2018). Roehling et al. (2001) and Thompson et al. (2015) stated that flexible work arrangements increase attachment to the organization, but Behson (2005), Haar (2008), and Kausel and Slaughter (2011) determined that there was no relationship between flexible work arrangements and the employee's sense of engagement and attachment to the company. Masuda et al. (2012) purported that employees' organizational attachment decreased when they participated in flexible work schedules like those in telecommuting. Martinez-Amador (2016) later used qualitative interviews to show how virtual job components affected employees' levels of engagement, finding that telecommuting enhanced engagement especially when the work was new or innovative. But Martinez-Amador (2016) also found that telecommuters tended to disengage when their leaders were ineffective and did not provide a clear direction for their work, changed priorities, and did not provide opportunities for growth. Those employees who felt most strongly supported by their leaders were those who felt the most engaged (Martinez-Amador, 2016).

When employees lack engagement with other members of their team, there is the potential for isolation and corresponding feelings of loneliness and depression. Cooper and Kurland (2002) found that isolation was more prevalent among telecommuters when they missed out on developmental rewards like interpersonal networking, informal learning, and mentoring available to on-site employees, and those workers were choosing not to telecommute as a result. If they missed out on professional development activities when they telecommuted, they also felt more professional isolation (Cooper & Kurland, 2002). Bloom (2014) studied a group of employees who volunteered to telecommute for nine months and found that half of them wanted to return to the office at the end of the experiment, despite their commute being about 40 minutes each way. The employees reported that they felt isolated, lonely and depressed (Bloom, 2014), and those feelings would play into their work-life balance and overall well-being.

### **Work-Life Balance and Employee Well-Being**

Kalliath and Brough (2008) studied the literature on work-life balance and found that defining it proved to be difficult. However, they suggested that any definition of work-life balance revolved around a few basic concepts: the multiple roles that employees played in home and work, the sense of equity and satisfaction across the multiple roles, fulfillment of the value they placed on those roles, and resolution of conflict and perceived control among the roles (Ashforth et al., 2000; Breugh & Farabee, 2012; Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

Ashforth et al. (2000) and Breugh and Farabee (2012) considered the conflicts involved in maintaining work-life balance and the different roles that employees play in life (e.g., employee to parent, boss to subordinate, etc.), the consequences of those conflicts, and the ways telecommuting or flex-time schedules could resolve them. Breugh and Farabee (2012) found that the ability to transition among roles is dependent on the flexibility of the boundaries and is

not necessarily easy. In fact, employees “frequently lament[ed] having to ‘wear different hats’ and ‘shift gears’” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 472).

Hill et al. (1998) conducted qualitative research on how telecommuting affected work-life balance, and the perceptions that they found among the respondents disproved the popular belief in the media that telecommuting inherently helped an employee achieve work-life balance.

Konradt et al. (2003) found that teleworkers reported more stress from non-job-related factors than their office-based co-workers, meaning that stresses involved in maintaining their work-life balance were more of a problem for telecommuters than work-related stresses. Some employees felt that telecommuting made finding a work-life balance difficult as it blurred the line between work and family and made it harder for them to know when to quit working (Fleetwood, 2007; Hill et al., 1998; Jones, 2016; Lockwood, 2003). Breaugh and Farabee (2012) countered those claims and found that if telecommuting was implemented well, it could help relieve some of the struggles between work and home balance. Later, Jones (2016) would also find, through a qualitative study, that respondents perceived several benefits of telecommuting to work-life balance, including time and cost savings, elimination of office interruptions, and time for completing family tasks while working. However, Palumbo (2020) argued that telecommuting negatively affected an employee’s work-life balance and increased work-to-life conflicts, causing greater fatigue among employees and a negative perception of work-life balance. Lapierre et al. (2016) and Kaduk et al. (2019) suggested that if telecommuting were involuntary, then workers experienced more strain-based work-to-family conflict. Lautsch et al. (2009) said that while telecommuters whose supervisors engaged in information sharing reported lower work-family conflicts, those same workers were not as likely to work longer hours under

stressful deadlines. However, Palumbo (2020) found that more work engagement seemed to curb the negative effects of telecommuting on work-life balance.

Vander Elst et al. (2017) investigated whether there was a relationship between the extent of telecommuting and determinants of employee well-being, like potential burnout, worker engagement, and stress. They found that factors like social support, a feeling of empowerment and autonomy, and the amount of work-life conflict were related to well-being, but the extent of telecommuting was not, except in terms of levels of social support (Vander Elst et al., 2017). Baert et al. (2020) found that teleworking increased employees' efficiency and decreased burnout, but teleworking lowered the opportunities for promotion and weakened relationships with their colleagues and supervisors. However, Mahmoudi and Zhang (2020) found that rates of telecommuting were related to negative health effects, and Grant et al. (2013) said that overworking from telecommuting and lack of time to recuperate negatively affected employee well-being. Weinert et al. (2014) said that IT employees who telecommuted had increased stress and exhaustion, partially from information overload. Because employees experienced isolation and depression, there is a potential for a decline in productivity and a budding mental health problem among teleworkers (Bloom, 2014; Gorlick, 2020).

### **Productivity and Employee Satisfaction**

Bain (1982) defined productivity as how employees contributed toward achieving an organizational goal versus the resources used in that effort. Imtiaz and Ahmad (2009) studied how stress affected employee performance in terms of productivity, finding that as stress increased, job performance declined. Mawanza's (2017) regression analysis later showed that poor work relationships, lack of support from employers, and poor planning hindered productivity. However, in higher education settings, Hanaysha (2016) argued that when

employees were empowered, got to work together as a team, and received more training, their productivity increased. In a more recent study, Rietveld et al. (2021) found that, among higher education employees who teleworked during the coronavirus lockdown, there were both positive and negative changes in productivity, but the overall result was negative. However, unlike the participants in my study who had some time to make the transition to telework, those employees had to transition to teleworking overnight. Abdullah et al. (2021) found that the more productive employees were also the most competent at their jobs.

Productivity is considered in terms of whether telecommuters are at least as productive as employees in traditional on-site office settings (Butler et al., 2007). Some research studies found that telecommuting increased productivity 30 to 65% for certain groups of employees (Abrams, 2019; Cote, 2020; Westfall, 2004), but others assert that there is little research showing that telecommuting actually increases job satisfaction and productivity (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Ahmed et al., 2014).

Hartman et al. (1991) found that productivity was related to the employees' satisfaction with their performance evaluation systems and the number of telecommuting hours versus total work hours while Ma and Ye (2019) said that happier workers are those whose commute distances are short and those who walk or cycle to work, and happier workers tend to be more productive. Lautsch et al. (2009) related productivity to supervisor type, saying that those telecommuters whose supervisors engaged in information sharing were more productive. Yap and Tng (1990) and Bailey and Kurland (2002) also emphasized the effect that supervisors had on the telecommuting experience, saying that those telecommuters who had supportive supervisors were likely to have a more positive experience.

Telecommuting and its implications on productivity depend on the actual tasks involved in a job, with telecommuting negatively impacting productivity in dull tasks and positively impacting productivity in creative tasks (Birkinshaw et al., 2020; Dutcher, 2012). This counters Dubrin's (1991) earlier findings that teleworkers were more productive than in-house workers on structured, repetitive tasks. Whether mundane and repetitive or creative, the tasks that teleworkers focused on were those that they felt really mattered, with them working on 50% more jobs because they chose to and spending 12% less time in what they considered as unnecessary meetings and 9% more time in knowledge sharing and engagement (Birkinshaw et al., 2020).

The trust and support of supervisors, the suitability of the home workspace, and the opportunity to care for family members positively affected productivity (Merrefield, 2020; Nakrosiene et al., 2019). Bloom (2014) and Nakrosiene et al. (2019) reported that fewer co-worker interruptions contributed to greater productivity, which contrasted Bailey and Kurland's (2002) and Birkinshaw et al.'s (2020) findings that, while fewer interruptions might increase productivity in the short-run, it might not be good for the institution in the long-run as it hinders the opportunity for creativity and interaction. Van Der Meulen et al. (2014) studied gains in distraction reduction and teleworker productivity. They found that when distractions declined, employees' self-rated productivity increased, but not necessarily the supervisor's perception of their productivity (VanDer Meulen et al., 2014).

Birkinshaw et al. (2020) looked at employee job characteristics over time and found that in 2013, employees broke down their work activities in the following manner: 52% were standard parts of their job, 18% were those needed by a peer, 24% were important but done independently, and 3% were done independently and spontaneously. By 2020, respondents felt



differently about how important each of those tasks were, reporting that when they felt their work was important, they felt important (Birkinshaw et al., 2020).

Employee satisfaction, whether employees are happy and fulfilled with their work, is a factor in motivation, goal achievement, and high morale among employees (Sageer et al., 2012). Golden and Veiga (2005) found that although employee satisfaction increased steadily as the number of telecommuting hours increased, it plateaued and then leveled off at about 15 hours. Arrington (2007), however, found that there was no significant relationship between job satisfaction and the number of days that an employee telecommuted, but rather that satisfaction increased with higher levels of work-life balance and the extent to which an employee identified themselves as workaholics, contending that non-workaholics were more satisfied than workaholics.

Morganson et al. (2010) investigated work-life balance, job satisfaction, and inclusion among employees who worked in traditional work settings versus those who telecommuted. Telecommuters reported less role conflict, greater happiness with their supervisors, and a greater commitment to their organizations than office workers (Igbaria & Guimaraes, 1999; Morganson et al., 2010). Hartman et al. (1991) found that the more support supervisors provided, the more telecommuters seemed to be satisfied with their jobs, and the higher the number of family disruptions, the less satisfied they were. Palmeri (2013) concluded that, overall, flexible work schedules like those provided by telecommuting do impact job satisfaction.

### **Telecommuting and Higher Education**

Mas and Pallais (2020) found that most jobs today have nontraditional features, and the more educated the worker, the more likely they are to have flexible job schedules, mainly due to the nature of their jobs rather than individual preferences. Especially since the COVID-19

pandemic, vulnerabilities in the education system worldwide have shown that society will need to be flexible and resilient as we face an unpredictable future (Ali, 2020). Johnson (2000) implied that university academic employees could easily adapt to a telecommuting experience because they had already learned that in order to do their writing and research, they needed a peaceful home office setting, and they had already learned how to adapt their classes to online learning methods to accommodate the needs of nontraditional students. They had also learned the importance of the Internet if they were going to collaborate with faculty from different regions (Johnson, 2000). Since academic work has also traditionally been assessed on results, the lack of physical presence for an employer's evaluation of the employee might be less of a problem for academic teleworkers (Ng, 2006). Snodgrass and Brewer (2012) said that the main reason for implementing a telecommuting option in higher education institutions was for the overall benefits it provided to employees, but costs to replicate the complex higher education structures at home could be a constraint.

Waters (2016) found that the experiences with telecommuting were unique among each employee, but some consistent themes emerged, including that they would prefer to work from home more and felt that they were more focused, and, therefore, more productive. However, an earlier study by Nicholas and Guzman (2009) found attitudes toward teleworking among university employees might depend more on when they were born rather than where they work. Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1999) who worked at universities did not prefer teleworking or the autonomy and work-life balance it afforded; however, regardless of age, level of education also seemed to play a factor in attitudes toward telework (Gross, 2019; Nicholas, 2007; Nicholas & Guzman, 2009).

Azmy (2019) examined employee engagement at higher education institutions and found that it most closely correlated with supervisor relationship and least correlated to employee satisfaction, meaning that worker engagement did not appear to affect satisfaction as much as it did the relationship with their supervisors. The research on this is conflicting, however, because an earlier study by Tepayakul and Rinthaisong (2018) found a direct statistically significant relationship between employee engagement and satisfaction. Chen et al. (2006) asserted that higher education employees were most satisfied by higher salaries and fair promotion systems, which might not be factors involved in telecommuting environments. Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2016), however, found that supervisory leadership style, especially servant leadership, had the most significant positive impact on higher education employees.

As noted earlier, Hanaysha (2016) found that when higher education employees were empowered, worked as a team, and received more training, their productivity increased. While telecommuting might increase employee empowerment, it might hinder team efforts and training. Balwant et al. (2020) stated that supervisor support, the employees' own motivation to learn, and their engagement with the institution also affected the training climate and the level of the employee's productivity.

### **Chapter Summary**

The data on how effective telecommuting is in terms of employee productivity, satisfaction, work-life balance, well-being, worker engagement and feelings of isolation are conflicting. And while working from home has been a practice that has been ingrained in our society for a while, telecommuting itself is not well understood. However, the concept of telecommuting may begin to play an important role as we question existing knowledge on remote working and how our society will look after a pandemic (Wang et al., 2021).

### **Chapter 3. Research Methods**

This chapter includes the research methodology I used to examine how administrative, and clerical and support staff at a mid-size university in the Southeast experienced working from home during a pandemic. It includes a description of the qualitative method used, how I selected the participants for the interviews, the research question incorporated in the study, my role in the research process, and how I collected and analyzed the data. I also describe how I ensured validity, reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness, which is especially challenging in a qualitative study. Finally, I outline the ethical considerations, which are also especially important in a qualitative study designed to elicit private thoughts from responses to interview questions.

#### **Qualitative Method Used**

I chose a phenomenological approach to this study because the scientific aspect of phenomenology is concerned with depicting the perspective of those studied and the meanings that they attribute to their experiences, and then the researcher examines those perspectives through “scientific constructs” (Aspers, 2009). The phenomenology research approach considers the “common meaning of the lived experience of several individuals about a particular phenomenon” (Webb & Welsh, 2019). In other words, phenomenology explores the perceptions of people who are brought together based on a similar life experience. Naturally flowing from a phenomenological approach, the qualitative method is characterized by a flexible research design that incorporates unstructured data through a subjective research process focused on subjective data gathered from a small sample size (Hammersley, 2013). Qualitative research, according to Hammersley (2013) is characterized by verbal, rather than statistical, analysis. Therefore, researchers who want to describe conditions and explain them rather than prove or disprove a hypothesis should use a qualitative method.

Winter (2000) said that qualitative research was founded in the personal experiences of people and groups. These personal experiences could only be gotten at through interviewing the person involved by finding that person's "truths' through a series of subjective accounts" (p. 7). Frankel and Devers (2000) stated the importance of research questions, especially in qualitative research, and also implied that the major focus of the research itself might be based on determining the right questions to ask. They stated that one of the tenets of a good qualitative research project is that the research questions it answers are clear to the reader and are important.

### **Research Question**

The following research question guided this study:

How did administrative, and clerical and support staff at a university experience working from home during the pandemic?

### **Researcher's Role**

Unluer (2012) argued that, especially in qualitative research, it is important for a researcher to define their role in the research process to ensure that the results can be reliable and trustworthy. It is also important for the researcher to overcome the disadvantages of playing an insider role in the research process in order for the results to be valid. Breen (2007) said that researchers are considered insiders if they belong to the group they are studying, and outsiders if they are not part of that group. Although I was a member of the population I studied, I was also the interviewer, collector of data, and research instrument.

When approaching this study, I had the inherent bias that working from home increased productivity and employee satisfaction. I realized that reviewing the literature and assimilating the results from my own research could support that bias or refute it, and I took measures to limit my own bias as much as possible by allowing my committee to review my work and point out

potential weaknesses in the research. Even though I am employed by the institution in the study and some of the participants were also be co-workers, I felt I was objective during the interviews and in presenting the results.

### **Population and Sample**

For this project, I only interviewed staff classified as administrative, and clerical and support who worked from home during the coronavirus restrictions in the spring, summer and fall of 2020 and winter of early 2021.

Their participation was entirely voluntary, and there were no methods for screening participants except for the requirements that they be either university administrative or clerical and support staff and that they worked from home for a certain period because of coronavirus restrictions. I received a response from more than 20 participants, so I obtained an amendment to my original Institutional Review Board (IRB) application approved through both East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and the university from which I pooled the participants. Because I work at this institution, I had close access to the study population and was familiar with some of them beyond the work setting.

### **Data Collection Methods**

To recruit participants for the study, I worked with the Human Resources Office to determine which staff fit my target category. Since the list that I received included all active employees from January through December 2020, I had to cull out directors. Then, I sent emails, as a blind carbon copy (so no one could determine who had been emailed) directly to the staff who meet my research criteria within the departments and academic units across campus. As I received responses from those interested in participating in the study, I scheduled interviews. The sample email I sent to solicit participants is in Appendix A.

Before I conducted the first live interview, I conducted a test interview with one of the staff who met my criteria to determine whether my interview questions were appropriate and would gather the data to answer my research question. I conducted the interviews through Zoom meetings or in-person, depending on what the interviewee chose. If the interview was done through Zoom, I recorded the interview, and enacted the transcription option. I also required a password for the interviewee to be allowed into the interview and to ensure confidentiality. After the interview, I reviewed the transcript and made any necessary corrections in spelling, etc. No interviews were done in person. Then, I provided a copy of the transcript to the participant who had the opportunity to review to ensure that their words were recorded accurately.

Prior to the interview, I read a prepared script to the participant that provided information on the informed consent, ensured that participation was voluntary, and indicated that the participant could end the interview at any time. I asked the participants to sign the informed consent and return it to me via email. I used a semi-structured interview protocol approach which allowed me the flexibility of using open-ended questions. This created an informal dialogue, allowing a more in-depth look at the participants' feelings and beliefs about the subject (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). In this type of environment, the participants would be free to share their true opinions without fear of reprimand as I ensured confidentiality of their responses.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Thorne (2000) asserted that data analysis in qualitative research is nebulous in that qualitative data can be in the form of anything that is not numerical, including open-ended surveys, interviews, or other qualitative data. The qualitative researcher's goal is to unearth knowledge about how people feel about certain circumstances (Thorne, 2000). Therefore, I interpreted meanings in the structure that emerged from the respondents' experiences.

In analyzing the data provided from the interviews, I incorporated inductive coding that allowed themes to emerge (Foster, 2004). The inductive coding involved studying the content grouped by question and categorizing the data based on common responses (Patton, 1990). I also included the negative responses (Sadler, 1981) that represented themes outside the emergent ones to ensure that I was presenting the full spectrum of responses, ensuring a richer description of the participants' experiences.

Since every question could not be answered in the same manner (e.g., questions on how long the participant had worked at the institution were answered with a numeric response, and questions about whether the participant felt isolated or lonely were answered with words that depicted emotions and could be grouped more readily into themes), I used different techniques to analyze the responses. For the numeric response questions, I simply compiled the data into a table, grouped by gender. For the responses requiring more in-depth descriptions, I began highlighting words that I felt depicted certain emotions. Then, I grouped the responses by words and phrases that were repeated (e.g., if certain participants said they did not feel isolated or lonely, I grouped their responses in my results section). I also created tables on four different areas that I wanted to compare: employee satisfaction, loneliness and isolation, negatives and positives, and whether or not the employee would want to work from home again. From those tables, I was able to easily compare the number of respondents who experienced greater employee satisfaction at home, those whose satisfaction did not change, and those whose satisfaction decreased, etc. I then used primary and secondary data comparisons to see how the responses I received aligned with what I had found in the literature. Overall, this gave me a picture of how the staff experienced working from home during the pandemic.



