

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

How Can Telework Contribute to the Administration of Social Services in the Public Sector?

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Master of Public Administration, Public Sector Management and Leadership

By

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## Abstract

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Technological innovations and the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 drastically amplified teleworking prospects for employees in the public sector. The upsurge in the number of teleworking employees created many challenges for the administration in public social services attempting to continue and endure the operation of serving millions of county beneficiaries, residents, and stakeholders. The purpose of this study is to explore the telework program in social services in the public sector by discovering experiences of teleworking employees from three levels from the organizational hierarchy of the existing bureaucratic system of governance in the public sector. Four themes emerged from the interviews: organizational, employee, social benefits of telework program and its leadership aspect for successful implementation. Furthermore, this paper will address the implementation of the telework program through e-leadership. This project employed the case study design with telework program organizational leadership framework. To gain an understanding what could be used to successfully manage the telework operation through human resources and technology under e-leadership.

It used the qualitative research method to gain insight from managers, teleworking supervisors, and employees within Public Social Services Department, Los Angeles County participating in the Telework program. Data were collected through structured interview questions to explore the viewpoints of managers use to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency, as well as accountability and equity in dealing with the distant system of operations. Suggestions for future study include research focused on the telework program in Public Sector leading to improved and increased teleworking opportunities for employees countywide benefiting not only the organization and employees but also, the community at large by expediting the process of services, decreasing traffic congestion, reducing greenhouse gases and decreasing air pollution resulting healthier and happier County residents.

## I. Introduction

During the past decades, technological advancement has drastically limited the necessity of physical or face-to-face communication and minimized the importance of location when interacting or conducting business (Khaifa & Davidson). Personal computers with sophisticated, yet user-friendly software and capabilities, have enabled communication and business from surpassing any topographical boundaries to generating media societies, expanding commercial and corporate culture to the mind-blowing level. Consequently, these technological achievements offer business opportunities to alter the way they operate and to create organizational operation alternatives in the workplace. Furthermore, computer-based technology and telecommunication allow the opportunity for the private and public sector workforce to perform duties from home. Subsequently, this opens a broad prospect for the organizations to flourish and prosper in both sectors (Apgar, 1998). This paper will address the benefits and challenges in administering the modern way of providing social services to the public with the synergy of technological fast growth and indispensable transformation in Public Administration. This study consists of concepts from peer-reviewed literature and studies, and results from interviewees' insights on the topics of telecommuting and the essentials of its management. Moreover, leadership theories have been discussed to connect and synchronize the telework program initiative with a successful organizational change. Furthermore, a new style of Leadership named e-Leadership has emerged with the same goals as Transformational Leadership alongside the new concept of leading and implementing the organizational goals electronically with the help of virtual teams scattered over time and space (Louie, 2017). The philosophies and evidence, pros and cons of this fast, unceasingly growing phenomenon, named telework, selected from various writings will support to manifest the hypothesis of the contemporary business conduct for public



administration in light of efficiency, effectiveness, equity and accountability in its primary role not only in providing services but also, enriching and inspiring lives in the community as a whole.

### *What is Telework?*

Telework means working from outside the traditional office and using technology to perform assignments and to communicate with that office (Louie, 2017). The concept of alternative work place will be presented under “Telework,” “Telecommuting,” “Alternative work schedule,” “Alternative Workplace” interchangeably (Apgar, 1998). The meaning of Telework is to complete the work regardless of location (Edwards, 2001). The term “telecommuting” refers to work from home through the use of telephone, fax machines, computers, printers, modems, and Internet connection. When employees take their work home, they transform a part of their living space to an office or workplace for the organization they work for (McQuarrie, 1994).

During the last few decades, technological advancements have facilitated remote or flexible workforce in many organizations worldwide. The technological advancements include computers, laptops, mobile telephones, Internet connection and link with its increasingly fast connection and data transfer speeds, as well as numerous application and software enabling the completion of the automated tasks. These technologies provide the opportunity to work in virtual offices through the facilitation of communication technology. In 1974, Jack Niles, a rocket scientist from NASA, invented the term “telecommuting” one day when he was trapped in traffic on his way to work. Academics recognized the words “telework” and “teleworkers” most adequately describe employees performing their assignments remotely, as “tele” meaning distance combining with the word “work” work that is inferred to work done from a distance. A teleworker is defined as an employee who works at home or another than the main office she/he

is assigned to work, consistently working one or more days in a week or month. The telework was invented to satisfy 24-hour customer support worldwide, information and communication technology advancement and employees' interest in flexible work arrangement, attract a new workforce, increase productivity, reduce overhead costs, decrease the need to drive to work, reduce traffic and fuel consumption, lessen air pollution (Hoffman, 2002).

### *Problem Statement*

Two years after laws passed creating telework programs in 2010, about 25% of U.S. service employees were participating in the telework program. Managers rushed to implement the telework program following the established eligibility criteria. The results from surveys conducted involving federal employees have shown that teleworkers felt isolated and that managers lacked in tactics and strategies to ensure the connectedness of teleworkers and effectiveness of the telework. Moreover, the lack of sufficient and adequate training was apparent for the groundwork starting and supporting such programs (Millis, 2016). The general problem is that the experience of teleworking in organizations is limited to a small number of employees. Further, limited research exists on telework programs contributing to the successful operation and achievement of organizational goals under effective leadership and management. Advantages of the telework program are many yet the assumption is that it benefits employees and the community more than the organization. To provide support to these issues, the research approach chosen is a qualitative study of experiences from employees who currently telework two or more days each week for a period of at least two years.

