

HUMAN RESOURCES ACTIVITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES

HUMAN RESOURCES ACTIVITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEDERAL HUMAN
RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BY

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DISSERTATION

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HUMAN RESOURCES ACTIVITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEDERAL
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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to describe and explore the lived experiences of Human Resource (HR) professionals as they conducted recruitment and retention activities within an organizational environment permeated with COVID-19 restrictions. Transitioning to the COVID-19 restricted environment was alive with turbulence, substantive change, and economizing. Corporate cultures, business functions, and human resource practices changed rapidly, without notice or prediction. This lack of planning prevented management from adequately coordinating the strategic planning needed to transition to this new environment. In addition, some federal agencies that decided to suspend hiring or reduce recruitment found even more challenges as employees chose to withdraw from the workforce earlier than anticipated because of COVID 19 related challenges and concerns, as stated by Shilling (2020). These combined factors posed an immediate and potentially long-term challenge for executing sustainable HR recruitment and retention activities. There were no studies that focused specifically on exploring the lived experiences of HR professionals as they perform recruitment and retention activities within an organizational culture permeated with COVID-19 restrictions. The results of this study will make considerable contributions to the Human Resources field, future policy, and the availability of relevant literature. The study's goal was to eliminate a gap in available research and expand the general knowledge and existing pool of literature. The findings confirmed the existence of several workplace vulnerabilities due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The CDC mandated regulations negatively impacted both the organizational culture and employee morale. The study determined the necessity for improved HR processes and procedures, including virtual communication methods and computer-mediated work use.

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Glossary

HR Professional: HR professionals manage an organization's human capital and focus on implementing policies and processes. They can specialize in finding, recruiting, training, developing employees, and maintaining employee relations or benefits.

Recruitment: Recruitment in a federal organization is the process of identifying an open position, determining the best method for attracting talent to fill this position, and opening a vacancy announcement to attract interested candidates. The last step in this process is to onboard the selected candidate.

Retention: Employee retention is when employees stay with their current organization and do not actively seek other job prospects. The opposite of retention is turnover, where employees leave the company for a variety of reasons.

Organizational Culture: Organizational culture explains to an employee “the way we operate in this environment.” It communicates the organizations' history, philosophy, and acceptable business practices. An organization's culture is based on shared beliefs and the inner workings, comprised of both written and unwritten rules.

Office of Personnel Management: The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is the authority for a federal organization's HR policy and procedures. This agency is known as the HR policy and procedure manager for the Federal Government. OPM provides Human Resources leadership and support to Federal organizations and directs Human Resources and Employee Management Services.

Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP): The COOP plan provides requirements, guidance, and procedures for continuing the performance of the organization’s mission essential functions and primary mission essential functions to include Human Resources functions, during a wide range

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of emergencies, including localized acts of nature, accidents, and technological or attack-related emergencies.

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
COOP	Continuity of Operations Plan
AWS	Alternate Work Schedule
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
COVID – 19	Coronavirus Disease 2019

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The rapid spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has impacted the current organizational culture in unanticipated ways. It has caused increased challenges on how Human Resources professionals continue to execute the Human Resources Lifecycle (e.g., recruitment, selection, onboarding, and retention). The primary duties of Human Resources professionals are to recruit, select, onboard, and retain Federal employees in an organizational culture governed with CDC-mandated preventive protection measures. CDC mandates include wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), maintaining six feet spacing from other people (social distancing), frequent hand washing regimens, and remote work to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has placed Federal agencies in uncharted territory. It has created one of the most unpredictable work environments in the U.S. Without notice, organizations proceeded from overcoming recruitment, selection, and retainment challenges to deserted workspaces and dire job loss forecasts.

According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Memorandum 2020-05, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined that COVID-19 meets the definition for severe acute respiratory syndromes referenced in the Executive Order (E.O.) 13674. As a result, Schaltegger (2020) reported the COVID-19 virus as a quarantinable communicable disease. Consequently, OPM encouraged organizations to review and update their emergency and Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) as needed. The successful incorporation of telework and “social distancing” in the COOP and emergency planning allowed Federal agencies to continue functioning in a restricted environment to ensure employee safety and compliance with CDC guidelines. Agency COOP should fully incorporate telework options to

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ensure the continuation of government operations during a pandemic. After the CDC announced that an outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States is inevitable, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2020) released the following statement:

As more cases of COVID-19 continue to spread around the world and within the U.S., employers must take the necessary precautions to prevent the spread of this virus within the workplace. To preempt this potential danger, employers should ensure business continuity plans consider and prepare for biological threats. SHRM recommends employers consider the following preventive measures: Actively encourage sick employees to stay home, send symptomatic employees home until they can return to work safely, and require employees returning from high-risk areas to telework during the incubation period. (p. 2).

In November of that year, CDC statistics showed that more than 13 million people in the United States were diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus, resulting in more than 161,842 deaths (CDC, 2020). Researchers forecasted infections would continue to increase over the next 12-months, infecting 40-70% of the world's population (CDC, 2020). COVID-19 has changed the paradigm of executing organizational Human Resources activities. However, little information is available about the lived experiences of HR professionals performing these duties in the COVID-19 restricted environment.

Statement of the Problem

The transition to conducting HR activities in the COVID-19 environment was alive with turbulence, substantive change, and economizing. Organizational cultures, business functions, and Human Resource practices changed rapidly, without notice or prediction. This prohibited opportunities for management to coordinate strategic plans needed to transition and sustain

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operations in the new COVID restricted environment. Federal organizations suspended hiring or reduced their recruitment efforts; experienced even more challenges as employees, including those with pre-existing conditions, withdrew from the workforce earlier than anticipated because of COVID-19-related challenges and concerns, as stated by Shilling (2020). In addition, researchers found a “large” increase in those who identified as retired among Americans who were not in the labor force. The category of unemployed people rose from 53 to 60 percent Ashcroft (2020). These combined factors posed an immediate and potentially long-term challenge for executing the sustainable HR recruitment and retention activities needed to support organizational operations.

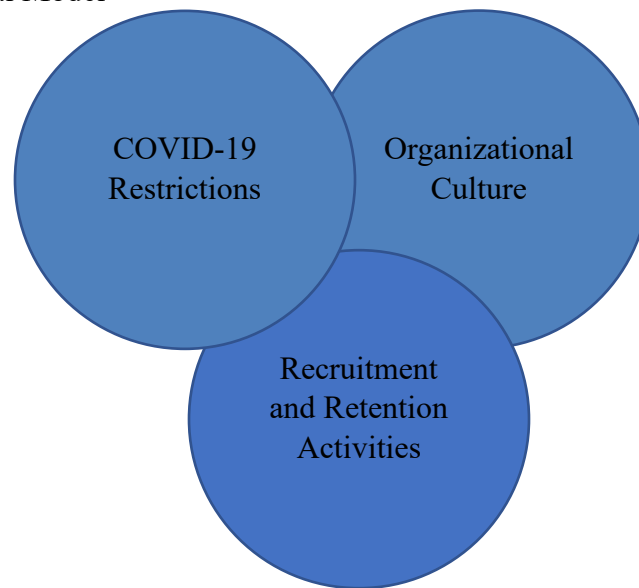
Performing sustainable HR recruitment and retention activities in the pre-COVID environment has extensive research available, as listed by Fattaah et al. (2020); Gupta et al. (2019); McCain (2009); and McCracken et al. (2016). However, according to research, there was no available information when investigating the lived experience of HR professionals as they executed HR activities within the current pandemic environment. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of, and challenges faced by Federal HR professionals as they executed HR recruitment and retention activities within the COVID-19 restricted environment.

Conceptual Framework

This study used a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Federal HR professionals with three constructs. The Conceptual Model shows the constructs examined in this study, which include performing recruitment and retention activities in a COVID-19 restricted environment and the perceived impact on the organizational culture

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Figure 1: Conceptual Model



The researcher developed the questions to gain insight into Federal HR professionals' lived experiences and challenges as they execute HR recruitment and retention activities within the COVID-19 restrictions. In addition, HR professionals' practices and lived experiences lend insight into the best processes and procedures needed to perform such a critical HR function in a CDC-restricted environment such as the one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does the COVID-19 restricted environment impact the HR Professional's ability to recruit and retain Federal employees?

RQ2: How do the COVID-19 restrictions impact the organizational culture in the Federal Government?

RQ3: How do perceptions of organizational culture impact HR policy and decision-making?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceived experiences and challenges faced by Human Resources professionals executing the sustainable Human Resources activities of recruitment and retention of Federal employees in an organizational culture impacted by the CDC mandated restrictions. CDC mandates suspended in-person interactions in this COVID-19 environment. If they were in person, employees were required to exercise social distancing and wear personal protective equipment. In addition, because of the CDC mandates, management officials directed employees to take frequent breaks to conduct hand-washing regiments to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus (CDC, 2020).

After examining the literature, it revealed gaps in research and knowledge of the COVID-19 virus and the impact the restrictions would have on a federal organization's culture and the HR professional's ability to continue recruitment and retention activities. This literature review and research focused on the following: a)—the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; b). Federal organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic c). The role of the HR professional d). Organizational culture and environment, e). Challenges faced by HR professionals

The Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic

By the end of March, most of the U.S. employed population was mandated to perform their duties either via telework or remote work. The restrictions were implemented to prevent the further spread of the COVID-19 virus, included closing public facilities, banning large gatherings, and canceling public events. In late November, over 9.8 million cases of the COVID-19 were listed in the United States. In addition, the CDC recommended additional regiments such as social distancing, strict handwashing, and remote work because of the increased spread of the virus.

Federal Organizations' Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

There is scientific evidence that indicates that the COVID virus originated in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The discovery of this virus caused heightened public awareness about potential health risks to the United States. As stated in the OPM Memorandum 2020-01, a senior Human Resources working group comprised of leaders representing all Federal organizations convened to determine what Federal agencies needed as Human Resources guidance in response to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting concluded with agencies receiving additional HR flexibilities to navigate this pandemic safely. As a result, a myriad of HR flexibilities is now authorized for organizations to use during periods when employees are subject to quarantine or isolation in connection with a national emergency of any type.

As stated by DeFilippis et al. (2020), the COVID-19 global pandemic disrupted the way organizations function; as the number of cases increased, governments across the globe closed their borders and physical work locations to reduce the spread of the virus. As a result, by November of this year, most Americans had to shelter-in-place within their homes, like the citizens of many other countries. Many Federal organizations responded to this new reality by changing their in-person work arrangements rapidly to the most extensive remote work population known to the Federal government. Given the enormous economic impact and social upheaval resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the abrupt transition to remote work occurred when organizational coordination, decision-making processes, and productivity have never been more consequential.

The following sections describe the Federal organization's primary response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Alternative Work Schedules

One of the more popular flexibilities granted to Federal organizations was using the alternate work schedule (AWS). This flexibility permitted national organizations, at their discretion, to exercise more flexibility when scheduling work for employees instead of the use of a traditional fixed work schedule, with the intent to help balance work and personal responsibilities. Further delegated to Federal organizations was the authority to utilize weather and safety leave when employees not displaying symptoms of the COVID-19 virus were told to quarantine or isolate by public health authorities due to a significant risk of exposure to the virus.

Remote Work

As a result of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, several authorities and flexibilities were authorized, specifically related to Federal organizations. The flexibilities include the increased use of remote work and telework (OPM, 2020). National organizations have always used telework, sometimes referred to as remote work - this is work done outside of a traditional physical workplace setting, among other flexibilities to promote continuity of operations.

Sick Leave is additional flexibility; the employee can use. There is an unlimited amount of accrued sick leave when they cannot perform their duties due to physical or mental illness or are receiving medical examination or treatment. For example, an employee (ill) due to a communicable disease, such as the COVID-19 virus can use their accrued sick leave (OPM, 2020).

The international response to the COVID pandemic was unprecedented. For the first time, organizations across the world found themselves working with a 100% remote workforce. As a result of the rapid shift to remote work, employees had to rely heavily on virtual technology to communicate and perform their daily duties.

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Years prior to the pandemic, more than 20,000 employees worldwide were surveyed to figure out what motivated people in the workplace? Speculations were that work-life balance and the ability to work from home might rate high on the list. However, when McGregor and Doshi (2020) measured the total motivation of people who worked from home versus the office, the survey results concluded that working from home was less motivating. Even worse, when people had no choice in where they worked, the differences were unbelievable.

In a recent poll conducted by the World Health Organization, results showed a significant number of the U.S. workforce felt burned out after more than two months of working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Chen (2021), responses received from several HR Professionals communicated a lack of work-life balance, leading to feelings of burnout. The abrupt transition to the remote work environment forced the change in habits and lifestyle.

The Role of the Human Resources Professional

Human Resource Management (HRM, or simply HR) manages an organization's workforce or Human Resources. In practice, HR is responsible for the employee's experience during the entire employment lifecycle. Human Resources professionals' duties include attracting the right employees through employer branding. HR then must select the right employees through the recruitment process. Subsequent steps include onboarding new hires and managing their training and development during their tenure with the organization.

The traditional role of HR professionals primarily focuses on recruitment, selection, salary, benefits, training, evaluation, rewards, and retention. HR professionals focus on finding the appropriate balance of workforce supply, which determines how efficient and productive the workforce will be. According to Todericiu and Serban (2013), employees are recognized as a

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vital asset to an organization's success and have extended the strategic role of an HR department. HR professionals must identify new potential employees, select the most qualified, evaluate their performance, promote individuals properly, and retain top talent.

The role of Human Resources has evolved to become more than just a functional complement to a strategic business. The evolution of HR's duties is ongoing to ensure regular human resource practices match and help fulfill an organization's goals. Identifying, selecting, evaluating, promoting, and retaining employees are all vital to organizational productivity. HR professionals are knowledgeable in each of these areas and are essential to an agency's success.

Like many other business areas, Cattermole (2019) Human Resources has a unique life cycle, which involves the stages of an employee's time with a given organization and the responsibilities of the Human Resources department. Each step of the human resources life cycle has its own set of challenges, opportunities, and benefits. The typical employee experiences five different stages during their employment with an organization: Recruitment, Education, Motivation, Evaluation, and Celebration/Retention and Termination, as stated by Cattermole (2019).

Celebration/Retention or Termination is the fifth stage of the HR life cycle in which organizations re-energize the workforce for their hard work and recognize essential milestones. Organizations can delegate incentive allocation to HR professionals. Therefore, HR must show the value of each employee's contributions by offering unique benefits (such as flexible work schedules, gift cards, and extra paid time off). Many organizations identify innovative or creative solutions to motivate employees so that they want to achieve company goals. An intelligent leader makes employees feel empowered and appreciated by giving them a sense of ownership Ulrich and Ulrich (2010).

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All cycles must come to an end, including the HR life cycle. The HR life cycle ends either with retirement or separation. There are many reasons in which an employee separates from an organization, including pursuing academics, finding opportunities for increased responsibilities or pay, family endeavors, and more. For many organizations, the most favorable of the alternatives is to retain the employee. Investing resources to support retention efforts is equally as important and significant to organizational achievement as recruitment, training, or development, as emphasized by Cattermole (2019).

According to Glass (2008), recruitment and retention are known as sustainable Human Resources functions; however, before an organization can thrive in recruitment and retention, it must have a defensible business approach, a clear vision, and a set of core values that the organization itself believes in. Productivity improvements, reduction in labor costs, and a competitive edge are all the things that contribute to a successful recruiting and retention program. Fernberger (2004) believes these are incentives that make an organization more alluring to those on the outside looking in. One can argue that once a person is recruited and accepts a position, the job of HR is complete. However, placing a job candidate in a job position is only one part of the challenge. The question remains: Once an employee has entered an organization and is a high-performing and productive employee, how does the organization retain them?

Recruitment

Bartleby Research (2015) stated that attracting the right talent and retaining effective employees is vital to the success of any organization. Failure to attract and retain the right talent can create high employee turnover, affecting business finances and productivity. As emphasized by Fernberger (2004), an organization must re-invest in recruiting, training, and benefits, to

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name a few. In addition, high employee turnover diminishes employee morale and affects the agency's culture, which in the long run can decrease productivity due to poor workforce performance.

The first responsibility of HR professionals in the recruitment/selection process is to determine a need for and identify potential candidates for the organization. Recruitment is a highly vital role and can make or break a company. The applicant pool is vast and saturated with potential candidates. Shilling (2020) emphasized it is the job of Human Resources professionals to focus and review applicants that best match the organization's needs. The duty of an HR professional is more than just picking the correct title. For example, as stated by Shilling (2020), if an organization is searching for a new manager, HR focuses on the resumes of candidates with experience and knowledge in management, with the goal in mind to find a candidate who can ultimately improve an agency's productivity.

The second responsibility of an HR Professional in the recruitment/selection process. Even after narrowing down the many applications for any position, HR professionals must choose the best match. It may not seem like a difficult decision but making the wrong choice can waste the company's time and money. HR professionals must align HR practices with the organization's goals and strategies, as stated by Todericiu and Serban (2013). They can strategically select the right candidate by looking at experience and knowledge, interviewing the candidate, and analyzing how they fit into the organization's goals. While some managers may pick a good candidate, the HR department's background and overall knowledge of the organization are more effective, as stated by Shilling (2020).

Fernberger (2004) pointed out that Human Resource professionals can hire and promote employees, but they must create strategies and incentives to retain the best talent and to keep the

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best talent. These incentives can include benefit packages, training initiatives, and components within the workplace environment such as policies, procedures, and the voluntary learning of new tasks. Creating an engaging workforce culture and environment is a strategic way of improving organizational productivity Todericiu and Serban (2013).

According to Cattermole (2019), recruitment involves growing one's business, which begins with management determining a hiring need. Hiring decisions play a critical role in turnover, productivity, and growth. To succeed in the HR life cycle recruitment phase, the Human Resources department must create a strategic staffing plan that identifies critical positions and identify incentives to compete with local competitors. The plan should include employee roles, responsibilities, and technical competencies (e.g., knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the work), robust marketing strategies to attract best-qualified candidates, and compensation and benefits packages Ulrich and Ulrich (2010). In addition, organizations benefit from extending the strategic staffing plan that includes streamlined interview protocol, including tests and measurements Ulrich and Ulrich (2010).

In Federal organizations, two of the most integral roles of the HR professionals are recruitment and selection of a potential employee; it involves determining qualifications, conducting the interview, a background check, and the necessary vetting before the candidate receives the job offer. During this process, management officials decide whether it would be appropriate to appoint any of them Sisson and Marginson (2003). However, not all organizations use the same recruitment techniques; recruitment depends on a variety unique factors. Additionally, policy and legislation play a significant role when organizations are recruiting new employees. Implementing best practices in recruitment and selection can help a business reach its objectives as it helps to identify which candidates are suitable for the job..