## **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

To maintain credibility and trustworthiness of this qualitative research, I used a peer debriefer and an auditor. Michael Aikens, director of the Tennessee Center for Rural Innovation and a peer who also did a study on productivity and satisfaction related to working from home, was the peer debriefer and reviewed the study from an outside perspective. A colleague, Jeff Schaeffer, was the auditor for the project as he has a Ph.D. and has been a scientific journal editor and involved in many reviews of dissertation research. I also kept detailed notes on my interview process and recorded the interview sessions (See Appendices B and C).

## **Ethical Considerations**

The research proposal was reviewed by the ETSU IRB for the Protection of Human Subjects to limit any potential emotional, physical, or psychological harm to the participants. I also read all participants the statement on informed consent during my introduction, ensuring that their participation is voluntary, and they may withdraw from the study at any time. I also gave them the form a week ahead of the interview and asked them to sign it and return it to me via email before the interview. The responses in the survey were only linked to the respondent through the pseudonym. The reported results are anonymous.

## **Instrument**

As my interview guide, I used open-ended interview questions to attempt to draw the interviewee into meaningful responses. The questions were written in such a way that they naturally lead to follow-up questions and discussion. The interview questions are:

1. *How long have you been in your current job?*
2. *Describe the type of work you do. (Follow-up: How well do your normal work duties lend themselves to working from home?)*

3. *What was your input in the decision to work from home? (Follow-up: How did your unit determine how you worked from home; for example, did you phase in a work-from-home policy, or did everyone start working from home at the same time?)*
4. *When did you start working from home, and how long did you work from home? (Follow-up: Were you working from home prior to the pandemic? If so, tell me about that experience.)*
5. *When you first heard about working remotely, what were your initial thoughts about it?*
6. *What was it like to work from home? (Follow-up: Were others in your household working from home? Did you have children who were doing school from home, and if so, how many, and what were their ages? What other family responsibilities did you have during the pandemic?)*
7. *What were the negative aspects/challenges of working from home?*
8. *What were the positive aspects/benefits of working from home? (Follow-up: Tell me about something you accomplished while working from home. Was there anything you thought you'd accomplish that you didn't? How would that accomplishment have changed if you had been in the office?)*
9. *Describe your work-from-home office space. (Follow-up: Was it adequate? Did you experience any issues with technology access, connection, etc.?)*

10. *Did you have a performance evaluation while you were working from home, and if so, how did your supervisor evaluate your performance?*
11. *Did your interactions with your co-workers change while working from home? Tell me about that.*
12. *Do you feel your productivity changed when working from home?*
13. *Tell me about your job satisfaction before working from home and if it changed when working from home.*
14. *Did your job duties change when working from home, and if so, how?*
15. *Did you ever feel isolated and lonely working from home? (Follow-up: How is that different from the isolation and loneliness when working from the office?)*
16. *How did your unit transition your work back to the office?*
17. *If you had the opportunity to work from home again, would you want to? Why or why not?*
18. *What would you want your supervisors or administrators to know about your experience?*
19. *Is there anything I haven't asked you about your experience that you'd like to tell me?*

*Questions specific to administrative staff*

1. *Do you have personnel who report to you? If so, how did you accommodate that role while working from home?*

2. *As administrative staff, your typical work schedule might be beyond the regular 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. work day. Did your typical work schedule change while working from home?*

### **Statement of Researcher Perspective**

Most of us were affected by the recent coronavirus pandemic, but probably the deepest impact I felt was suddenly being displaced from the office environment that had been my work home. Suddenly, my work ethic was challenged and I had to stay motivated and maintain high work standards even when my supervisors were not nearby. This led to my questioning my motivation as an employee and my ideas on employee productivity and satisfaction.

In terms of my positionality in the research, I know that I am a member of the population I wanted to study, and in terms of reflexivity, I also know that my own experiences and beliefs about working from home will inherently shape the research. When I worked from home, my own productivity suffered as I did not have access to two monitors. This greatly hindered my ability to perform my tasks, and it caused me to lose self-esteem and confidence in my job performance. My satisfaction with my job while working from home varied depending on the circumstance. Some days I was happier working from home, and other days I was not. I realized I was eating more, but I could also take walks on my lunch, so there seemed to be trade-offs. All of these personal beliefs about the work-from-home experience would be in my subconscious, but I knew that in my interviews, I would need to remain subjective and neutral. I mitigated the potential effects from my positionality and reflexivity through member checking in that I allowed the participants the opportunity to review the transcripts.

## Chapter Summary

For this study, I chose a qualitative method because I wanted to learn about the experiences of those who worked from home during the coronavirus pandemic, and I felt that verbal descriptions, which are characteristic of qualitative research, were more fitting than statistical analysis (Hammersley, 2013). My perspective for this project came from my personal experience as one of the employees I wanted to study, one who had been displaced from an office setting to a home-based one because of the COVID-19 restrictions. Even though I represented the population I wanted to study, which included administrative, and clerical and support staff at a mid-size university in the Southeast, I felt I remained objective and unbiased in interviewing the respondents and in presenting the results. My research was guided by the following question: how did administrative, and clerical and support staff experience working from home during the pandemic?

To pursue that question, I interviewed representatives from my target population and then prepared a table of the responses. To help me maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, I solicited the help of a peer debriefer and auditor to review the study. Since qualitative research inherently involves the private thoughts of those being interviewed, I ensured that the study met the requirements of the ETSU IRB, thereby limiting any potential emotional, physical, or psychological harm to the participants. Through these efforts, this research is intended to be an unbiased representation of the real experiences of university staff who worked from home during the coronavirus pandemic.

## Chapter 4. Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how employees at a mid-sized public university in the South experienced working from home from approximately three to four months during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-2021. For many, this was a first-time experience working from home, and it created a new set of challenges to completing everyday work tasks. I determined the participants via a list the Office of Human Resources provided of all administrators and administrative, and clerical and support staff who worked at the university from January to December 2020. From that list, I subsampled only administrative, and clerical and support staff and sent those personnel an email to solicit participation. All of those who responded to that email and fit the criteria of working from home during the pandemic could participate in the interview, consisting of 19 pre-written, open-ended questions. If the staff member was classified as administrative, I had two additional questions for them. I also conducted a pilot interview to determine whether my questions were appropriate and accurately reflected what I intended to ask. The pilot interviewee said that Question 3 needed to be expanded to make it more open-ended and ask the participant if they felt that their input was considered. I included that as a subpart to the original question during the interviews. I used Zoom to record and transcribe the interviews. I sent the transcripts to the participants to review for accuracy. Although I offered the opportunity to interview via telephone, no one chose that option.

The following research question guided this study: How did administrative, and clerical and support staff experience working from home during the pandemic? I sought answers to this question through the qualitative interviews and the subsequent themes that emerged from the responses.

## **Description of Participants**

I interviewed 21 participants. The list I received from the Office of Human Resources had originally included 296 staff who I determined to be administrative, and clerical and support. Since the Office of Human Resources could not delineate among administrators and clerical/support staff, I had to sort through the list by job titles. I eliminated staff in IT, athletics, and facilities since they could not do their jobs at home. Of the 296, 36 expressed an interest in participating. Since I had only received IRB approval to interview 20, I requested a change to both my ETSU IRB application and the application I had to complete at the university I studied. I increased the interview limit to 40 participants. Of the 36 who expressed interest in participating, 21 scheduled a time and participated in an interview. Two others scheduled an interview but did not attend, and one scheduled an interview but said they needed to reschedule and never did so. The following table summarizes the demographic information of those who participated in the interview. I used a random name generator online and also used random names of my own choosing to determine pseudonyms for the participants. The table does not depict the real names of the participants.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Number of Years in the Position</b>
Lynn	Male	Administrative	16.5 years
Douglas	Male	Administrative	2.2 years
Gloria	Female	Administrative	9 years
Christine	Female	Administrative	4.5 years
Amanda	Female	Administrative	4 years
Linda	Female	Administrative	3.5 years
Carolyn	Female	Administrative	3.3 years
Kirsten	Female	Administrative	2 years
Lyndsie	Female	Administrative	1.2 years
Amy	Female	Clerical and Support	16 years
Rachel	Female	Clerical and Support	16 years
Darcy	Female	Clerical and Support	15 years
Lauryn	Female	Clerical and Support	14 years
Marie	Female	Clerical and Support	6.5 years
Judy	Female	Clerical and Support	5 years
Cynthia	Female	Clerical and Support	4.5 years
Patricia	Female	Clerical and Support	4.5 years
Diana	Female	Clerical and Support	3.3 years
Nancy	Female	Clerical and Support	3 years
Anne	Female	Clerical and Support	3 years
Melissa	Female	Clerical and Support	3 years



## **Applicability of Job Duties to Working from Home**

I began the interview by asking each participant how long they had been in their current job and to describe their job duties. I then asked them to explain how well their job duties translated to working from home.

The responses varied, but several participants said their jobs converted well to an at-home environment. Linda said that she “coordinates the grant for a [social services] program. It was a very easy transition to set up at home.” Nancy performs clerical data entry and, like Linda, said it was “very easy to transition.” Cynthia said, “I manage the budget for a college” and 100% of her job could transfer to working from home. Lyndsie said, “I deal with contracts [for a purchasing group].” In terms of how well her job transferred to working from home, she said. “It was fine because the first part was training, and it was basically reading that I had to do online.” Carolyn, a research associate, said her job transferred “actually really well. Unless it's field work, obviously you can't do that from home.” A scholarship coordinator, Amanda said, “It was not a huge burden to transition to working from home.” A graphic designer, Lauryn also said, “I can easily do my work from home.” Amy is an assistant to a high-level administrator and supports him with clerical and special projects. She said that transferring her job to working from home went “really well actually, especially with the laptop.” Douglas’s job provides primarily support to faculty and students for a learning management system. He said, “I have all the equipment that I need. I feel I could work 100% from home if I needed to.”

Access to necessary equipment and files seemed to emerge as a theme among several of the respondents in determining how well their jobs transferred to working from home. Diana, who maintains the database of classes for different sites and the campus, said her job transitions well to working from home as long as she has everything she needs there. Darcy, who manages

finances for a department, had similar feelings about access to technology and files:

I think it was fairly good. It took a little while to get used to it and kind of get things set up just trying to make an office, make sure I could get into things. I think our IT people did a great job helping us to be able to get into my files that are limited unless I have Tunnel Connect, Connect Tunnel, or whichever one it is. Once I could get into all that, I could pretty much get into all my files; it was just a setting. Like at work, I normally have two monitors and my keyboard and mouse, and that's more comfortable for me. It's hard to work off a laptop, especially to me if you're trying to find information and add it to something. At that point, we were learning Teams and Zoom. Zoom. I'd been on very little. Teams, I didn't even know existed until we were getting ready to go home. And we started working with all of that. That really wasn't too bad. It was just a matter of getting used to that and getting that working. I think once we did that then I was able to do my job, almost as good as here.

Anne does clerical work with data and processing and also expressed that the “actual duties were doable with the appropriate equipment. It was an adjustment.” An assessment coordinator who supports accreditation and institutional reporting, Gloria also had concerns about access to the equipment she needed:

My job was easily shiftable to work from home. The only issue that I really had with that part of the process was making sure I had the connectivity to servers and transferring the phone and making sure I could still access my office phone number.

Rachel works with faculty members on budgets and external projects and does bookkeeping for departmental accounts. Her experience varied from that of Diana, Darcy, Anne, and Gloria:

I did not have any problems, because I usually saved my information on OneDrive or Sharepoint, so I had everything there. I had a few things that I didn't have scanned, but it wasn't something that I had to have. If I did have to have it, I was allowed to come back on campus and get something that I needed, or I waited until we were back on campus full-time.

Christine supports research accounts, and like Rachel, she made ways to work around not having what she needed at home:

When we were home for COVID reasons, it went better than I expected I guess. Our office still works with some paper copies. We would just have to print to Adobe in a file, and when we returned to the office, then we printed out the necessary documents that we had to keep a hard copy of.

However, not all participants agreed that all or part of their jobs were necessarily compatible with a work-from-home environment. Marie, who provides administrative support for an academic administrator, said:

I don't feel like it worked well at all, actually. Part of my job is facilitating visitors, and without me sitting here at the front desk to greet people that came in, a big piece of what I do is missing.

An office administrator, Patricia said that her job transferred to working from home fairly well. "I mean actually very well," she said. "The only thing that I wouldn't be able to do is greet people in person, because that would be my job at the front desk." Lynn maintains scientific instruments and manages equipment purchases. He said concerning his job duties that transferred to working from home:

Some do, some don't. Obviously, it's hard to do instrument maintenance from home. At the time I was working from home, we were heavily involved in planning for the new building. I was reviewing equipment lists, organizing those, making sure we had everybody had the right equipment that they wanted and the right amounts in the right room, that sort of thing, a lot of Excel work.

Judy, who reconciles accounts and creates documents for student employment, said, "I would say 75% I could do at home easily." Kirsten said that her job involves ensuring the university's policies and procedures are followed, and that it transfers to working from home "fairly well, with the exception of something that I'd have to see in person. Most everything I could do from home." Melissa described her job which involves data processing and counseling:

If I am just doing my processing side, and I have not been doing my [interacting with the students] side a lot here recently, due to a shift in the dynamic of my processing team, I can do my whole job from home.

Regardless of whether the participants' job duties transitioned well, the participants were still asked to begin preparing to work from home. That process would prove to be different, depending on their supervisors and their circumstances.

### **Transition to Working from Home**

To determine how the participants began transferring to working from home, I asked them whether they had any input in the decision to work from home and how their units transferred home. The answers were not as varied in this case. Linda, whose office staff began working from home immediately; Marie, Nancy, Lyndsie, Amanda, Kirsten, and Douglas, whose office mates transitioned to working from home at the same time; Diana, whose staff transitioned at the same time but had some flexibility in their schedules also; Lauryn, whose office staff

transitioned at the same time except for two co-workers who had to start earlier; Judy, whose staff went home within a week of each other; and Melissa, whose office transitioned to working from home at the same time except for one person, had no say in the decision but were told they had to work from home. “I would have been happy staying on campus and working the entire time,” Lynn said, “But the department chair wanted me to work from home.” He and his staff members began alternating schedules where one of them could be on campus a couple of days a week, and then the other could be on campus. Gloria said that she and others in her office all began working from home at the same time. Concerning her input in the decision to work from home, she said:

I had zero. I mean everything happened, and then I asked one day, because I didn't feel that my supervisors were too keen on the idea of working from home and the whole process. I waited until some decision was made in that regard. And it took, I think, the Governor's final say on that to finally get that put into place; otherwise, I would have been willing to work from home at any point.

Christine had an experience similar to Gloria's:

At the time that the university made the decision for the employees to work from home during that period...it was relayed to me by our then director that we'd be working from home, and pretty much the day that she told us, she left because she already had a laptop that had been assigned to her, so she went home. I'm not sure if the rest of the office phased out and went home as quickly, to be quite honest with you I'm not sure about that. I don't remember.

When I asked Anne if she had a say in the decision to work from home, she said that they “came up with a schedule to phase into working from home.” Cynthia also commented that she had some flexibility in determining which days she could work from home:

I think at first we had to work from home, if I'm remembering correctly. I'm not sure if at one point we had an option to work I think two or three days from the office and then the rest at home. But I chose to work at home full time. I think it might have started with an option, a couple days a week or something from home. Maybe it was the other way around. Maybe that's the way they phased them out and then back in that way too. I'm not sure, but I ended up opting to work from home completely the whole time.

Carolyn and her team had input on when they would begin working from home:

We did have say in it. The university closed, and technically you weren't supposed to come in, but we were given the option to come in if we wanted to. Pretty much everyone was told to work from home, and then pretty much everybody did until the field season picked back up. We started working from home in March, mid-March, and then probably around June people started coming in, periodically to get equipment things and then go out in the field.

Rachel's supervisor also gave her and her team some input:

We had a meeting about it, and our supervisor just said, ask us. We were able to do it, and of course, we were told we were going to be doing it, and we had as long as we had.

Patricia's office had some input in their working from home as well:

I certainly got a say in what kind of schedule I wanted at different times. We alternated days a lot. We got to choose really which day we wanted to work from home. I'm pretty

sure it was phased in. And if I remember correctly, we definitely phased back into going to campus. That wasn't an immediate thing.

Amy's supervisor also gave them some flexibility in their working from home:

The dean gave us accessibility and scheduling times where we could rotate into the building to cover it. We had a chance to voice our opinion. There were, yes, people were mostly from home, but we would rotate in and shift off to cover the entire day. We got to choose designated dates and times where we could fill in, so that there would always be somebody in the building.

However, Darcy's experience was a little different:

I'm pretty sure they just sent us all home. Well, no, I take that back. At first, we thought we could make that decision, and one of the other girls was going to stay and the other two of us were going to go home and then they, I think they told us that we all needed to be off campus at some point. Two of us went home pretty much permanently. We were still having to come back and get things, but then the other one went home like, I don't know a few days or a week later. And I had to actually go to that person's house and help them set up because she was struggling with that.

After determining the process of how each of the participants' offices transitioned to working from home, I thought it important to know if some of the offices worked from home longer than others. Since the state mandates on working from home during the pandemic guided the experience, the work-from-home period would not vary greatly at this university.

### **Work-from-Home Time Period**

Most respondents began working from home around the same time as most others at the

university and came back to their offices around the same time. Some could not remember exactly when or how long they worked from home.

**Table 2**

*Extent of Working from Home*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Began Working from Home</b>	<b>Returned to Office</b>
Lynn	April 2020	July 2020
Douglas	April 6, 2020	June 1, 2020
Gloria	March 2020	First week of June 2020
Christine	March 2020	June 8, 2020
Amanda	March 23, 2020	June 16, 2020
Linda	March 16 or March 20, 2020	Still working from home
Carolyn	March 2020	July 2020
Kirsten	Around March 2020	End of May 2020
Lyndsie	December 14, 2020	January 14, 2021 (Lyndsie was uncertain of dates.)
Amy	March 21, 2020	Does not remember
Rachel	March 2020	June 2020
Darcy	End of March 2020	First week of June 2020
Lauryn	Third or fourth week of February 2020	First of July 2020
Marie	March 2020	June or July 2020
Judy	March 2020	After July 4, 2020
Cynthia	March 2020	Still working from home
Patricia	May 2020	July 2020
Diana	March 2020	April 2020
Nancy	March 2020	June 1, 2021



Anne	March 20, 2020	Late May or early June 2020
Melissa	March 2020	Late May or June 2020

On top of determining how long the participants worked from home during the pandemic, I also wanted to know whether they had ever worked from home previously. I believed that would provide more depth into how previous work-from-home experience shaped the experience during a pandemic.

### **Prior Work-from-Home Experience**

When I asked the participants whether they had worked from home prior to the pandemic, Linda said she had, and Lyndsie and Amanda had in previous positions. Darcy said she had worked some from home prior to the pandemic “very little maybe just because there was something for which we had a deadline, and we didn't get to it. I might have worked from home a little bit.” Amy said she had worked from home “after my husband's passing, but not a lot.” None of the other participants had worked from home prior to the pandemic. I inadvertently left that question out of interviews with Judy, Patricia, and Douglas.