## II. Analytic Framework

Preceding studies underlined the organizational, personal, and social advantages of telework. It is mainly linked to productivity increase and cost savings, life-work balance, and job satisfaction, reducing air pollution, and improving air quality because of reduced driving to work.

### *Literature Review*

In this section, the research around benefits and challenges of the telework program will be discussed. Telework reduces business-operating costs, improves work productivity, and adds magnetism to employment opportunities, and retention (Khaifa & Davidson). Among many organizations, AT&T took an initiative to start telecommuting. On September 20, 1994, about thirty-two thousand employees started working from home. It made sense and was a great strategy for the telephone company to start such an experiment as it advertised and encouraged the usage of telephone service (Apgar, 1998). This test that included one hundred thousand people came to prove that it is possible all levels of the employees to work from home instead of the traditional office settings and be more productive as it motivates managers and administrators to test where else other than the office the workers would like to work. It has been estimated that since 1991, AT&T saved \$550 million by reducing the number of offices that they did not need. Hence, the alternate workplace provisions could not only increase productivity but also it would decrease business costs. Fortunately, the best practices from the companies using these programs and succeeding in effectiveness and efficiency offer a variety of options, which allow the organizations to choose and even alter such programs to suit their needs (Apgar, 1998).

The new requirements by Congress for enabling 100 percent of eligible agency employees to telecommute by 2004 based on many benefits of telework programs in the Public

Sector. Telework initiatives enhance the recruitment and retention of the workforce, increase employee satisfaction and efficiency, decrease absenteeism, and lowers office-related costs (West, 2001). The telework program has many benefits, such as decreased absenteeism, employee job satisfaction, which increased productivity in comparison with non-telecommuters. Moreover, it advances the organization to the next higher level in a competitive business world and progresses it to a result-oriented management environment (Wilkes et al., 1994).

Surveys taken from employees participating in the Mobility Initiative revealed that employees were more productive and effective when performing their duties from home (Apgar, 1998). The commercial reasons for telecommuting include the development of new and modern communication technologies, an increase in sales, being competitive in the world of business and success in productivity, decrease absenteeism and labor costs, increase the effectiveness in operation, improve organizational agility and public responsiveness. Telework enhances computer knowledge, expands and speeds up the information and communication processing, increases productivity, serves as recruiting advantage and employee retention tool, provides flexibility to employees and reduces office space costs, and saves funds (Goodrich, 1990). Telework benefits employees and by benefiting employees, the organization benefits itself. Happy employees increase productivity, which benefits the organization, reduces commuting time and reduced physical presence reduces costs on parking and office space costs and attracts new employees in a competitive job market. The workers' inability to psychologically separate work and home because they work from home makes them workaholics, which in turn benefit the employer. The company saves office space and equipment when employees work from home, while employees have to create an office space in their homes without getting reimbursement from the employer. Furthermore, the employer gains at the price of the

employees' expense. The telework comprises assignments for the workers in isolation and control by the management of the organization, which results in higher productivity and increased productivity since there is no distraction. The companies exercising telework programs reduce the number of offices since the office is relocated to the worker's home. Thus, employees who telework pay for the employer's expenses indirectly. Telework provides several societal benefits (McQuarrie, 1994). Telework is a cost-effective way to manage human capital, boost productivity, and improve the quality of employee lives (Meadows, 2007).

Another benefit of telecommuting is that in the most dangerous case scenarios of terrorism, a threat of widespread disease and natural disasters cannot stop the continuous operation of the organization. Working remotely and being able to work continually at home, will sustain the government's infrastructure and function (Snyder, 2012). Moreover, it benefits the quality of air and environment, because the fewer commuters on the streets and freeways, the less pollution caused by fuel energy usage. Consequently, the health condition of sick people, mainly children and the elderly with respiratory diseases will improve and their number will decrease. Another benefit is it's a positive effect on productivity due to decreased absenteeism as employees are likely to work from home even if they are sick (Snyder, 2012). Telework programs reduce traffic and air pollution (McQuarrie, 1994). Furthermore, telework based on virtual communication and teamwork attracts the new workforce as people like working from home because it saves them money and time. Hence, the telework offers effectiveness, efficiency, and equity to the organization, employees, population, and taxpayers.

There are personal motives for interest in telecommuting such as saving themselves from commuting, saving time to do something else than driving, need for more free time to pursue other interests, starting or continuing education, and being more productive. Moreover,

teleworking employees save on food, clothing, and transportation. Telework allows employees to be more productive with a sense of own control over what they are and with fewer interruptions.