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Recruiting is the process of generating a pool of candidates by reaching the right audience suitable to fill a vacancy Leopold (2002). Recruiting involves searching for and obtaining qualified applicants to consider when filling job openings Jackson et al. (2012). In other words, through recruitment, companies can get a pool of qualified candidates, exclude those less skilled, and hire only those they think have the talent and potential necessary for the organization's direction. Being able to recruit highly qualified people for an organization is vital to an organization's long-term success. Recruitment and selection are essential processes for a successful organization; having the right HR professionals can both improve and sustain organizational performance Petts (1997).

Retention

Reducing its turnover and retaining valuable talent is one of the most important things that a company can strive to do. The people a company keeps may be the most crucial variable contributing to the organization's overall success. Special programs designed to retain high-quality employees are a wise investment for organizations. Turnover cost is something that all organizations consistently evaluate. Heneman et al. (1997) pointed out:

“Although turnover is a detriment to organizational performance, there are several positives. A vital part of employee retention strategy and tactics thus must involve a careful assessment of both retention costs and benefits at a reasonable cost to the organization.”

Retention includes all an employer's activities, intending to encourage qualified and productive employees to continue working for the organization Jackson et al. (2012). As a result, an organization must be willing to motivate and satisfy high-performing and productive employees enough to continue to work there at that same job level, if not a higher level.

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The ability to retain talent is of utmost importance. Still, if it fails to maintain the talent recruited, it fails to attain its projected goals and mission. To retain talent, managers need to have an open-door policy so that employees can feel welcome to communicate any concerns to their managers Bidisha et al. (2013). The ability of a company to acquire and retain talent successfully determines the company's future. By creating strategic plans for recruitment, employee onboarding, talent management, and training and development, management will avoid low retention rates Mukulesh (2013).

In summer 2011, a study by the Association of Black Nursing Faculty (ABNF) Journal concluded that linear method recruitment and retention of minority nursing staff had not been enough to solve a shortage problem Kim et al. (2016). Instead of a singular approach, they decided on a compound tactic of action and a steadfast culture dedicated to recruiting and retaining minority nursing staff. The group determined which strategies worked; they then kept the efficient plans and eliminated the remainder. The following ideas remained: 1) focus faculty search initiatives, 2) emphasize internal resources of the academic institution, 3) traditional and distance mentoring, 4) specific nursing department initiatives, 5) welcoming activities, and 6) campus-wide programs. In analyzing the strategies highlighted in the ABNF Journal, engaging the nurses on several levels was critical to retention. Synergy focuses on employee engagement as a business management tool and believes that engaged employees are excited and fully entrenched in their role as someone who helps achieve an organization's goals. Corning (2007) stated that:

“Engagement can affect employees' attitudes, absence and turnover levels and various studies have demonstrated links with productivity, increasingly pointing to a high

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correlation with individual, group and organizational performance, a success measured through the quality of customer experience and loyalty” (p. 2).

According to Martinez (2020), a constant turnover of employees comes with a myriad of problems, but the most immediately detrimental for the workforce is the negative effect on productivity. Naturally, there are often understaffing issues: unfilled positions can equate to delays in mission accomplishment and frequent, otherwise avoidable mistakes. Additionally, a new employee needs to form good working relationships and solid communication with their colleagues. Social connections in the workplace can promote collaboration and increase productivity all around. Time wasted due to miscommunication can add up rapidly if the mistakes or misunderstandings are severe enough. In most workplace environments, it can take up to 2 years for a new employee to reach the level of productivity of the employee they replaced, according to Sheridan (1992). While some turnover is inevitable, even a tiny increase in employees who remain in a job can save a business from lost productivity - both employees and the HR teams must deal with these transitions.

Mukulesh (2013) mentioned that recruitment and retention activities are significant activities and can be detrimental to an organization’s success or demise. With solid recruitment and retention tactics, organizations can always find the best candidates for their needs. Finding the best and most qualified employees for open positions can be an excruciating and meticulous task; Cattermole (2019) points out that it takes willingness from a recruiting standpoint to remain open to considering different methods to recruit the most qualified people. After these qualified candidates accept positions within the organization, it is up to that same organization to keep the good ones motivated and happy for their future success. The researcher realized the importance of recruiting and retaining through the present research and has also discovered some of the

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unique methods used in these processes. Although the researcher may not think specific ways are as effective as others, the researcher agrees that recruiting and retaining highly qualified employees is vital to the long-term business success of an organization.

Organizational Culture and Environment

An organization's culture is often informally defined as “how things get done around here” or “what employees do when no one’s watching.” If an organization’s leaders do not create the culture they want, one develops in the ensuing vacuum, which may not be positive. Employees need to know what behaviors are expected of them and should see leaders modeling these behaviors.

According to Ulrich and Ulrich (2010), a positive organizational culture is a competitive edge making people want to work for a company. The researcher adds:

Company culture is an integral part of the business. It affects nearly every aspect of a company. From recruiting top talent to improving employee satisfaction, it is the backbone of a happy workforce. Without a positive corporate culture, many employees will struggle to find the real value in their work, which leads to various negative consequences for an organization’s bottom line. Companies that are named as a “Best Place to Work” see so much success. These organizations tend to have strong, positive corporate cultures that help employees feel and perform their best at work. Research gathered by CultureIQ found that employees’ overall ratings of their company’s qualities – including collaboration, environment, and values, are rated 20% higher at companies that exhibit strong culture.

Culture includes the places from where the talent pools would develop and the organization's beliefs (internal & external). Each organization’s culture has different extents.

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Martinez (2020) states that a particular culture can create shallow relationships among members who do not work closely but have connected over time. Bernstein et al. (2020) imply that each relationship has a vital role in organizational performance and goes on to say that shallow relationships are challenging to create and maintain in a virtual environment. However, if the ability to bump into each other in the hallway and have lunch in person is no longer an option, you have carved out a big piece of the core of most organizations Bernstein et al. (2020).

According to Erickson and Gratton (2007), an organization's signature experience should strengthen processes that send consistent employee messages. Our research shows that one of the most common causes of low engagement in organizations is employees' perception that management is not always transparent about the availability of job positions.

Fostering Relationships

Chen (2021) speculated that although working in a virtual environment has posed some challenges for management officials to observe and establish meaningful relationships with their remote teams, it is not impossible. Organizations now must think creatively and make concerted efforts to develop relationships within and across functional groups. There's never been more pressure on frontline managers Bernstein et al. (2020) to develop productive relationships within and across virtual teams. People are still getting the work done, but the long-term relationships that once evolved from the in-person shared experiences are undoubtedly at risk.

Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) infer that employee retention and company culture go hand in hand simply because you have businesses focusing on building their name and brand. They want to know that they have the most loyal and reliable individuals who would do what is necessary to build the company up and keep it that way. An organization should strive to mentor and train both employees and managers who come from the same background regarding their area of

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expertise, which shows everyone they are equals. Both individuals who worked from the ground up to get where they are, and both received the same training and motivation as they climbed the ranks. Company culture is an essential part of the business process, It affects nearly every aspect of an organization. From recruiting top talent to improving employee satisfaction, it is the backbone of a happy workforce, as acknowledged by Ulrich and Ulrich (2010). The culture of a business is the personality of the company and its environment. The more positive the culture, the happier the employees are and the higher the retention remains. Unfortunately, much of what employees believed to be their organizational culture (norm) changed because of fears and changes as the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread rapidly, without warning or opportunity for management officials to adequately plan.

According to Ashcroft (2020), anxiety and uncertainty have prevailed for months during the COVID-19 pandemic, negatively affecting essential workers and employees who work remotely. Later this year, the media reported that 53% of U.S. adults said their mental health had worsened because of worrying about the pandemic and the resulting recession. In May, a Society for Human Resource Management survey indicated that more than 50% of employees said they had experienced challenges maintaining what they believed was their organization's culture. As reported by Chen (2021), there were findings that also suggested the pandemic impacted employees' sense of stability in ways not anticipated.

. Work relationship dynamics have changed tremendously for millennials. Research conducted by Schinoff et al. (2020) indicated that when employees have friends at their place of employment, they are happier and more productive while completing their duties. They are better performers, more engaged, and more satisfied with their jobs. A lot has changed at work due to the onset of the COVID pandemic and the subsequent requirement to use technology as a primary

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means for communication. Ribera (2020) mentioned that there were many lessons learned during the pandemic, stating that employees are less likely to be co-located with friends and co-workers as in the past. This means they are less likely to have person-to-person shared experiences or organization-sponsored events. Additionally, the use of technology has changed the way we communicate in the workplace. Today's employees rely heavily on technology to communicate with each other. However, it isn't easy to get to know each other or establish relationships when most interactions are strictly through text messages, FaceTime, and Instant Messages. Using technology does not allow us to assess a person's body language or other non-verbal communication.

To investigate this, Schinoff et al. (2020) engaged in an 18-month study of the Midwest division of a global technology corporation. During the study, their representatives conducted a total of 114 interviews with 64 different people. They interviewed people who worked remotely at least 50% of the time, with many working remotely 75-100% of the time. Schinoff et al. (2020) spent an additional amount of time observing employees from this corporation to determine how their interactions were different when they were in person.

Schinoff et al. (2020) discovered that remote workers often saw working in this environment as a barrier to forming friendships. To overcome this barrier, they established a cadence. Employees set the rhythm with each other when they have determined or predicted how to best interact with another co-worker in the virtual environment. Because of this cadence, employees felt that they had gained a better understanding of each other and believed this would make it easier to communicate in person when necessary. However, in those instances where employees did not establish cadence with their coworkers, some found it challenging to contact them or find it frustrating to interact with them when necessary.

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According to Ahern and Loh (2020), amid the COVID-19 pandemic, employees began to have low trust in their organizational leadership; few say organizations have the resilience and culture to navigate crises, and many worry about job security. The researcher's opinion is that the coronavirus global pandemic has placed organizational leadership in uncharted territory with no end in sight, and that is creating perhaps one of the most stressful workforce situations in U.S. history for employers and employees. "In just a matter of days, organizations have gone from employers struggling to recruit, select and retain employees, to deserted offices, and dire job loss forecasts" (Bauer et al., 2020).

Onboarding of New Employees

Culture has always been a significant part of the HR hiring and onboarding processes according to Shilling (2020). Typically, new employees get an office tour and are introduced to other agency employees to help them learn about the agency's culture. In addition, new hires typically attend face-to-face culture training conducted by the HR professional, which encouraged and welcomed team activities. So, when an organization moved to remote hiring and onboarding, the HR professional had to find new ways to infuse culture into the processes.

Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) emphasized that the onboarding of new employees has always been the foundation for introducing them to the organization's culture. Pre-COVID, in-person briefings were designed to ensure the employee understood the organization's mission, vision, and history. As stated by Chen (2021), several onboarding activities changed in the remote work environment, and briefings are given using a preferred virtual technology platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. In addition, the tour of the employee's workplace is more difficult to replicate using a virtual technology platform; this part of the briefing uses a visual setup. The Federal organization's culture and employee integration are all challenged because of working

remotely. Past operations requiring person-to-person communications are excluded from future HR operations Bernstein et al. (2020).

Challenges to HR Professionals

Sutton (2020) spoke to the many stressors experience by Federal HR professionals as they transitioned without notice or time to prepare for a remote work environment. This unprojected transition caused additional challenges to the HR professional, who had to swiftly move to virtual processes and procedures. In addition to establishing new techniques to continue their recruitment and retention efforts, the HR professionals also had to guide employees and management officials using virtual technology platforms Maurer (2020a).

The culture and functions of organizations changed at such a rapid pace that leaders did not have the opportunity to coordinate timely decision-making processes related to the sustainability of their current workforce. Unfortunately, many organizations made uniform decisions during times of crisis to stop both recruitment and hiring Glass (2008). In addition, employees in the workplace at the onset of the pandemic which had pre-existing health conditions were forced to consider the risks of continuing to work outside of their home, as stated by Bauer et al. (2020). Consequently, retirement-eligible workers and those with pre-existing conditions chose to withdraw from the workplace sooner than anticipated. While the combined forces did cause additional recruitment and retention challenges for the HR professional, Glass (2008) saw these combined factors as an opportunity to reinforce processes to recruit and retain top organizational talent.

Many assumed that employees might have found it challenging to stay engaged in long virtual meetings compared to in-person meetings. Wasson (2004) stated this was because virtual meetings were longer and required additional training on new technology explicitly used in the

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remote work environment. DeFilippis et al. (2020) noted that the functions of meetings also changed due to moving to a post-COVID climate. Chen (2021) emphasized that while the onset of the COVID pandemic had everyone operating using unplanned guidance, meeting virtually in the post-COVID environment may require shorter meetings less often. Management officials and HR professionals have become familiar with the daily strategies of their organization and can proceed as close to normal in the virtual environment.

In some instances, HR professionals are concerned that hiring managers might ask inappropriate or discriminatory questions during the interview. For example, inquiries related to who may or may not be carriers of the COVID-19 virus would be unacceptable to ask during an interview. Of course, employers know of any employees' potential exposure to the virus. Employees' privacy must be protected if infected or potentially infected Ababneh and Al-Waqfi (2016).

Other considerations when working in a virtual environment are the challenges faced when using virtual network tools such as shared routers and communications channels which introduce a series of concerns. For example, without the assurance of adequate security protections, organization networks are more assessable to network confidentiality and integrity vulnerabilities Bays et al. (2015). Although all kinds of networks are potentially affected, the shared use of these resources in a remote work environment increases these concerns. As a result, management officials have added pressure to work effectively and collaboratively across different time zones Mehtab et al. (2017).

According to Bernstein et al. (2020), the workforce has been having virtual meetings more frequently than at the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to generate a feeling of organization-wide unity. However, employees see the increased frequency of meetings as just an

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opportunity to master their use of Zoom and prevent them from completing their individually assigned work. In addition, after one month of working in a remote environment, some employees are still trying to figure out how to obtain a work-life balance amidst the increase in recruitment demands due to the COVID-19 pandemic Shilling (2020).

Communications

Effective communication is ultimately about human verbal as well as physical interaction. Contact occurs in both verbal and nonverbal forms expressed through the words we speak and write. Nonverbal communication revolves around the facial expressions and gestures we use, how we employ silence to convey meanings, and our tone of voice. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) emphasized that our culture dictates what is and is not acceptable and the relative importance of nonverbal versus verbal communication. Essentially, the culture we associate ourselves with determines how specific we are in our contacts and the degree to which we show emotion. Therefore, it is essential always to consider your audience in all communications, both verbal and non-verbal Cardon (2014). Advances in communication and technology are allowing companies to have a virtual global workplace. The benefit of having a virtual global workplace is that organizations can have employees from all over the world working on projects with fixed skills needed. However, management officials must create healthy boundaries between work and home and understand how to control communication with co-workers and managers Sutton (2020). When looking at remote workers and virtual teams and providing them with the advantage of working whenever and wherever they want, setting rules is essential. Knowing that the goal is creating trust between the workers and the managers Akkirman and Harris (2005).

When the ability to convey culture through physical interactions is limited, communication becomes even more critical to ensure connections with and between employees.

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The chances of physical interactions become diminished when interacting in the remote work environment. Face-to-face interactions and communications changed when using technology, and so has the way relationships are formed and maintained Leaning (2010). Interpersonal communication transformed to a higher level using digital technology, and those without access to these tools will have difficulty assimilating and interacting with others in society, as inferred by Rice and Katz (2003). The evolving digital communications technologies have transformed how interpersonal communications and relationships are conducted and maintained. The future of technology will also enable management officials to understand better their organizational culture and, most notably, the ability to handle emerging issues that might affect the operations of an organization . Because of changes that have taken place in the evolution of technology, the society at large and its culture changed Cui et al. (2015)

With respect to social networking sites, Dudovski (2012), thought could be explained as “web-based meeting places for friends, and family. Co-workers, and peers might allow users to create a profile and connect with them for purposes that range from getting acquainted with keeping in touch to building a work-related network Pride and Ferrel (2011).

Work-life Balance

According to Bernstein et al. (2020), the ability to turn off work at home has proven to be especially tough. At the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, less than half of the federal workforce could physically maintain an 8–10-hour workday. As time progressed, this number lessened due to feelings of burnout. In a study conducted by Eagle Hill Consulting, it was found that 58% of U.S. workers were experiencing burnout, up from 45% in the early days of the pandemic. Almost 40% of those surveyed, responded attributed that feeling to a lack of communication, feedback, and support from their organizations.

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As stated by Zielinski (2020), it was during periods of crises and disruption that employees wanted recognition for their hard work. There seem to be more of need to be recognized because people were concerned both about keeping their job and wanted assurance that their managers knew they were making a difference

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we work, where we work, resulting in a lack of clear distinction between work and home. The remote work environment and workload demands have led to burnout and increased employee stress levels Maurer (2020b). Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work and telework were considered advantageous flexibilities available to employees. However, employees have now learned that flexibility does not always equate to work-life balance. Sutton (2020) communicated that since working in a remote environment because of the pandemic, employees often experience increased workloads and less opportunity to maintain connections with their friends and family. The constant connectivity with colleagues can blur the boundaries between work and non-work activities. Chamberlain (2018) thought that offering reasonable flexibilities such as paid family leave and childcare support might raise perceptions of unfairness in the workforce; it was also a way to encourage the community through work. Although workers with caregiving responsibilities can use these specific flexibilities., others were more accessible for single employees who desired the same level of work-life balance but lack urgent family responsibilities Russo and Morandin (2019).

HR Policy and Procedures

Organizations often see the overall employee experience as an HR responsibility. Yet, for many HR professionals themselves, that experience might fall short of what they need to achieve their full potential and help their organizations do the same. Common HR challenges, including inefficient recruiting and onboarding processes, inadequate file-management systems, and even

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literal paperwork processing , can become overwhelming in today's remote work environment.

The many resources that an HR team had at their expenditure to devote to administrative maintenance are no longer available Peopledoc (2020). As a means of innovation, creativity, and growth of HR professionals within the virtual environment, HR managers should develop training plans which allow workers to use emerging technology to upgrade their technical abilities Parry and Battista (2019).

Reconciling HR roles can be significantly affected by the institutional environment associated with public and private sector organizations. Private sector employees believe that bureaucracy exists within the Federal government organizations, causing ambiguous goals, informal communication, and direct supervision (Akkirman & Harris, 2005). Consequently, Mamman and Al Kulaiby (2014) state that HR professionals within the Federal government are less likely to be seen as strategic partners. Also, the same bureaucratic factors affect organizational policies. In contrast, Mamman and Al Kulaiby (2014) infer that HR professionals who work in private sector organizations have relative freedom to adopt and recommend innovative approaches to HRM practices at their level of responsibility. The organization's culture, environment, and other contextual variables (crisis and pandemic planning) influence HR policies, which in many cases limits the development of HR roles at such a crucial time DeKok and Uhlaner (2001).