Although participants who had previous work-from-home experience might have been more prepared for it during a pandemic, I wanted to know how all the participants felt when they were first told they would be working from home and whether the concerns would be different based on previous work-from-home experience. If I asked the participants their initial thoughts on working from home, I would get more of a clear picture of how those first impressions of the experience might change after actually working from home.

### **Initial Thoughts**

The participants’ initial thoughts about working from home varied. Linda’s thoughts began with a question:

How in the world are we going to complete evaluations virtually because the tool that we use in person is very hands-on with the [client]? And I was really, really worried about how are we going to get accurate scores for [clients] with not being face to face with them? We began looking at other tools that we could use.

Marie admitted that she, also, had some concerns:

I'm not great with change. It generally causes me a fair amount of anxiety, so I was very nervous about how much of my job I'd be able to do from home. How it would work and how I would interact with people were hard for me.

Darcy, too, was reluctant:

I feel like I panicked just a little bit for more than one reason. How is this going to work? Will we be able to still take care of the students? Because like I said we hadn't really at that point, worked on Teams or Zoom much, and I didn't realize how well that really does work. It's not the same as actually being in the office, but it's the next best thing I guess. Then again, because I guess I didn't realize how bad things had gotten personal, I mean you know like that was my personal, little bit of panic like, oh, things are that bad that we need to go home? You know what I mean? Like, are things that bad that we really need to go home? I guess I didn't really let that sink in before just hearing a few things on the news or whatever.

Diana had concerns about her office setup at home:

I didn't have a printer at home. I only had the one screen on the laptop where I'm used to having two screens. I didn't have a desk. I was working at my kitchen table. There were some things that were uncomfortable, which is why I ended up coming back after a month because I had everything here at my fingertips that I needed.

Anne had similar sentiments as Diana. “My biggest concerns really were environment, and also having what I needed to be able to work from home.” Kirsten said that she also had some uncertainty seeing how it would work. “I didn’t appreciate or realize how much stuff we already had, created online, scanned in and documented online,” she said.

Rachel was concerned about where she would work in her home:

Well, I don't have a dedicated home office. Of course, I was thinking, where am I gonna work? And I tried different locations in my house, and finally settled in the living room and everything was fine. I was concerned that my Internet might not be the best, and I had to get a new modem at that time. I was having issues with it. It wasn't anything else, but once I got it going, then everything was fine. Of course, I'd never worked from home before, and I wasn't really sure how it would be. And I mean it was just different. It just seemed odd...If I did it on a full-time basis, I would definitely have to establish a dedicated workspace for me so I wouldn't be distracted by my cats or anything else.

Lauryn expressed concern about how it would work with her computer at home. “My computer is really slow at home,” she said. It is not capable of running all of her software at the same time.

Christine, like others, wanted to ensure she had what she needed to work from home:

Well, initially it was making sure that I had the equipment that would work from home that I could connect. I'd actually been given VPN access before, and I had tried that from home on another computer. But then, of course, when we got the loaner computers, they had it set up. It was maybe a little bit easier even accessing, but that was my main concern.

Amy also had some worries, but they were of a different vein. “I was a little concerned, wondering about coverage for the building, and how I would be able to support [my

supervisor],” she said. Melissa’s initial thoughts were that “this is going to be a terrible idea. I don’t know how I’m gonna be able to do all this.”

Others expressed more positive feelings concerning working from home. Amy said, “We worked really well via email. It was really good and texting and calling supplemented that for the face to face.” Nancy, originally thought she would only be working from home for a week or two, so she “didn’t have any major stress about it.” She said that her work was experiencing a slow point, and she thought that “we’ll just get through it with these old laptops, and then we’ll come back, and it will be fine.” Since Lyndsie had worked from home for her former employer, she said, “I was set up already to do it.” Cynthia said, “I was actually glad” about the possibility of working from home.

Carolyn also had positive feelings toward working from home:

I was kind of excited about it at first. I got a master's degree before I came here and I worked from home a lot, doing that, and I kind of already had some experience working from home at my previous job. I was kind of excited about it.

Patricia looked forward to the possibility of working from home:

I was surprised because there were a lot of shocking things during the pandemic that I don’t think any of us were expecting. I was excited for the possibility to work remotely. I have a young son at home, and it sounded like a good way to balance staying at home with him and staying safe and being able to continue working.

Gloria was positive about the experience and felt she was more productive at home:

I welcomed the idea of working from home because I actually get more completed when I’m at home versus here because not as many people are stopping in asking random questions. People tend to contact you with more of an intent when you’re working from

home or outside of the office. I welcomed it. I was actually wondering why we didn't start earlier, but it's not left up to me.

Judy said, "I was okay with it, and I thought it wasn't something that we couldn't or should do at that time," and Douglas noted that he "didn't have any problem with working remotely." He said he was mainly concerned about the faculty he supported who had never taught online. "It was a steep learning curve for them," he said. Lynn's attitude was also casual like Douglas's. "Basically, I didn't care one way or the other...Like I said, I would have been happy continuing to work on campus."

After gathering preliminary information, I began delving into the actual experiences that the participants had in working from home. I wanted to understand the home dynamic and how working from home affected work-life balance, including whether or not there were others working from home also, or what other familial responsibilities the participants had.

### **Work-Life Balance**

Some interviewees had young children to care for while working from home. One had her mother living with her, and others had only animals to distract them from their work. Still others had no one else in their home while they tried to complete their work.

Linda described her personal responsibilities when working from home:

During that time right at when the pandemic started in March of 2020, the end of February, my mom passed away. And I had all of that, like her house, the possessions, just trying to take care of all of her stuff. I had that plus my regular home duties, things [like] cleaning, folding laundry, food, groceries.

Marie expressed other obligations as well:

I just had my daughter's dog to care for. He got used to me being there. We walked at lunchtime and all the things that he didn't normally have, so he got a whole routine. It was a little bit of a problem for him when I came back to work because he had to change his routine.

Concerning her family responsibilities while working from home, Nancy said she had "just my immediate family, just my spouse and two children." Gloria also expressed other familial situations:

My husband is a faculty member here, so he already was involved in online teaching. His dissertation was over computer mediated communication. He already was in that world, so it was an easy shift for him and his students...I had the downstairs, and he had the upstairs for most of his stuff. The office is downstairs, so that's where I stayed.

Kirsten said, "My son was home. But okay, he was doing school from home." Patricia had a young son who was not in school, and her "in-laws did help quite a bit, and they kept him during the day a lot." Amy had a nine-year-old at home, and she had to coordinate his schooling. She said:

They ended up going into a very easy module and actually went back to school, so that went away as soon as he was able to do that. I just had to drop him off and then come back and log in.

Darcy also had some familial responsibilities when working from home:

At my house, my mother lives with us, my 87-year-old mother, who doesn't get around very much. I mean she can; she's a little bit self-sufficient. In a way, it was kind of good

because I could be there where we didn't have to have other people coming in and out and another chance of maybe her getting that virus.

Lynn said, "My wife was there already. She retired several years ago, so she's there all the time. And do we count our Labrador retriever?"

Rachel had workers at her home because her home had been affected by storm damage, and she also has cats to care for. She said:

We have workers in our house and outside, and I had a painter in the house at one point.

And of course, I'd had to go to a room, so he couldn't hear what I was discussing and that sort of thing.

Others had no or few other familial or personal responsibilities while working from home. Lyndsie said she had "none, make my lunch, but household responsibilities, I didn't have any, no children or anything like that, nobody to take care of." Cynthia also had few other familial responsibilities:

I do have older children, and a husband in the home, but he works outside the home. He's gone almost all the hours that I'm working, and same for the kids. And it's not been really an issue with any of those. My kids were being homeschooled for a short period of time.

Carolyn's situation was similar:

My husband's a PhD student here as well in the similar field, and that was kind of nice to still have someone you could talk about work with or work problems with. We're married, no kids or anything.

Amanda commented:

I'm a homebody; I don't really mind being at my house all the time. And I don't have any kids or anything, just a cat, and my significant other is an instructor. Yeah, he was also working from home at the same time.

Lauryn and Judy had no other familial responsibilities while working from home, and Christine had a quiet place to work at home:

It was fun, because my husband is self-employed, but it's outside work. And I did not have any disruptions at home, no children at home. My children are grown and live out of state or certainly not in [town], so there were no disruptions of that sort.

Melissa and Anne both said, "It was just me" working from home. Diana said, "I have a roommate, but that's it."

While work-life balance issues might have provided challenges to working from home, I wanted to know further negative aspects that the participants found in the experience. I wanted to explore whether things such as distractions at home or lack of interaction with co-workers caused participants to look poorly on working from home.

### **Negative Aspects/Challenges**

The responses to my question about the negative aspects or challenges of working from home varied from issues with technology to challenges with office space.

Linda expressed some challenges involving her family commitments:

I know my husband got frustrated with me because I sat at the kitchen table a lot. We made a little office downstairs, and I stayed downstairs, quite a bit; he would walk in the door and go 'Oh, you're working again.' It did take away time with my family when I felt guilty for sitting at my computer.



Marie reported:

Really, none, I just felt disconnected from our group. I mean, office staff is who I mostly interacted with, but they interact and function as their own group, as they should as it's designed to. I interact with them because we're all here near each other and working, and we'll call or we'll email or we'll stop into each other's office. I had hardly any interaction with them during the time that we were out. I felt a lot of disconnect from, from all my other co-workers. Even the other director and his staff would stop in or we just kind of connect once in a while in person, so without that, there was no real need for us to communicate. I felt very disconnected from everybody.

Gloria also had problems concerning communication with her team:

I am directly under [two supervisors], but I'm in this weird position, where I'm not connected to the departments. Then I have [supervisors], so I'm the middleman between the two, essentially, and the communication aspect we struggled with. From the end of March, from when we went into lockdown until June, when I came back, I talked to my direct supervisor once and the [other] no times until I saw her in the hallway sometime in June. And that was it. It was the communication on that side of things. Now we did have a couple of our college-wide meetings and stuff like that, so I saw them in that regard. But outside of that required meeting, I think that was part in May, the first week of May right before classes let out. That was the only time that I saw anybody else besides just emailing back and forth, taking care of items like that.

Judy also commented on the lack of communication:

I think it's still somewhat frustrating getting a hold of people. We had one company that owed us for an event, and it took over 12 months to get paid. No one answered the

phone. They wouldn't respond to emails. You try individual cell phone numbers, and no one would answer. You'd call the corporate office, and no one would answer. And then of course when you finally did get a hold of somebody, it was 'well, we're working remotely.' I felt that wouldn't have been an excuse for me. I think I was expected to perform at the same level as if I was in the office.

Others expressed concerns about their at-home office space. Nancy said her seating at home "was not comfortable." She continued, "As a female, I do enjoy getting dressed up and putting on makeup, and I guess it was a little bit of a bummer to not have any reason to do those things." Christine lamented that her home office space "might have been a little more convenient, and of course at work, I had a better setup with my desk at work, better lighting, that sort of thing, access to files and printing." She continued:

I felt like, perhaps, there were some people that weren't quite as accessible. People that I needed to work with and get information from weren't as accessible while we were working from home, as they might have been had we all been on campus. At least one of those lived in an area, maybe even in a basement home and had some connection issues, so they might have to stay on in order to not be kicked out of Banner. They might not be able to take a Teams call. They had some issues like that; that was part of it and then some others, I don't know, everybody has a different situation at home and different types of disruptions and that sort of thing.

Darcy also commented on her office setup:

Just getting my setup. I don't know if this matters, but I live in an older home. Trying to get enough outlets, so I can get all my stuff plugged up. My husband was great with that, but he put in a bunch of strips and that kind of thing. Getting my chair, I had to get my

office chair home because I had no chair at home that was comfortable to sit in for an hour. Even if you're moving up and down, you've still got to sit in the chair for a while. I did request permission to take my chair, and pretty much our boss told us to take whatever we needed, just make note of it. And once I got the wireless stuff and everything set up, it really wasn't that bad.

Lynn also had trouble with technology and office setup:

The [university] issued laptop was the biggest one for me in that it had a smaller screen, and keyboard. I would have been happy, happier using my personal laptop because it has a larger screen, larger keyboards, but obviously IT says, 'No, you can't do that.'

Lyndsie had just started working at the institution, so her experience involved adjusting to a new job while working from home:

Well, being new, not meeting my peers, right off the bat, face to face in person type of thing. In my case, like I said, since I was used to working from home, but it was different because here I'm starting a new job and I'm starting at home. That was unusual, but [my supervisor] is real [sic] good. She had me to assign me things to do and I'd go in the system, and we have the training. I didn't have a problem with that.

Cynthia said the negative aspects working from home occurred mainly when the experience first started:

In the very beginning, it was a little bit of a transition, mainly with the campus coming up with the correct forms that would be usable electronically across the board with everybody. I remember one issue we ran into, not everybody in our group had Acrobat Pro. And that's one hurdle. It was just little technical things like that in the very beginning. But once that got straightened out, it became very easy.

Anne also had difficulty at the beginning of the work-from-home experience:

I actually lost my home in [a storm] three weeks prior, so I moved into an apartment on March 10, about two weeks before we moved to working from home. I think my experience was different in some ways. I had to struggle a little bit in the beginning with setup just in the sense I had my computers on cardboard boxes because I didn't have a desk yet. That was a little bit of a struggle. In the first part, I was more worried about not seeing my people in the office. And conflict with other employees, which had existed previously kind of mutated in that new form.

Carolyn, however, found negative aspects throughout the entire experience in that it was harder to do her job:

I think as far as with work, it was challenging. We had Zoom meetings and everything, of course, but it was hard to pin everyone down at the same time. We had to kind of do one-on-one meetings...me with the students sharing my knowledge about things and then my supervisors their actual advisor and her communicating to them, her expertise. And it was just hard to do like a cohesive lab type research like we normally do in person. That was the biggest struggle that I remember.

Amanda had difficulty doing her job because of the lack of equipment:

I didn't have my screens, my monitors. I just had a little laptop, so that was a little bit inconvenient. And then being on the VPN caused like a slight lag delay on everything that I was doing, like saving a file would take like five seconds instead of just happening. It was like more opportunities for me to get distracted and be like, okay, well that's saving. Let me open up another window and get off task. It just introduced more opportunities because of that lag.

Diana, who experienced the same difficulties as Amanda, said:

I didn't have access to everything. I didn't have a printer at home. I only had the one screen on the laptop where I'm used to having two screens. I didn't have a desk, so I was working at my kitchen table. There were some things that were uncomfortable, which is why I ended up coming back after a month, because I had everything here at my fingertips that I needed.

Lauryn also said her computer was slow, but it was more than that. "I would say that it got lonely. I'm used to seeing my co-workers during the day, and it was such an abrupt change that it kind of felt like I was out on my own." Patricia also had concerns around technology:

One of my biggest frustrations was probably the VPN and just having that connected all of the time. If it went out, I did have a cell phone so my phone also rang on my computer if it wasn't forwarded to my cell phone. If the VPN wasn't working, then my phone wasn't working, so that was a major pressure.

Amy had issues with technology as well:

Sometimes the connectivity wasn't as fast. I was wondering whether or not it was my house connection, or the campus's connection, maybe accessing a paper file or something or other that I had to reference. It taught me to scan most everything that I work with, so I could easily access it, if anything, but nothing major.

Still others noted the distractions they experienced working from home. Kirsten said that there were distractions from her son to her pets:

I had two large dogs at that time [who] were indoor, and also I was still trying to recover from [a storm]. I lost my house in [a storm], and there were a lot of distractions.

Douglas also expressed some issues that he had with distractions at home:

Well, you never think of your home as, I mean, entirely as being your office. There were distractions there sometimes, the urge to get up and maybe look at something on TV and come back. To be honest, I tried to use as good a work ethic as possible.

Rachel dealt with repair workers being in her home:

Just besides the [construction] workers being there and having to maneuver around that. And of course, it was my first experience with video conferencing software. That was a little bit of a learning curve like anything else. We didn't have time to be trained in it, so we had to sort of work on the fly. But if that all worked out, and if you did it all the time, of course, you would know more about what you were doing, and you'd get into a better routine I suppose.

Only Melissa noted that she missed seeing her friends:

The only negative that I experienced was I didn't get to see my friends. I work in an office where I'm friends with everybody. We're a pretty fun group, so I missed that dynamic, that interaction with everybody, but I still got to talk with my other co-workers, through Teams or through Google Hangouts. I was still connected with them but I did miss that.

Posing the negative aspects/challenges question first, I then followed by asking the participants what they saw as the positive aspects/benefits of working from home. I wanted to determine how the participants felt the benefits balanced against the challenges.

### **Positive Aspects/Benefits**

When I asked the participants to describe the positive aspects or benefits of working from home, the responses varied, ranging from being able to work in their pajamas to not having a commute.

Linda said, "I don't have to take time, which I don't live too far from campus, but I don't have to take the time to drive across campus. And I have fewer interruptions at home." Lyndsie had several positive comments on working from home but also expressed appreciation for the lack of commute:

It's nice being at home. You don't have the commute, obviously, which, it's not a long commute anyway. I find that working from home I actually get more done. And I think the company usually got more out of me because, for example, I would go to the microwave heat up my lunch...And then, I didn't necessarily take my break because I'm hungry now, so I would eat while working type of thing. I mean I was supposed to take an official lunch, which most times I did.

There were trade-offs in working from home for Amanda, but she echoed the positives of not having a commute:

I like not having the commute. It gave me extra time in the morning and in the evening. I usually ride my bike to work, and that's about a 30-minute bike ride. It's only about four-and-a-half miles. If you drive, it's only 10 minutes. I liked having that time back, but at the same time it was also harder to get my exercise. The trade-off is like it was nice, but then I was going on bike rides after work like around the block or whatever. I don't feel as motivated if I don't really have a destination. That was different. I liked being at home for lunch time because I could cook myself a nicer lunch, and not have to worry about microwaving or whatever else. That was more convenient. And I'm a homebody, so I don't really mind being at my house all the time, and I don't have any kids or anything, just a cat, and my significant other is an instructor at [the university], yeah, he was also working from home at the same time.

Lynn also said “not having to commute” was a positive aspect of working from home for him.

Judy agreed that not having a commute was a good part of working from home. She continued:

I don't know, mow the yard on lunch, and things like that. It was nice to be at home, and then I was able to have a different type of lunch or cook at home and not having to pack lunch or eat out.

Technology issues were related to negative experiences for many of the participants, but Rachel said that once she got a new modem, “then everything was fine. Of course, I’d never worked from home before, and I wasn’t really sure how it would be. And I mean it was just different. It just seemed odd. It wasn’t bad at all.”

Others shared comments related to productivity working from home. Gloria noted:

I could get things done with minimal intrusions; like, here we've got GAs outside my office. I've got people that'll stop by and ask random questions and stuff like that when you're working from home or just outside the office in general. Here, people will think or look more up before they contact you for a specific question, and it was easier for me to get things done in that regard. For me, I'm more of an introvert, so I'm good being in my downstairs basement working in the office. There's not even a window down there, so I'm right at home; just that type of environment I'm good with.

Carolyn said she found it easier to focus at home without a lot of chatting that occurs in the office. “Not having that distraction, I was able to be more productive, to have longer stretches of time, or I wasn’t really interrupted by anything like that,” she said. Darcy said the positives of working from home were:

That I was at home, and that when I would take a break [I could] walk down the hall to go throw in a load of laundry. I guess the good time was the fact that I could stay in, and I



didn't have to be out and I didn't have to be around other people. That was a good thing I did because my mother lives with us. We didn't have to expose her as much to the virus. You don't have to have anybody come in; I didn't have to get out. I could have had my groceries delivered if I wanted that kind of thing, not having people you have to be around, I guess.