Although benefits of telecommuting program are many, the organizations are taking time to adopt such programs because the adoption and implementation can be challenging like any other transformation that requires a change in culture, a new approach from the administration, and management improvement within the organization (Apgar, 1998). There are apparent top-down planning problems when the evaluation of the effectiveness was not completed due to a lack of face-to-face interaction. The management does not know how the workers are doing or whether workers are productive or effective or need help and support or other resources (Brotherton, 2012). First, the organization has to be ready for a change; otherwise, regardless of the program's beneficial aspects, it will not succeed. The culture and management style has to change from "line of sight" to "results-oriented." The organization should determine whether the employees' tasks could be completed in a remote environment or it must be performed in the office because it deals with confidential information; if the job requires mandatory face-to-face interactions with clients, management or coworkers and the general public. Additionally, an assessment should be conducted to know if the work can be completed regardless of the location, electronically and if the results can be measured, and working independently is desired. Moreover, an evaluation has to be completed if the nature of the task involves access and usage of the resources available in the office and/or remote working is prohibited.

The recommendations for the successful telework program include training supervisors, managers, and employees to expand the concepts and components of telework because most of the decisions during the telework are made with employee and supervisor level. The Telework program offers many benefits for employers and employees but it is essential to carefully plan

and design it. The organization ought to assess its time to responsiveness and create a healthy working relationship and environment for supervisors and employees to perform their tasks and duties. Finally, it is the organization's responsibility to provide resources to enable remote work alternatives through electronic connection and data processing systems (Edwards, 2001).

Organizations that do not show interest and take action toward the change. The organizations ought to set a goal to identify telework as in their best interest, design focus groups to use it as a productivity enhancement tool (Khaifa & Davidson, 2000). The manager responds that it takes about three months for teleworkers to go through the change and get used to teleworking. They explained that the transitional period could cause a loss of productivity. However, when the tuning period is over, the productivity increases. The managers insist on person-to-person interaction at least a few days in a week so that they don't feel isolated (Goodrich, 1990).

Working at home people experience issues with physical and psychological differences of separation between personal and professional lives. When the concept of telework is examined in a larger context, the technological aspect brings forth issues of control overwork. Some compare employees working from home to "cottage"-based, pre-Industrial Revolution type of work when people made things home and sold their products.

Due to the Industrial Revolution, mass production because of heavy machinery, the work was centralized in one working space and work was divided into smaller tasks. The first, perhaps the most important benefit of telework is the reduced traffic and air pollution (McQuarrie, 1994).

In 2010, U.S. legislators passed a law that significantly amplified telework opportunities for federal employees. President Obama signed and advised the federal administrators to provide the federal employees with the opportunity to work remotely. The intention was to implement a program that ensures the readiness for continuous operation of the federal workforce under any

circumstance. The implementation of the policy has started, however, it triggered complaints and dissatisfaction from 25% of managers reporting that teleworking impacts negatively on workplace relations and teamwork. However, the program decreased office space costs by 35%, improved employee retention by 20%, and provided many benefits such as; continuing operation during disasters, saved energy, and solved traffic congestion difficulty to a significant degree (Millis, 2016). Although telework presented many benefits, the managers and teleworkers faced many challenges. Lack of commitment from the leaders due to inadequate leadership skills, absence of abilities for virtual team building and management, inefficient training and preparation, deficiency in employee motivation are challenges when employees telework (Millis, 2016). This study attempts to direct attention to the opportunity of policy implementation with the new tributary in transformational leadership accelerating with the technological phenomenal progresses (Louie, 2017). Leaders encourage the followers and constituents to participate in professional groups and decision-making processes dealing with critical issues involving business (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). “Leadership is a process whereby the individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal “ (Northouse, 2013 p. 2). Transformational leadership is the process when an individual involves others and makes a connection that promotes and raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. To create and implement change, transformational leaders are the best role models for their followers because they are confident and expressive with a poignant magnetism and approachability (Northouse, 2013). Teleworking or alternative work programs are a novelty in the organizations, yet it has already attracted the attention of many employees from different organizations including organizations in the Public Sector. President Obama signed the 2010 Telework Enhancement Act requiring agencies to come up with a strategy for teleworking



programs and encouraged Federal leaders to create and adopt different approaches to motivate and encourage employees, which required them the possessing skills to lead by virtual communication (Snyder, 2012). Thus, Federal leaders needed to learn necessary and vital leadership skills and approach, and problem-solving skills to be able to ensure own individual commitment and accountability, and interrelation with the diverse workforce as a team, in providing services to the public with the synergy of walking in the world of technological fast growth and indispensable transformation in Public Administration. Research on virtual teams suggests that organizational success heavily depends on the leadership skills of the leaders and managers as this factor contributes to an effective and efficient virtual team's function and results (Gebhart, 2020). E-leadership a new phenomenon of leadership and its pursuit is to add knowledge in managing a successful telework program through Information and communication technology (Louie, 2017). E-leadership is different from a conservative way of understanding and explaining leadership based on face-to-face interaction and practices because e-leadership refers to leaders who communicate primarily through information technology. While some people think that e-leadership is based on the same competencies as known leadership styles with the same goal and leading mechanism, the e-leadership requires special skills and behavior to effectively and successfully lead virtual teams (Lilian, 2014). In general, change or implementation of a new program in an organization creates threats and at the same time providing with chances to turn those into opportunities. Thus, the increasing interest and demand on organizations to propose telecommuting options to employees, first of all, generate challenges for the leadership (Louie, 2017). If the organization has already adopted transformational leadership, the implementation would not be impossible. The absence of proper leadership causes problems and prevents the successful implementation of telework to enable and increase

in productivity and employee well being (Gebhart, 2019). The main problem common to many organizations in the public sector is the leaders' lack of knowledge and understanding in organizing virtual leadership and management to enable an effective Telework program. Additionally, insufficient training could be another reason the program is not as successful to include more employees who are interested in participating in the Telework program (Louie, 2017).