Organizations recognize that transitions in HR processes and procedures are necessary for successful recruitment and retention in this COVID-restricted environment. However, there are steps needed to improve employee knowledge and skills by providing the required HR training. As a result, HR professionals are assisting the organization in this transition, but they still need to take the time necessary to continue improving their knowledge and skills Parry and

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Battista (2019). Training or vocational education of the team is not only essential but also hard work and should be similarly given priority in an organization's training plan Kirby (2020)

Summary

Information ascertained from this literature review indicates the spread of the COVID-19 virus combined with the CDC mandated protocols have impacted the organizational environment/culture and presented increased challenges to how the HR professionals continue to recruit and retain employees in Federal organizations. There are continued challenges to the organizations' culture, leadership, employee experience, and digital workplace experiences. The way many companies work changed overnight. Massive numbers of workforces have gone remote.

As the COVID 19 pandemic progressed, many organizations had to adjust their way of doing work rapidly. Working in a remote environment forced the use of a virtual technology platform. It caused the necessary digitalization that many organizations had spoken about and perhaps mentioned in their marketing Zielinski (2020). For many organizations, virtual technology suddenly became a top priority because of the many COVID-related CDC mandates. The federal workforce transitioned to having virtual meetings and having them more frequently than usual to generate a feeling of organizational unity Bernstein et al. (2020). While discovering new best practices for communicating using Zoom and Microsoft Teams combined with figuring out how to manage the work-life balance in the remote environment, employees felt an increased level of added stress Shilling (2020).

According to Compton (2009), recruitment and selection were processes by which HR professionals solicit interested applicants, Sisson and Marginson (2003) went on to add that – it was after the completion of this process; that management officials determined whether they

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wanted to hire them. With the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, organizations rushed to develop recruitment and retention strategies to align with the stress and fears of their employees. While some retention and recruitment strategies included flexible scheduling and remote or telework, these strategies also led to common HR challenges, including inefficient recruiting, onboarding processes, inadequate file-management systems, and even the paperwork processing became overwhelming. As noted by Peopledoc (2020), the resources an HR team devotes to administrative maintenance would be better utilized, enhancing their overall innovation, creativity, and growth.

Many people now work from home for more extended periods than previously seen. Employees changed their digital communication patterns (e.g., meetings to emails) to replace the face-to-face conversations that once occurred in their physical workplace Bidisha et al. (2013) and Choudhury et al. (2019). Nicastro (2020) cites other challenges experienced in the remote work environment include a lack of collaboration and communication tools and the loss of the "social" aspect that defines a company's culture. However, with all the technology options out there, these challenges are controllable. According to Craig Walker, CEO of Dialpad, technology serves as the new water cooler in the remote work environment, where people take a few moments to socialize via video chat before starting their workday. Sajwaj (2020) added that while in a virtual environment, this type of interaction helps people feel more connected

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

This chapter describes in detail the design of the study with specifics on the technology platform used, participants' role, research design, and procedures, including data collection and subsequent analysis that guided the researcher. Included are trustworthiness and ethical concerns.

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of HR professionals in the Federal government as they conducted recruitment and retention activities within an organizational environment permeated by the COVID-19 restrictions. A quantitative study would not fit the goals of this research due to the researcher seeking to understand the experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of the HR professionals. Instead, the purpose of the phenomenological study was to interpret an experience by determining its meaning as perceived by the participants Ashworth (2003). Using the data presented, the researcher described and expressed experiences of the phenomenon without attempting to solve a problem.

This study used a naturalistic inquiry, using the principles of phenomenology. The phenomenological research design aimed to understand the experiences through those who experienced them and sought to understand the lived experience of persons experiencing a specific phenomenon Depoy et al. (1998). The goal was to have the participant describe the phenomenon in detail, illuminating their experience as they lived them. A qualitative research design is most appropriate for this study because it investigates the actual meaning of the participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994) and allowed the researcher to empathically view participants' world from their perspectives Lodico et al. (2010). The objective was to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon through an inductive approach.

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Instrumentation

All participants completed a demographic questionnaire (DQ) (Appendix A) where they submitted the following demographic information: employment status, Government Service Grade, and more. The DQ contained variables commonly examined by past researchers and the research interest. The DQ validated that the participant met the inclusion criteria. In addition, the researcher used 20 open-ended interview questions (Appendix B) to examine the participant's experience executing recruitment and retention activities in a Federal organizational environment pervaded by COVID-19 restrictions. The study employed interviews as a means of collecting data. Qualitative queries allow the researcher and potential respondents the opportunity to discuss the phenomenon under investigation without being encumbered by time restraints (Creswell (2013)). Informed consent protocols remained in effect during the entirety of the study. The researcher gave respondents time to read all disclosures and made them aware of their rights as participants in the study. The interviews were audio/video recorded using the Zoom technological platform to ensure the reliability and credibility of the study. Each interview took approximately 45-to-60 minutes to complete.

Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria for participation were Federal, mid-level (GS-9 to GS-12, or equivalent) Human Resources professionals. In addition, participants must have worked for the Federal government for two years or more and working during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were no restrictions on the selections of Federal agencies from which to recruit.

Exclusion criteria:

- (1) Those who are not current employees of the federal government.
- (2) Those who are not HR professionals in the federal government

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- (3) Employees who are either lower than the grade GS-9 or over the rate GS-12
- (4) Those who have not worked during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Qualitative Questions

The open-ended qualitative method of interview is systematic about observing a pre-described order of questions to ensure consistency in the data collection process. Respondents were provided with the exact questions, allowing them to respond beyond the usual closed-ended response Gall et al. (1996). The phenomenological inquiry model afforded the participant the freedom of expression when recalling their lived experiences, which enabled the researcher to gather salient comments of their specific experience at a given point in time. Creswell (2013) noted that the qualitative method of inquiry allowed the participant the advantage of telling their stories and describing their experiences without being encumbered by time restraints. The challenge with open-ended questions is the difficulty with coding the data. As previously stated, the proposed research questions cover three areas of inquiry, the HR Professional's (a) recruitment/retention experience during COVID-19 restricted environment, (b) impact of COVID-19 restricted environment on the organization's culture, (c) impact of the organizational culture on changes to HR policy and procedure.

Population and Sample

The Federal HR professionals' population size was unknown. Therefore, this study used non-probability sampling in the form of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling helped identify cases of interest from sampling people who knew others with similar characteristics, referring more people with similar traits Palinkas et al. (2013). For example, the researcher asked HR professionals who participated in the research to identify and refer other HR professionals interested in participating in the research study. Snowball sampling is when research participants

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recruit other participants for a test or examination and when potential participants are to find Depoy et al. (1998). The population sample included ten Federal HR professionals who met the demographic criteria.

Procedure

Touro University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted in March 2021 (Appendix C). Later this month, I started soliciting research study participants from Facebook and LinkedIn social media sites. Those who expressed interest in participating in the research study were sent the demographic questionnaire via email. I contacted eligible respondents and invited each to an interview, where the researcher told the volunteer the purpose of the study, data use, and the reason for the research. Participants were assured anonymity throughout the entire process and the subsequent research report. The informed consent form (Appendix D) from all participants was read and recorded verbally via Zoom—the preliminary examination of the questions allowed for any potential changes to this instrument before data collection. Five very experienced HR professionals completed the pilot test. They were not included in the study but reviewed the mechanism and responded to the interview questions before the research study data collection began. Which allowed the researcher to confirm the wording was appropriate to elicit the information sought and correct any potentially confusing language. Therefore, no changes were necessary after the pilot test.

Data collection began with those I selected for the study based on specific criteria, including federal employment experience, years of total national HR experience, Government System (GS) grade level or its equivalent, and work location. Data collection procedures included individual video/audio recorded interviews, transcriptions of the discussions, researcher reflective journaling, the consent form that disclosed the purpose of this study, and how the

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information was collected and used. The consent form also highlighted that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that participants could withdraw participation at any time. Informed consent was read to the participant verbally before the start of the interview. The participants had to verbally acknowledge consent by stating, “Yes, I agree to participate in this study by completing the interview and to being audio and video recorded via Zoom.” The verbal consent was audio and video recorded before starting the one-to-one interview. Participants took part in a 45-to-60-minute one-to-one interview session with the researcher to gather initial research study data. The researcher completed Interviews using audio/video recording via Zoom, then transcribed by the researcher.

During the last part of the interview, a debriefing statement was provided to each participant, verbally and audio/video recorded. The primary investigator gave their contact information to participants who had questions or wanted to obtain a copy of the results. The debriefing statement also explained the nature of the research, how the information would be utilized, and how confidentiality was to be maintained. After the participants were debriefed, they were emailed both a Thank You Note with the researcher’s contact information and a \$25 Amazon Gift card as a token of appreciation for participating.

Pilot Test

A vital component for the preparation of data collection is the utilization of the pilot test. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2007), the pilot test can assist the researcher in determining the weaknesses and strengths of the research design before its implementation. This test allowed the researcher to test research protocols, data collection instruments, and recruitment strategies. The test results allowed the researcher to adjust as necessary the data collection instrument (interview questions) which initiated the research study. McNamara (2011) suggested that the

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researcher arrange questions to allow the respondent: (a) to respond without feeling pressured; (b) queries should be impartial and unbiased; (c) queries should be given in allotted intervals, allowing for adequate time to focus on each question at a time; (d) queries should be provided in the language of the ordinary citizen; and (e) guard against the usage of questions that may unjustly place the respondent in a defensive mode. Creswell (2013) suggested that follow-up questions are vital to engender more salient responses from the respondents and allow them to further expand on the answers.

Accordingly, 20-open-ended interview questions were made accessible to the pilot testers, including five senior HR professionals, who met the criteria and experience needed for the proposed study. The rationale of the pilot test was to ascertain the approximate length of interviews, suggestions to alter the sequence of questions, solicit maximum input from respondents. The pilot test results revealed that the initial questions were adequate to meet the intent of the research study. Therefore, no revisions were necessary.

Data Collection

The data collection process used a researcher-developed interview protocol that included a demographic questionnaire and 20 open-ended questions based on the research topic. All participants were asked the same set of predetermined questions based on information from the literature review. Research areas of interest were generated that guided the questions or areas of focus for the interview. As suggested by Willig (2001), all questions were open-ended and non-directive as much as possible to help reduce bias and allow the participant to freely share their individual experiences as indicated in this type of analysis. The method of data collection employed by Giorgi (2009), core interview questions. The HR professionals in the study portrayed with as much specificity of their lived experience while executing recruitment and

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retention activities in a COVID-19 restricted environment and the perceived impact on the organizational culture. The researcher offered follow-up questions to the interviewee to help further describe the phenomenon. However, the questions were not leading questions. Instead, the objective was to promote a conversation-like exchange between the participant and the researcher. The core interview question format allowed for the spontaneity of participants' responses while speaking of individual perceptions and lived experiences. An audio/video Zoom recording of all interviews provided an accurate transcription of the participant's responses. Each audio/video recorded interview was listened to carefully and transcribed verbatim into the written format by the researcher. Video/Audio recordings were compared with transcriptions to promote accuracy and comprehensiveness when identifying themes and patterns. The participants were also given transcript copies for review to promote accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Following the study, the participants had a chance to meet with the researchers to clarify any issues that seemed vital.

All participants' names were changed to ensure confidentiality. The digital files of the interviews are on a password-protected file, with all data files given numbers instead of using birth names or initials to identify participants. Participants' identification used numbers in all future references, with titles such as P1, P2, and P3. The researcher used reflective journaling throughout the study. Data collection required the researcher to constantly reduce preconceptions and biases, a process referred to as "epoch." Data collection was primarily done through in-depth interviews and analyzing data, which requires rigorous thematic analysis. Data collection also included completing multiple steps to understand the whole while connecting meaningful units within the description.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began after the researcher transcribed the audio/video-recorded interviews. The researcher reviewed the transcriptions for themes. Data analysis is methodically probing, examining, classifying, and categorizing data collected in Stake's (1995) research project. Data analysis makes sense of the findings and allows the researcher to express those findings to others. Stake (1995) stated that data analysis comes from reading and rereading the data, thinking deeply, and then understanding the data comes forth and develops in a written narrative. Data analysis started with a thorough review of the transcripts from the audio/video recorded interviews and journal notes taken by the researcher Saladana (2009). Smith and Osborn (2003) described a single transcript analyzed before analyzing the other transcripts as a template for emerging themes. The researcher transcribed the data to an appropriate level of detail, and participants checked the transcripts for accuracy before the coding process began. The Thematic Analysis process is a qualitative analysis that involves recording or identifying passages of text or images linked by a common theme or idea Gibbs (2007). Data first reviewed obtained a general sense of the information and reflected on its overall meaning Creswell (2013). Transcripts were manually coded individually utilized the inductive or open coding process, with initial codes created based on the research question. I used a word document to organize the coding, which served to be helpful when I began to frame them into conceptualized themes and ideas that contributed to the study's findings. The codes originally came from the transcript broken into segments according to the research question; it provided a response, then compared to each other, and grouped according to construct Glaser and Holton (2004). Thematic Analysis established emerging themes, described as “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich). Thematic

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analysis is one of the many research analyzing methodologies that help researchers analyze narrative data. Thematic analysis is about understanding people's everyday experience of reality in detail to understand the phenomenon in question McLeod (2001).

Thematic Coding Analysis /Results Organized by Research Questions

Thematic Analysis means “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich). However, frequently it goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic. Braun and Clarke (2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) continue to state, “a theme captures something important about the data concerning the research question and represents some level of patterned response within the data set” (p. 82). Thematic analysis is one of the many research analyzing methodologies that help researchers analyze narrative data.

According to Academic Scope (n.d.), Thematic Analysis consists of six phases of analysis. Phase one involves the researcher becoming more familiarized with the data: reading and re-reading the transcribed data, reflective journal, and noting initial ideas. During this phase, the interview protocol provided a venue for a rich depiction of the participants' experiences and perceptions. Careful analysis of the interview transcriptions allowed the researcher to identify words and thought patterns that set the stage for later theme emersion (Smith et al., 2009). After reading each transcription multiple times, the researcher entered phenomenological reduction by organizing themes and ideas and delineating ten transformed meaning units. Again, noting patterns in the way participants described their experiences and perceptions help to capture the transcribed pieces. When the researcher began taking notes and recording ideas for coding, this was evident in subsequent phases. In essence, coding continues to be developed and defined throughout the entire analysis.

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During Phase two of the analysis, the researcher was generating initial codes, which begins when the researcher has read and familiarized themselves with the data and developed an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting. During this phase, we extract the initial code list from the available data. A comparison of the participant's experience of the phenomenon was studied Colaizzi (1978). Codes identify features of the data, which appears most attractive to the researcher and can be assessed in a meaningful way to describe the phenomenon studied Boyatzis (1998)

During Phase three of the analysis, the researcher is now searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each possible likely piece. This phase, which re-focuses the researcher at the broader level of articles rather than codes, involves sorting the different codes into possible themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. Essentially, the researcher is starting to analyze principles and consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme. Here is where the researcher begins the initial development of the mind-maps to write the name of each code.

Phase four involves reviewing themes and begins when you have devised a set of candidate themes, and it involves the refinement of those themes. During this phase, it becomes evident that some candidate themes are not themes (e.g., if there are not enough data to support them, or the data are too diverse). In contrast, others might collapse into each other (e.g., two different themes might form one article). Other pieces might need separate themes. Patton (1990) emphasizes that dual criteria judging categories are worth considering here. Data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, and there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between pieces.

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Phase five: begins when the researcher has an goodt thematic map of the data. Defining and naming themes involves the ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each article and the overall story the research tells, generating clear definitions and names for each article. For each piece, the researcher should conduct and write a detailed analysis. As well as identifying the ‘story’ that each theme tells.

Phase six is when the scholarly report of the analysis: The final opportunity for comment. The selection of vivid, compelling extract examples captures the essence of the point demonstrated and sufficient evidence of the themes within the data. A detailed report that uses the participants' own words and ideas provides an overview of their experience. This final analysis of selected extracts shows where the study relates to the research question and literature. The write-up does more than just provide data. Embedded quotes within an analytic narrative compellingly illustrate the researcher's story about the data beyond the description but argue the research question. At this point, a thematic map has been developed, showing the principal themes Braun and Wilkinson (2003)

Coding Process

Each individually coded transcript utilized the inductive or open coding process, where the researcher refined, and semantically analyzed and conceptualized themes based on data and research questions. The researcher used a word document to annotate and organize their codes, which served to be helpful when the researcher began to frame principles into emerging themes and ideas that contributed to the study's findings. Descriptions appeared which told a story of how the participants perceived their lived experiences while performing recruitment and retention activities within the COVID-19 restricted environment and how it impacted the organizational culture of the federal employees. The data was organized and prepared by

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transcribing audio/video recorded interviews and notes taken by the researcher Saladana (2009). Inductive coding and line-by-line data analysis with each incident receiving a keyword, which provided a synopsis of that section of data (Glaser & Holton, 2004). These common themes stood out as meaningful events (Hatch, 2002). The researcher also noted individual experiences using horizontalization regarding the ideas presented during these times. Horizontalization narrows the scope of data into specific categories (Creswell, 2013). Common themes were identified in each transcription and organized as they corresponded to the research questions. The sentences were reviewed and shortened to one-word labels, which effectively summarized the article. Establishing the tags happened, then review before being placed in categories. These groupings (constructs received a title) form as many conceptual categories as possible, with the researcher engaging in constant comparison (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Codes with the percentage of participants supported are listed in Appendix F . As new evidence emerged, they too were subject to constant comparison, analysis, and categorization (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

Bracketing is a tool used to maintain objectivity. Bracketing is how one can set aside bias and prior knowledge concerning the phenomenon under consideration Charmaz (2006). Unfortunately, the researcher's data collection and analysis instrument are qualitative, and researchers can't maintain complete objectivity. The researcher must become aware of their preconceptions and beliefs, but still, it is difficult to put these issues aside. Nonetheless, awareness of one's values, interests, and perceptions are imperative when setting aside issues that can influence the research process.

Trustworthiness

Validity in qualitative research often describes as the level of trustworthiness one can place on the conclusions obtained from the data (Creswell, 2013). The techniques implemented

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in the study consisted of member checking, triangulation, and peer reviews. Participants conducted member checking, which allowed each participant to review transcripts and results after the coding process. To ensure the trustworthiness of the results, I incorporated member checks and conducted participant debriefing. Devault (2019).