Patricia said, "It was pretty enjoyable and pretty easy to keep up with my tasks," and Christine reported:

I could try to keep things as normal as possible. I'm an early bird. I usually come into the office early, so I still got up early, took my shower and went to my dining room desk. Just like I would be here and began working, and there might not have been as many interruptions with phone calls during the day, so that might have been a positive. On one hand that's a positive, but then like I said, on the other hand, maybe sometimes when I need to get in touch with somebody, they weren't as accessible.

Melissa said, "It was great. I was a much happier person; I got all of my work done in a fraction of the time. It was great."

For Douglas, the resilience that his team showed when working from home was a positive:

Well, it proved that we could, if we had to do this again, that we could do that, and that we could work entirely from home. There were only just a couple of things that I needed to have done to my system. I didn't use a [university] issued managed system. I had my own computer, and I had to have some special software installed, a VPN software installed, so I could complete tickets. I think, once you have an established routine, then it gets to be pretty easy.

Others, like Amy, discussed the freedom of working from home:

I guess it was just relaxing, just to be able to work in your pajamas if need be and be able to choose your setting. I can still be as productive as I wanted to, rolled up on the couch, looking out my window listening to the birds.

Nancy agreed:

I was more comfortable or relaxed. I felt like I was more productive. I talk to myself when I'm trying to concentrate and working in an open office is not very conducive to that; I felt like I was able to just do the work the way that I wanted to do it without disturbing anyone else. And I liked that I had more time, because my work is about 30 minutes from where I live. There was about an hour of the day that I didn't have to spend driving. I just had more time in general with my family.

Marie was also relaxed at home but admitted she is more comfortable in the office:

It was a lot more relaxed atmosphere for me from working from home than it was when I'm in the office. [At the office], you carry yourself a certain way, dress a certain way. But at home, it was much more casual actually, but for me, I'm actually more comfortable in the actual office setting. I'm more productive when I'm dressed for work, and I'm in my office and at my computer versus my home where the living room or the TV are in the next room or the kitchen's right around the corner. I'm really a person who really thrives in structure. And for me, being from home was the opposite of having structure. Both my husband and my daughter work down the street where they could come to me anytime or they got used to me being there and being able to call me and say, 'Hey, can you bring me this? Can you bring me that? Can you help me with this? Can you do this errand for me? Where normally when I leave the home in the morning for work and go to work. I'm

not accessible to them all day, and they know that and they don't really look for me to do anything. They got really used to having me, and it just became a much more casual thing where I allowed my family more access to me during the workday than I normally would.

Diana said one of the positive aspects was “working in my pajamas. You could just get up and brush your teeth and go sit down and start working, so that was convenient. It cut down my prep time in the morning.” Lauryn also said “you could work in your pajamas as long as you have a nice top on. I got more work done at home because there's really nothing to distract me...I could sit in front of my computer and work.”

For Anne, “certain personal connections with other employees that I probably wouldn't have fostered or developed without being kind of forced into that increasing communication” was a benefit of working from home.

Cynthia said that transitioning to a paperless system was a positive aspect of working from home. She continued:

It was much easier than I thought. And I feel more organized now actually without all the paper and binders and things. Without the distractions at the office, I feel more efficient now and more relaxed overall. I feel like I can tackle my day, feeling more prepared. I can actually sit down in the mornings and have my coffee and Bible study and prayers and just maybe go through my to-do list and be more prepared for the day.

In determining how the positive aspects of working from home framed the participants' picture of the experience, I wanted to determine whether there were things they thought they would accomplish when working from home and did not get to or whether there were things that they did accomplish from home that they might not have in the office. This would also provide a beginning idea of how working from home affected the participants' productivity.

## *Accomplishments*

I asked the participants if there was anything that they accomplished when working from home. Linda said working from home gave her “more time to look at our data. We came up with different tracking forms, just a different way to look at data, so I think it’s given me a different perspective on what we’re doing.” Nancy had accomplishments in dealing with students:

The students were impacted by COVID, so it was a huge undertaking, trying to give the students extra allowances that they would normally have not been given to get the aid. I was able to accomplish it with no problems remotely. It was just a lot of extra work.

Lynn got to work on “lots and lots of spreadsheets related to equipment purchases from the new building.” Lauryn said that her project involving creating commencement graphics would “not have occurred at all” if she had been working in the office. Lyndsie said, “I think the fact that I started with [the university] being at home was an accomplishment in itself because it’s something totally different to start with the company, and you’re working from home.” Cynthia said “transitioning to paperless” was an accomplishment for her, and Carolyn was able to meet her “own little kind of lit review goals, learning new skills like statistics stuff. I was able to kind of use some of my time to do that, so it was nice.” Melissa “had a greater sense of motivation.” Darcy commented she had to do more multitasking but:

...I think I learned a lot more. Like I said, I learned about Zoom. I learned about Teams. I learned how to work them and manipulate their settings, and not just because we had a meeting, but I could actually do a meeting, and I could do my settings the way I wanted. Now, we have files and lots of Team folders. A lot of stuff has come out of that. I’ve learned some new things.

Gloria worked on projects while working from home:

I got to catch up and clean up a lot of other projects I had been working on because of everybody just backing off and trying to figure things out. It's the double-edged sword on that because I did get time to catch up on things I've been trying to work on. Things slowed down, so I could finally get those bigger projects finally wrapped up and tweak the ones that we had before, but those smaller ones that I kind of need to get rolling for future years did kind of go on the back burner because of the little things that kept popping up along the way as I worked those through.

Patricia was included in meetings she had not been included in prior to working from home:

One thing I can think of is promotion. I do a little bit with promotion and tenure dossiers, but I'm usually not included on those meetings. That one thing that we did at home since everyone couldn't meet in person to vote on the dossiers. I set up a Microsoft forms link, and then we had either a Teams or Zoom, some kind of virtual meeting, and then everyone voted through the forms app that I had created. And that was completely different, because I otherwise probably wouldn't have been included in the meeting. But since we met that way, I was.

Amy used her time at home organizing her work:

I did take binders with me one day when I came in, so I guess that would be a completion. I was able to purge and then start my binders for the next fiscal year. I would have to put away the old stuff, and I was able to do that without interruption at home. That worked out. I could purge last year's stuff and get ready for next year's and not have to stop and go, stop and go like I do here because people come through the office or the phone rings.

Douglas said, “I was able to do everything at home.” Anne’s accomplishment was not related to working from home; she described the difficulties in moving to her apartment:

I think just my transition into the apartment was probably what I consider an accomplishment. It was increasingly difficult with not being able to supply my apartment because as we worked at home other places shut down. We couldn’t do things like buy furniture or go to buy things that we needed to furnish the home.

Not all of the participants described accomplishments. Marie did not feel that she accomplished anything more at home than she would have at the office:

I’m not sure there was anything really. I knew nothing about Teams before. I’d never heard of it. I don’t think I really learned anything other than that I could adjust even though it makes me uncomfortable. I could adjust and still get my job done and do what was required of me.

Judy said that there was “not anything different than what I would have accomplished while at work on site.” Christine’s response was similar to Judy’s in that she “can’t think of anything.”

Diana “just wanted to be sure that I got all my work done every day.”

### ***Projects Not Accomplished***

I then asked if there was something that the participants thought they might accomplish when working from home but were not able to accomplish.

Linda had high expectations for working from home:

I thought I was going to be a Home Improvement Project Queen. I thought I was gonna have so much time, and I was going to work from home, and I was going to repaint my house and do all this stuff. I got nothing done because of work. I had a misconception about working from home.

Darcy also said she had big plans for when she worked at home, including redoing her balance sheets, but none of that happened “because it does take longer to communicate where somebody is not like right next door to you, and then you have to call on Teams, and they are on another call.” She said she would not have been able to accomplish that at the office either because she would have had more students to deal with at the office. Anne said, “I think I had hoped for advancement before working from home, so I wanted to continue that,” but she did not get to do that. Gloria had some stumbling blocks:

There were a couple of projects that I just couldn't seem to get to because of little things that kept popping up. I mean, and when I say little things, it would be students adjusting to the whole online process, faculty and stuff like that. We had a lot of transition time and back and forth time during that year, and it just seemed like a lot of little things mounted up whether it was small technology issues and stuff like that. Those issues took over where it would be time that I would normally spend getting a couple of other small projects set up, that I just never got to during that time frame because of just those new and ever-evolving little issues that kept popping up.

Judy did not have a lot of slow time to accomplish other projects:

We're busy all the time. We don't have downtime or slower times, necessarily, and there was some training I wanted to do. I took my training home, and there's some old files I wanted to go through that I thought I would have time, and I didn't. I didn't have time to do those extra chores that I can't get done at the office either.

Melissa said she thought she would gather information on how other colleges deal with their transcript systems, and they had the “intention of garnering more information” on it, but they did not do that. Amy had intentions to organize when she was working from home:

I wanted to organize our supply cabinet and what we share with students. I had a whole big project of new stuff that we had inherited from the department shutting down, and we never got to organize that because we weren't here to do it.

Marie, Nancy, Cynthia, Carolyn, Lynn, Lauryn, Kirsten, Patricia, Christine, and Lyndsie said that there was nothing that they had hoped to accomplish at home that they did not get to accomplish. Diana said, "If things got a little hinky, I would just come into the office," she said.

To create a better idea of the overall work-from-home experience, I wanted the participants to describe their work-from-home space. I wanted to determine if the work-from-home space contributed to either the negative or positive aspects of the participants' experience.

### **Work-from-Home Space**

Some of the participants mentioned uncomfortable furniture or slow Internet connections when working from home. Their office spaces ranged from the kitchen table to a room in the basement to the front porch.

Linda said her office space was adequate. In terms of connectivity, she said:

I guess we have fast Internet. I don't know, but I've never had any problems with Zoom freezing, or losing connection. It's been that aspect has been really easy and good. Our IT guy on campus really helped me set everything up and get going.

Lyndsie also said her work-from-home office space was adequate:

I was in an apartment. My office setup is basically, I've got my table, my laptop, and around the table, I have my binders and documents and things like that. The space was adequate. The Wi-Fi I had at the apartment was fine. The apartment supplied the Wi-Fi.

Marie described her at-home office space:

I had a desk, but I did have to, of course, like we all got sent home with the [university]



laptops. Rather than using my desktop, I used the [university] laptop, which proved very difficult for me. I actually had some problems. Basically, because it was not set up ergonomically correct, and using the different setup, I actually ended up having some physical issues with my back and neck because of that. It wasn't properly set up for work on the computer. I ended up having that problem, but working with the laptop was a very different thing than working with my computer here with the double screens and everything at the right height. We tried to set up external monitors, so that I could have the extra screen space, and we were unable to get them going. It wouldn't work with the [university] laptop that I was sent home with, so I didn't really have a choice other than the laptop. We ended up putting books under it, to get higher, so the screen would be closer to eye level, but it never really was right.

Carolyn also already had a designated work space at home:

We have a desk, and we have two bedrooms in our house. We have the second bedroom. We have a desk that's really a nice typical office space, and half a day I would have that space. And then for the other half a day, I'd be in the kitchen at the kitchen table, and my husband would have that office space. The only negative was not having dual monitors, so that's one technology thing I guess. I never got to have that working from home. And there's certain tasks that are a lot easier, probably take about half the amount of time, if I had two monitors, so every once in a while, I'll get a situation where it would take me like double the amount of time to do the task as it would if I was in here. That's probably only happened like a handful of times though.

Gloria had a well-established office space at home as well:

I have a full desk with two large monitors in our office. We have a desktop and a way that I can plug in my work laptop to it, so that functioned really well. If I didn't plug in my laptop, I could use the desktop for most online things, because we were doing a lot of things via Teams and OneDrive and such. Either one of those options worked, but I've also got like a, we call it the game room. But it's essentially a downstairs living room next to that where I would work on my work laptop. It's perfectly fine. I still do it for school and everything. It was small technology issues and stuff like that.

Melissa described her home office:

Yeah, it is just four walls. I have my desk in there. At the time, I was working just off of a laptop and that was kind of difficult, but I eventually brought my monitor with me, so I was working off of two screens at that point. I had my kitty cat. His little bowl was in there, his little cat tree and a bookcase and that was the office. The space was adequate. At the very beginning, I had connectivity issues when everybody was moving online, and the IT department was trying to get everybody access to the VPN and to all the databases and stuff I did for maybe like a day or two. But after that, I can only think of maybe one or two instances where I lost connection or where weird things happened. For the most part, it was pretty normal.

Other participants had less than ideal space. Nancy lacked an official at-home space:

I did not have a designated workspace. I worked either from my dining room table or a little side table that I had in our bonus room. But I never did set up a proper office, but it was adequate other than the chair. When I first started working from home, I was having

some VPN connection issues. But the [university] was working on it, and it was constantly improving. But, at first, I did have some connectivity issues.

Cynthia office space was also makeshift:

Most of the time, I'm in the living room with my big monitor setup here next to my laptop. I've got kind of a makeshift desk setup, which works really well for me, and a chair that's actually better for my back than an office chair. It is much better for my back, but yeah that's mainly where I'm at. But if I feel the need to go shut myself off in a room, I can do that too, and I have several times when I did have the kids at home. Like I said, they're older and they tend to themselves, but if I go in my room and have my door shut, I can work very well like that. The space was adequate, but in terms of connectivity issues, I had barely any at all. With the issues I have had, I've worked well with our tech rep. But I've not had many connection problems at all. I use the VPN.

Amanda's office space was limited:

My office space was pretty much where I'm sitting at my kitchen table. Because it was springtime, a lot of the days when it was nice enough, I worked out on my porch, which was very nice. I didn't have my screens. I just had a little laptop, so that was a little bit inconvenient, and then being on the VPN caused a slight lag delay on everything that I was doing. Like, saving a file would take five seconds instead of just happening.

Diana had a similar setup:

I was working at my kitchen table, so there were some things that were uncomfortable, which is why I ended up coming back after a month because I had everything here at my fingertips that I needed. I did not have any connectivity issues.

Darcy converted other spaces in her home for her work-from-home space:

I have a spare room that I'm using for other things, but there's no bed or that kind of furniture in there. It's other stuff, but a small table that I had in there wasn't working, so we actually got me a larger table. And then I was able to set up on it just like I did my office desk because I have a little mini desk. We took that table and just added it close enough, so I could make almost an *L* in that space between that and the monitors and the chair. I took my stapler home with me and papers, and I had a printer of my own that I use, so it worked great if I needed to print something. My Internet speeds are great. Once I learned Tunnel Connect, I think I called IT maybe three times or something.

For some, using spaces in their home for a home office made working from home easier.

Lynn was also able to convert other parts of her home into a work-from-home space:

Fortunately, we have a furnished basement, so I took my [university] issued laptop down there. And in the morning, I would say ‘Goodbye, Honey, I'm headed for work’ and then come up for lunch. ‘Honey, I'm back’ and then repeat the process, and then the afternoon, ‘Hi, Honey, I'm home.’ The [university] laptop was my biggest technology issue. It had a smaller screen, and keyboard. I would have been happy, happier using my personal laptop because it has a larger screen, larger keyboards, but obviously IT says no you can't do that. I had cable TV and a Cable modem, so I usually did not have any other technology issues.

Rachel also tried working from different parts of her home:

I tried different locations in my house and finally settled in the living room, and everything was fine. I'm concerned that my Internet might not be the best. I have Internet through Spectrum. And I had to get a new modem at that time, and then and we were needing one anyway. I was trying to get it installed and through my ignorance I was

having issues with it. It wasn't anything else, but once I got it going, then everything was fine, of course.

Lauryn developed an adequate office space from a spare room:

Yes, I have a desktop MAC, and I just have what I call my office craft room. It's already set up, but it just is not very powerful. There's a lot of things that I could be doing there, filing papers and different things, but mainly it was just me and my computer. It was adequate except for the computer. Sometimes I would have trouble connecting in the morning to the server. I think it's called Connect Tunnel, or something like that.

Occasionally, it was tough to log into that.

Still others, like Judy, managed with the space they had:

I just had a table that I set up in my living room. I don't have an office area at my house. And I would set it up on Monday morning, and I would take it down, Friday afternoon, and I'd set it up again every Monday morning again. It wasn't the best circumstance. If I knew it was going to be long term, I do have space in my house that I could turn into an office. I just didn't know if it was going to be three weeks or six months. I had no clue. I did [have technology issues]. One of the technology problems I had throughout the entire time I was at home ended up being an individual laptop problem, which I did not realize until we got back to the office.

Kirsten also used the space that she had available:

It was my kitchen table, which was dead in the center of the rental home I was living in at the time. It was kind of like an open concept, so my son would come through, get a bowl of cereal or whatever, just those things. It was adequate, but I didn't like the fact that it always had all my work stuff on it, so that kind of was inconvenient. In terms of

technology and connectivity, we happened to have already had some laptops that we had ordered in advance before. We had that in place, so that was nice.

Patricia also worked from her table:

I mainly worked at my dining table. I only had a laptop. My phone was forwarded to where I could answer it through my laptop, so I didn't use a phone or anything to answer our calls. One of my biggest frustrations was probably the VPN and just having that connected all of the time because if it went out, I did have a cell phone. My phone also rang on my computer if it wasn't forwarded to my cell phone. If the VPN wasn't working, then my phone wasn't working, so that was a major pressure.

Although Amy had some technology issues, they were resolved fairly quickly. Where she worked from home depended on the circumstances:

A lot of it would vary. I would sometimes sit on the front porch when the weather allowed with my cup of coffee. But, for the most part, because it was a little chilly, March and whatnot, I was on the couch in the living room, so I could have the big window. I'm used to working with the window in my office, so it's just a Zen thing. I did [feel it was adequate] because I thought it was good. I was organized enough that I could do it.

Christine's office space was adequate but lighting was problematic:

My office space at home was on my dining room table, and they gave us the loaner laptops. And then, I actually was allowed to sign out because in the office, I have the two large monitors. And I was allowed to sign out one of the monitors to take home, so I'd still have at least one large monitor with the laptop monitor. I still had the dual monitors, so that helped, and I took my keyboard home and mouse. It was fine. It was maybe not

quite as convenient as my desk. The lighting was the big issue. My lighting in my dining room wasn't the best even though I added a lamp and that sort of thing. In terms of technology access, for the most part, it went okay.

Anne said her work space was definitely not adequate, and she had moderate issues with connection. She further said:

I actually lost my home in the storm three weeks prior. I moved into an apartment on March 10 about two weeks before we moved to working from home, so my experience was different in some ways. I had to struggle a little bit in the beginning with setup just in the sense that I had my computers on cardboard boxes because I didn't have a desk yet.

That was a little bit of a struggle.

Douglas also commented on his Internet connection, "Compared to the bandwidth we have here at [the university], it pales and is not anywhere close to it, but it is adequate." He said he had his own workspace and his own computer.

After determining the physical work conditions, I wanted to see how the experience affected the participants' work style. I asked the participants to tell me whether they had a performance evaluation while working from home and, if they did, to tell me their scores if they did not mind sharing that information. Performance evaluations could provide a picture of how well the participants were accommodating working from home.