### *Research Question*

#### *How Can Telework Contribute to the Administration of Social Services in the Public Sector?*

The purpose of this paper is to explore the theory of alternative workplace program as a new way of doing business in the public sector. Additionally, it recognizes the telework program benefits along with its challenges and complications, and evaluates its effects on the business and people in general, this study intends to contribute to the studies of the telework as an alternative way to conduct business in social services in the public sector. The unique context of the research question conveys the purpose of the study and involves the leadership aspect of the theory. The qualitative research method would be the best option to explore and connect dots to conclude analysis and discussion from the theoretical and experimental discoveries.

### *Purpose Statement*

The growing demand for telework requires more than applying guidelines established in the Telework Act of 2010. The main intention of this study is the detection of possibilities to improve and enable the advanced implementation of the Telework program within the public sector. The problems involving the implementation of the Telework program included discussing the employer, employee and social advantages, challenges in leadership and management styles, infrastructure changes, criteria for mass inclusion (Hoffman, 2002). Peer-reviewed articles from

scholarly journal research and studies using qualitative methods were reviewed. This study addresses the telecommuters' perceptions of Telework program with its benefits to organizations, employees and stakeholders. Additionally, it attempts to direct attention on the Telework program implementation under e-leadership. This analysis tries to help better understand the theory of the telework program, challenges of the implementation involving leadership and its strategies, human resource, and technological aspects.

### III. Methodology

#### *Design*

Selecting a qualitative phenomenological approach was the best design in attempts to answer the research question, which subsequently serves as a solution to the problem placed under the spotlight. The reason is that the concept of phenomenology provides a guideline to ask open-ended questions and receive descriptive stories from the involved parties and individuals that encounter or live through experiences of the subject phenomenon (Louie, 2017). The best option for this study was the qualitative method because not only does it provide the opportunity to learn what others said and shared about the subject, but it also allows the researcher to explore people's views and opinions about the topic through open-ended interview questions as well. By gaining awareness through interviews, makes it possible to better understand the complexity of the issues connected with teleworking and difficulties in the program implementation and successful results. Moreover, this study discusses the importance of leadership and technology as important components in telework program implementation and highlights the advantages and disadvantages of the Telework program from the people who have been telecommuting at least three years and more. Thus, this study uses the insights and practices of managers involved in dealing with organizing and executing telework programs in the social services department, teleworking supervisors' and employees' perceptions of telework based on their involvement to discover real-life experiences about telework program. The collection of the data has been conducted through interview questions addressed to selected employees and first-line supervisors who currently telecommute and managers who oversee the teleworkers. During the interview, it was asked if he/she could explain more if clarification was necessary to let the respondents expand their stories of personal encounters about their thoughts of telecommuting. In addition to

some questions to get comprehensive answers, questions, “Why do you think?” or “How do you feel” of the point they brought up and discussed during their responses were helpful. When the interview process was completed, the narratives from the interview answers I collected were codified under categories and made ready for analysis.

### *Participant Recruitment and Protection*

Purposive sampling method has been used as the entire sample was made of representatives with desired characteristics for this project. The participants all telecommute at least two years twice or more days a week. The expectation was to hear about employer and employee benefits, common good, how well are in-group telephone or virtual meetings are managed, and how well the overall telework program is organized and managed in the department in their opinion. The respondents participated voluntarily, knowingly that the participation is confidential and anonymous. Three respondents who are currently in managerial positions were selected, meaning that each designated participant has a high-level management position with high-level of responsibility, authority over more than thirty subordinates which includes at list twenty-five telecommuters, and/or decision-making powers within one section in Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services. Five teleworking respondents hold supervisory positions reporting to a higher rank manager. Supervising telecommuters supervise at least five telecommuting employees. Twelve teleworking respondents report to teleworking supervisors. When the recruitment process initiated the probable participants were contacted via email and telephone communication and they were advised of the reason for conducting a scholarly study for the university project and selecting respondents who agree and are willing to share his/her perceptions about the Telework program in the organization. There were a total of twenty participants selected for this research study. The recruitment process took place during