Triangulation

This occurred when comparing information from the interview, current literature, and the researcher's reflective journaling (Carter et al., 2014).

Member Checks

To further ensure trustworthiness, member checks were incorporated. Participants were provided with portions of the data that were put into codes and corresponding categories and written information to determine if it adequately depicted their perceptions and experiences. This process provided another means to ensure the accuracy of the results (Devault, 2019).

Reflective Journal

The researcher maintained a journal throughout the data collection process. After interviewing participants, the researcher recorded thoughts about what was observed and the discussions that ensued (see Appendix E). By recording thoughts or questions the researcher had, further questions were formulated for the interviews. Journaling also helped to clarify some of the information gathered from the interviews. Researcher bias was identified during the journaling process that can limit the interpretation of the data collected. Comments noted in the journal were compared to transcripts from the interviews to increase the validity of researcher reflections.

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Credibility

Credibility regards the accurateness of the researcher's interpretation of participants' meanings (Creswell, 2013). In this study, one factor assisting to increase the credibility of the research was triangulation or relying on several sources of data and data collection methods (Creswell, 2013). Of the HR Professionals who participated, data was collected from interviews, member check-ins, transcript review, and researcher's reflective journaling.

Dependability

Schwandt et al. (2007) clarified that judging dependability in research includes examining the research process. The research procedures used in a study should be related in such detail that the research could be replicated Shenton (2004); this will increase the dependability of the study). Therefore, the research included thorough descriptions of the processes employed and contained copies of the instruments used.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative studies describes the method of replicating the findings in one social construct with possible duplication in another context. Patton (2002) emphasizes that transferability in qualitative research offers no absolutes, and each researcher must determine their findings based upon the sample provided and the data collected at the time of the study. Therefore, it is necessary to consider that findings may only represent a specific point in time, based upon their recollection of those events in time.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the assurance on the researcher's part that no one else will have access to any information obtained from participants; no data can be linked back to participants in the study (Depoy et al., 1998). A coding system was used, giving each participant a pseudonym, i.e.,

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P1, P2, P3, for identification during audio/video recorded interviews and transcription of the data.

A list of the participants with their pseudonyms (Table 1) and data collected (such as transcripts, audiotaped conversations, field notes, time logs) has been saved as a digital folder containing a password that only the researcher can access. The researcher will delete all audio/video recordings and documents three years after the study.

Ethical Considerations

First and foremost, researchers have a responsibility to protect the participants in their studies. Participants had a complete understanding of the purpose and methods of the study and the demands they were to experience in agreeing to be participants of this study. All data collected as confidential, and pseudonyms were used in the report. Participants' names were never and will never be released. In all the data collection, field notes, and transcripts, there were no personal identifiers. All the data is password protected on a digital folder. None of the data was shared with anyone.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The primary rationale of Chapter 4 is to present the data and preliminary results from the phenomenological study of the perceptions and lived experience of HR professionals conducting retention and recruitment activities within a federal organizational culture permeated by the COVID-19 restricted environment. The phenomenological method does not test hypotheses by predicting results. Rather, participants describe their experiences in different situations. The psychological implications are extracted from these descriptions Giorgi (2009). The method incorporates description, phenomenological reduction, a search for essences, and a search for an eidetic structure within the context of consciousness Giorgi (2009).

Chapter 4 presents a comprehensive description of the sample of participants, the method of organizing and analyzing the data, the development of meaningful units, and the psychological essences that emerged from the participants' personal experiences. In addition, collective descriptions were clustered together into a thematic map (Braun & Wilkinson, 2003) to show the structure of the concrete experiences being analyzed by determining higher-level eidetic invariant meanings that belong to that structure. A description of how the methodological approach was applied to the data analysis process is presented. This information led to the presentation of data and result findings. The analysis of the participants' experiences is presented using direct quotes from the individuals experiencing the phenomenon. The thematic map structure is established to display all the data, regardless of the data being supplied by different individuals, to promote efficiency.

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Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceived experiences and challenges faced by Human Resources professionals executing the sustainable human resources activities of recruitment and retention of federal employees in an organizational culture impacted by the COVID-19 CDC mandated restrictions.

Conducting HR activities in the COVID-19 restricted environment was alive with turbulence, substantive change, and economizing. Organizational cultures, business functions, and human resource practices changed rapidly, without notice or prediction. This prohibited opportunities for management to coordinate strategic plans to transition and sustain operations in this new environment. Many Federal agencies that suspended hiring or reduced recruitment experienced even more challenges as employees, including those with pre-existing conditions, withdrew from the workforce earlier than they had anticipated because of COVID-19-related challenges and concerns Shilling (2020). The media reported a “large” increase in those who identify themselves as retired among Americans who are not in the labor force. The category of people who are not employed increased from 53 to 60 percent (Ashcroft, 2020). These combined factors posed an immediate and potentially long-term challenge while executing the sustainable HR recruitment and retention activities to support organizational operations in a COVID-19 restricted environment.

Chapter four includes a description of the participants and a detailed report of the perceptions shared using their reflections and words. Codes and emerging themes identified from a thorough analysis of the data are included in this chapter.

Presentation of Results

The interpretative meaning discussions from each participant are provided in transcribed narrative form and are supplemented by direct quotes from the participants. The direct quotes are the HR professionals' descriptions who recalled their lived experience while performing recruitment and retention activities within the COVID-19 restricted environment and their perceptions of the impact this had on the organization's culture. Emerging themes became evident during the analysis process and were interpreted by the researcher through thematic analysis. As they became more apparent, the meaning units were clustered together to reveal overall narrative themes. Important themes that were considered essential to the phenomenon were contrasted with the other sub-themes until a thematic map structure emerged. Finally, each transformed meaning unit, originally expressed in the participant's own words, was transformed through a careful descriptive process into psychologically pertinent expressions. The transformed meaning units formed the basis for writing the general experience and perceptions of the participants as they lived it. It is essential to fully describe the participant's experience and perceptions within the meaning unit when reporting the analysis process Schreier (2012).

During the analysis, several possible alternatives were considered when interpreting the lived experiences of HR professionals while conducting retention and recruitment activities within the COVID-19 restricted environment. The meanings were discriminated against and discarded until the most fitting meanings emerged. This process helped discern the essential from the contingent, allowing for the essential to be described and the contingent to be ignored.

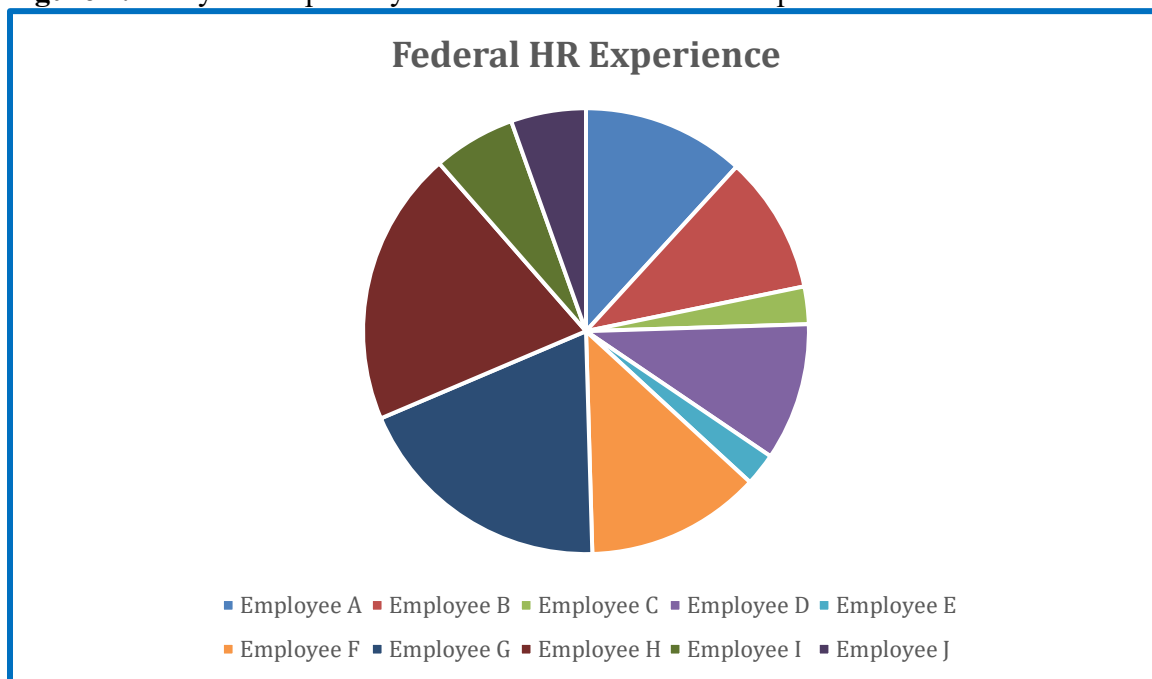
Participants

The study was conducted using ten HR professionals who volunteered to share their lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges while executing the sustainable human resources

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activities of recruitment and retention of federal employees in an organizational culture impacted by the COVID-19 CDC mandated restrictions. All the Human Resources professionals are employed by the United States Federal government across different demographics of Federal agencies. This population represents an equal number of males and females with a range of experience from 2 years to 22 years of employment within the federal government as Human Resources professionals (Figure 2, Table 1). Only two of the ten participants had less than six years of experience working for the Federal government. Only two of the ten had less than six years working as Human Resources professionals. Ten participants allowed data saturation in that enough data was collected until it would be redundant to continue to do so (Creswell, 2013).

Figure 2: Study Participants: years of Human Resources Experience



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Table 1: Study Participants Demographics

<u>Name</u>	<u>Agency</u>	<u>Paygrade</u>	<u>Federal HR Exp</u>
P1	United States Department of Agriculture	GS-12	13 years
P2	Department of Homeland Security	GS-12	11 years
P3	Department of Health and Human Svc	GS-9	3 years
P4	Animal Plant Health Inspection Svc	GS-9	11 year
P5	Naval Research Laboratory	GS-10 equal	2 years/6 mos.
P6	National Park Svc	GS-12	14 years
P7	Farm Protection and Conservation Center	GS-11	21 years
P8	Department of Education	GS-12	22 years
P9	National Science Foundation	GS-11	6 years/6 mos.
P10	Department of the Army	GS-12	6 years

Participant 1

Theme

The theme that was most prevalent in P1's description of his experiences was that pre-COVID HR processes and procedures were not conducive to continue recruitment and retention in COVID-19 restricted environment. Required updates and revisions to current Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were ongoing. There was an increase in the use of a myriad of technological platforms for interaction with customers, colleagues, and friends. Due to remote work requirements, many retentions and recruitment activities previously conducted in person were being done in a virtual environment using the available technological platforms or being waived. While remote work eliminated the commuting requirement and resulted in increased productivity, it negatively impacted the organizational culture. Employees were more accustomed to in-person interaction, which caused feelings of isolation in some instances. Communication with leadership was good and provided updates on changes regarding COVID as they occurred. The participant was not aware of the existence of the organization's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). He indicated an unprecedented increase in workload and a lack of work-life balance (burnout). Based on the current organizational culture, made recommendations

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for revisions to future HR processes and procedures. Overall, P1's perception of the current environment seems optimistic, and he doesn't believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impact recruitment and retention activities.

Transformed Meaning Unit

P1: I have not heard from employees or hiring managers that COVID-19 had any impact on their decision to remain in the organization. However, other HR professionals within the organization are saying that hiring managers list retention as one of their major concerns. Many of the pre-COVID HR processes did not enable me to successfully execute retention activities within the current restrictions. All the activities were executed virtually, using technology. Job fairs were conducted virtually with the use of Microsoft Teams or Zoom Recruitment, and retention activities are being performed using the USAStaffing module. The use of technology has made the transition from working in the office to working at home quite seamless. So, I haven't seen any issues with that. From that perspective, things are working well so far. It has been helpful to successfully execute recruitment activities. I knew we had a COOP Plan from seeing the emails sent from the Organization's Administrator Officer. None, at the worker level. We now have virtual platforms that allow for continuous communication from senior-level management officials; this same platform allows for us to participate in virtual events such as happy hours, fitness sessions, and mental health sessions. Current changes in HR processes and procedures now require that while working within the COVID-19 restrictions, we incorporate the use of technology in all areas of recruitment and retention processes and procedures. CDC restrictions prevent me from seeing my friends and family on a regular basis; therefore, I maintain my personal and professional relationships using phone calls,

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face time, and Duo. I feel that our workload has increased while in this environment, the demands for recruitment actions have increased. I have not been able to separate my work life from my personal life. Simply stated, I feel a sense of burnout. Since we began 100% remote work, the communications and engagement with leadership have been good. We often meet using Microsoft teams and/or zoom. While I do feel safer working in a remote environment – I also feel isolated from my friends and colleagues.

Communicating via Microsoft Teams is not the same as meeting for lunch in person. I miss the in-person interaction and am excited to return to the office once this is over.

There are some changes to the HR processes and procedures that can be done to eliminate some of the inconsistencies in remote work policies: My recommendation is as follows:

Develop a clear and comprehensive flexible work schedule policy that details exactly how managers can implement the use of both the Alternate Work Schedule and Flexible Work Schedule and how employees can use it. It appeared that each manager was doing their own thing, which caused a lot of employees' complaints about the fairness of the flexible work schedule. I think our organizations' morale was much better before we entered the COVID-19 restricted environment. Personal interactions were more important than we knew before.

Participant 2

Theme

The theme that was most prevalent in P2's description of her experiences was that the pre-COVID-19 HR processes and procedures were helpful but needed revision to continue recruitment and retention activities within the restricted environment. There was no time to plan. Therefore, updates and revisions to current SOP, processes, and procedures were ongoing. Based

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on the requirement to move to a 100% remote work posture, we began using available technology for interaction with customers, colleagues, and friends. Additionally, many retentions and recruitment activities conducted in person are now being performed using collaborative technology such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx. While remote work has proven to be advantageous for the safety of the workforce, it has impacted our organizational culture. We now see each other's lives up close and personal and has led to more understanding and apathy for each other. P2 did understand the existence of the organization Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) but played no part in the development. Overall, P2's perception of the current environment seems optimistic, and she doesn't believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impact recruitment and retention activities. Based on the current organizational culture, she made recommendations for updates to future HR processes and procedures. She believes that future HR policy should include the maximum use of technology, to replace all manual processes.

Transformed Meaning Unit

P2 communicated that, for the most part, their organization uses Microsoft Teams predominantly for communications. It has replaced the in-person interaction in every area, conducting activities related to recruitment and retention, interacting with customers, friends/family, and colleagues. HR processes and procedures had to be revised to be conducive to the COVID-19 restricted environment. Retention during COVID-19 is still going well because people are saying, in some instances, they have a preexisting condition, and now that the organization is working remotely, they feel safe and have decided to remain in the workforce. However, because of the opportunity to remote work fully, people have decided to remain in the job market, whereas if they had to return to the physical location and interact with other people, the decision could be different. I've

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also known people who have left because they did not want to go into the office; they were afraid of having to interact with people face to face and weren't comfortable with it. Therefore, I decided to retire earlier than anticipated. We had adequate processes and procedures in place, but they obviously had to be revised because of who has planned for this. So, the changes have been ongoing as the situations have unfolded. As soon as COVID hit and the organization was placed in a remoter work environment, we were chasing our tails, trying to revise SOPs. In the interim, we put temporary SOPs in the place where there were none. We started using the USAStaffing upgrade for everything for all recruitment and onboarding activities. It's the latest technology to use for recruitment efforts in a virtual environment. It is an advantage to use technology in a virtual environment. However, our customers have very unrealistic expectations because we are working remotely and using technology. Our customers think that we should be able to process recruitment actions faster, therefore more in a shorter period because we are using technology. They don't seem to understand that the only difference is that we are doing everything in a virtual environment. However, we still have the same OPM statutory requirements to meet where recruitment activities are concerned. It's been easier to attract employees from organizations that are not continuing to offer remote work or options for a flexible work schedule in the COVID restricted environment. Some Pre-COVID HR processes and/or procedures had to be revised to enable us to continue recruitment activities in a virtual environment.

My understanding of the COOP is that it is the plan that prescribes HR operational priorities in the event of a national emergency or crisis. I was not involved in the development. The organization's culture has been impacted because we are now at a

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100% remote work stature; we have employees who are balancing the care of their kids with being full-time employees.

My organization has moved to a 100% remote work environment. There is no longer face-to-face interaction, meetings, luncheons, or social events. All communications, meetings, and social events are conducted using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or email.

The use of technology has increased in every area, meetings, consultation with hiring managers, interviews with applicants, virtual onboarding, and virtual job fairs.

Personal relationships are maintained by communicating via daily video chat or phone calls. Communications with colleagues and customers are done utilizing technology such as Microsoft Teams and/or Zoom, Email, and phone calls.

Pre- COVID, I would have frequent face-to-face meetings, lunch, and social events with my colleagues and customers. My personal relationships were maintained in the same manner. Pre- COVID, separate from the use of phone calls, there was less virtual interaction. When we initially moved to a virtual work environment, I felt a sense of isolation. It took time for me to make the mental adjustment and finally develop a real work routine. We are ensuring that I have the necessary equipment to work from home, such as computer monitors, headsets, and appropriate home internet access. I have not been back in my office since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic because I have not had a reason to return to the office. The organization management and leadership teams have done a great job keeping us informed of changes related to COVID-19 protocols, employment, and when we might return to our physical work location. Remote work has caused me to suffer from a lack of work-life balance; my workday often runs into off-

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duty time. I have been more productive because the daily commute is no longer a factor, and for lunch, I just grab a quick sandwich as I now have time to incorporate 15 minutes of exercise.

Recommended changes to HR processes and procedures include training on how to dress for virtual meetings and proper communications. Other changes could include the appropriate use of both oral and written presentations and how to conduct virtual consultation sessions with hiring managers. Additionally, updates to the Hiring Manager's Handbook to include the changes as they relate to the use of technology to perform recruitment and retention activities. The morale of the organization was ok. I think that was less of an understanding of the challenges each of us endured on a day-to-day basis. We all share more of a sense of understanding and empathy for each other. Because now we see each other's lives up close and personal, I think we're seeing how each of us is just really trying to make it work.