### **Performance Evaluations**

There were very few participants who had a performance evaluation during the work-from-home experience. Linda did have an evaluation, and she shared with me that her scores were "exceeds expectations." Nancy also had an evaluation and said that she got a good review. "I don't remember how it scored exactly," she said, "but I was scored well." Cynthia also had an

evaluation, and she said that her performance evaluation was just as good or maybe even better than in previous years. “Actually, I received an award in 2021 for clerical and support staff, outstanding staff,” she said. Anne did have an evaluation and said that most of her evaluations were “mostly based on the status of everything up until working from home.” She said that her supervisor disregarded working from home as part of the evaluation. Patricia had a performance evaluation and said that she “got all high marks and either meets or exceeds expectations.”

Douglas described his good performance evaluations:

I had a performance evaluation, and my supervisor had nothing but good things to say about how I had stepped up after the storms, especially since my immediate supervisor had lost her home during the storm and had to be out for a few weeks. I was given super admin access, and to really step in and step up. They owned that, and I mean complimented me on that. My work ethic was appreciated because I stepped in and did what I needed to do.

Marie, Lyndsie, Carolyn, Darcy, Lynn, Rachel, Kirsten, Melissa, Amy, and Lauryn did not have an evaluation while working from home. Amanda, Diana, Judy, Christine, and Gloria said they could not remember if they had an evaluation or not.

I followed the performance evaluation question with a question on whether or not the participants’ interactions with their co-workers changed when working from home. This information would add to the overall picture of the participants’ experience.

### **Interactions with Co-Workers**

In terms of how working from home changed co-worker interactions, some participants said they used Teams to communicate with co-workers. Some interactions changed in that they communicated less. Linda had already worked from home:



To be honest, I think we had less interactions working from home, which is interesting. Before the pandemic, our interactions were every three months. We did an in-person staff meeting. Working from home, all across the state of Tennessee, referral numbers rose. Our evaluators are busy doing evaluations, so we did not do a lot of virtual staff meetings because they were so busy.

Patricia also mentioned interacting less with her co-workers:

I definitely interacted with them a lot less, in pretty much every aspect. We interacted through Teams. I take the minutes for [my committee assignment as a recorder], and I remember those being through Teams, and then it was a lot of email correspondence.

Marie had a similar experience. She and her co-workers were not talking as much. “Mostly my interaction was with my [supervisor],” she said, but when they did speak, Marie said they communicated via email and phone. The level of Melissa’s interactions with her co-workers also changed:

We have a lot of vivacious and effervescent people there. Their job is to [interact with young people], so they're very outgoing, very funny, very lively. I didn't get a lot of that, just because you can't get a lot of that through a screen. My interactions with them changed in the fact that I wasn't speaking to some people more, and I wasn't feeding off of that; I wasn't getting their energy. But I talked to the people that I talked to every day that were my close friends. I still talk to them every day but the people who are more acquaintances, I didn't talk to them unless they had a question or something. [They communicated] primarily through Teams. A few of us have Google Hangouts, and we would need to talk that way for stuff that doesn't have to deal with work.

Lynn said, “I didn’t see them as much obviously. When I was at work, I still didn’t see them as much.” Lynn also said that most of the communication was via email, but “if there were something urgent, people would call.” Darcy said:

Well, one I didn't get to interact with as much. She did seem to have more trouble with being from home. We talked some, and like I said, then as a group, all of us would talk. We tried to talk at least on a daily basis. The three of us that were working together, and then our chair, we would get him involved or try to explain to him what we were doing for the day because that's what they had asked us to do. We would either send him an email or have a meeting with him. I'm not sure that it really changed a whole lot because of, like I said, again, I can't say that enough I guess, because we learned Teams we made [ourselves] a group. And if I had a question or wanted to get their comments, sometimes you just need feedback from your co-workers. I would just Teams them, and we would talk through whatever was going on. And maybe that happened more for them because they would be taking care of a student, and then they would just want some feedback. I set up quite a few meetings that way, like with students so students can talk to the chair. Because our offices were all adjacent at the time, and when we came back from COVID we had to separate. I mean coming back from working at home, that was probably a bigger adjustment than actually going home. That was a bigger adjustment because I moved across the hall from our main office, and we split the other two into the other two offices in there. Even though I loved the fact that we were back on campus, I think the anxiety of trying to do all the things they wanted us to, like the plexiglass and separating and all that was probably harder than going home.

Carolyn experienced a lot of change in communications with her co-workers when working from home. “They definitely became more focused about the job,” she said. “We didn’t really talk much about other things when we were in our Zoom meeting.”

Other participants communicated more with their co-workers or in different ways when they worked from home. Lyndsie said she had just started working in that office when they were sent to work from home. She said her communications changed in that they “had a Teams type of meeting, did the video thing. We got to know each other that way.” When I asked Amanda if the interactions with her co-workers changed when working from home, she said, “Um, yes and no. One thing that helped was to get everybody on Teams because Teams was still fairly new, and Skype was still being phased out.” She said that a lot of times, her co-workers would just say good morning through Teams because they could not walk into each other’s offices. Christine commented:

Well, for us, we transferred our desk phones to our cell phones...I was available as if I were in the office. I also was available by Teams, so I had, of course, more Teams calls during that time than previously. It was also hard to get in touch with my co-workers.

Diana’s supervisor ensured that she and her team stayed connected:

We all kept in touch. My boss made sure that we had a Zoom meeting a couple of times a week with everybody, so that we could all talk about what was happening and make sure that we were all on the same page.

Anne communicated with her co-workers more frequently:

My usual work is primarily with computers and data, so it doesn't have a lot of people-to-people interaction. To ensure that employees were actually completing work,

we have to be very literal about checking in with face-to-face on a daily basis. We just used Teams, never Zoom.

Amy said her interactions with her co-workers changed in that they were more in touch:

We actually got to see each other more because we would do check-in sessions with [our supervisor]. We would Zoom in, and we actually get to see each other more, because I don't see [my co-worker] as much as I did when we would do the Zoom meetings. We can actually see each other on the screen, and sometimes here, it might be a day or two that I won't see [my other co-worker], or the ones that didn't see every single day I can actually see on a weekly basis consistently because we would have those Zoom meetings. The [boss] was very big on keeping connected, and that's how we would do it.

Douglas also connected with his team more:

It seemed like I interacted with them more when I got home because here at the office we tend to stay in our own offices. And unless we're in a meeting, I don't get to see my co-workers. But because I think we were so far apart, we depended on one another. We leaned on one another for help and support. Like, I would reach out to the designers for things I couldn't answer, and likewise they would reach out to me for some of the more technical stuff that I was more familiar with.

Judy described how she and her co-workers interacted:

We would have video calls at least, I think it was once a week that we would get together and meet. And we still had to put out workshops. We had a lot of planning meetings so at least once a week we were meeting by Teams I think or Zoom. I can't recall now, but at least in the beginning I know it was at least once a week. [Before the pandemic] we met like every two weeks. And I think [our supervisor] might have checked in with us all a

couple times a week through the phone just to see what we're doing and what was going on with us.

Kirsten said her office “had like a morning meeting” every day to say “this is what we’re doing for the day, what I’m gonna be working on” or to ask questions. She said those meetings did not continue after they came back to the office; they only meet once a week now. I failed to ask Lauryn the question about interactions with co-workers.

Nancy said the interactions with her co-workers did not change when working from home:

In our office, we use Teams messaging a lot because, like I said, it’s an open office, so any talking is very disruptive to people who are trying to concentrate. We rarely talk anyway; we chat through Teams.

Cynthia also said her office communications did not change much while working from home. “I work through email almost completely anyway,” she said. “Our college is spread out in four different buildings anyway, so it really didn’t change.” Rachel said the communications among her co-workers also did not really change:

When you're calling someone, you had to learn and look up at the top and see if they were available or not. We use Microsoft Teams primarily. That's not different than if you're in the office, and maybe they are three doors down from you, and you call, and they're not there.

Gloria described her interactions as:

...pretty normal. Honestly, I mean most of them knew how to get a hold of me. We usually either text or call or email anyway. We're not big office phone users unless it's

something that we need just real quick, lickity split for something. It pretty much stayed the same.

The change in interaction with their co-workers could relate to whether or not the participants felt they were more productive at home. If the interactions were fewer, participants might feel their productivity benefited from fewer distractions. If the interactions were more, participants might feel that their productivity was hindered. I then asked whether or not the participants felt their productivity changed when working from home.

### **Productivity**

The responses on whether or not working from home increased or decreased the participants' productivity varied, but several said they were more productive. Linda said:

It's harder for me to focus if I'm on campus. When I'm at [the university], people walk by my door, not that I always look up, but I hear people. That's a little bit distracting. I'm a quiet person. I don't have TV on or anything like that, so it was very quiet and easy for me to focus.

Cynthia had a similar experience. She said:

I feel like just the interruptions of the office hindered me a little bit when I was working on campus and maybe that's partially because I'm a budget person, and I normally don't have a lot of contact face-to-face. But then when people come in, I feel the need to greet them, even though we do have an admin associate in our front office with me. I still got interrupted because I was right there beside the front door. Now I have that privacy, and I'm able to concentrate. If I'm balancing an account or doing some sort of budget activity, I can focus on that until I'm done with it instead of getting interrupted and having to take the time to remember where I was at. I just overall feel more efficient now.

Carolyn mentioned the same benefit of working from home:

I found it a lot easier to focus. I think a lot of people realize there was a lot of time in the office that they were chatting with people. And not having that distraction, I was able to be more productive, to have longer stretches of time.

Rachel got more work done because:

There were less (sic) work distractions, I mean, except when my cat would hop in my lap, I would just kind of push her away, or whatever. But I felt like I was able to concentrate more, and I felt like I could get things done quicker when at home.

Lauryn said, "That's true," when I asked her if she felt like her productivity increased when working from home. Gloria also said, "I can definitely get more done while I'm working at home." Amy also felt she was more productive:

I think I got more done because a lot of times, I would just wait to do something in the afternoon after [my son] came home. As soon as he came home at 3:30, quarter to four, it was getting him set up for homework, dinner, that kind of stuff. I would have to pick up when I had him settled like between six and seven o'clock, and he goes to bed at 8:30, and I will stay up till 11:30, 12, one o'clock in the morning working but it was total quiet time. And there were no interruptions again, so I wouldn't have to split my day when he came home. I'm a night owl. It worked well for me.

Nancy said she was more productive at home:

I talk to myself when I'm trying to concentrate and working in an open office is not very conducive to that. I felt like I was able to just do the work the way that I wanted to do it without disturbing anyone else.

Christine said, “I felt like I was just as productive, if not more so. Since I was home, I might even stay even later than I would have in the office to continue working on something to get it done.” Melissa had positive feelings about how her productivity changed when working from home:

I was super productive at home. I would get up in the morning, and I would pop on my laptop, and I was able to knock out all of my work in a very short amount of time. That was because I wasn't having to answer [academic questions from my other co-workers], from students, and student workers. I was able to focus on just my work. I also wasn't having to answer phone calls, and also all the other distractions that come with working in an office environment.

Lyndsie did not provided a definitive response on whether her productivity changed when working from home:

I was in the process of learning how things ran (sic), so, how do I explain? We'd have a Teams meeting, and then [my supervisor would] give me an assignment to do something to look over, and it would be a starting point because at the beginning, a lot of it was taking a lot of notes on things that she was training me on. Then I go into the system and looking at where things are, and learn the system.

Other participants agreed that their productivity did not change at home. Amanda said that her productivity at home was mostly the same as it would be at work, or maybe even a little less because of lack of computer screens and lag time. “I don't feel like inherently being at home lowered my productivity,” she said. “I feel like if I had the same setup as I did at work, I would have been fine.” Anne said that her productivity did not change at home. “It was kind of different,” she said. “My pace was different, but I think that was across the board for



everybody.” Judy said, “I really didn't have an opportunity for it to because there were certain things that had to be done, so no, I don't think so.” Concerning whether or not his productivity changed when working from home, Douglas also said, “I would say that it stayed about the same.” Lynn said, “Actually no,” when I asked him whether his productivity changed when working from home. Patricia’s response was similar to Lynn’s. “I don’t think so,” she said.

Others said their productivity was hindered by working from home. Diana believed her productivity decreased when working from home:

It took me a little longer because I didn't have a printer. I only had one screen. Those things, having two screens you get used to it really quick. It ends up taking you a little bit longer to do the things you wanted to do.

Marie also said she was less productive at home:

It’s a whole mindset that I get up in the morning, and I’ve got jeans on or sweats or something and not my work attire, and I don’t dive right into it like I do when I get here.

It was the whole difference in the relaxed atmosphere versus the in-office atmosphere.

Kirsten also said, “with the monitors and the layout and the setup, all the distractions and everything it definitely slowed my productivity.” Darcy commented on whether she felt her productivity increased when working from home:

Not really. No. But like I said, it probably slowed down trying to get adjusted. But once we did that, then I pretty much think we all picked up where we were. Of course, you got to remember too that we didn't have the student contact in the same way, and we also didn't have professors with having issues and we didn't have different things that we might do like because the bathroom’s leaking or something's gone out of one of the

rooms. It's kind of hard to judge that in a way when you really think about it because the areas were not the same, so I still did everything I was supposed to do on time.

After examining how the participants perceived working from home affected their productivity, I followed with a question about their job satisfaction. I wanted to determine whether working from home increased or decreased the levels of satisfaction with their job.

### **Job Satisfaction**

The participants had varying perspectives on whether their job satisfaction changed before and after working from home. Some liked their job before the experience, so working from home did not affect their satisfaction. Others felt the work-from-home experience dampened their sense of satisfaction in their job after negative incidents with co-workers while working from home.

Linda had several thoughts on how working from home affected her job satisfaction:

I love my job working from home. I'd say probably my job satisfaction went down some. I hadn't really thought about that until you just said it. And the reason that I'm going to say that is because our [group]; we have a group who is just negative. Everything is negative. They complain about everything, and it got significantly worse, working from home. I felt like I was constantly putting out fires with them. If they called or emailed, it was never good. It was never, 'Let me tell you something funny that happened today.' It was always something negative and just how miserable they are, and I was frustrated a lot. And I am still with that group who have just not come out of this negative state.

Linda said her co-workers were like that somewhat before the pandemic, but it was not this bad.

Lyndsie also said her job satisfaction was better in the office. "Since I was new, it was better for me in the office setting because I would get to know, obviously, the other people that I had not

met before in the office setting,” she said. Anne believed that working from home prevented her from advancing:

I liked the work that I did while still wanting to make advancements and grow in the position, which working from home didn't really allow. But I was able to resume it immediately after we returned.

For Kirsten, the frustrations from working from home made her job satisfaction less. “I don’t think it’s job-related,” she said. “It’s all the things I previously mentioned” like the fact that she was recovering from losing her home in a storm, and there were a lot of distractions. Melissa said she was fairly content in her job before working from home, but when she transitioned back into the office, things “started going more south” in terms of her job satisfaction. “I really started to resent my job and not like it, and I grew more bitter of what it means to be a clerical and support employee.”

Marie said her job satisfaction “didn’t change at all” after working from home during the pandemic. Nancy ranked her job satisfaction as a “four out of five before working from home and a five out of five when working from home,” with five being the greatest satisfaction. Cynthia said that her job satisfaction is “about the same or maybe better now. I enjoy my job. I always have, but I do enjoy it maybe even more now that I’m at home.”

Amanda already had a fairly high job satisfaction before working from home, but she said that “it was just a series of tradeoffs, so there were some things that were nicer and some things that were not as nice. Overall, I feel like it probably kind of washes out.” Diana said, “No, it didn’t change at all. I’m satisfied with my job.” Darcy echoed Diana’s thoughts, saying “I don’t think there was much difference. I was happy that I had a job that I could be flexible and

go home.” Rachel, in a similar response, said, “No, it was about the same.” Patricia also did not believe her job satisfaction was affected by working from home:

I would say it stayed pretty much the same. I did enjoy being at home for different things, just like not having to pack lunch, like things that aren’t really job related but more of a convenience because you’re at home. With the job itself, I enjoyed just the same.

Lynn said, “The kind of work I was doing really didn’t make any difference whether doing it at...work or home, so I would say, no, my job satisfaction really didn’t change that much.”

Lauryn said that she is fairly satisfied with her job. “I don’t think it negatively impacts anything on my satisfaction and my job.” Judy said that her job satisfaction was really not affected, but she also said, “I think I had more frustration when I was at home than I do in the office, just technology and not being able to get a hold of people.” Christine said her job satisfaction did not change, but she does like working in the office, “because your co-workers are there that you might need information from, and it’s just easier sometimes.”

Carolyn said that her job satisfaction increased slightly:

I was able to take little chunks out of my day that I lose from talking to people or going and doing some random thing with somebody because I happen to be here to help them out. I was able to kind of expand on other things professionally like learning new methods of statistics and things like that,

Gloria said that it was tougher before she worked from home:

When all that happened, it’s like everyone just took a breath and stepped it down a notch. Things are happening, and we all need to just be able to roll with it and not be as upset over little things.

Amy said her job satisfaction changed in the sense that “I love it even more because we were given the option to do that and still be productive.” Douglas had this to say concerning his work-from-home experience:

Well, I did have maybe three, no, about three months before I had to shelter in place, and of course, I already had a positive experience prior to that. Yes, I think that it probably heightened my, enhanced my experience, [made it] more positive.

Along with finding out if the participants’ job satisfaction changed when working from home, I also wanted to determine whether their job duties changed due to the circumstances. Changing job duties could frame the participants’ perception of the work-from-home experience either negatively or positively.

### **Job Duties When Working from Home**

Most participants said that their job duties did not change much when working from home, except for those whose job entails greeting guests. The responses would again be varied.

Linda’s job duties changed some when working from home:

Prior to working from home, I rarely picked up evaluations, and I rarely took a referral and handled it myself. COVID has changed that because I think people have a different perspective. Prior to COVID, not many people took vacations or took time off or sick time. Now, we’ve got a lot of sick time, so I’m picking up their caseload. Marie said that she was not able to greet people like she normally did when she worked from the office. She continued:

Again, a big part of my job [is we] entertain a lot of guests from different areas, different states, and different areas of our state. And of course, with the pandemic, nobody's traveling. Nobody's going out and about, so I was missing a whole big part of what I do,

which is setting up all that travel and arranging all those tours and arranging meals for everybody, so I spend a fair amount of time, or I used to spend a fair amount of time, setting up those visits and facilitating those visits, and then there were no visits to do that with.

Lynn also said that his job duties only changed in that he was not able to maintain equipment like he normally would “and not being able to interact directly with....my stock room clerk.” Rachel said that her job duties were the same when working from home except for the extra assignment that her supervisor gave her on top of her regular duties. “He wanted to make sure we had a project we were working on, and I was working on a spreadsheet that we would maintain on any external funding.” Judy said that she could do about 75% of her job from home. “I was assigned to come to the office at least a couple of times a week,” she said. Melissa said, “The only thing that changed was the [meeting-with-people] portion of my job. I didn't do it, so I was just fully processing.”