our breaks/lunch and/or after work hours. The actual interviews also took place during lunch hour and /or after work over the telephone. An electronic correspondence was sent to each participant to explain that the interview is for a study for school project connected to purpose and entirely confidential and his or her identity will not be disclosed in the study. Likewise, it was ensured that each participant agreed to participate in interview process voluntarily to avoid anyone feeling obligatory or enforced to comply. When the purpose of the interview was explained and agreement has been reached, a verbal consent was obtained and arranged a suitable time to interview over the telephone. The guidelines for the recruitment followed to the goals and principles of Human Subject Protection. Due to voluntary nature of the study, Right to Self-determination or “autonomy” has been considered. The respondents were not from protected class (children, prisoners/institutionalized, diminished cognitive capacity, pregnant, minorities) who have diminished autonomy and needed additional protection. During the interviews, the respondents were treated with respect and were given reasonable time to respond. It was also ensured that participants comprehended the benefits and risks of contributing to the study. No compensation was offered or pressure placed on anyone to take a part in the interview process. Furthermore, none of the respondents questioned are considered a vulnerable population (e.g., homeless, economically disadvantaged); therefore, no supplementary safeguard was needed to protect or defend the rights and welfare of the voluntary participants. This study involved no risk to participants; therefore, a verbal consent sufficed.

### *Measures*

The interview guide and questions served as the main instrument for collecting data in this qualitative research study. The interviews assumed discussions that stimulated respondents to share their real-life experiences from involvements, and perception of the telework program

within the department/section. The goal of the study has been accomplished by initiating and developing a focused and structured interview guide, comprising right questions that enabled to identify each respondent's attitudes and behaviors, opinions and needs, feelings, and experiences about the telework programs that they have been either monitoring or participating in. It was ensured that the questions were asked in a logical order, to assist in avoiding misunderstanding and confusion during the course of the interview. The atmosphere during the interviews was friendly because an authentic relationship has been established between the interviewer and the respondents. The participants' answers were honest and welcoming. The interview questions are included in Appendix A.

The quantity and quality of most of the questions were appropriate given that each key question was designed to determine how social-economic and employee readiness or knowledge in technology factors influence their overall performance, whether there is any evidence of the effects of Telework program on productivity, and the leadership's role in the program implementation as previous researches suggested. Questions were open-ended so that the respondents had an opportunity to expand their stories in sharing their viewpoints about the subject and provide valuable information. The questions were designed to be ethical, appropriate, transparent, coherent, valid, and addressing specifically the research topic. Taking notes preserved the data from the answers.

#### *Data Collection*

The interviews were conducted over the telephone, during lunch hour or after work hours, in allowing respondents to share their thoughts about telework in general. Before and after each interview, the participants were thanked for participating in the interview process for the study and reassured of my ethical considerations not to disclose their identity. The reason and intention

for confidentiality were to receive the most honest and brave replies from the respondents. Respondents were reminded that the notes that taken and data gathered were only for my academic commitment and that the confidentiality rule will be respected as his and or her name would remain anonymous. They were encouraged to engage in a talk rather than just answering to the questions asked. During the interview, relationships were established to have honest expression of the thoughts. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. During the interview, individual notes were taken from the respondents' responses.

### *Data Analysis*

A coding approach was applied to categorize and analyze the interview responses. Subsequently, from these analyses, three themes emerged: organizational, employee benefits and social economic significance and the leadership phase of its implementation. Managers use the practices from decades of experience to newly strategize and synergize the execution of the telework program within the section parallel to technology novelties. While keeping the guidelines flexible, the data collection process was based on the philosophies and procedure of stranded theory, so that copies of the interviews were not needed for the record keeping. When all the interviews were conducted, data was sorted and process of analysis has started. Data was classified through the coding and categories, comparison, defining, and linking the data to refine concepts. Additionally, based on the previous literature and research study a theory was conceptualized and developed. It is helpful to use and follow memo-writing guidelines as it was efficient and ensured transparency throughout the process of research supporting this study and tracking decision-making (Hennink et al., 2011). The respondents' replies were measured by deductive and inductive codes. The deductive codes were developed from the telework theory framework in the available research literature, driven by the questions. Inductive codes were



applied to the respondents' viewpoints were likewise considered to sustain and/or challenge the existing research literature. Thus, to develop inductive codes, it was analyzed whether the respondents talked about any other benefits or difficulties from their telecommuting experiences; then it was determined whether any other underlying concepts that have not previously considered or addressed to include in the findings. The vital codes were included it in the findings. Consequently, the data gathered from the interviews were appropriate because they recurred or repetition in primary concepts that helped to create a list of ciphers relevant to this research study (Hennink et al., 2011).

### *Themes*

Based on the summary of responses, four themes emerged from the interviews: organizational, employee, social benefits of telework program and its leadership aspect for successful implementation. The benefits including organizational, employee and social economic significance of the telework program are discussed further in this and following sections. The majority of the answers given by the participants conveyed their own understanding and support for the telework program because of its benefits to organization, themselves and the community. Interestingly, eighty-five percent of the respondents spoke about the absence of leadership and how disorderly the department started the mass telework program due to Covid-19 pandemic since February of 2020. Employees were working from the offices until mid March, when the department closed its doors to the public and implemented rules for public and employee health and safety. Sixty percent of respondents did not participate in meetings from the time when they started working remotely. They stated that due to coronavirus outbreak in the County, they work remotely and during the period of six months they did not participate in virtual or audio in-group meetings. However, they were able to connect to their immediate supervisors when help needed

via electronic mail or telephone contact. They stated that electronic mail is the main method for connection and the only County information network. The respondents specified receiving emails from the director of Human Resources and the CEO about the Covid-19 County updates. They mentioned about the special situation and that the department administration was not ready for the change because of the emergency situation due to lack of either experience or governance in state of emergency.