Participant 3

Theme

The themes that were most prevalent in P3's description of his experiences is that all in-person meetings and communication, including recruitment and retention activities, were suspended and performed using Microsoft Teams and Zoom technology. Pre-COVID-19 HR processes and procedures were not conducive to continue recruitment and retention in the COVID-19 restricted environment. Updates and revisions to current SOPs were ongoing and substantive. There was an increase in the use of technology for interaction with customers and colleagues due to the move to a remote work environment. Additionally, all retention and recruitment activities that were previously performed face to face are now being performed in a

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virtual environment. COVID restrictions led to most federal organizations' transition to a remote work environment negatively impacted the culture. HR professionals who were accustomed to in-person interaction now must adjust to interacting using some form of technology; this has caused a sense of isolation for some. Remote work has eliminated the need for a daily commute, resulting in an increase in productivity. P3 says that the increase in productivity has been attributed to a lack of work-life balance. Challenges with communication have also risen due to the virtual environment. P3 said that he was aware of the existence of the organization's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP); however, he did not provide input. Overall, P3's perception of the current environment seems optimistic, and he doesn't believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impacted recruitment and retention activities. Based on the current organizational culture, he made recommendations for updates to future HR processes and procedures.

Transformed Meaning Unit

P3 states that the onset of COVID resulted in my organization moving to a 100% remote work posture. My retention and recruitment taskings immediately moved to the use of technology such as USASTAFFING, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. There were no in-person meetings due to the move to a 100% mandated remote work environment. Initially, there was the concern of returning to the workplace due to pre-existing conditions. So far, no one has resigned from my knowledge due to COVID. Utilizing the pre-COVID HR processes and procedures would not have helped to execute recruitment or retention activities during the current restricted environment. Changes to policy and procedures were updated as time went on. The decision to move to 100% remote happened so quickly that our HR leadership did not have the appropriate opportunity to

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prepare. However, HR procedures and processes were put in place as necessary to include many of the new processes that were disseminated by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). OPM disseminated policies to the Federal workforce such as Extended leave flexibilities, the use of the Maxi Flex Schedule, and 100% remote work. Without the usual face-to-face interaction with customers and colleagues, I must say it was quite a challenge. But as time went on, we began to creatively use the available technology to perform our recruitment and retention activities. Many of the pre-COVID HR processes and procedures had to be revised so that we could continue to successfully execute recruitment activities in the current restricted environment. Changes have been ongoing for the past year. Policies did not cover questions such as injury while at home. How is this covered? Prior to COVID, I was not aware of the HR Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Our HR office is incredibly compartmentalized. Therefore, we have a unique team to work with different Directors and our Policy Division who has oversight for all the guidance and rules of management and determines when to implement the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). As an HR Professional, my involvement in executing the COOP was to know what my priorities were when it came to the mission essential functions of Staffing and Recruitment functions, voice concerns with issues, and provide feedback.

COVID restrictions had negatively impacted our organization's culture to the point that leadership developed an employee engagement committee with the sole purpose of enhancing employee engagement. Since we left the workplace, everyone seemed to be more isolated. Everything is so different because of the effects of COVID and the fact that we are separated. When we were in the office, everyone seemed to be

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okay; we always had cool activities to do together. We had office potlucks together from time to time, conducted some fundraising and other events which kept everyone connected. But since COVID, we have not had the opportunity to do any of these things. The use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom to conduct meetings has replaced in-person Team and Staff meetings. The culture of our organization was very personal in nature; we would check on each other almost daily. We still connect daily, but the virtual interaction does not feel the same. Because we're all separate, some have feelings of isolation. Everyone is now working remotely; there is no longer face-to-face meetings or communication. All communications, meetings, and team-building events are now being conducted via Skype, Microsoft Teams, and/or Email. The HR Office no longer uses hard copy files; all files are maintained electronically now. There is an increase in the use of technology for recruitment events like job fairs, use of the USASTAFFING module to conduct onboarding 100% virtually. Consultations with management officials are conducted virtually using platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. I communicate with my friends and colleagues in a variety of ways; we talk on the phone every single day, and we FaceTime each other. However, communication with my customers and the hiring managers is performed primarily using Microsoft Teams and Skype. I maintained my personal relationships, and my relationship with colleagues was tight pre-COVID. We went to lunch together and would stop at each other's desks to talk daily. I didn't have furniture, a desk, or a chair when COVID first started. Therefore, I was working by sitting up in my bed. Communicating with upper management has been a challenge since we have been working remotely. Therefore, I wouldn't say the communication has changed drastically to where there seems to be a barrier to understanding each other. I

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feel this is mainly because, in the office, we communicated primarily face to face.

Because they were not familiar with my writing style, it has led to miscommunication. I have had to remind them of who I am and that they know me; any perceived offense was not intended.

I have not worked from my office since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and our organization resumed a 100% remote work environment. Communications and engagement with leadership are more often now due to COVID-19 restrictions. Our leadership keeps us informed of changes as they occur. They seek our feedback and are supportive of our suggestions. Our leadership team is often disappointed in the lack of participation in social activities. However, as HR professionals, we do not participate due to our heavy workload. For us, the work never stops. I feel like the hiring managers believe that because we are in a remote work environment that we can work 24 hours a day, and I am approaching the burnout stage and starting to make minor mistakes as a result. I would say that my productivity has increased due to remote working. However, I have no work-life balance. I continue to maximize the use of technology for meetings, onboarding, recruitment/retention activities, job fairs, personalized access to systems information, and virtual desktop tools. The morale in my organization is worse because of the COVID-19 restrictions that have placed us in this virtual work environment. The lack of face-to-face interaction is having a negative impact on us because of the ways we are accustomed to interacting.

Participant 4

Theme

The theme that was most prevalent in P4's description of her experiences is that she saw changes happen so rapidly, there was no time to prepare or plan. The Pre-COVID-19 HR processes and procedures were not conducive to continue recruitment and retention in COVID-19 restricted environment. Updates and revisions to current SOPs were ongoing. There was an increase in the use of Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, and WebEx for interaction with customers, colleagues, and friends. Additionally, many retentions and recruitment activities previously performed in person were now being performed using USASTAFFING upgrade in a virtual work environment. COVID restrictions did impact organizational culture, mostly because of the remote work stance, which led to the use of Microsoft Teams for meetings and collaborative communications. However, the morale of the employees did not change from pre-COVID. P4 was not aware of the existence of the organization's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Overall, P4's perception of the current environment seems optimistic, and she doesn't believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impact recruitment and retention activities. Based on the current organizational culture, she made recommendations for updates to future HR processes and procedures.

Transformed Meaning Unit

P4 states: "There did not appear to be any issues with retention as it relates to the COVID-19 restricted environment, especially since the entire agency was at 100% remote work. Many employees stated that they would remain in the workforce if they could work 100% remotely. Those who have pre-existing conditions feel safe if they are not required to come into their physical work location. Pre-COVID HR processes were

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not effective in executing retention activities during the current restrictions. Pre-COVID HR processes required in-person face-to-face interaction; this is not possible during the CDC mandated restrictions. It was difficult, but with some revisions, we were able to continue recruitment activities. The technology was always available to perform recruitment activities virtually. However, we were not using the USASTAFFING upgrade to its maximum capability. I was not aware of what the COOP plan was; therefore, I was not involved. The entire agency is at 100% remote work; the use of collaborative technology such as Skype, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom has increased. All meetings that were conducted in person are now being conducted using Microsoft Teams, and all Team building, and social events are now being conducted using Teams or some other technological platform. Communication is primarily disseminated via email and/or Microsoft Teams. There is no longer face-to-face interaction, which has led to a lack of employee engagement in some instances. There are no longer in-person meetings; eating lunch together will not happen, onboarding of new employees is being conducted 100% virtual. Social interactions and celebrations are conducted virtually using a technological platform, such as Microsoft Teams or its equivalent. Laptops etc., are being mailed to employees as opposed to them picking it up. Many pre-employment requirements have been waived, such as fingerprinting and drug tests, and where applicable, the need for official transcripts as a part of the onboarding process is also being waived. Presently, The Administrative Officer and the Hiring Manager both play a larger role in the onboarding process. Performance discussions are being conducted virtually using a technological platform such as Microsoft Teams or a similar platform, which has never happened before. I maintain my relationship with customers, colleagues, and friends via

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email. Sometimes I call if I can't get them on the Microsoft Teams site, I will just send them a chat via teams just to check on them. And if there are new employees, I'll just send an email asking them how things are going? How are you doing? And they'll just respond back if necessary? Sometimes I might even have a question asked of me about WEBTA or about an ID card or something like that. I maintain my current relationships by having virtual lunches and meeting with personal connections - those I consider my friends. Pre- COVID, my colleagues and I will order lunch, and we will just sit and have lunch together at our desks. With the onset of COVID- Initially, it was a challenge for me to focus because I was never a person in favor of remote work and never did remote work prior to COVID. It took me some time to adjust to this remote work way of life. It's been a year now, and I'm now pro-remote work. Yes, I have been in my office since the COVID outbreak. When I first went into the office, I was a little apprehensive based on what I understood about the spread of the virus. However, once I got there and began working, I felt much safer when I noticed there was hand sanitizer everywhere. And when I noticed the people who were there were complying with the CDC guidelines by wearing their masks and practicing safe distancing. And when I got to my office, it was just another coworker and me, and we were a safe distance apart while we were in the office working. I think that I will feel safe going back to the building once we are required to return because I only work and share office space with one other person. If we work alternate days, the issue of spreading the COVID-19 virus won't be an issue for either of us to be concerned about.

There are no significant changes in communication and engagement with leaders. Even though our communications are now primary using Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and

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Skype, we are kept abreast of changes as they occur with respect to everything regarding COVID-19 and HR procedures and processes changes. Staff and Team meetings are still being consistently conducted weekly using Microsoft Teams. For the most part, all the employee engagement and communication in my experience has been consistent since we've been in a COVID-restricted environment. At the start of COVID, everything seemed crazy because, at this time, we didn't have adequate HR processes or procedures in place to address many of the challenges we were facing. However, as time went on, we worked through these challenges. Minus the commute, I would say I'm much more productive. But I am less busy now that it appears everyone has a better understanding of what is on — changes to HR processes and procedures that should continue are the conduct of virtual onboarding and virtual job fairs. Pre COVID, I will say that the organization's morale was up and down. It depends a lot on what is going on internally to the organization at any given time. The morale is like the way it was before COVID again; it depends on what is going on in the organization at any given time.

Participant 5

Theme

The theme that is most prevalent in P5's description of her experiences is that the pre-COVID-19 HR processes and procedures were not conducive to continue recruitment and retention in a COVID-19 restricted environment. Updates and revisions to current HR processes and procedures are still ongoing. There was an increase in the use of technology for interaction with customers, colleagues, and friends. Additionally, many retentions and recruitment activities conducted in person are now being done in a virtual environment using the available technology. She feels more productive and has experienced an increase in recruitment activities since the

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onset of COVID-19 restrictions. Issues of communication did arise during the restricted environment related to working with people you have never met. COVID-19 restrictions did impact the organizational culture. All communications and social events are being conducted in a virtual environment using available technology. P5 was not aware of the existence of the organization's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Overall, P5's perception of the current environment seems optimistic, and she doesn't believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impact recruitment and retention activities. Based on the current organizational culture, she made recommendations for updates to future HR processes and procedures.

Transformed Meaning Unit

P5 stated, "I feel like the retention has been a lot better in the current environment, only because it has been complicated for people to find and keep jobs in the private sector. So, it's almost like when they or if they get a public sector/public service job, they tend to keep it. A lot of the people that work in my office have been in this organization for approximately 20 to 30 years. They love the organization and their job; even if there are a few that have left, they always seem to come back. Many say that they don't really have an issue with social distancing, and for the most part, we have been full telework indefinitely, and we're still teleworking. And because there is still no return date to go back to work in the office. For some, this is their main reason for remaining with the organization.

Regarding recruitment: we are bringing more people on than a little bit. Yes, we have been busy with hiring, even doing career fairs, onboarding, and most recruitment and retention activities virtually; we have been busy. We do use technology to include USASTAFFING a little more than before the intent of the system was to complete

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onboarding in a virtual environment. There have been changes to processes because of working remotely; we now administer the oath to new employees using Microsoft teams and zoom. I never thought I would see this being done when we were not faced to face. The biggest issue that we have had so far is that now we have to ask the Supervisors or the Administrative Officers to administer the oath of office to the new employees. Pre-COVID, the oath was administered on their first-day work, when they would come in to get their security badges. However, now that the Administrative Officers and Supervisors are administering the oath of office, the employees are uploading the forms via email and returning them to HR after they've signed them. I'm not real familiar with the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). I was going to say from what I gather, they kind of had to put a plan in place once the COVID pandemic started. It appeared that things had just happened, and our leadership just got together and figured some things out. I was not 100% sure that they had a COOP plan in place; in the event, something like this happened. But I can say they came up with a plan quickly to adapt to the current situation. Regarding our organization's culture, for the first time ever, everyone is working 100% remotely now, and they are really a family community and workforce. The organization does parties and holiday celebrations via Zoom, and we still have get-togethers with each other via Zoom. I guess, and what some would call a virtual happy hour. Also, we've done baby showers using Microsoft Teams. Something we did that I thought was so awesome is that we all sent money to one person via cash app, and then that person would order whatever gift we all decided, as a group for the person being recognized and have it shipped to their house for the day that we planned the baby shower, and then we had online games that we played. It was kind of cool. Our

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organization tried as hard as possible to make everything seem normal. Many HR processes and procedures have changed because of the COVID-restricted environment.

The onboarding of employees is 100%: virtual with the use of USASTAFFING for onboarding. More involvement of Supervisors or Administrative Officers in the onboarding process and job fairs are conducted virtually. All interactions with new employees are conducted using Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Email, or via Telephone. Maintaining personal and professional connections has been quite challenging, as well. We are really a family community or workforce. So, it, it's like, you know, especially since this pandemic has been going on for so long, we miss getting together during the holidays. We have always had a lot of parties and celebrations; this is one of the things that I miss most about my coworkers. So, we try to, we try to get together via Zoom, at least once a month, but you know, it's just not the same. Our HR Director wanted us to put together a COVID Time Capsule thing, to note this period to remember our past, present, and future, and things that we missed during COVID. She asked each person in the organization to put together something like that, and she wants us to open it again in five years to comment so we can go back and reflect. So, I thought that was kind of cool. Pre-COVID relationships with some of my close coworker friends would simply be us sitting around outside sometimes after work and just talking. Since the onset of the COVID pandemic, of course, those gatherings don't happen face to face anymore. However, the traditional meetings still occur as normal, but not nothing, like, you know, special. We still have our All Hands and our regular Staff/Team meetings using Microsoft Teams. We don't have as many meetings, but I think it's just because we've been super busy. Everything has been done virtually because of remote work. I've

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discovered that getting the things together for a virtual job fair is a little more tedious, especially when training is needed on the technology being used – like breaking into separate rooms using Zoom.

My friends and I communicate using FaceTime because a lot of us have the iPhone. So that's fine, iPhone or Microsoft Teams or whatever works pre-COVID, we'd go out walking together, or even just going to the cafeterias and having lunch together. I'd prefer in-person interaction; everything to include work, seems a lot easier in person. For example, when you have questions about something, it's easier to just go over to somebody's desk quick versus having to call. For training, it was a lot easier in person; even on-the-job training has been a challenge. Any questions that I have, it's like, okay, now I must call on Microsoft Teams and try to get her face to face on Microsoft teams. And then, you know, I would have to share the screen. Therefore, if I wasn't sure where to go for something, this would be even more time-consuming in some ways. COVID restrictions presented challenges to completing our HR duties in a virtual environment, which includes not having adequate equipment available when needed. I think that it's important that Flex work and telecommuting employees should be provided with all the equipment needed to do their jobs, and we should assume the organization is responsible for it. Employees should not feel that they must use their own equipment for work.

Challenges to HR Specialist: Sometimes, we needed additional training on certain things. Some of the government computers you can't use because they don't have a camera. Therefore, in this case: I had to use my phone and the computer at the same time. Not all the laptops in my organization were like this, but most of them are SECRET. I'm not sure if it's just because the Department of Defense (DoD) that they don't have cameras on

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any of the desktops and laptops computers. Unfortunately, we still have customers that want to see you. In this case, I must use my personal phone because it has a video camera. And I must join it with my computer. With participating in training with my colleagues: I'm watching you from my phone, but if I need to share my screen, so you can help me do something, then I will have to link my phone to the computer. Or another issue was they didn't have enough laptops. So, Pre-COVID, my organization didn't really want people to telework much. So, they essentially had a limited number of laptops. Some people had to bring home desktops at first, and others used their personal laptops. I was one of the lucky folks whose desktop stopped working in the middle of COVID; therefore, I was able to obtain a laptop sooner than expected. The whole process of getting into the building to meet with the IT personnel to get the laptop was a real adventure. Therein lies a much-needed discussion about putting a process in place. And I wanted to talk to management about that because I know right now, their priority is getting everybody laptops. There are a lot of us who still have our desktops, so we are hoping to be the first to get the laptops. Our organization is a completely working capital fund. So, I don't know what the budget looks like for them versus, you know, someone who is an agency whose funds come from Congress or gets their budget from Congress. I don't know if that plays a part. Well, we only have enough money for this and not that, so we are just going to have to work with what we have.

Since COVID-19, I have been to my office twice for computer issues. Okay. And then I think I went there one time because I had to pick up a file or something like that. But I never, I never really stayed all day. I was okay. Um, I don't think there was a point where I was kind of uptight. In the beginning, I was a bit nervous about being around

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other people, but after a while, it started to subside. So, when I went into the office, of course, I wore my mask. And the IT person, she didn't have her mask on at first. But I think when she realized that she had a customer, she said, oh, let me put my mask on. I'm okay interacting with anyone, but we must do social distancing. Not to be mean to anyone or anything like that. I just think we should do what is necessary to get through this the best way we can, so we can move on. Well, also, I've noticed that a lot of organizations are not placing a specific area of consideration for location in their announcements. With the rise in remote work, I think this is a good idea, and many management officials are starting to recognize that. They're not really worried about where you're working from now. Although you could always reside in another state and work for an organization in, let's say, Washington D.C, they're starting to go in that direction. This COVID thing really has got leadership thinking outside of the box with respect to recruitment. In-kind of just a casual conversation with some of my leadership they're thinking about that, you know, now being able to hire people from other areas without bringing them here You know when we must do their Tax forms and stuff like that. This is just going to be a whole new way of doing business in HR because we are now going to deduct taxes based on where they live instead of where they work. The next thought is mainlining the 100% remote work environment. And, you know, I would like to work so much better because I'm able to multitask. I'm able to work, and if I need to get up and do something at home quickly, I can then come back and finish my work. Even if I must work a little later than usual, or whatever, it doesn't feel like I am. The daily commute takes so much time away from my family time or the ability to do extracurricular things with my children, like going outside with my daughter at

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lunchtime, just to kind of get her out of the house and stuff like that. Without the daily commute, I do feel like I have more time to spend with her versus before COVID; I feel like I was with her for two or three hours before we'd go to bed and backup and the next day out the door. I was doing the same routine over again. I've heard other people say that they're very social, and they need that they need social interaction; they need to be around other people. The interaction that we have with each other via Zoom and Microsoft Teams is enough for me. I don't have to get up as early anymore, I don't have the required daily commute, and I'm still able to log in for work at 8 am. I'm all done with my workday by 4:35 pm. Communication can be a bit difficult when you're trying to get to know people without being in their presence. So, when you send emails as communications to people, it may be received as sounding harsh to you because you don't know the person or you are not familiar with their communication style. Now, you think maybe you don't like this person, who you have never met. But really, they may be the sweetest person, but you've just read the email kind of different. Based on this, I think in some ways, it is kind of rough hiring when you have people onboarding, and you never meet face to face.