When I asked Nancy if her job duties changed when she worked from home, she said, “They did not, other than extra work, like I said, because of COVID.” Lyndsie said her job duties did not change when working from home. “It was defined,” she said. Cynthia said, “No, it's just the same, other than the normal budget fluctuations that we always have. There's always something changing, but it's nothing to do with working from home.” Amanda also said that her job duties were “pretty much the same” when working from home. Carolyn said that her job duties did not change drastically but that “the project changed. That’s kind of the nature of my job. I work on one project for a few months to a year and then switch, but I wouldn’t really say my job duties changed all that drastically.” Diana said that although her job duties didn’t change, she was not able to access some of the things she needed as easily. “Like I couldn’t print things,”

she said, “so I just had to save them to the computer, and that always made me a little nervous.”

Darcy noted that students were still contacting her via email and that:

I think my duties changed very little, other than the classroom...I had that issue at home with my printer or something and I'd have to call the IT people and say ‘Hey, can you help me figure this out.’ No, I'm not really sure a whole lot changed, other than I wasn't in the building with other people.

Anne said that her job duties did not change “to any great extent” when working from home.

Gloria said, “Not really, not really at all,” when I asked her if her job duties changed when working from home. Lauryn, Patricia, Christine, Douglas, and Kirsten also said that their job duties did not change at all. Amy also said, “No, it was still, a lot of reminding people to do things just more on email obviously, but no not really.”

In another aspect of the work-from-home experience, I wanted to explore whether the participants experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness when working from home. I also asked them whether those feelings were different from how they felt when they worked at the office.

### **Isolation and Loneliness**

Some participants agreed that they experienced some loneliness when working from home, but others did not mind being alone at home. However, Linda said that she could feel a little lonely at times, but she is a loner and does not need people around. She did say that she was isolated at times. “I think the people that I miss talking to are like my supervisors,” she said. Cynthia said she was an introvert and only rarely missed her co-workers when working from home. “I thrive working by myself,” she said. But she also said she was slightly lonelier at the

house. Marie, on the other hand, said, “I wouldn’t say I felt lonely at all. I just felt separate from the team. Lonely isn’t the right word. I would say just alone but not lonely.”

Nancy and Lyndsie said they did not feel lonely or isolated when working from home. However, Lyndsie said that her co-workers do not interact at work, so she thought, “if I’m going to be by myself anyway, not talk to anybody, I might as well be at home comfortable and not talk to anybody.” Rachel also said she was an introvert, and she was okay with being home alone. “I could probably go all day and not see a single soul and be fine,” she said. She also said she does not feel isolation and loneliness at the office.

Others expressed more intense feelings of loneliness and isolation. Carolyn said:

Yeah. I’m a people person, and I try to connect with people, a lot. And I think that having that like, when we were working from home and Zoom being straight to the point because people are sick of being on Zoom we didn’t have much of a connection otherwise. While it was good for work productivity and like my work self, I had a hard time having you a two-hour meeting with somebody and then not feeling like I was actually connecting with them on a personal level. I did struggle with that a little bit.

Amanda said, “Yeah, a little bit,” concerning her feelings of loneliness. “Just not seeing people and only talking on Teams and whatnot.” Diana expressed feelings of isolation that went farther than just working from home:

I think it was just because of what we were going through. Nobody wanted to go to the grocery store; we didn’t want to go anywhere at first, so I think that had a lot to do with it.

Anne said she did feel lonely, and that it was different from any feelings of isolation or loneliness when working in the office. Gloria said her relationship with her colleagues who had



been down the hallway in the office “carried on pretty much the same, but it was a little bit different experience with my supervisors here. In that time, I was isolated. I felt isolated from them a little more, yes.” Patricia had several things to say about feelings of loneliness when working from home:

I missed saying good morning and good evening to my co-workers every day. Oh, it's just a simple thing. I wouldn't say I felt lonely because of that, but when I came back in the first few days and got to tell [my supervisor] ‘good morning,’ it felt like a nice routine had returned. I will say, and I don't know if I'm even allowed to say this, but before the pandemic, I did share an office. And then once [the university] went to remote work, my office mate started staying at home, and is still at home. She did not return to the office, and for that reason, it does feel lonelier at this stage in the pandemic than it did pre-pandemic.

Darcy did not feel lonely when working from the office, but working from home was different:

I can't even honestly say that because like I said, we learned to use Teams, and a lot of times, there was a couple of days I know for sure that we just kept the Teams up. And we were all like you and I are right now like I would still be doing my work, but we were all kind of here for each other. I think that really helped. I think if we had not done that and not talked often like every day and weekday, I think, then yeah you could have gotten, maybe felt isolated. But I don't think we ever did because that's how we were working still as a team.

Other participants did not seem to be inflicted by feelings of loneliness or isolation. Lynn said that he did not feel lonely or isolated from his co-workers when working from home. “When

I was at work, I still didn't see [my co-workers] as much," he said. And concerning whether or not he feels lonely working in the office, Lynn said, "No, I don't." Judy said, "No, I actually kind of felt the opposite" of loneliness. She continued, "No, I do not," when I asked her if she felt lonely when working from the office. Christine said, "No, I didn't," when I asked her if she felt lonely or isolated working from home, and she also said she does not feel isolation or loneliness when in the office. Melissa commented on her personality traits in relation to feelings of loneliness or isolation:

I like to say that I'm an extroverted introvert. I was living my absolute best life working from home. When I'm in the office, and as much as I love it, I love the people that are there, I get drained. I have to come home and recharge, so being able to do my job from home and still stay connected to my co-workers, I didn't feel any type of loneliness or isolation. It didn't affect me in the way that it affected others. I do feel left out at the office. And I think that stems from the fact that when you are in person, there is the potential for that. There's more opportunity to feel left out just because other people have other friends or they're talking about other things. I definitely do feel more isolated and lonely in the office, which I know, sounds weird because I just said that I love to be around my friends. I like to be around my co-workers, but that does bring more opportunities of those feelings for me, versus when I worked from home.

Amy also did not have strong feelings of loneliness:

No, because we had that one day where we could see one another once in a while, depending on who was rotating in, and then with Zoom. And we text each other constantly; we are always keeping in touch. We were very connected even off campus.

She also noted that, “Oh, we're a very social interactive group” and was not lonely at the office.

Douglas denied feeling lonely:

No, I didn't feel that way at all because lots of times here at the office we have our own assignments, and most of my day doesn't involve interacting with others in the office. I used to interact with those who email me or call. I'm getting the same thing at home. I have instructors who email me and call me, and I respond to that.

I inadvertently did not ask Lauryn and Kirsten this question.

Although I had touched on this briefly in previous questions about the work-from-home time frame, I wanted to know how the participants' offices transitioned back to the offices. I wanted to know whether they all came back at the same time or if they used a phased-in approach as some did in transitioning out of the offices.

### **Transition Back to the Office**

Responses to how their unit transferred back to working from the office varied. Linda, whose job involves visiting clients and working with them directly, said:

We transitioned going back to [visiting clients in person] a couple of times. We transitioned back, I guess it was July. And then we still had the virtual option if [clients] said ‘I don't want to do it,’ and then COVID numbers spiked, and I guess, October, something like that. We said, ‘We're pulling back. You guys do not need to be out there.’ And we stayed pulled back to virtual until it was right in the middle of December. We thought, ‘Okay, we're okay. Everything's fine. We will go back to personal visits, and even the [funder] said they'd like to see more in-person visits. Then the omnicron new variant has hit. However, we didn't pull back this time, we said, ‘Give the client options.’ Or as an evaluator, if you've been exposed, don't go [to clients in person]. Don't

talk to [clients] if you feel sick.’ Right now, about half our teams’ work is done in person, and about half is done virtually.

Marie, Lynn, Lauryn, Kirsten, Christine, Melissa, and Rachel said their units came back to the office at the same time. Nancy, Lyndsie, Cynthia, Amy, Anne, Judy, Patricia, Gloria and Darcy said their units phased back in when coming back to the office. Carolyn also said her office phased back in for the long term, but her experience was slightly different:

I guess I kind of phased in if I think about it like long-term because now you kind of work every once in a while, but when we did originally come back from the first work-from-home to an office, we were all in the office five days a week. I think that when the pandemic becomes a little less severe, we will probably still have that option as long as we're still getting our projects done.

Amanda described her experience of phasing back:

We mostly just came back. We were told the date. Everybody had their own date that they were given that they were coming back. But it was not over a long period of time. It was over like a week or two.

Diana’s experience of her office phasing back in also differed slightly from the other participants:

I was here by myself for probably a month. Then my co-worker came back, and she and I were here probably two or three weeks by ourselves. And then everybody was told that they needed to come back a certain date. And then people just started showing back up.

I inadvertently did not ask Douglas this question. To culminate the overall feelings of the experience and determine how the participants had transitioned back to working from an office, I asked them whether they would want to work from home again if given the opportunity. That

question would provide data on whether the participants had experienced working from home positively or negatively.

### **Desire to Work from Home Again**

The responses to my question of whether the participants would want to work from home again if given the opportunity varied, based on their circumstances.

Linda still works from home, but she said that if she had the option, she would continue to work from home:

If I were to take another job and I had to go into the office every day, it would be a struggle for me. My clothes have changed. I am comfortable now in just a cotton shirt and leggings. If I had to dress up and go somewhere, that would be miserable.

Cynthia is also still working from home, and she would like to continue working from home. “The benefits greatly outweigh the cons,” she said. “I would prefer to continue working from home if it’s possible.” Nancy is not still working from home but expressed positive thoughts toward working from home again:

Absolutely, I would in a heartbeat if it was allowed. I was comfortable and could concentrate more. And I think it’s a huge bonus to people who have children because you have all that time that you can get in an extra load of laundry, or take the kids to school or something like that, I wouldn’t normally have the opportunity to do.

Lyndsie said she would want to work from home again if she had the opportunity:

As I said, I've had the experience of working from home before. If I'm going to be with a group of people that don't talk all day, I might as well be at home not talking to anybody all day. I go into my office. I do my work in there. I eat lunch at my desk. I'll go for a walk and come back. And I'm not that someone that people need to come see me about

anything, so basically except for things like the copier, I don't have any stuff. But let's say the printer, I have a printer at my desk, but maybe access to printing is the only thing I can think of. Working from home is no problem.

Diana said simply, "I would not mind it at all as long as I had everything that I needed." Gloria was enthusiastic about the possibility of working from home again:

Absolutely, I think that I work better at home. There's nothing about my position that couldn't be conducted at home other than forwarding my phone service to a phone. I would do it again today. It worked really well for me, everything considered.

Melissa was also positive about the work-from-home experience:

Yeah, I would absolutely want to work from home again, just because I was a much happier person. I was able to get my work done, and I felt like I did a better job at doing it. And, at least for my office, we're not working every single second of the day. Like there, there will be times where we will stop by somebody's desk, and we'll just talk to them for a few minutes or we get up to go to the water fountain. And I liked those little breaks that I got at home, where I could run my dishwasher or put up my clothes or just take a step away from the computer. I was a much more productive human being working from home, and if given that choice again, I would. If I'm able to get my work done and do a good job at it, I don't see why there would be a reason to prevent an employee from working, where they live. I think currently where I'm at right now with my life I have no children. I think having some days on, some days off would be fine. Like, three days in the office or three days at home, whatever it may be. I think that would be the most ideal situation.

Lauryn expressed her thoughts on whether she would work from home again:

I think that I would. I liked the convenience of it, and I now have an upgraded laptop. But we all switched over from our desktop computers to laptops so that we can take them home and be ready to work, and we need to during the snow. I was able to take my laptop home and use it instead of my desktop computer.

Judy did not mind the thought of working from home again:

I would not object to working from home. And I would not go out and seek a full time work-from-home job probably. I mean if we were working at home through a pandemic type thing. And that's one thing that I don't know. I think it would be nice to have the opportunity to work from home from time to time. But for different circumstances, other than pandemic.

Conversely, Marie was adamantly against working from home:

I would definitely not want to. I thrive more on the structure and the work environment and the mindset of dressing for work and sitting in the office at my desk. I'm definitely more productive in that environment.

Carolyn was also more hesitant about the idea of working from home again:

I would not want to work 100% remotely. I want the option to, but I want to be mostly in the office. I think it's mainly the connection with people that I work with, and it's nice that I can work from home when I need a day to like really hammer a paper out or something. I can go do that and have that like super focused time where I'm not pulled into different things.

Kirsten said, "Nope. I would not, I mean. I guess, but it's not what I thought it was going to be."

Douglas would rather work from the campus:

If I had the opportunity to work from home, and it was given, I would say that I would probably rather work from here because it's something about being here on campus, the whole experience of being on this university campus really makes me feel more a part of it.

Anne said, "At this point I would not want to primarily because I would be the only one in my household that is working from home." Christine prefers working from the office:

As long as I have my current job. I'm perfectly happy being here in the office. If I were to ever retire from this job, and someone wanted me to do something part time from home or whatever, I think that would be fun. I think it would be fine, but, I don't know that I would if somebody needed me to come into an office and work elsewhere, I'm not gonna say I wouldn't do that either.

Others would consider working from home again, but not full time. Darcy said, "Would I want to do it all the time? Hmm. No, maybe not, but for the most part it was good." Patricia commented:

I would say yes, but maybe not on a completely remote basis, like maybe if it was some kind of hybrid schedule, and that would be good. I think it does lend a better work home balance, but I do enjoy seeing people in person also.

Lynn said he might want to work from home again part-time:

There are certain aspects of this job that can be done just as easily from home as at work; in fact, when even now, when I take a day vacation or something like that, I'll usually spend some part of the morning checking emails, so I'm not swamped when I come back into the office.

Others had mixed feelings about working from home again. Amy said:



Yes, I would. If we could still do what we did, where we would have a day that we come back in the office and reconnect, I think it's doable; we could do it. And I've seen other friends whose work is not as interactive do it, and it's worked out well for them. I think we could do it.

Amanda expressed similar thoughts:

I have a hard time choosing, just because like I said it was trade-offs. I think probably I prefer to go into work in general, just because that allows you to be in a workspace, mentally, and have more separation. But I don't know. I wouldn't mind.

I wanted to provide the participants an opportunity to not only explore their feelings on whether they would want to work from home again, but also to anonymously let their supervisors know how they felt. One of my final questions offered that opportunity.

### **Take-Aways for Supervisors or Administrators**

I asked the participants what they would want their supervisors or administrators to know about their experience. Some focused on the positives. Linda said that she was “faced with something that we did not think was possible, and I think we have done a fabulous job at it.”

Nancy said:

I loved it. Other than the old laptop. I felt supported, and I still felt like part of the team. I don't think they ever made me feel left out in any way. I hope they felt like I was as productive as I felt like I was.

Diana wanted to say this to her supervisors:

I did not have a bad experience; I really didn't. The only thing was that we were so rushed kind of to get home and get laptops and get things set up that there were things that we didn't think about, like I need two screens, or things like that, that I would have taken that

home. I didn't take home my mouse. Because I didn't have a laptop at the time, and once they gave that to me, and then I had to do everything without having a mouse. That was a little odd. It's all those little things that we take for granted, every day of our job.

Rachel said she would want her supervisors to know that, "I mean, I had everything I needed. I had a computer. I had access to my files, and I was able to do everything that I could do here."

Patricia said she would like her supervisors to know that one good thing that came out of working from home was updating the technology for everyone. "We were buying laptops for people who had not traditionally had laptops or the ability to take things home, so that was a big plus," she said. Christine said, "I don't know that there's anything necessarily I want them to know because it worked out okay for me." Cynthia said she knows that her supervisors already know that working from home works. Her supervisor said at one point that "it's obvious it's working well for me to work from home." Amy said, "It was really amazing that they allowed us to do it. I wish that they had continued it." Douglas agreed:

I would certainly want them to know that I had a really positive experience, and of course, they were really good to us. Our supervisors provided us everything that we needed when we needed it. I have nothing but gratitude for that.

Marie had a completely different message for her supervisors. She said she would want to tell them not to have their team work from home again. "Leave me alone, and let me keep coming to work and doing my job," she said. Kirsten also had negative comments. She said she would like to tell her supervisors that it was not a productive and motivating experience.

Some wanted to let their supervisors know how well their jobs fit or did not fit in the work-from-home environment. Carolyn wanted her supervisors to know that she could be "just

as productive working remotely as I can working in the office.” Amanda would leave her supervisors with the following thoughts:

I guess two aspects of my job that didn't translate well to working from home were partially just phone calls; phone calls were difficult. I basically just had to call the voicemail several times a day to see if we had voicemails and then use our personal phone to call people back on. That was not great. And then I also had to drive to campus. I had a routine that I would drive to campus once a week on Friday because I have [official] letters that have to be mailed out through the campus mail. I wound up printing those on my home printer, and the office ordered me an ink cartridge to make up for the ink that I was using, and I just use the letterhead on my personal printer, and then I would have to stuff envelopes and drive them to campus to put them in the mail. We had one person for all of our building enrollment management who came in and was taking the mail to the post office because post mail pickup wasn't happening and getting and picking up the mail for the building.

Other participants focused on the need for better communication with and involvement of their employees in the decision process and to ensure that the employees had what they needed to work from home. Lynn said he would want to tell his supervisors to keep the lines of communication open so people do not feel isolated. “Just make some effort to keep people involved,” he said. Gloria would say:

I just wish the communication had been better between the supervisors and me.

Everything considered, other than that, everything was pretty well handled. There were stressful times, or at times with more tension when everybody was meeting online trying

to get things done and stuff like that, just because there were a lot of unknowns at that point. But otherwise, it went okay, considering.

Darcy said she would want her supervisors to know that she does not always agree with what they do. But, “they have to look at a big picture that I don’t,” she said. They don’t just look at me.” Anne said that she would like to tell her supervisor that if we ever had to work from home again it would be important to evaluate her experience and look at the hierarchy of needs. “Make sure your employees have housing and a desk and Internet access,” she said.

Lauryn framed her comments around clerical and support staff time:

We were given different directions, like conflicting directions. Some of them said we could work from home, and then others said we can’t. And there were some issues of comp time. I think that all needs to be clarified.

Judy also had opinions about how clerical and support staff were treated:

I felt HR was really on top of clerical and support staff to make sure they didn’t get an extra five minutes somewhere that they shouldn’t have. And I don’t know that was true across the board for everybody. I think we had to follow different guidelines than other people.

Lyndsie and Melissa had more profound exhortations for their supervisors. Lyndsie said:

The university needs to come into, I don’t want to say century, but in this world that we’re in where people work from home. I know there are folks that cannot, but roles like mine, you can work from home, be productive no problem.

Melissa had many other things to say:

I would just want them to know that life is so much more than an 8 to 4:30 job, and that it is asinine to have your employees shackled to their seats and their computers when they

can get their whole job in a fraction of the time. I think it's crazy to think that we are still following such a rigid structure of work that was created for a different time, a different culture, and different society. It doesn't work today. I think the research and studies have shown that people as a whole are a lot more unhappy, and I think it has to deal with the fact that we are working to make other people rich, and we are doing jobs that don't enrich us, and we are not living lives that are fulfilling and that allow us to be who we were created to be.

After hearing the final take-aways from the work-from-home experience that the participants wanted to share with their supervisors, I offered all the participants the chance to offer final comments on anything that I had not asked them about their work-from-home experience. I did not want the participants to feel completely limited by my pre-written questions, and I wanted them to be able to share other ideas if there was anything else I had not asked them.