Researches explored and examined transformational leadership as a key leadership style to implement change; however leading in a remote environment is a new situation for them. Many researches of Telework lack to discuss the leadership in a remote context of work environment. In some situations, researchers talk about the virtual leaders or leaders of virtual teams remotely connecting with the employees in the central office to conduct or participate in virtual meetings. Leadership through computer technology is called virtual leadership or e-leadership (electronic leadership). The model of e-leadership is different from any leadership style because the communication, which is the foundation of leadership, is different from traditional face-to-face routine. This new phenomenon in leadership philosophies is essential when implementing telework program in the public sector. According to researches, the new aspect in leadership is the communication technology. Thus, in addition to its many benefits the telework program will contribute to understanding and learning e-leadership concepts. This is important because effective leadership is the groundwork for acceleration on organization toward its goals and objectives (Louie, 2017).

### *Findings*

The findings from this study are important because they authenticate the telework program implementation in public social services. Moreover, it was found that managers and

supervisors are very understanding of subordinates participating in the telework program. All twenty participants liked to telecommute. Employees pointed out that they are being micromanaged because they must complete a detailed report of every little thing they did to complete hours of the duty, while working in the office they are not required completing a daily report. They also mentioned that to complete a daily report itself is a time-consuming task and that they rather would work. They said there is no point or reason for completing a report because supervisors and management see the result of their performance in the end of the day. Employees connected the detailed reporting to micromanagement and said not only completing a detailed report for the task accomplished, is time-consuming but also it is frustrating and stressful. Supervisors saw the mandatory daily reporting responsibility as the only and important tool for monitoring employees' daily activities while working remotely. The management had no other tool to offer for supervising telecommuters. Based on employees' views of telecommuting, the management and supervisors supported micromanaging and remain task oriented rather than willing to change to result-oriented to increase productivity. Employees do not participate in in-group meetings when they telecommute. For the general meetings, they report to the main office even on telecommute days. Thus, virtual in-group meetings are not being conducted to connect the telecommuting employees. Fourteen respondents said, although leaders preach and present themselves as pioneers or supporters of change in social services department within the Los Angeles County, the deficiency of leading remote work and workers skills is apparent.

### *Key Survey Findings*

The respondents talked about the increased productivity and how happy they were being able to be work from home and use their own time for themselves and their families rather than drive to get to and from work. They talked about saving money as well due to decreased

spending on personal items such as clothes, cosmetics, shoes and food. Seventeen respondents said that they worked remotely the days that they feel sick because they would not worry of the coworkers' well being when the illness was contagious. The respondents were happy about contributing to air quality by reducing gas emission from cars while driving. They all acknowledged its benefits to society due to its positive impact on environment and air quality. Hence, the social economic significance and the program's positive impact on the environment were fully understood and supported by all respondents.

The respondents extended their replies and conveyed additional information. Fifteen respondents said that the organization presents the telework program as a privilege rather than a mechanism for production increase and cost cut. Eighteen respondents stated that the organization uses the telework program as a reward. They said the management offers the telecommuting work schedule as a privilege and based on Air Quality Act rather than efficiency measure or cost cutting initiative. Employees and supervisors said that the entire department and employees who are interested should be given the opportunity to participate in the telework program.

The respondents also talked about disadvantages of telecommuting. Eleven respondents talked about isolation and disconnect from others. The employees criticized the mandatory daily reports that they submit to their supervisors. They all found daily reports unnecessary because reports do not support the productivity or well being of employees but rather, hinder the performance due to wasted time and affect employees' health negatively because of frustration. Twelve respondents perceived the daily task reports as micromanagement, which impacts the productivity negatively due to time spent to complete it. Furthermore, sixteen respondents stated that they feel isolated and detached from the organization due to absence of connection through

in-group virtual or audio meetings. Fifteen participants said in-group meetings and discussions would be helpful to feel in the gap of divide and disconnect and perhaps organizing in-group meetings is an administrative matter. Eight of the respondents participated in video in-group meetings and only ten of them participated in audio in-group meetings during the telework days.

The results of different studies indicate that a key to success of the telework program is in careful planning and execution of personnel management matters (Goodrich, 1990). The planning includes the strategic approach of providing all the technological tools and training employees. Further, the managers ought to trust the remote workers and assist them when needed and set clear expectations (Goodrich, 1990). Active participant and transformational leadership practices and encourages relationships with innovative action using reward as a motivational approach to achieve success in their goals with greater performance level (Chen & Chen 2009). Jobs involve certain characteristics, such as; using computers and telephone to perform tasks, mundane information usage, requiring less face-to-face contact, tasks performed mainly independently and/or later combined project-oriented responsibilities, and a minimal necessity for space (Goodrich, 1990). The experiment conducted in the Office of Information Resources Management (OIRM) showed that more than 50% of the participants were interested to stay with the organization, if telework is a work schedule option for them, it means the Telework schedule will attract more job seekers and candidates as an advantage over the organizations that do not offer flexible work schedules (Thormahlen, 2001). While the positions in the public sector are under strict and set salary limitations, the flex place schedule can play the role of an additional benefit to the employees (Thormahlen, 2001). The advanced technology eliminated long processes of the employees' tasks without the need of being physically present in the office and increased the quality of their personal and professional lives. Employees did not have to spend

time commuting to and from the office. Many studies concluded that the benefit of the implementation of the telework program first of all encompassed the advancement of technology, brought in innovation in operation, and modernized all levels of the organization (Watad & DiSanzo, 2000).