Participant 6

Theme

The theme that was most prevalent in P6's description of her experiences is that the pre-COVID-19 HR processes and procedures were not conducive to continue recruitment and retention in COVID-19 restricted environment. Updates and Revisions were ongoing. There was an increase in the use of technology for interaction with customers, colleagues, and friends. Additionally, many retentions and recruitment activities that were conducted in person are now

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being done in a virtual environment. Remote negatively impacted organizational culture; employees were more accustomed to in-person interaction, which caused a sense of isolation in some instances. P6 was not aware of the existence of the organization's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Overall, P6's perception of the current environment seems optimistic, and he doesn't believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impact recruitment and retention activities. Based on the current organizational culture; she made recommendations for updates to future HR processes and procedures

Transformed Meaning Unit:

P6 states, "The turnover is maybe about a third of the retention rate prior to COVID. And so, trying to get those individuals to stay if they are required to return to their physical work location as is- will be difficult, as it is related to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are in a 100% remote work environment because of the spread of the COVID virus. As a result, most organizations and their HR offices either have a set telework schedule or 100% remote work. Therefore, when it comes to retention, employees are sure to be more apt to go where there is 100% remote work rather than stay in an organization where they might be required to go into the office three times a week. Okay. So that makes sense. So, what about if you have any idea about people who are retirement eligible and may have not necessarily considered retirement, but maybe thought they were going to remain in the workforce a bit longer, but because of COVID decided to retire.

Regarding recruitment: Last year, it hasn't been bad. Being able to conduct meetings via Zoom and Microsoft Team has been better than going to the physical work location. Being in a 100% remote work environment is different; for me, to provide the same

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consultation services is different without face-to-face interaction. If I were meeting with the hiring officials bi-weekly in face to face to the meeting, communication just seems to be easier. Sending the same information via email seems to get lost in translation between the two of us. Using Zoom and Microsoft Teams as the primary means of communications has been a challenge for many reasons; speaking to someone without the camera on sometimes feel weird, feeling like people are multi-tasking during the meeting, therefore you don't have their complete attention and sometimes just the mere lack of training. In the end, we can make it work because we have a pre-established relationship, and I already have an idea of what I'm recruiting for and how best to proceed to meet the needs of the organization. The organizational culture was impacted with regards to conducting some processes virtually. I experienced while conducting a job fair via Zoom was intense. It was a great opportunity to help to pilot the first-ever virtual job fair, but it was not easy, and more training was needed on the use of Zoom. There were available processes or procedures available preceding the transition to 100% remote work. The transition to conducting HR staffing operations in a virtual environment happened so rapidly, there was no guidance in place, so it was a learn-as-you-go type situation. Procedures, as it relates to the conduct of drugs tests and fingerprinting, were waived for new hires due to the facility not being prepared to complete these activities in a CDC-restricted environment. Because there were no policies in place for these events, onboarding was slightly delayed at the beginning. The training was needed at the beginning on the use of technology such as Zoom and Microsoft teams. Therefore, in the beginning, things were both a bit challenging and a bit tedious as well. This was one of the noted issues, and although everyone tried their best, we all learned through trial and

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error. Soon our managers begin implementing their plans of action and how they operate and release and recruiting because it seems that everybody does it differently in each state. So, trying to transition, you know, for me was a bit difficult. However, based on my experience in the HR field, I have been able to navigate some of the challenges and turn them into successes. I was not aware of what the Continuity of Operations Plan was in the organization; I was onboarding when the onset of COVID happened, I was just coming on board. So, I was only in the organization for about a month and a half. We came into the office one day and were told you need to pack up your stuff and go home indefinitely. We were told that we would be working from home until further notice. The organization shifted to 100% remote work with the use of technology for all communications with less than 24 hours' notice. In the remote work environment, there is an increase in the number of meetings and emails, which are replacing in-person interactions. Onboarding of new employees is now conducted 100% virtual. Celebrations of all types are now virtual. HR processes and procedures that have changed because of COVID: We are doing more things virtually, such as onboarding new employees using USASTAFFING, administering the oath via Microsoft Teams. The hiring managers and administrative support folks are more involved in the onboarding process. Once employees are hired, they are not required to relocate to the location of their new position. Some pre-employment requirements such as drug testing and fingerprinting have been waived based on CDC mandates. The conduct of job fairs via Zoom. maintaining personal and professional connections (relationships) because of CDC mandated restrictions, I used technology more to maintain both personal and professional relationships. I use email, texting, phone calls as well. Pre-COVID relationships, I did

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more face-to-face interactions, hugging, handshakes, and having lunch and breaks in person. Challenges to performing HR duties: I had to adjust to 100% remote work because I've never been a big advocate of working from home. This caused some mental challenges for me because the face-to-face interaction with co-workers and customers was no longer there. It took more discipline for me to get started at the beginning. Communication is more challenging now because in-person interaction is being replaced with the use of technology. I once did my consultations in person with the hiring managers, and now it's different using teams because there are instances where the face-to-face interaction is not there, and the opportunity to build a rapport with new people is no longer there. Conducting the virtual job fairs has been quite tedious. I have not been in the office since COVID. Both communications and engagement have been good. There are weekly meetings keeping us informed of all changes that occur with respect to HR processes and procedures and COVID-19. Challenges during remote work. I found myself working longer than I normally do in my normal 10-hour workday. I now constantly find myself on a computer; all I do is work; there is no such thing as work-life balance. When I was in the office, I would leave the computer at work and pick it up the next day. Now because I'm at home all the time, I remind myself of all the things I need to get done. I then said to myself, let me log on and get this done. So that impacts my mental well-being. Because I now spend more time working than I do other things that brought me to balance such as reading and relaxing. I have experienced an increase in productivity due to the absence of commuting and working in a 100% remote environment. Ability to focus with distractions that might have occurred within the office. Many of the changes in procedures are not yet reflected in HR processes and SOPs

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as they relate to recruiting within the COVID-19 restricted environment. My organization is not sure how long we will remain in a 100% remote or COVID-restricted environment. The employee morale was good, and there has been no change because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Participant 7

Theme

The theme that was most prevalent in P7's description of her experiences is that the pre-COVID-19 HR processes and procedures were not conducive to continue recruitment and retention in the COVID-19 restricted environment. Updates and revisions were ongoing. There was an increase in the use of technology for interaction with customers, colleagues, and friends. Additionally, many retentions and recruitment activities that were conducted in person are now being done in a virtual environment. The remote work environment has negatively impacted the organizational culture. Employees were more accustomed to in-person interaction, which caused a sense of isolation in some instances and impacted employee engagement. P7 was aware of the existence of the organization's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Getting replacement equipment in a timely manner was an issue. Overall, P7's perception of the current environment seems pessimistic. However, she doesn't believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impact recruitment and retention activities. Based on the current organizational culture, she has made some recommendations for updates to future HR processes and procedures.

Transformed Meaning Unit

P7: I have not spoken to colleagues and management officials face to face since the onset of the COVID pandemic. However, I have had conversations using Microsoft Teams and Zoom to speak on the topic of retention and recruitment, and as I have spoken to

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employees who are on the fence about staying or leaving the organization. The main factor in their decision-making process is – we will remain in remote work status if COVID-19 is still a concern. Employees feel safer working from home while we are in this COVID-19 restricted environment. They make up two populations, those who have pre-existing conditions as well as those who are retirement eligible. However, it appears their perspectives are the same, whereas the work environment is concerned. Many of the pre-COVID HR processes and procedures were ineffective to be used as is in the current restricted environment. However, revisions occurred as necessary to fit the needs of the agency. Executing recruitment activities within the current COVID-19 restricted environment required the increased use of technology-based systems such as USA STAFFING; job fairs were conducted virtually using Zooms; applicant interviews were conducted either by phone or the use of another technological platform such as WebEx, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom. Many of the pre-employment requirements were waived, employee travel to new employment locations was halted. Most pre-COVID HR processes had to be revised so that they would be more conducive to use in the COVID-restricted environment. The HR Professional's role in executing the Continuity of Operations Plan is to execute the tasks and projects that leadership has determined to be a priority.

The COVID-19 restricted environment has negatively impacted our organizational culture. All in-person interaction has been replaced with communicating using a form of technology, email, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx. Onboarding of new employees is now virtual. Leadership Meetings are now conducted via some form of technology. HR processes and procedures that have changed because of working within

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the COVID-19 restricted environment are that the relocation of new employees has stopped, all non-essential travel has stopped, most processes are now technology-based. Job fairs are now conducted virtually, and fingerprinting requirements have been waived, drug testing requirements have been waived, the requirement to submit transcripts has been waived. Onboarding of new employees is now being conducted virtually.

The way I've maintained my personal and professional connections are now done via telephone calls and virtual meetings. My personal connections are made via social media channels such as FB, Instagram, and FaceTime. Challenges I have dealt with because of remote work as it relates to my performance of HR duties are that working in different time zones than my customers and the use of the maxi flex schedule has made it difficult to schedule meeting with my customers to discuss recruitment actions and processes. Customers who happened to be home with school-age kids make it even more difficult to coordinate schedules for meetings because their schedules are centered around their children.

I have not worked in my office since the onset of COVID-19. We've had more meetings and increased communications and engagement since the onset of COVID. Our organization's leadership wants to ensure that we are kept abreast of all changes as they relate to COVID protocols. In contrast, remote work has been good for me in terms of productivity, without having to make the daily commute. It has posed challenges from other aspects of my job as an HR professional. I feel like my day never ends, and there is always something to do. I have no work-life balance and am approaching the burnout stage. Hopefully, more changes to the HR processes and procedures will be put in place as they relate to the following: Develop detailed instructions, language, and policies

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specifically related to both remote works, working in an office safely, and equitable distribution of awards and recognition within the CDC mandated COVID-19 restrictions. My organization's morale was much better pre-COVID; now employees are unhappy for many reasons, but what I hear more is that employees are working extremely hard, however, are not being recognized for their efforts, therefore becoming less engaged and enthusiastic about their work. Many employees do not feel engaged with the organization, and morale is not up to par.

Participant 8

Theme

The theme that was most prevalent in P8's description of her experiences is that the pre-COVID HR processes and procedures were not conducive to continue recruitment and retention in COVID-19 restricted environment. Updates and revisions were ongoing. There was an increase in the use of technology for interaction with customers, colleagues, and friends. Additionally, many retentions and recruitment activities conducted in person are now being done in a virtual environment. The remote work environment negatively impacted the current organizational culture. Employees feel less engaged and unappreciated by their leadership, which could be caused by the lack of in-person interaction. There was also a challenge with getting replacement equipment in a timely manner. P8 was not aware of the existence of the organization's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). P8's perception of the current environment seems pessimistic. However, she doesn't believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impact recruitment and retention activities. Based on the current organizational culture, she made recommendations for updates to future HR processes and procedures. She believes that there has been an increase in recruitment activities based on the perceived reduction in retention.

Transformed Meaning Unit

P8: Organizational changes that occurred because of COVID restrictions were that we were placed in a 100% remote environment without warning. All HR recruitment and retention processes were conducted virtually using technology such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and email. In the COVID restricted environment, the recruitment workload has increased drastically and has impacted my work-life balance. My productivity has increased because I no longer have the daily commute to contend with and the remote work environment is very convenient when it comes to spending time with my family.

In my opinion, there are many HR processes that need to be revised because of working in a COVID-restricted environment. The use of USA STAFFING as a part of the onboarding process, Zoom and Microsoft Teams to continue to recruitment discussions. Implementation of a maxi-flex work schedule is most conducive to the transition to a 100% remote work environment. The challenges that I encountered that prevented me from completing my HR duties are as follows: Communication and collaboration difficulties, timely handling of computer technological issues. Getting computers fixed or replaced was time-consuming since our IT department worked on a rotational basis. I have never heard of a document referred to as a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). However, revision to current HR SOPs would be beneficial if it included the following: Establishing guidelines for a home office, such as a designated work area, and provide training related to workstation setup and safety measures, including ergonomics. When appropriate and possible, conduct periodic checks of employee home offices to help identify and eliminate work area safety hazards. Set fixed work hours and meal and rest periods for telecommuters. Doing so can help establish whether an injury was “in the

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course of' employment. In comparison, I'm in favor of the remote work environment, which has provided me with more time to do my work instead of sitting in traffic for hours in length. Working remotely because of the COVID restricted environment has negatively impacted the organization's morale. We were a close group of people who communicated and saw each other daily before COVID. Then without notice, there was no face-to-face interaction and limited communications at first as we adjusted to this new normal. The morale of our organization has never been worse. All our communications with customers and colleagues are done via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. I think there are folks who are still adjusting to this virtual work environment.

Participant 9

Theme

The theme that was most prevalent in P9s description of her experiences is that the pre-COVID-19 HR processes and procedures were not conducive to continue recruitment and retention in COVID-19 restricted environment. Updates and revisions were ongoing. There was an increase in the use of technology for interaction with customers, colleagues, and friends. Additionally, many retentions and recruitment activities conducted in person are now being done in a virtual environment. Remote negatively impacts organizational culture. Employees were more accustomed to in-person interaction, which caused a rise in instances of miscommunication. This has inadvertently caused internal conflict. P10 was not aware of the existence of the organization's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). P10's perception of the current environment seems pessimistic. However, she does not believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impact recruitment and retention activities. Based on the current organizational culture; she made recommendations for updates to future HR processes and procedures

Transformed Meaning Unit

P9: Seemingly, there was no virtual workplace strategy in place when the COVID -19 pandemic started. We were all working in the office one day and forced to move to a 100% remote work environment the next day. It appears that my organization had no plan at all. Recruitment and retention-related activities are all being conducted using technology such as USASTAFFING, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and email. As a result of being in a remote work environment, we had to meet and interact with customers, colleagues, family, and friends via conference calls, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom. She has experienced longer workdays, which has led to a lack of work-life balance and burnout. We have been meeting our recruitment goals mostly by hiring employees without the challenges of them relocating. In this instance, we were able to attract the best talent, and the employee also can apply for the job he or she wants without any geographic limitation. Job fair and onboarding of new employees is now being conducted virtually. Pre-COVID HR processes would not have been effective given CDC-mandated protocols. However, revisions are being made as necessary to accommodate the organization's mission and business processes. Prior to COVID, I was not aware that our organization had a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). As an HR Professional at my grade level, I was never asked to provide any input. Working in a virtual environment has limited social unity, which refers to situations in which individuals are bound to one another by common social and cultural habits. Our organization's morale is the worst I've ever seen since my arrival. As we have progressed through this new normal, I do see things getting better with the engagement of employees. Changes that have occurred within our organization because of the COVID mandated protocols include no longer having in-person interaction. All communications are

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done via some technological platform. I miss having team luncheons and team-building activities.

Lots have changed with respect to HR as well. We conduct employee onboarding in a virtual environment, we administer the Oath of Office to new hires via Microsoft Teams, and new hire paperwork is sent to new employees via USASTAFFING. Job fairs are conducted via Zoom or another technological platform. My personal and professional relationships pre-COVID involved in-person interaction by having lunch, attending meetings, and other things we took for granted. Since we moved to the remote work environment, my communication is limited to social media interaction with my friends and the use of Microsoft Teams, Zoom, email, or telephone calls to customers and colleagues.

Challenges that I have encountered in a remote work environment that prevent me from performing my HR duties include a lack of vital training and mentoring, remote experience—isolation, diminished collaboration, longer hours, and burnout. I have not been back to the office since the COVID outbreak. Communication challenges suffered from the in-person interaction include the effect of computer-mediated communications (emails), sometimes posed challenge-based communication styles, the use of slang, or incorrect grammar usage. Recommended changes to HR processes and procedures: Develop a different strategy and selection criteria for the remote workers and ensuring these employees' abilities match the organization's culture. Develop a telecommuting policy that outlines the employer's expectations for employees who work from home. The organization's morale was a lot better, pre-COVID. Since the onset of COVID, everyone seems to be more stressed and wound up about everything.

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Due to a lack of face-to-face communication, there are more chances of clashes between virtual environment team members. Some team members feel like their project may not get proper project visibility. We are working to find effective means to manage conflicts.

Participant 10

Theme

The theme that was most prevalent in P10's description of her experiences is that the pre-COVID HR processes and procedures were not conducive to continue recruitment and retention in COVID-19 restricted environment. Updates and revisions were ongoing. There was an increase in the use of technology for interaction with customers, colleagues, and friends. Additionally, many retentions and recruitment activities conducted in person are now being done in a virtual environment. Remote negatively impacts organizational culture. Issues with communication, collaboration, and teambuilding have arisen due to the lack of in-person interaction. The employee's morale was a lot better pre-COVID, where everyone was interacting in person. P10 was not aware of the existence of the organization's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Overall, P10's perception of the current environment seems pessimistic. However, she doesn't believe that the COVID restrictions negatively impact recruitment and retention activities. Based on the current organizational culture; she made recommendations for updates to future HR processes and procedures

Transformed Meaning Unit

P10: I continued to speak to employees regarding their plans to remain with the organization. However, the difference in our conversation within the COVID restricted environment is that we do not communicate in person. Our communication is primarily done using telephone, email, or using some other form of technology such as Microsoft

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Teams, Zoom, or WebEx. The pre-COVID HR processes minimally enabled me to continue to execute my retention and recruitment activities. Most of the processes were intended to be conducted using face-to-face interaction. However, based on CDC mandates, our entire organization resumed a 100% remote work posture. It became necessary to begin using technology as a replacement for all prior face-to-face interactions. Applicant interviews were conducted virtually, interaction with management officials and/or other customers is being conducted telephonically, via email, or using technology such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, USASTAFFING, or WebEx. Onboarding of new employees has been conducted using a 100% virtual process. Job fairs are being conducted virtually via Zoom.