### **Final Comments about Experience**

Few had anything to add; some said that the interview had covered everything fairly well. Linda said she didn't have any final comments. "I feel like we covered quite a bit, the pros and cons," she said. Marie also said that she had nothing further to add to what I had already asked. "I think you kind of got the gist of it," she said. Cynthia, Carolyn, Lynn, Rachel, Anne, Kirsten, Patricia, Christine, Melissa, and Diana had nothing to add.

Amanda closed by saying that "when the weather was nice, I really liked working on my porch, because I could see the trees and birds." Darcy said that she feels like working from home was so long ago. She said that the only negative thing she experienced was in trying to maintain a balance between working and her home responsibilities. "Once I got set up," she said, "it was

almost as good as working here. Not quite, but almost. And I know a lot of other people probably didn't feel that way." Judy also had some positive comments to leave about the experience even though, initially, the process was difficult for her:

Overall, after we got home and settled in, it was a positive experience. I have no complaints about it necessarily. It was rough. At first, the unknown was rough. The first couple of weeks, I didn't think that, and I know this probably isn't what your study is about, but I don't think the university did a good job of putting information out about the technology and how to use it. And they didn't make everybody aware of the information and where to find it. I know we were having some problems, and we were told it was on the website. We should read it. We had no clue it was there. I don't know we missed the memo telling us where to go find that, and I think that information needs to be better available now. And people are more aware now, but we were just 100% clueless as to some of the VPNs and all of that. And there's some tricks that we figured out while we were at home that would have been nice to know before we got home, as far as with the VPN, and some of those things, we wouldn't have the problems that we had.

Gloria wanted to leave the following positive comments concerning her experience:

I was pleasantly surprised about how well it went, considering. I mean there are things I wish could have been improved on definitely. But again, like you asking if I would do it all over again, or would want to even now, yes, I would go home today because there's no reason why I couldn't. And if they needed my office space for something like to turn it back into a closet, that's probably fine too.

Douglas stated affirmatively:

I can say that I had one advantage to that, that I had taught online classes myself when I worked at [another institution in the Southeast], and I did that for six years. I was used to the distance education thing, and I had even designed courses for online learning. I think that I was fully equipped and ready to help faculty with their courses with their own life experience. It wasn't as bad as they thought that it would be because when you're used to teaching in the classroom for years and years and years and all of a sudden you're told to change, switch over to remote learning. And it gets to be a formidable task, so I was able to help those faculty adjust because of my own experience in that area.

However, Lauryn expressed some concerns about working from home:

It was frustrating trying to get work done with the slow computer. I think it's helped a lot that we've got the laptops now. I would be happy to work from home or in the office, either one. I like the convenience of it, of being home. We can just go into another room and start working. I can't think of anything else.

Nancy had several final comments to make:

I think my hope with your research is that HR, or whoever makes the types of decisions that surround working from home, that they'll be more open to it. Because I had a really good experience. It seems like the rest of the world is already going that way and higher ed. seems to be not for whatever reason.

Lyndsie had similar remarks:

I think some higher up decisions are being made on a past life of how things used to be. And I think they should be made more along the lines of where things are going in the future. Okay, a quick example, my son is at [a university in another state], and I get their

alerts. I got an alert that they were last week, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, were going to be working online instead of in person. And I got concerned; I'm thinking something with COVID, so I texted him and I said, 'What's going on? Why are they switching you to remote?' And he said, 'Oh, because of the storm that's coming. We got this new thing where we can do remote; we did not shut down.' I know here it's different. The infrastructure is not there. I think it's a good thing and opportunity for those that can do it, and you'll have less space to share an office type of thing with people.

Amy also had remarks about the potential for working from home:

It was quite thorough. Thank you for giving us a chance to say how could they have improved it other than to allow us to continue to do it. I know a big industry in town that did that for their people that productivity has gone up. They could have an option to stay or continue. A lot of them said, 'I'll go back to the building,' and a lot chose to stay home, and productivity has not gone down at all.

After asking the question on final thoughts, I had two other questions for administrative staff. Since some administrative staff have personnel who report to them, I wanted to determine how they accommodated that role when working from home. Also, since administrative staff might have to work beyond the regular 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. work schedule, I wanted to know if working from home changed their schedules.

### **Questions Specific to Administrative Staff**

Nine of the respondents were classified as administrative staff.

### ***Personnel and How They Were Supervised***

Linda does have personnel who report to her. She said:



I would jump on Zoom with them while they talked to [clients], and then after the Zoom, I would share information about their visit, or their visit with the [clients], just for a few minutes, and then they'd have to go and do another [meeting].

Lynn has a staff member who reports to him. He said that he communicated with the staff member through “emails and phone calls.” Christine said that she was training a new employee during the work-from-home experience. She said that she accommodated that role by communicating through Teams and some phone calls. Since the new personnel had to go back to her hometown to work from home, she was on a different time zone. “We just worked through it.”

Carolyn said that she had technicians who were hired for a brief period, and she supervised them. She said that it was challenging to supervise them from home:

I was very thankful that we went back to work pretty soon. I had to delegate tasks to them on the project, so I would have to explain the project and teach them the tools that we were using remotely. They'd have to email me the questions, and I had to answer when I could get back to them. And then, there's just like a wall between the communication, I think. And that was a struggle, but luckily it didn't last very long. The students definitely had a struggle with it.

Amanda also said that she had one person who reports to her. She said that it was possible that her direct report had less that they were able to do because part of their job was to answer phones. She continued:

I think they were a little more restricted in how much of their normal job duties they could do. But as far as what I needed out of them, I was able to get that I think. Is it

possible that they were sitting there bored some of the time? Probably. But, we did the best that we could, and it wasn't that they were not working, not doing things.

Douglas said that he normally has student workers, but during the work-from-home period, he said, "That's one thing we did not have. One luxury we didn't have was student workers during the time as we were sheltering in place." Lyndsie, Gloria, and Kirsten also did not have personnel who reported to them.

### ***Changes to Typical Work Schedule***

Linda said that some days she was working from 5 a.m. to midnight. but "it's not every day. I mean, that would be terrible. I couldn't continue that." Carolyn said her work schedule did change when working from home. "I'd say it changed," she said, "like, I would start earlier and end earlier."

Lyndsie said her typical work schedule did not change. Douglas said, "Yeah, we stuck with our schedules, our regular schedules that we had here." Amanda said that she tried to work within the regular 8 to 4:30 schedule and take a lunch. She has to work extra events on the weekends or evenings, but during the pandemic those events were not in person. "One of the big reasons we went back when we did was because of [events]. We had to be there for events in person," Amanda said. Gloria said that her work schedule did not really change. She said some days, she may have started work around 8:30 a.m. and then finished up whenever she wanted to wrap up in the evening. She continued:

I was normally here until 5 or 6 in the evening, anyway. That was an early evening for me most days. Being at home, being able to get things done, I could actually get finished by 5 or so. It actually worked out pretty well, considering.

Lynn also said his work schedule did not change. “In an effort to maintain discipline,” he said, “I try to do my normal hours, which are 7:30 to 4.”

Kirsten said, “I spent more time on work just because I felt like I could tell it was slow to get through a lot of things, and then the fact that it’s just right there on my kitchen table.”

Christine had a similar experience in that she would just keep working. “I’m always an early bird,” she said, “and if I needed to stay late, I did, so that didn’t really change that much.”

That was the last question I had prepared. I then concluded the interviews with the participants.

### **Chapter Summary**

During the qualitative interviews, I asked the participants approximately 19 open-ended questions ranging from how long did they work from home to did they feel isolated and lonely during the work-from-home experience? The responses were varied, but themes arose. Some participants were excited about the work-from-home opportunity, but some expressed feelings of concern. Some participants were lonely, but others classified themselves as introverts and said they were fine working by themselves. The interviews provided a broad overview of the work-from-home experience among administrative, and clerical and support staff at a mid-size southern university.

## **Chapter 5. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Further Research**

### **Introduction**

When I began this study, I knew that I would have to overcome personal biases about the work-from-home experience and what I felt were the positives and negatives associated with it. I would also have to set aside any relationships I had with some of the people I was interviewing and the preconceived notions about what their responses would be based on my knowing them. After beginning the interview process, I was amazed at how widely the actual responses varied from what I believed would be the results. While one employee loved working from home and said the university needed to consider instituting the option to work from home to keep pace with the future trends of work, others hated the experience and loved getting dressed up every day to come into an office and tell their supervisors good morning. The specific findings would reveal even more details of an experience that I found was so specific to each participant.

### **Findings**

#### ***Productivity and Performance***

In the initial planning of this study, I specifically wanted to know whether working from home affected productivity and performance. Even though I later broadened my focus to incorporate many areas of the work-from-home experience, productivity and performance were still two of the main topics of greatest interest.

I anticipated that a majority of the participants would say their productivity and performance improved when working from home, but only about one-fourth of them did. Lauryn, Amy, Nancy, and Gloria said their productivity increased when working from home, and Christine said she was just as productive at home, or maybe more so. Melissa said she was productive at home. Linda, Cynthia, Carolyn, and Rachel all said they had fewer distractions

when working from home, but not necessarily that their productivity increased. This contradicted Bloom (2014) and Nakrosiene et al. (2019) who found that fewer co-worker interruptions increased productivity. However, it seemed to support Bailey and Kurland (2002) and Birkinshaw et al.'s (2020) research that said fewer interruptions might increase productivity in the short-run, but it might not necessarily provide the greatest good for the institution in the long-run in that it hinders opportunity for creativity and interaction.

I was curious if the number of years the participants had worked at the university might be a factor in their responses, as the length of employment ranged from 1.2 years (Lyndsie) to 16 years (Rachel and Amy); however, it does not appear to have made a difference. Both male participants, Douglas (who had been at the university only 2.2 years) and Lynn (who had worked there 16.5 years) said their productivity did not change. Of the female participants, Amanda, Judy, Darcy, Anne, and Patricia, agreed that their productivity did not change when working from home, and Diana and Kirsten said it took them longer to do their tasks at home. Marie said she was more productive at the office, and since Lyndsie was in the process of learning her job, she could not determine changes in her productivity based on the work-from-home experience.

Even though Bailey and Kurland (2002) and Ahmed et al. (2014) said that there is little research that shows telecommuting actually increases productivity, I was still surprised when some participants said their productivity was not increased by working from home. I attributed that to some of the negatives and challenges of working from home. For instance, some participants noted the inconveniences of work-from-home office spaces and were having to work from their dining room tables. One had been displaced from her home because of recent storms and placed her computer on a box. Other participants had difficulty in reaching co-workers.

Hanaysha (2016) studied higher education settings and said that when employees were empowered and got to work together as a team, which might be more challenging but important during work-from-home opportunities, their productivity increased. None of the participants in my study mentioned those factors as relating to their productivity.

### ***Employee Satisfaction***

Besides determining how working from home affected productivity and performance, I wanted to see if it increased employee satisfaction. I believed that it would, but once again the participants' responses would prove unpredictable. When I asked the participants if working from home increased their satisfaction, I was surprised to find that almost half of the participants (Marie, Amanda, Diana, Darcy, Rachel, Patricia, Lynn, Christine, and Lauryn) said their satisfaction with their jobs did not change. Palmeri (2013) found the opposite and concluded that flexible work schedules like those in telecommuting do impact job satisfaction. I also noticed that, for the most part, those who said their job satisfaction did not change when working from home were also those who had been at the university the longest (Darcy, 15 years; Rachel, 16 years; Lynn, 16.5 years; and Lauryn, 14 years), implying that those employees were already satisfied with their job before working from home. This coincides with Golden and Veiga's (2005) findings that although employee satisfaction increased steadily with more telecommuting hours, it plateaued at about 15 hours. Amanda and Diana also said that they were already satisfied with their jobs, and their job satisfaction did not change when working from home. Amanda commented that there were trade-offs that made the experience about the same as working in the office. Christine said she likes working in the office, but that her job satisfaction did not change when working from home.

With a small number of male participants, it would be presumptuous to suggest that there are differences in gender, especially since Lynn said his job satisfaction did not change, but Douglas said his satisfaction with his job increased. Even the female participants reported different levels of job satisfaction. Anne and Judy, who have been with the university three and five years respectively, cited hindrances to advancement and more frustrations working at home, like having technology difficulties and not being able to get in touch with people, as reasons that their job satisfaction decreased when working from home. Hartman et al. (1991) also said that those workers with higher numbers of family disruptions when working from home, which could cause frustrations like Anne and Judy expressed, were less satisfied with their job. Lyndsie, Linda, and Kirsten also said their job satisfaction decreased. They have been with the university less than five years.

Nancy, Carolyn, Gloria, Amy, and Douglas said their job satisfaction increased when working from home. Cynthia said her satisfaction with her job was the same or maybe more when working from home, but that she had always enjoyed her job. Melissa said that her job satisfaction increased when working from home, but she had always been fairly content with her job. She said the satisfaction with her job declined when she returned to the office when she started feeling resentment about what it means to be a clerical and support staff member. While most of the participants in this study are not permanent telecommuters, Martinez-Amador (2016) found that telecommuters tended to disengage when they did not have opportunities for advancement. This could be a caution for employees who think a permanent work-from-home opportunity would be a benefit. Martinez-Amador (2016) also stated that those employees who felt most strongly supported by their leaders were those who felt the most engaged. Therefore, supervisor support might also be a factor in employee satisfaction, and varying levels of support

might have been an underlying factor in the varying responses on employee satisfaction in this study.

Besides learning about the participants' feelings toward their jobs, I wanted to know whether working from home created feelings of isolation and loneliness. I also wanted to know if interactions with their co-workers changed significantly when working from home, and if so, whether those changing interactions led to loneliness or isolation.

### ***Isolation, Loneliness, and Worker Engagement***

In my own experience working from home, I felt isolated and lonely some days, but on others, I enjoyed the solitude. My interactions with my co-workers changed in that we communicated through Teams calls, rather than phone calls, and I found myself ignoring Teams calls more easily than I would have ignored my desk phone. I also became more tied to my dining room table desk than I would have been to my office desk. My supervisor commented that it was easier to get in touch with me when we worked from home. However, I knew that my experience may or may not have been the same as those I interviewed, and in many cases, it was not.

Only five participants, Linda, Cynthia, Carolyn, Amanda, and Anne, said they experienced loneliness when working from home. Cynthia, however, said her loneliness was only slight, and she thrives working by herself. Marie, Nancy, Lyndsie, Rachel, Patricia, Darcy, Lynn, Judy, Christine, Melissa, and Douglas said they were not lonely when working from home. Melissa said she is an extroverted introvert and felt she was living her best life when working from home. Amanda also said that her interactions with her co-workers changed in that there was more general small talk on Teams among her co-workers, but she admitted that even in the office, she uses instant messages to communicate because she is more introverted. In



Bloom's (2014) research, the employees, who volunteered to work from home nine months, reported feeling isolated, lonely, and depressed. None of the participants in my study expressed such extreme feelings of depression in terms of their experience working from home even though the conditions surrounding the pandemic could have enhanced those feelings of depression. The participants in my study may also not have expressed feelings of depression because they worked from home a shorter time than those in the Bloom (2014) study.

Feelings of isolation and changes in interactions with co-workers appeared to be related. Linda and Marie said they felt isolated, and they also had fewer interactions with their co-workers when working from home. Carolyn also said she felt isolated when working from home, and she experienced a lot of change in communications with her co-workers. She said that they became more focused on their jobs and did not talk about other things in Zoom meetings. Melissa said she felt left out at the office also, and she was not speaking to her co-workers as much and feeding off their vivacious energy when she worked at home. Although Diana and her co-workers had a Zoom meeting several times a week, she felt isolated when working from home, but that had to do with the conditions of the pandemic. Anne said the feelings of isolation she felt were different from isolation or loneliness she feels when working from the office, and that the interactions with her co-workers changed in that they were communicating more frequently. Gloria's experience was different in that she felt isolated, but the interactions with her co-workers did not change as they would normally text, call, or email anyway. Patricia said her co-workers interacted a lot less when working from home, and Judy said she and her co-workers had video calls once a week. Amy said she does not feel lonely or isolated at the office either but that she and her co-workers got to see each other more through Zoom meetings. Douglas's experience was similar in that he did not feel isolated when working from home, but he

interacted more with his co-workers when working from home because when they are working from the office, they tend to stay in their offices. Kirsten also said her office had a morning meeting every day when working from home, and those meetings did not continue when they went back to the office.

Nancy, Lyndsie, Darcy, Lynn, Christine, and Rachel said they did not feel isolated when working from home, and their interactions with their co-workers did not change. Lynn said he normally does not see his co-workers that much anyway. Christine said she does not feel loneliness or isolation at the office either, and that she was just as available to her co-workers as she would have been in the office. However, it was hard for her to get in touch with her co-workers. Rachel said she does not feel isolated and lonely at the office either. Nancy said she and her co-workers chat through Teams, and Lyndsie said that she does not interact with her co-workers in the office setting either. Cynthia also said her interactions with her co-workers did not change, and that they work almost entirely through email anyway. Most of the literature that I reviewed considered working from home in terms of how it affected worker engagement with the institution. My study mainly considered how communications among co-workers changed and whether that contributed to feeling isolated or lonely.

When I began this study, I thought that most of the participants would express feelings of isolation or loneliness when working from home, so I was surprised that most participants did not feel lonely or isolated. Those feelings also seemed to be related to their own personalities and whether their interactions with their co-workers changed. I determined that feelings of isolation and loneliness might lead to whether or not the participants would want to work from home again. It would be important for supervisors to create lines of communication and maintain them

regularly to ensure that feelings of loneliness or isolation did not become a part of the work-from-home experience.

### ***Desire to Work from Home Again***

Bloom (2014) showed that about half of the employees who had volunteered to telecommute for nine months wanted to return to the office at the end of the experiment. This was different from what I found in my study. When I looked at how many participants would want to work from home again if they had the opportunity, a majority said they would want to or at least have the option to work from home. This seemed to align with Dubey and Tripathi (2020) who found that their participants' sentiments toward working from home ranged from being excited to hopeless, but overall, they viewed the work-from-home concept positively. In my study, Linda and Cynthia are still working from home, and both prefer it. Cynthia believes the benefits of being able to transition her work to paperless and feel more organized outweigh the challenges involved in transitioning to a work-from-home space and the difficulties involved in using digital forms. Lyndsie and Lauryn said they would prefer working from home, and Gloria and Melissa said they would absolutely want to work from home again. Nancy said she would work from home again "in a heartbeat." Diana said she would want to work from home again if she had everything she needed. Lynn and Judy said they would like the option to work from home, and Carolyn said she would not mind working from home but mainly wants to be in the office. Amanda echoed those sentiments in that she would not mind the option of working from home, but she mainly wants to work from the office. Amy had a similar opinion; she would not mind working from home as long as she and her co-workers could come back to the office one day to reconnect. Patricia also said that she would be in favor of a hybrid-type schedule, with

some days at home and some in the office. Darcy said that, for the most part, working from home was good for her.