## IV. Background

### *Preparation and Planning*

The preparation and planning for the telework program implementation should include investigating and studying the organization's needs and culture, nature of the work executed, and supervisor and employee association and characteristics (Edwards, 2001). The results of different studies indicate that a key to success is in careful planning and execution of personnel management matters (McQuarrie, 1994). The planning includes the strategic approach of providing all the technological tools and training employees. Further, the managers ought to trust the remote workers and assist them when needed and set clear expectations (Goodrich, 1990). The phenomenon of telework has to be examined at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. Telework might be more beneficial to the employers than the employees, but due to incompetent management control and inaction, it can be inefficient and unsuccessful (McQuarrie, 1994). Many enthusiastic progressive organizations adopted telework programs to encourage employees to change lifestyles and be happy working for the organization. In a telecommuting agreement between the employer and telecommuter, the power and control are in employers' hands in addition to benefiting more (McQuarrie, 1994).

The initiation of a pilot telework program has to start from introducing the program as a beneficial option with educating and training the line managers and supervisors. Additionally, clearly defined roles and responsibilities of involved parties and agreements would establish expectations for employees and managers. Further, trust in the program and timely job performance evaluation program is expected to form the supervisors and line managers. Precise and consistent guidance for the teleworkers addressing work ethics and values, goals, and objectives as encouragement is a tool to achieve effectiveness and efficiency (Meadows, 2007).

Further, the cost savings from real estate as the organization consolidated its offices, was used to purchase laptops and necessary other equipment for remote workflow without interruptions or any security concerns. At the beginning of the program implementation, the organization might incur expenses such as the purchase of laptop computers, hiring professionals, as some staff that was not suited or was unable to walk with changes and use new technologies and sophisticated applications, but in the long run, the organization would profit more than it spent (Watah & DiSanzo, 2000).

The management should set expectations of the virtual employees' performance and responsiveness and employees are responsible to meet those expectations. Much research has shown that the cubicles are empty about 30% to 40% when employees are at the office and besides, managers cannot be certain whether the employees are busy with doing work and not doing something else on their computers (Weisberg, A., & Porell, M., 2011). Furthermore, as the government business evolves, work becomes more projects based involving a collaboration of many departments and units within and outside of the administration (Weisberg & Porell, 2011). There is increasing validation that employees working remotely are more productive. For example the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) adopted a telework program allowing the employees flexibility and control over their work, which resulted 10% productivity increase and saving millions of dollars on real estate costs. It is no surprise that the NRC was recognized as number one place to work in federal government. If telework program were done properly, it would motivate employees to perform to their maximum potential and meet and exceed the performance expectation and be content about it (Weisberg & Porell, 2011). There is a misconception that managers are being "protective" of their sections. Their judgment and belief that the telework is not going to work for them counterattacks the telework program



implementation. However, the contemporary world of public administration demands change and a positive approach to change that is going to benefit the organization and the services they provide to the communities. The managers should take the opportunity to be pioneers to change and be examples for others to follow (Weisberg & Porell, 2011). Moreover, the evaluation of the survey revealed that employees and management are not fully satisfied with the way the program was operating due to a lack of proper guidance.

The resolution for eliminating the barriers from the study addressed the improvement of IT design, collaboration within the organization, investing in technology, safeguarding the security of the remote access to organization's application and data systems, training, educating and guiding the teleworking staff in all areas of responsibilities, including informing the organization's telework policies (West, 2002). An individual who is committed to the program's success should lead the program (Wilkes, Frolick, & Urwiler, 1994). The preparation and synchronization of the process for a successful Telework program in the Public Sector because will result in changes (West, 2001). While virtual workforce under telework programs offers many benefits, many federal leaders hinder the process with different fallacies and excuses, such as; failures to manage when employees physically are not present or there is no point in benefiting employees, but rather, the reason is a lack of interest due to fear of change (Snyder, 2012).

Laws for telework process and implementation have been passed and documents are written since 1990, however, it wasn't taken seriously because managers viewed it as an employee entitlement and problem on themselves. This type of thinking is mainly based on the existing perceptions such as: out of sight out of mind, telework days are different from office days; technology is expensive and insecure, not in my department (Weisberg & Porell, 2011).