The HR processes and procedures that were in place did enable us to continue to conduct retention and recruitment activities in a COVID-19 restricted environment, but only because of the increase in the use of technology. Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had no understanding of our organization's human resources continuity of operations plan (COOP). The COVID-19 restrictions caused my organization to transition my organization to 100% telework, which negatively impacted my organization's culture. Many of my colleagues have a great need for in-person interactions. At the same time, many of my tenured colleagues are now embracing the concept of virtual communications and activities. The conduct of team-building activities has become a challenge in situations where people are working for, and with people they have never met or have no prior interaction with. As a result of working with the COVID-19 CDC mandated protocols, all internal organization interaction is being conducted virtually using a technology platform of some type. Pre-COVID, I had more intimate

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contact with family, friends, and co-workers; we shared hugs, kisses, and handshakes. As a result of COVID, and our desire to remain safe, we communicate via telephone, facetime, Microsoft Teams, FB, Instagram, Duo, WebEx, Facebook, and Zoom.

The biggest challenge I faced was completing my HR duties during a remote environment communication. There has been some miscommunication based on style with customers that I previously had on face-to-face communications with prior to the movement to the remote work environment. I have not visited my office location since we begin remote work because of COVID protocols. The communication and engagement with senior management during COVID have resulted in an increase in the number of meetings, with the primary mode of communication using Microsoft Teams, WebEx, and email. Our leadership does a good job keeping us informed of all things COVID and other areas.

I enjoy the flexibilities that working in a virtual environment has afforded me. However, with so much work to do about HR functions, I find it hard to disengage. I find it difficult to disengage from work because I don't have the commute. Therefore, my work-life runs into my home life, causing burnout and undue stress. Things that I think would lead to a more efficient remote work environment and take the guessing out of Dos and Don'ts of remote work. I recommend HR includes the following written guidance as a part of the process and procedures while working in executing HR activities of any sort during COVID-19 restricted environment - Continuous investment in the workforce HR-related training. Develop a procedure that includes expectations for how work will get done outside the office, incorporating work hours, communications, and home-office needs. It should also spell out how to flex workers should use company computers and networks

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so that employees are aware and protect the organization's proprietary data and intellectual property. I think the organization's morale was better, pre-COVID based on the in-person interaction, which led to a stronger team, and the ability to strengthen relationships. The organization's morale has been negatively impacted by COVID restrictions. Changes happened so rapidly, and there was no adjustment period. Remote work and technology happened without the opportunity to plan.

Data provided by each participant were analyzed individually and collectively to present a picture of the experiences of federal Human Resources professionals while executing recruitment and retention activities within a COVID-19 restricted environment. These experiences included daily routines and interactions with their colleagues, customers, supervisors/leadership, as well as family and friends. They presented stories of success and frustration and comparisons of varying intervention models used by study participants. In addition to an array of opinions on their perceived challenges and successes with the use of technology, other common themes resounded throughout the data, creating the basis for answering the research question.

Findings and themes were gleaned from the data and recorded along with the percentage support from data presented from the participants, which assisted in categorizing themes according to the research questions they responded to - constructs were assigned one-word labels. The thematic map showing the main themes represented by one-word labels can be found in (Appendix F). From the data presented emerged a collection of themes that resounded throughout the study from the ideas and experiences shared by the study participants. The following themes were identified: The increased use of technology is important to the success of conducting retention and recruitment activities within the

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COVID-19 CDC restrictions; the use of remote work has impacted the organizational culture and employee morale in the federal government; lack of support, the perceptions of organizational culture as it was impacted by the CDC restrictions have resulted in a myriad of revisions to the current HR policy and procedures.

Response to Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study and provided the researcher with a reminder of the purpose of the research and the information that was being sought. This section provides answers to those questions gleaned from the insight given by the study participants. These answers provide valuable insight into specific perceptions and experiences as communicated by ten federal Human Resources professionals. They continue to execute the sustainable human resources activities of recruitment and retention of federal employees in an organizational culture permeated by COVID-19 restriction.

Research Question 1

How does the COVID-19 restricted environment impact the HR Professional's ability to recruit and retain Federal employees? Across a myriad of Federal agencies, Federal HR professionals stated that continuing to perform retention and recruitment activities in a COVID-19 restricted environment has led to increased use of technology in most recruitment and retention activities. As a result of the CDC mandate to social distance, there was limited opportunity for face-to-face interaction with management, colleagues, customers, as well as family and friends. Therefore, the increase in the use of technology replaced the previous in-person interaction. Where recruitment and retention conversation were once conducted in person, these one-to-one interactions were being conducted using email, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or telephone calls. Recruitment activities: such as advisement/consultation services with customers, interviews and

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other conversations with applicants, onboarding of new employees, and the conduct of job fairs were being conducted virtually using technological platforms such as USASTAFFING, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Zoom, or Skype. The use of this technology has closed the gap to many of the lack of in-person communication challenges that were prevalent due to the COVID-19 CDC mandated restrictions.

Research Question 2

How do the COVID-19 restrictions impact the organizational culture in the Federal government? Remote working has become a growing phenomenon, and the flexibility it offers has made it a priority item on the list of demands made by many new and existing employees. Remote working eliminated many of the challenges associated with commuting, such as traveling during rush hour, often subject to traffic delay, and has replaced this time with increased productivity. However, fears are reinforcing the desire for a remote working environment, often in home environments that were previously not conducive to effective and productive working. The ability of people to adapt—to get on with it, feel valued, be productive, and succeed—requires a work culture that reaches into remote environments, is supportive, empathetic, inclusive, collaborative, proactive, and encourages initiative. Employees had to rapidly learn the use of new technology and new ways of working in a remote working environment where they may have to deal with many distractions and conflicting responsibilities, i.e., children home from school, a working spouse, and other elements. Alongside the personal adjustments, their working style—habits and behaviors—had to adapt. Retaining or adapting a personal work structure and routine was necessary for productivity, but it was vital to ensure interaction and collaboration of both a social and work nature. Team and Staff meetings, performance reviews were all conducted virtually. Workplace connections that had occurred casually in the office cafeteria or breakroom no longer exist. Meetings of all types, including team building

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activities such as happy hours, fitness sessions, and mental health sessions, were conducted virtually. The increased use of technology does allow continued communication. While working in a virtual environment, some employees still feel a sense of isolation from co-workers and feel that technology is not the same compared to in-person communication. One thing that became abundantly clear from the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic was the need for regular communication. With the increase in communication challenges based on the replacement of in-person interaction with the use of a technological platform, this pandemic has taught everyone that empathy and transparency were critical. Some HR professionals felt that management worked hard to keep the workforce informed; however, the virtual meetings were conducted too often and too long. The length of meetings removed the opportunity for HR professionals to maintain an already growing workload.

Research Question 3

How do perceptions of organizational culture impact HR policy and decision-making? Updated and revised HR management handbooks, processes, and procedures were needed to ensure the organizational culture was being supported at the core functioning level. Establish standard expectations for employees and provide updated job descriptions that align with the overall culture that is being adopted Ribera (2020). Collecting information from employees to ensure strategies developed met both organizational objectives and what employees needed most, wanted, and valued. The employee experience can be supported by putting the right policies, practices, and expectations in place. Supervisors and management officials at every level must set clear expectations around remote working practices, even if on a short-term basis. This included defining which tools and platforms to use, how to use them, and defining practices that are necessary for your organizations' culture and accepted business practices.

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Develop and implement a clear and comprehensive flexible work schedule policy that details exactly how managers can implement it and how employees can use it as needed Chamberlain (2018). It appeared that each manager was doing their own thing, which caused many employee complaints about the fairness with the utilization of the flexible work schedule. Other considerations include changes to HR processes and procedures, training on the appropriate dress for virtual meetings, proper communications, the appropriate use of both oral and written presentations. In addition, make the necessary updates to the Hiring Manager's Handbook; detailed training to include processes and procedures on the conduct of virtual onboarding and virtual job fairs.

As remote work environments necessitate the use of technology, the propensity of using personal devices to distribute organizational information increased the security risks. To avoid this potential liability, it was also necessary to have updated and editable data security procedures, which should address the use and/or purpose of your organization's work devices. Communication and collaboration practices were critical to the morale of the organization. As a leader, it falls on you to act as a role model for the type of remote worker you want your employees to be. To assist those who are not accustomed to working from home to transition becoming comfortable working in a remote work environment, consider creating a support network. For example, select an Employee Engagement Champion per business unit to help colleagues understand how best to work from home within the context of their role.

Summary

The rationale for this study was to eliminate a gap in available research and expand the general knowledge and existing pool of literature. The study's goal was to describe the experiences of a sample of HR Professionals who expressed their perceptions and lived

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experiences while executing recruitment and retention activities in a federal organization impacted by COVID-19 restricted environment using the phenomenological methodology. According to Giorgi (2009), thematic analysis involves descriptions on two levels. The first level of description comes from the individual participants who describe their experiences in the language of their everyday lifeworld in the context of a one-to-one Zoom audio/video-taped interview with the researcher. The second level of description takes place when the researcher, while in the attitude of the phenomenological reduction, takes the everyday descriptions provided by the participant who experienced the phenomenon and expresses in psychological language the meanings of those descriptions.

Upon reflection, the themes of the participants and their stories integrated with each other provided a description of the interpreted meaning of the phenomenon. The themes and further discussion of the structures of their experiences are discussed with further depth in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 compares the findings of the study with the theories that were the framework of the study and with the literature that provided existing information on the topic, discusses the conclusions and limitations, suggests implications of the findings for HR professionals, and presents recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary

Chapter 5 focused on the interpretation of the results from the previous chapter. A summary of the results and a discussion of the results are provided. A discussion of the limitations and recommendations for future research is presented. Study findings were discussed extensively in this chapter, followed by a review of the methodology and how the study findings related to current literature. Finally, recommendations for further research or intervention are discussed, followed by a conclusion.

The purpose of the study was to analyze the lived experiences and challenges that the Federal HR professionals faced as they conducted recruitment and retention activities amidst the COVID-19 prevention measures, which led to restrictions placed on most of their in-person interactions. The COVID-19 restricted environment led to many changes in Human Resource activities due to the rapid change in business functions and organizational cultures. A large proportion of Federal employees were unable to appear in their places of work to reduce the ever-increasing spread of the COVID-19 virus. Due to such scenarios, there was a need for employers to seek alternative arrangements for employees to conduct their day-to-day operations. The changes in human resource activities in a work environment impacted by the abrupt changes to mitigate the spread of the virus have not sufficiently been addressed by research. As a result, this study evaluated the experiences of Federal HR professionals performing their functions during the COVID-19 restricted environment and documented the impact on organizational culture and the functions in their places of work. The most common activities in Federal HR departments are hiring and retaining employees within the organization.

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However, many federal organizations decided to reduce their recruitment activities at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

The research questions were developed to gain a deeper insight into the lived challenges and experiences of the Federal Human Resource professionals. The traditional recruitment and retention activities were altered by the COVID-19 restrictions put in place by the Federal government because of the CDC mandates. Using properly developed research questions, an analysis of the responses from the federal HR professionals provided proper insights into the activities and changes in policy and procedures needed to carry out their critical HR operations amidst the restrictions. The research questions were: a) How does the COVID-19 restricted environment impact the ability of an HR professional to recruit and retain Federal employees? b) How did the COVID-19 restrictions affect organizational cultures in the federal government? c) What is the impact of the perceptions of organizational culture on Human Resource policy and decision-making? The research questions covered three areas of inquiry: the impact of the restrictions on organizational culture, HR professionals' experience while conducting recruitment and retention activities within the restricted environment, and how the organizational culture impacted revisions to HR policy and decision-making.

Methodology

The qualitative with phenomenological research design was used for this study. Braun and Clarke (2006) guided the data organization and analysis using the Thematic Analysis process. This analysis outlined the lived experiences of 10 HR professionals, which were described in detail in relation to performing recruitment and retention activities in the COVID-19 restricted environment. Significant statements were compiled into a narrative form, where the Thematic

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Analysis process was used to find common themes and concepts. Meaning Units/Theme Clusters were developed from the listing of significant statements. Common themes were identified and organized as they corresponded to a research question. These themes were categorized into groups based on constructs and reduced to one-word labels from which the Thematic Map was developed.

The data obtained was used to interpret the phenomenon and its meaning without trying to solve a problem. A demographic questionnaire (DQ) was used to outline criteria for participant eligibility. Also, a questionnaire containing 20 open-ended interview questions was used to evaluate the experiences of the federal HR professionals as they executed their duties within the federal organization pervaded with COVID-19 restrictions. Interviews were used to collect data directly from the participants in sessions, allowing the researcher to assess the respondents' expressions during the interview process. Additionally, qualitative queries were used as techniques that allowed the researcher and participants to discuss the research issue fully without any constraints, including time. The interviews were conducted using the Zoom technological platform, were recorded in audio/video format to ensure that the study was reliable and credible. Since the interviews for each participant took an estimated 45 to 60 minutes, ample time was given for each to either decline or accepted participation in the study at any time during the interview—this ensured openness of the research and a thorough data collection process. The questions were delivered using an open-ended interview method in a manner that ensured consistency in the process of data collection. The study relied on the ability of the participants to recall their lived experiences and describe them without being hindered by time constraints. Member check-in occurred to allow participants to check transcripts for inconsistencies and to serve as a platform for further clarification. This process helps the researcher “check their own

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subjectivity and ensure the trustworthiness of their findings” (Jones, 2002, p. 469). Lastly, findings were communicated through thick-rich descriptions. The unique voice of the participants was at the core of my research process and allowed future researchers to determine the applicable transferability of findings to other settings (Creswell, 1998).

Interpretation of the Findings

The study analyzed the experiences of ten HR professionals from Federal HR Offices representing different organizations across the United States. Based on their responses, it was clear that HR recruitment and retention activities, as well as the organizational culture, were affected by the COVID-19 restrictions. The Federal HR professionals acknowledged that the rapid change in business functions, human resource practices, and organizational cultures without prediction or notice caused immediate turmoil in their organizations. Such changes barred opportunities for management to implement strategic plans that would help transition operations and sustain them in the new COVID-19 environment. According to Maurer (2020b), because of moving to a 100% remote work environment in a short period of time and without warning, HR professionals had to shift to virtual processes while they also helped usher other employees into working from home and answer employees' questions, calm their fears, and make hard decisions that directly impacted employees' lives and the organization. The culture and functions of organizations changed at such a rapid pace that leaders did not have the opportunity to coordinate timely decision-making processes related to the sustainability of their current workforce. Unfortunately, during times of crisis, most agencies made the mistake of uniformly entering a hiring freeze and/or scaling back on recruiting events Glass (2008). The coronavirus pandemic made it riskier than ever for older adults to continue working. As a result, a range of older workers and those with pre-existing conditions started withdrawing from the workforce

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earlier than they had anticipated because of coronavirus-related challenges and concerns Bauer et al. (2020). Such factors immediately presented a short and long-term challenge in executing sustainable HR activities such as recruitment and retention.

Many of the HR processes and procedures in place before COVID-19 did not address safety concerns or the rapid changes in the workplace environment because of the CDC mandated restrictions. Consequently, it was necessary to conduct ongoing updates and revisions to HR policy and procedures, including the increased use of technology (Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams) to communicate with colleagues and customers within the remote work environment. HR recruitment and retention activities, including job fairs, were being conducted in a virtual environment using the Zoom, USASTAFFING, and Microsoft Teams technology platform. Organizations often see the overall employee experience as an HR responsibility. Yet, for many HR professionals themselves, that experience might fall short of what they need to achieve their full potential and help their organizations do the same. In today's remote work environment, common HR challenges, including inefficient recruiting and onboarding processes, inadequate file-management systems, and even literal paperwork, can become overwhelming. The resources that an HR team previously devoted to administrative maintenance are resources that are no longer available to an HR professional as means of overall innovation, creativity, and growth Peopledoc (2020). In the context of working within the virtual environment, HR managers should develop plans to allow workers to use emerging technology as well as to upgrade their technical abilities Parry and Battista (2019).

The mandated move to a remote work posture created a sense of isolation among some employees, thereby having a negative impact on the organizational culture because most employees were accustomed to and preferred in-person interactions. The restrictions caused the

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onboarding of new hires to go from a group in-person orientation to being conducted virtually using Zoom. This change inadvertently impacted the organization's culture as well. Because culture has always been a huge part of the HR hiring and onboarding processes Shilling (2020), typically, new employees are taken on an office tour and introduced to other agency employees to help them learn about the agency's culture. For new hires, face-to-face culture training was held with the HR professional, encouraging team welcome activities. So, when an organization moved to remote hiring and onboarding, the HR Professional had to find a new way to infuse culture into the processes.

The employees' morale has been significantly lower since the onset of COVID-19 restrictions. Company culture is an integral part of the business. It affects every aspect of a company. From recruiting top talent to improving employee satisfaction, it is the backbone of a happy workforce. Without a positive organizational culture, employees struggle to find the real value in their work, and this leads to a variety of negative consequences for an organization's bottom line. There are reasons why companies listed as a "Best Place to Work" see so much success. These organizations tend to have strong, positive cultures that help employees feel and perform their best at work. Research gathered by CultureIQ found that employees' overall ratings of their company's qualities – including collaboration, environment, and morale are higher at companies exhibiting strong culture, which was pointed out by Ulrich and Ulrich (2010).

Also, the participants identified that there was a significant increase in their workload and the demand for recruitment activities in the COVID-19 restricted environment. While working in a virtual environment has led to increased productivity, there is also an increase in the overall workload and seemingly no boundaries to separate personal life from work. This has led to burnout among many Federal HR professionals. According to DeFilippis et al. (2020), the ability

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to turn off work at home has proved especially tough. In the weeks immediately after the lockdown began, only half of the employees could maintain a 10-hour workday or less, whereas nearly 80% had previously been able to do so Bernstein et al. (2020). These patterns have started to trend back to pre-lockdown levels, although the workdays are still 10% to 20% longer on average. A study received from Eagle Hill Consulting showed that 58% of U.S. workers were experiencing burnout, up from 45% in the early days of the pandemic. Almost 40% of those survey respondents attributed that feeling to a lack of communication, feedback, and support from their organizations (Zielinski, 2020).

Many employees acknowledge that the availability of technological tools such as Zoom, Skype, and Microsoft Teams enabled a seamless transition from working in the office to working virtually at home. The virtual platforms enabled communication from all levels of management, customers, and colleagues; thus, enabling them to participate in activities such as mental health sessions, fitness sessions, and happy hours. As a result, technology has become a particularly important part of the activities conducted by Federal HR professionals and the organization. According to Metho et al. (2015), when employees have friends at work, they are better performers, more engaged, and happier with their jobs. However, thanks largely to technology, how they relate to their coworkers is changing in two important ways. First, they are less likely to live close to their coworkers. This means they may not have the opportunity for in-person, informal shared experiences (e.g., going to happy hours, running into each other at the “water cooler”) as well as organizationally sponsored shared experiences (company outings/dinners). Second, they increasingly rely on technology to communicate with each other. According to Schinoff et al. (2020), interacting through media like text messages, instant messages, and FaceTime makes it harder to get a sense of who someone is.