Only five participants, Marie, Anne, Christine, Kirsten and Douglas, said they would not want to work from home again. Marie emphasized that she would definitely not want to work from home again and had felt disconnected from her team. Christine said that if she retired from this job, she might consider working from home part-time. According to Belanger (1999), Bailey and Kurland (2002), and Nakrosiene et al. (2019), those who did not work from home mainly did not want to because of lack of home office and appropriate equipment; working from home was not an option; and they felt more productive in the office. Anne and Christine saw their home office as one of the challenges to working from home, and Kirsten and Douglas were distracted at home, which was consistent with those researchers' results.

I wanted to know whether feelings of isolation and loneliness and disconnection from co-workers affected the participants' desire to work from home again. I found that the responses varied. Even though Linda expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation, she said she does want to work from home again. Marie said she did not feel lonely but did feel isolated and does not want to work from home. Nancy felt neither lonely nor isolated and does want to work from home. Lyndsie also experienced no loneliness or isolation when working from home and would want to do it again. Cynthia expressed slight feelings of loneliness but would consider working from home in the future. Carolyn said she felt isolated and lonely when working from home and would not want to work from home full-time. She would like the option to work from home but mainly prefers being in the office. Amanda was slightly lonely working from home and prefers going to work in general but would not mind working from home. Diana said she experienced some feelings of isolation, but those feelings had some to do with the conditions of the pandemic

in general, and she would want to work from home again. Anne said she felt lonely working at home and does not want to work from home again. Gloria, however, said she felt some isolation when working from home but would still want to work from home again. Patricia, who missed interactions with her co-workers when she worked from home, said she would like to work in a hybrid schedule with work-from-home as an option. Darcy also wanted a part-time option of working from home and did not feel lonely when working from home. Lynn and Judy were not isolated or lonely when working from home and would not mind the option of doing it again. Christine, however, did not feel isolated or lonely at home but would not want to work from home. Melissa and Amy were not isolated when working from home, and Melissa would like to do it again. Amy would want to work from home if she and her co-workers could reconnect at the office one day a week. Douglas was not lonely or isolated when working from home, but neither he nor Kirsten wanted to work from home again.

Even though some participants did feel lonely and isolated working from home, they still would like to work from home again. Therefore, the desire to work from home seemed to depend more on personal motivation and other factors, such as the negative aspects or challenges of working from home, rather than the feelings of loneliness or isolation that the environment might create.

### *Negative Aspects/Challenges*

When I asked the participants the negative aspects/challenges of working from home, I expected certain themes to emerge. I expected the participants would refer to challenges with technology or home office space, but I never would have known that some of the participants were rebuilding from a devastating storm or dealing with the loss of a parent, which added so

many more challenges to an already difficult pandemic that forced them out of their familiar offices to a home environment that might or might not be conducive to their work.

Linda said her husband got frustrated with her working from home, and it made her feel guilty because it took time away from her family. This was aligned with Ashford et al.'s (2000) findings that employees expressed negative emotions in balancing the different roles they played between home and work. Konradt et al. (2003) also found that those who worked from home reported more stress from non-job-related factors than their office-based co-workers. Hill et al (1998), Jones (2016), Lockwood (2003), and Fleetwood (2007) also agreed that working from home made work-life balance difficult in that employees found it harder to know when to quit working.

None of the other participants noted feeling guilty working at home, but Kirsten and Douglas said some of the negative aspects of working from home involved at-home distractions. Kirsten was distracted by her son and pets and the fact that she had recently lost her home in a storm. This was in opposition to Jones (2016) who found that working from home provided more time for completing family tasks while working.

Others found difficulties in communication to be a negative aspect of working from home. Marie said she felt disconnected from the group. Lyndsie said she had just started her job, and it was unusual being at home and not getting to meet her peers in person. Gloria said communicating with her supervisors was difficult. Judy also said it was difficult to get in touch with other people. Melissa said she missed interactions with her friends.

Most of the participants noted difficulties in technology or at-home office setup as negative aspects. Nancy said she had uncomfortable seating and was disappointed in not having a reason to dress up and put on makeup. Cynthia said the transition was hard, and she had

difficulty getting the forms she needed and had technology issues. Anne had also lost her home in a storm and had just moved to an apartment, so because of that, the experience was different for her than what it might have been for other participants. She struggled with setting up her office space in the beginning, having to put her computer on boxes because she did not have a desk. She was also worried about not seeing people and found that previous personnel conflicts seemed to be worse in the work-from-home environment. Carolyn said it was harder to do her job. Amanda also had trouble doing her job because of lack of equipment, and the long time it took for her computer to save files caused the potential for her to get distracted while files were saving. Diana also said she did not have access to what she needed to do her job, and her work space was uncomfortable because she was working at her kitchen table. Lauryn said her computer was slow, and she got lonely. In the abrupt change to working from home, she felt like she was on her own. Patricia also had connection issues, and Amy had trouble with slow connectivity. Christine said she had an inconvenient work-from-home office space, and she had trouble getting in touch with people. Darcy had difficulty with her at-home office setup, and Lynn said the smaller laptop he had to use at home was one of the negative aspects. Rachel said the distractions from construction workers being in her home and the software learning curve were negatives in her work-from-home experience.

Several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of adequate technology in their at-home office space (i.e., lack of multiple monitors or a mouse). Ensuring that employees had adequate technology available at home would provide a more satisfying work-from-home experience.

Although the participants shared a lot of negative experiences, I wanted to see if the challenges of working from home outweighed the benefits.

### *Positive Aspects/Benefits*

When I asked the participants about the good things of working from home, I found that their answers were similar to my own, including a more casual atmosphere, more time with family, and more time for household chores. Linda mentioned that she enjoyed the lack of commute and fewer interruptions. Nancy also mentioned the lack of commute that gave her more time with her family and the more comfortable and relaxed atmosphere that allowed her to be more productive. Lyndsie noted the lack of commute was a positive of working from home, and she said it was nice being at home and the company got more work from her because she did not necessarily take a lunch break, but rather ate while working. Amanda mentioned that she enjoyed the lack of commute, which gave her more time in the mornings and evenings, and she was also able to make nicer lunches. Judy noted that she enjoyed the lack of commute and could do household chores on lunch and could cook lunch at home and not eat out. The lack of commute was the only benefit Lynn mentioned in working from home.

Carolyn said that fewer distractions allowed her to be more productive with longer stretches of time without interruptions. Gloria and Christine also noted that there were fewer interruptions when working from home.

Others said that the relaxed atmosphere was a benefit. Marie said she enjoyed the casual atmosphere that allowed her to be more accessible to her family. Cynthia said that switching to a paperless system made her feel more organized, and fewer distractions made her more efficient, relaxed, and prepared. She also had more time to do a Bible study in the morning and be more prepared for her day. Diana said she could work in her pajamas, and her morning prep time was less. Lauryn also said she could work in her pajamas and could get more work done because of



fewer distractions. Amy mentioned that working in her pajamas was a positive as she could still be as productive as she wanted to be.

The other participants had more general ideas on the positives of working from home. Anne said that she made connections with other employees that she might not have otherwise. Patricia said it was enjoyable and easy to keep up with tasks. Melissa said overall, it was great, and she was a much happier person and more productive. Douglas said that it showed that we could do this again if we had to and that it was easy once you have an established routine. Darcy said that because she was at home she did not have to get out and potentially expose her family to Covid, and she could do household chores easily. Rachel said after she got a modem, it was fine but different, and overall was not a bad experience.

### ***Recent Literature***

When I finished my data analysis, I went back to see what had been published on telecommuting during the pandemic since I had completed my initial literature review. I was looking specifically for studies on clerical and support staff in higher education; however, I extended my search to telecommuting during the pandemic in general.

Ravi and Anulakshmi (2021) studied employees who worked from home in India, but they worked in advertising and not in higher education. Their findings showed that stress, work-life-balance, and job satisfaction greatly affected productivity. My participants didn't mention this specifically. Garrote (2021) studied which jobs could be done from home, but considered the entire job market across the globe, not necessarily jobs in higher education. Garrote (2021) also referenced the fact that low-income countries had fewer opportunities for working from home, and workers across the globe who were poorly educated were also least likely to work from home, so it would be difficult to compare Garrote's results with mine as it appears the

telecommuting experience in many countries is somewhat different from that in the United States where more work-from-home opportunities exist.

In a recent study, Nayak et al. (2022) considered the effect of the coronavirus on productivity in higher education settings and found that poor work environments hindered productivity, as I found in my study; however, Nayak et al. (2022) focused on faculty rather than staff. Afrianty et al. (2022) examined the effect of the coronavirus on lecturers' productivity at Indonesian institutions and found that access to appropriate digital technology was important in ensuring successful work-from-home environments; although I was looking at clerical and support staff as opposed to faculty, my participants said the same thing. Khan et al. (2021) investigated employee productivity during the pandemic among academicians and non-academicians in Malaysia and suggested that the institutions should encourage peer support to increase employee productivity. None of my participants mentioned peer support as a factor in their productivity. In fact, some of my respondents mentioned interruptions from peers as deterrents to their own productivity. While Iwu et al. (2022) noted that the coronavirus caused significant challenges in higher education institutions, they were addressing the experiences of academics, not staff, in South African institutions. However, they found that working from home required significant organizational and personal adjustments by the faculty, just as I found with the staff in my study.

Watson et al. (2022) dealt with the effect of the coronavirus on student learning in higher education systems in Australia, and while I was not looking at student experiences, our results were similar in that we found that communication changed and the participants expressed feelings of social isolation. Drašler et al. (2021) studied the attitudes of students and employees at the University of Ljubljana toward working from home and found that they experienced an

involuntary movement to working from home, similar to some of my participants who stated that their transition to working from home was involuntary. Drašler et al.'s (2021) participants also reported the lack of a daily commute, better eating habits, and enhanced work-life-balance as positives of working from home, much like the participants in my study noted. They also reported poor working environment at home as one of the drawbacks, again like my participants. Osman et al. (2021) suggested that strong workplace environments positively influenced productivity among higher education employees, not necessarily staff, much the same as I heard from the participants in my study. Several of my participants mentioned that their work-from-home offices were inconvenient and hindered their productivity.

Finally, Ewing (2021) addressed higher education in the post-pandemic era, but only in terms of the economic impact the pandemic had on the institution and not how higher education employees were affected like in my study. Therefore, newer research on the experiences of clerical and support staff in higher education while working from home during the pandemic seems limited at best.

## **Conclusions**

After looking at the themes that emerged from my interviews, the most surprising outcome was that most participants found that working from home did not increase their overall productivity or job satisfaction. I had thought that it would.

I was also surprised to find that not as many participants felt lonely or isolated when working from home as I had originally thought. In fact, some participants thrived on being separate from co-workers as they classified themselves as introverts and enjoyed being alone although this also could have had to do with the short time period under which the participants worked from home.

I was not surprised to find the negative aspects and benefits that the participants related as they were similar to my own experiences. A lot of participants had difficulty concentrating at home and had uncomfortable work-from-home office spaces. However, this seemed to be balanced by the positive aspects of being able to work in comfortable clothes and being able to spend more time with their families. Overall, the negative aspects and benefits seemed to balance out in a series of trade-offs.

Probably the most decisive responses were related to whether they would want to work from home again if they had the opportunity. Despite any feelings of isolation or loneliness or lack thereof, despite the negative aspects or benefits, and despite lack of change in job satisfaction or productivity, the majority of participants would want to work from home again or at least be given the option to work from home part-time or on a hybrid schedule. It seems that this study provides support that an institution like this one should offer more work-from-home opportunities to accommodate its employees and to keep up with current labor trends.

### **Recommendations for Institutions**

One of the participants commented that higher education institutions need to follow current trends in providing employees work-from-home options. I had never thought of that, and it seemed to me to be one of the main take-aways from the research. I would recommend that Human Resources Offices at other institutions should consider how well certain job duties transfer to working from home and offer that option if the employee would find greater employee satisfaction under those working conditions. I realize that some jobs, like those involving data entry or projects that do not require a lot of interaction with students or other personnel, would more easily adapt to working from home and could be offered to those employees who wanted the opportunity. Those positions that mainly revolve around greeting

students and providing in-person advising, etc., could not as easily translate to working from home, and those job requirements would probably outweigh the desire to provide those employees a work-from-home option. As Belanger (1999) and Bailey Kurland (2002) said, whether the job is suitable for telecommuting is one of the highest factors in predicting those who would choose to telework. I would recommend that other institutions carefully consider the job requirements to determine which positions could be converted to teleworking environments and offer that opportunity on a trial basis to determine the effects. Then, the institution should determine which employees would want the opportunity to work from home. That could be done through a survey after it was determined which employees could do their jobs from home. This should be weighed against the institution's needs to provide strong customer service to its students and faculty, which might outweigh the employees' preference. Employees who desire to work from home would then need to be provided adequate technology, including multiple monitors, high-performing laptops, and computer mice, to ensure an efficient at-home office space.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

When studying the literature that was already available on the working from home, I found that results varied widely on whether telecommuting affected employee productivity, loneliness and isolation, and job satisfaction. Some sources reported that employee productivity increased while others reported it did not. The same occurred for loneliness and isolation and job satisfaction. This shows that there is room for a large body of future research over a long range of time to reveal enough information to provide accurate trends.

While the qualitative interviews that I did in this study provided an overall image of the work-from-home experience, future research could incorporate quantitative scales of

productivity and employee satisfaction. Participants would rate their own productivity on a scale, and then supervisors would be asked to rate their perceptions of their employees' productivity on the same scale. I would also like to study how participants' specific job duties related to their productivity when working from home. Dutcher (2012) and Birkinshaw et al. (2020) found that working from home negatively impacted productivity in dull tasks and positively impacted productivity in creative tasks. Dubrin (1991), however, found that teleworkers were more productive than office workers on structured, repetitive tasks. I would like to determine whether the results from the institution I studied would corroborate the work of Dutcher (2012) and Birkinshaw et al. (2020) or Dubrin (1991).

Other future research could look at how the participants' responses might have been different if they had not also been dealing with the pandemic. Darcy specifically said that she was glad to be able to work from home because it kept her and her family from being exposed to the COVID-19 virus. However, few of the other participants mentioned safety concerns surrounding the virus perhaps because they felt isolated from the ramifications of the coronavirus since they were able to mainly stay at home. I would like to know if the participants would feel the same about work-from-home opportunities if the repercussions from the pandemic were not involved.

Another interesting topic for research might come from interviewing those participants who were still working from home several years in the future to determine if their positive or negative feelings about the experience changed. This would help reveal more data about the long-term effects of working from home that this short-term study could not expose.

While I believe the questions I asked were comprehensive, if I had the chance, I would also ask the participants more direct questions on whether their supervisors' styles changed to

accommodate the circumstances of the pandemic. For example, did supervisors who normally took a hands-off approach become more adamant about receiving frequent updates on their workers' progress? I alluded to this in my question about whether the participants had evaluations during their work-from-home experience, but I would like to know more about the participants' interactions with their supervisors. This might also involve my interviewing the supervisors to get a more comprehensive picture of the employee-supervisor relationship. I would like to know whether the participants' opinions on whether their productivity changed during the pandemic matched the supervisors' perceptions on their employees' productivity

Another aspect of the work-from-home experience I would like to have delved into would be the concept of worker engagement. I looked at this in terms of how interactions changed with co-workers, but I did not specifically focus on overall employee engagement. Roehling et al. (2001) and Thompson et al. (2015) said that flexible work arrangements increase attachment to the organization, but Behson (2005), Haar (2008), and Kausel and Slaughter (2011) found that there was no relationship between flexible work arrangements and the employee's sense of engagement and attachment to the company. I would like to see what the results from the institution I studied would reveal about whether or not working from home increased employees' sense of belonging.

While I was pleased with the number of employees who were interested in taking part in this research, I wish that more males had participated. However, both of the males in my study were in administrative positions, so it might be difficult to find more males who are in clerical and support positions. If it were possible to get the participation of more males in administrative positions in the future, I would like to interview them at the institution to see if their responses showed a trend that was different from the female responses, especially in terms of work-life

balance since a stereotype exists that male workers do not experience as much stress in terms of work-life balance as female workers.

The interviews I did in this study provided me with personal insights into the experiences of these employees during probably one of the most difficult times of their lives. I hope that these results will be used to encourage the institution to look for ways to offer their employees more adaptable work schedules if job duties conform to it. I think it will lead to a healthier, happier workforce.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Sample Email to Solicit Participants

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Most employees in higher education settings were affected in some way by the coronavirus pandemic that hit the United States in the spring of 2020. While faculty were attempting to move in-person classes online with little notice, housing office staff were emptying residence halls and shifting remaining students into new living arrangements, and IT units were working long hours to provide the technology needed for remote instruction and access. Administrative, and clerical and support staff were determining how to continue to provide the university with services while coordinating working from home. Now that we have experienced working from home, will that experience change the future of how staff work in higher education?

My name is Amy Hill, and I'm an Ed.D. candidate at East Tennessee State University.

For my dissertation, I am performing research on how administrative, and clerical and support staff at a mid-sized public university in the South experienced working from home during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-2021.

As a member of the administrative or clerical and support staff category at [Name of Institution] and if you worked from home during the pandemic, you meet the criteria to participate in the study and provide your responses to several interview questions about your experience. If you would be willing to be interviewed, please respond to this email, and I will set up an interview time.

The interviews will be done via Zoom or by telephone and will be recorded. Identifying information will be removed in data reporting, so your answers will remain anonymous. Only I, the ETSU IRB, and office responsible for compliance will have access to the entire data collected, including the transcripts. The responses in the survey will only be linked to the respondent through the pseudonym. The reported results will be anonymous, and responses will not be shared with my colleagues or supervisors.

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. The interviews will last approximately one hour, and you will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in the interview. As a participant, you may indirectly benefit from the study by providing society a first-hand experience of working from home during a pandemic and could directly benefit if your employer decides that work-from-home opportunities are conducive to creating a better work environment and might offer more opportunities like that in the future.

Thank you for your consideration,

Amy Hill

Ed.D. Candidate

## **Appendix B: Debriefing Certification**

I, Michael Aikens, served as the debriefer for this study, A Phenomenological Study on How University Employees Experienced Working from Home During a Pandemic. I met with Amy Hill to discuss her impressions and concerns about the interviews as well as any potential biases she noted. In addition, we talked about the redundancy she had noted in the interviews as well as the 'negative case' interview.



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Michael Aikens, Director, TCRI

Date: 6/28/2022

### Appendix C: Auditor Certification

The audit of Amy Hill's interviews with administrative and clerical staff, and what is presented from them in Chapter 4 is complete. I found everything to be accurately represented and the process for determining how to present the results to be sound.

*Jeff Schaeffer*

(digital signature)

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Jeff Schaeffer, Ph.D.

Date: 7/11/2022

VITA  
AMY HILL

- Education: Ed.D. Educational Leadership, concentration in Higher Education Leadership, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, Anticipated Summer 2022
- Ed.S. Educational Psychology, Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee, 2016
- MBA, Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee, 2004
- B.S. English-Journalism, Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee, 1997
- Professional Experience: Editor, Office of Research and Water Center; Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee, 2002-present
- Presentations: Hill, A. (2020). "Perfect Storm," presented during the Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted Virtual Conference.
- Honors and Awards: Tennessee Tech Outstanding Professional Award (April 2022)
- Tennessee Tech Ambassador of the Month Award (February 2017)