Based on the possibilities enabled by sophisticated yet user-friendly communication and information technologies, the organizations can expand the magnitude to connect government agencies and departments. It is amazing how synchronized operations within the organization will allow the employees not only to accomplish goals and objectives but also to achieve extraordinary results. It is empirical that the Information Technology (IT) had a design and capability to ensure that the organization achieved not only its goal to automate its processing sales operation, but augmented accountability and enhanced service delivery through telework programs. Moreover, computer task performance through computerized software allows the organization to perfect its processing, including automated search engines for information updates and data storage. Managers move from being a task controller to result-oriented superiors. Furthermore, the fast technological communication system improved the decision making process faster which in turn made companies' responsiveness quicker. Thus, starting a telecommuting program requires thorough preparation because it calls for changes in most organizational scopes and capacities as well as policies (Wataid & DiSanzo, 2000). While with today's available sophisticated yet simple to use computer control access, the managers can review tasks employees are working on at any moment in time and connect with them via email and conduct individual as well as group virtual meetings. Moreover, if the managers think and approach the telework as an opportunity to work smarter and in a contemporary way of thinking of effectiveness and efficiency, telework is highly possible, doable, and required. Hence, technology provides all the possibilities that decrease the level of importance for location the work is performed (Weisberg & Porell, 2011). In response to a Congressional request in 2002, a report from General Services Administration's (GSA) office of government wide home-based policy revealed that there were no IT problems to constrain or delay the success of the telework

program in government agencies. The report was based on the study incorporating organizations such as: Health and Human Services, Departments of Commerce, the Justice, Interior, the Treasury, and Veterans Affairs; the Federal Trade Commission; GSA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, NASA; and National Imagery and Mapping Agency. The recommendations resulted from the findings and conclusion of the same study included Senior Management Leadership area. The recommendations emphasized the importance of the federal guidance to support the senior management to lead the implementation of telework program successfully (West, 2002).

## V. Conclusion

### *Limitations of the Study*

Like any example of qualitative research; this research study has its strengths and limitations. Under the time constraints, this was a great opportunity to learn about a very interesting topic with its modern widespread interest in the business world, both in public and private sectors. Excitingly, it was possible to interview more participants than initially projected. Each participant was asked all of the questions that were prepared to ask. Although audio recording was not conducted for interviews, taking detailed notes preserved originality of the respondents' answers. The limitation of this article is that the participants were selected from one department in the public sector. Any judgment from the researcher was suspended and own perception during the interviews and took a neutral stand when analyzing data. The respondents were free to express their thoughts about the telework experiences and tell their stories without withholding any feelings and thoughts that they wanted to convey.

### *Implications and Recommendations*

Although this study has limitations, the results could add value to the overall phenomenon of telework program implementation and the concept of e-leadership in the public sector. The reason is that it brings the e-leadership or remote leadership aspect to the frontline and distinguishes the face-to-face environment to a virtual environment (Louie, 2017). There is a great opportunity for a future research to address the current transformational leadership presence or absence and e-leadership aspects in bureaucratic governance environment in public sector as an eliciting force to implement the Telework program to benefit the organization, employees and the community in an effective, efficient, accountable and equitable manner under any circumstance. The novel coronavirus, also known as Covid-19, has impacted public service

and lives of millions of people in Los Angeles County in many ways. Due to health and safety quarantine, the Department of Public Social Services, which provides essential public assistance benefits to millions of county residents closed its doors to the community. Although the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted the telework program since January 31st 1989, the department was not ready when the emergency situation of Covid-19 hit. Employees were given a schedule to work from home two to three days a week to maintain social distancing. The department did not have sufficient number of laptops to provide to provide remotely working employees. However, employees agreed to have their personal computers to be secured and updated to use for county's business. The control mechanism of the gateway to sensitive confidential electronic data enabled the remote operation through the Internet connection. With its many challenges, employees continue performing their duties from home and providing services to the community in the state of emergency. Hence, the telework program and readiness to transition from the traditional office setting to teleworking, in cases of disaster or any state of emergency, the public social services offices not only will continue the usual daily operation but also ensure the distribution or issuance supplemental benefits provided by the state and federal governments.

### *Qualitative Research*

Even though qualitative research is subjective, this study was applicable because respondents provided their views of telecommuting. In asking a variety of questions, the interviewees exposed their perceptions of teleworking and how they do it. Based on analysis of the respondents' perceptions, they had similar thoughts and views about telecommuting. This fact validates the research as a prospective alternative work schedule with its benefits of being effective, efficient, and equitable to the organizations, employees, and society as a whole.

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## Appendix A

For the managers:

1. How many Teleworkers do you manage?
2. How long have you been organizing and managing the Telework program?
3. Do you conduct group or team meetings via Telecommunication?
4. Do you provide equipment to the Teleworkers?
5. Do reimburse Teleworking employees any expenses incurred due to telework?
6. Do you support the Telework program?
7. Do you think it is beneficial to the organization? Why?
8. Would you support the departmental participation in the program? Why?

For the Participating in Telework Supervisors: and employees:

1. Do you think the management of Telework is well organized? Why?
2. Do you organize and/or participate in in-group meetings via Telecommunication during your Telework days?
3. How well are group communications organized? Are they informational and meet your expectation?
4. Is all the necessary equipment available to you for Telecommuting?
5. Have you been trained for the Telework? If yes, do you find the training efficient? If no do find training is necessary?
6. Do you like teleworking? Why?
7. Is there any reason you don't like Telework?
8. What are the weekly reasonable Telework days? Why?