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In many instances, HR professionals cited communication was also a challenge with the shift from in-person consultations and the request for services; many customers found the changes hard to cope with because they were accustomed to using the new technological tools. Miscommunication was a factor where the use of email replaced a traditional face-to-face meeting. As stated by Valtysson (2020), effective communication is ultimately about human interactions. Communication occurs in both verbal and nonverbal forms. Verbal forms are the words that we speak and write. Nonverbal communication revolves around the facial expressions and gestures we may use, how we employ silence to convey meanings, and our tone of voice.

Additionally, COVID-19 restrictions caused challenges for HR professionals as they related to their personal relationships and in-person communication with family and friends. As a result, such relationships are maintained using communication tools such as cell phones, Duo, and FaceTime. The realization of the importance of in-person interaction with family and friends rapidly transitioned to the use of social media. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Once considered informal social networking sites, Pride and Ferrel (2011) say they can now be described as web-based meeting places for friends, family, co-workers, and peers that allow users to create a profile and connect with others for the purposes that range from getting acquainted with others - to keeping in touch, to building a work-related network. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that the evolving digital communications technologies have indeed transformed the way interpersonal communications are conducted and maintained, with even more surprises in the upcoming future. It is predicted that technology will also enable management officials to better understand their organizational culture and, most importantly, the ability to handle emerging issues that might affect an organization's operations. Because of

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changes that have taken place in the evolution of technology, the society at large and its culture are being transformed Cui et al. (2015)

Limitations

Regardless of the deep insights gained into the lived experiences of Federal HR professionals as they performed recruitment and retention activities, this study has many limitations. This is a phenomenological study that seeks to describe, interpret the experience by determining the meaning of the experience as perceived by the people who have participated in it. The findings obtained are restricted to the challenges and lived experiences of the ten HR professionals interviewed across the Federal government. As a result, the findings are not transferable. Transferability in qualitative studies describes the method of replicating the findings in one social construct with possible duplication in another context. According to Patton (2002), transferability in qualitative research offers no absolutes, and each researcher must determine their findings based upon the sample provided and the data collected at the time of the study. Therefore, it is necessary to consider that findings may only be representative of a specific point in time, based upon their recollection of those events record at this specific time.

Implications for Theory and Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges and lived experiences of Federal HR professionals while performing recruitment and retention activities in organizations permeated with COVID-19 restrictions. In the study, the effects of these restrictions on the job performance of the HR professionals were examined, as well as factors such as employee retention, organizational culture, employee morale, and HR processes and procedures have been identified as major areas that were affected. The findings suggest that the COVID-19 restrictions had negatively impacted the Federal organizational culture, including employee morale.

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The theoretical implications of the findings of this study are as follows. The study has an academic significance since it carried out appropriate and timely research of the HR professionals' experiences in the COVID-19 restricted environment. As a result, the study is meaningful as it examined a crucial part of the Federal workforce, one of the national areas heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also assessed the organic personal and workplace relationships that exist and are maintained in the workplace, which play a crucial role in workplace satisfaction, and employee engagement. Metho et al. (2015) indicate that when employees have friends at work, they are better performers, more engaged, and happier with their jobs.

To date, there are no studies that focus specifically on exploring the lived experiences of HR professionals as they perform recruitment and retention activities within an organizational culture permeated with COVID-19 restrictions. Consequently, the results of this study make considerable contributions to the Human Resource field, future policy, and the relevant literature. Additionally, the results of this study will contribute to the elimination of a gap in available research and expand the available knowledge and existing pool of literature.

Lastly, this study clarifies the effects the COVID-19 restricted environment had on the Federal organizational culture and the morale of the employees. The findings of this study present a practical and theoretical opportunity to explore and analyze the justifications of the feasibility of revising current HR processes and procedures so that they are conducive to the workplace changes necessary during a pandemic and is an opportunity that academics may use for further studies.

The Effect of the Limitations on the Implications

The different limitations of the study are linked to some outcomes of the study findings. For example, the study findings are based on the lived experiences of only ten HR professionals. The results are not representative of the experiences among Federal HR professionals across the United States. Additionally, the phenomenological study compares the lived experiences of the HR professionals before and during the COVID-19 crisis. As a result, the academic implication of this is a limitation in full experiences during the crisis since most of the accounts by the HR professionals are a comparison of how professional life has changed since the crisis began. Some of the lived experiences may be relatively new and not dependent on the changes made since COVID-19 began, leaving crucial findings undiscovered.

Future Research

The limitations of this study offer various insights into opportunities for future research. The findings confirmed workplace vulnerabilities due to the COVID-19 restrictions, which impact organizational culture and employee morale, and directly affect the HR professional's ability to successfully retain the current workforce and recruit new employees. The study examined the necessity for improved HR processes and procedures, which include and are not limited to virtual communication methods, and computer-mediated means of conducting work. Regardless of the effectiveness of the technological advancements brought about by the onset of the COVID-19 restricted environment, an examination of the experiences of various HR professionals shows that there were many challenges to overcome to work effectively under such conditions. However, organizational culture is the main aspect that can be used to retain the workforce since it builds a foundation for workplace engagement, enthusiasm, and loyalty.

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As a result of the findings, this study leads to forming a theoretical model that can be used to distinguish the similarities and differences in the approaches used to study workplace experiences in crises that lead to two dimensions, namely technological dependence, and geographic dispersion. To advance the findings in any similar research study, researchers can focus on additional dimensions of virtuality that affect the communication and conduct of duties in places of work. The study provides an essential foundation that can be used to advance the awareness of researchers to a larger body of workplace research amidst a crisis of any kind, thus helping to inform their research procedures. However, future research should be focused on a larger sample involving more interviewees to grasp a deeper understanding of the situation in places of work. Also, the research could be extended beyond the respondents involved in the topic research since they are unable to fully account for the broad experiences of the organization. Additional volunteers and witnesses who can independently account for the conduct of the main respondents can play a crucial role in gaining a broader picture of their experiences and leading to more detailed findings. Researchers should, therefore, utilize all approaches to uncover interests and increase the correctness of research as they advance this research in various significant ways.

Conclusion

After analyzing the lived experiences of Federal HR professionals executing recruitment and retention activities within the COVID restricted environment, findings indicate that most of their experiences have been affected by the COVID-19 restrictions put in place by the CDC. As a result of these restrictions, including social distancing and avoidance of physical interactions, the Federal organizations had to immediately revise and update workplace policies and procedures to respond to the new restrictive measures and ensure the safety and health of their employees. The

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new measures in federal organizations, including work-from-home arrangements, working using computer-mediated platforms, and virtual means to conduct recruitment and retention activities, were received with mixed reactions. The new HR processes and procedures have led to various outcomes such as increased productivity, reduced interactions among employees leading to weaker workplace relationships, and a more fragile work-life balance as HR professionals work longer hours while at home. The remote work arrangements are not new, as reported by various research studies. However, research shows the use of remote work initiatives has increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and has had many advantages while safeguarding the health of all organizational employees. Also, various studies have acknowledged that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the use of new technologies, increasing productivity and work flexibility. Various virtual tools such as Zoom, FaceTime, and Microsoft Teams are now being used among HR professionals to conduct HR recruitment and retention activities, thus, easing their work compared to a typical day in the pre-COVID-19 period.

The findings of this study are consistent with various studies that have been conducted previously and have multiple implications for theoretical research. For instance, the evaluation shows that HR professionals have different perspectives when adapting to abrupt changes in policies and procedures due to a crisis and the implications of working in a 100% remote work environment on organizational culture and employee engagement. However, some findings, such as a strong organizational culture, positively influence employee retention rates, preserved even amidst COVID-19 work-from-home measures. The implication of this research is a foundation for associations between the psychological response of HR professionals and workplace engagement. However, this study does have certain limitations of the findings, such as comparing experiences of HR respondents, pre-COVID and post-COVID, and transferability of

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findings, which have emerged in the study. Regardless of these limitations, the study can be applied practically and theoretically in analyzing the effect of workplace amendments during a crisis. Such applications present academic scholars with an opportunity to conduct further studies that can result in more findings in any theoretical context. The study shows the importance of agility; organizations had to be agile to adapt and respond quickly to changing events, especially during a crisis. Having updated Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) in place and flexible HR processes and procedures would be an excellent place to start.

The use of technology was prevalent in the remote work environment. Organizations realized the importance of technology more than ever because it was needed to remain productive and maintain communications and collaboration in the remote work environment. Many HR professionals said they used technology that was already available to them but previously rejected or ignored. Working from home revealed how many distractions there are in the office. Most participants found themselves more productive while working from home without interruptions in their office location. Other changes in organizational practices because of the move to remote work include a flexible work schedule and virtual teams working across locations and departments. While digital collaboration tools have become critical to remote work, the new way of work also revealed the need for human social interaction. Many stated they missed the informal kitchen and watercooler-style exchanges but tried to mitigate this gap by using other technology-related mediums to maintain relationships and communication. While the pandemic naturally had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of employees. While working from home, most HR professionals found it hard to maintain a work-life balance. Remote work has also resulted in increased recruitment and hiring of individuals from broader

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geographical areas. HR professionals believe that the increased acceptance of remote and flexible working will undoubtedly lead to a more detailed recruitment policy.

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Appendix A

Demographic Datasheet

This questionnaire is designed to obtain demographic information. Please check the answer corresponding to the appropriate response or provide a specific response in the blank.

1. Are you currently employed as an HR Professional with the U.S. Federal Government?
Yes ___ No ___

2. Please annotate your Federal Agency (e.g., Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, etc.).

3. Please identify your employment status

Part-time _____ Full-time _____

4. Do you perform the duties of a Staffing and/or Recruitment HR Professional within the Federal Government?

Yes ___ No ___

5. Describe your current duties as an HR Professional with the Federal Government

6. How long have you been employed with the Federal Government as an HR Professional?
(Please describe tenure in years and months)

7. Were you employed as a Federal HR Professional from January 2020 to the present?

Yes ___ No ___

8. What is your current General Service (GS) or its equivalent pay grade (please describe based on the 2020 GS Locality Pay Table)?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Describe your experience executing retention activities within the COVID-19 restricted environment.
 - a. How have pre-COVID HR processes and/or procedures enabled you to execute retention during the current restriction?
2. Describe your experience executing recruitment activities within the COVID-19 restricted environment.
 - a. How have pre-COVID HR processes and/or procedures enabled you to continue recruitment during the current restriction?
3. Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, describe your understanding of your organization's human resources continuity operations plan (COOP).
 - a. What is your involvement, as an HR Professional, in executing the COOP?
4. How has the COVID-19 restriction impacted your organization's culture?
5. What organizational changes occurred because of working within the COVID-19 CDC mandated protocols?
6. What, if any, HR processes and procedures have changed because of working within the COVID-19 restricted environment?
7. Describe how you maintained personal and professional connections (relationships) with your colleagues and/or customers in the current environment.
 - a. Describe your personal and professional relationships pre-COVID.
8. What challenges, if any, did remote work have on your ability to perform your HR duties?
9. Since COVID-19, have you worked from your office?
 - a. Describe your experience working in the office during the COVID-19 restriction.
10. Describe your communication and engagement with your organization's leadership during the COVID-19 restrictions.

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11. Describe any challenges Telework pose on your ability to execute HR functions, in general, during COVID-19 restrictions.
12. Describe your perceived productivity while Teleworking compared to working in the office.
13. What recommended changes to HR processes and/or procedures are suggested to support executing HR activities during the COVID-19 restriction?
14. Describe organizational morale pre-COVID-19.
 - a. How has the morale of your organization changed because of COVID-19 restrictions?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form
Participation in a Research Study
Institutional Review Board
Touro University Worldwide

Title of Dissertation: Human Resources Activities: The Lived Experiences of Federal Human Resource Professionals During The 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

Description of the research and participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Shirley B. Bryant. The purpose of this research is to explore the perceived experiences and challenges faced by human resources professionals executing the sustainable human resources activities of recruitment and retention of Federal employees in an organizational culture impacted by the CDC mandated restrictions. This includes responsibilities of HR professionals, Organizational Culture, and challenges to the HR professional. With the study covering a varied scope of questions, your support in the provision of the information to the questions is essential for meeting the study goals. Your voluntary participation is appreciated, and in case, within the duration of the survey, you may feel the urge to stop or withdraw, and your decision will be highly respected.

Your participation will involve completing the survey in two pivotal phases, starting with demographic information, work-related data (work length, history of experience, and grade. This will be followed by twenty open-ended interview questions. As a participant, you are called upon to respond to the questions with utmost honesty. The interview is designed to last 45-60 minutes.

Risks and discomforts

The participants may feel some discomfort answering some questions about their personal experiences and their attitudes about certain workplace issues. Please be aware that this survey is designed to test psychological theories, and it does not directly examine the participant's mental state or intelligence. Participants can stop participation in the research study if they feel any adverse reaction when responding to survey questions.

Potential benefits

In addition to the award of a \$ 25 Amazon gift card for your participation, your contribution to this survey is pivotal for a wider group of people and entities, especially on issues aligned with the recruitment and retention of federal employees. Hence, with your twenty question responses, you have an opportunity in supplementing the volume of research data on the topic of executing recruitment and retention in a COVID-19 environment,

Protection of confidentiality

HUMAN RESOURCES ACTIVITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES

Data collection during the survey is confidential. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy, as there is no collection of any identifiable information, with the survey only identified with numbers. Only the researcher will have access to the survey information, with your anonymity fully maintained. All information is kept in a password-protected website and password-protected computer hard drive. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication resulting from this study or any of the information about the responses you provided.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or withdraw from this study.

Contact information.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact me via phone at 202-428-9977 or sbryant.touro.edu@gmail.com at Touro University Worldwide. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Touro University Worldwide Institutional Review Board at 818-874-4115.

Consent

As a participant, I understand that the informed consent will be read to me verbally, and I will be provided with the opportunity to ask questions. Furthermore, I understand that I will be asked to verbally acknowledge consent by stating YES to complete the interview and being audio/video recorded via Zoom or a similar platform.

Appendix D



Approval Letter

TOURO UNIVERSITY
WORLDWIDE

Institutional Review Board

Approval Letter

For the Protection of Human Subjects

Date of letter:

Approval Letter

Principal Investigator:

Title of Dissertation/Research Study:

Student ID#:

Date:

Your application to IRB to collect data for your research has been reviewed and it appears to meet the requirements for protection of human subjects. Based on this, the TUW Institutional Review Board has determined to approve your application.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of this letter. In case any need for modification, complete the modification form and submit to IRB for review.

Sincerely,

Aldwin Domingo, Ph.D. Chair, TUW IRB

Digital Signature Digitally signed by Aldwin Domingo
Date: 2021.03.15 12:26:25 -07'00'

Abby Harris Ph.D. Committee Member

Digital Signature

Adriana Reza J.D. Committee Member

Digital Signature Digitally signed by Adriana E. Reza
Date: 2021.03.16 16:13:54 -07'00'

Appendix E

An expert from Researcher Journal

It was my observation that each of the ten HR professionals who agreed to participate in this research study communicated their perceptions and experiences from their own individual perspectives. Because they all represented organizations across the U.S. federal government, many of their experiences were unique yet remarkably similar in nature. The reason being that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) ultimately decides how federal organizations adhere to regulations, processes, and procedures, especially during times of crisis. Their response to how they performed their HR recruitment and retention activities within the COVID-19 environment was highly dependent on the organizations' culture and HR processes and procedures that were in place at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. They all seemed very flexible in their ability to change as the organizations' culture and HR process and procedures changed. For the most part, the HR professionals were optimistic that performing HR activities within the COVID restricted environment has been challenging; however, it did not hinder their success. The overarching themes of the increased use of collaborative technology when performing recruitment and retention activities, the need for training on the use of technology, the need for updates to HR processes and procedures to continue performing HR functions in a virtual environment, and how the remote work environment impacted the organizational culture were prevalent throughout the testament of each HR professional of their lived experiences.

Appendix F

Research Findings by Themes

RQ1: How does the COVID-19 restricted environment impact HR Professional' ability to recruit and retain federal employees?

Appendix F: Percentage of Supportive Findings, By Research Question

- Increase use of Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, USA STAFFING, Career Connect, Recruit Tracker and email to perform recruitment and retention functions
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**
- Job fairs were conducted using Zoom and Microsoft Teams
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**
- Pre-recruitment conversations with hiring officials were conducted using Zoom Microsoft Teams, WebEx, and email as a replacement for in person interaction
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**
- Experienced challenges with customers communication, because of the lack of face-to-face interaction
 - **Finding supported 80% with data presented by eight out of ten participants**
- Drug test, fingerprinting, transcripts, and security requirements were waived due to the COVID restricted environment
 - **Findings supported 100% with data presented ten out of ten participants**
- Pre-COVID HR processes and procedures were not conducive to performing HR recruitment and retention function in the COVID restricted environment
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**

Research Findings by Themes

RQ2: How do the COVID-19 restrictions impact the organizational culture in the Federal government?

Appendix F: Percentage of Supportive Findings, By Research Question

- Increase use of Zoom, Microsoft Teams and WebEx to conduct Staff/Team Mtgs and Team Building activities
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**
- New hire orientation and briefings were conducted using Zoom or Microsoft Teams
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**
- Increase in workload as it relates to recruitment events
 - **Finding supported by 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**
- Experienced an increased productivity, resulting in a lack of work-life balance
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**
- Some employees miss the face-to-face interactions and workplace relationships
 - **Finding supported 80% with data presented by eight out of ten participants**
- Working in a COVID restricted environment, with the (lack of face-to-face interaction) caused perceptions of isolation, and impacted employee

Research Findings by Themes

RQ3: How do perceptions of organizational culture impact HR policy and decision-making?

Appendix F: Percentage of Supportive Findings, By Research Question

- Initially HR Professionals didn't know what the priorities were as it relates to the HR Mission Essential Functions
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**

- Many were not sure how the use of the flexible work schedule/Alternate work schedules were being implemented
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**

- The use of Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx were immediately necessary, however there was limited training available on the use
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**

- Revisions to current HR processes and procedures are needed to continue performing HR functions in the virtual environment
 - **Finding supported 100% with data presented by ten out of ten participants**

- There was an initial shortage of equipment (laptops, w/o cameras) needed for use in the virtual work environment; w/o process/procedures in place for equipment replacement
 - **Finding supported 50% with data presented by five out of ten participants**