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ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP PERCEPTIONS AND CONTRACTING EFFICIENCY WITHIN THE UNITED STATES ARMY RHCO-A BEFORE AND DURING FY20 THROUGH FY21 COVID-19 PANDEMIC

June 2021

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EFFICIENCY WITHIN THE UNITED STATES ARMY RHCO-A BEFORE AND
DURING FY20 THROUGH FY21 COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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ABSTRACT

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMEDD	Army Medical Department
COOP	Continuity of Operations
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DCAA	Defense Contract Audit Agency
DCMA	Defense Contract Management Agency
DFAS	Defense Finance Accounting Service
DHA	Defense Health Agency
DISA	Defense Information Systems Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
DoDI	Department of Defense Instruction
DoDIG	Department of Defense Inspector General
DLA	Defense Logistics Agency
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FAR	Federal Acquisition regulation
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GSA	General Services Administration
HR	House of Representatives
IT	Information Technology
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel (United States Army)
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
PALT	Procurement Action Lead Time
PCF	Paperless Contract Files
RHCO-A	United States Army Regional Health Contracting Office-Atlantic
TEA	Telework Enhancement Act (2010)
USAHCA	United States Army Health Contracting Activity

USC	United States Code
VCEBI	Virtual Contracting Enterprise Business Intelligence
VPN	Virtual Private Network

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter communicates the foundation necessary to understand the motivation behind this research project, the target research questions, the scope, and the overall organization of the project.

B. BACKGROUND

The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 (TEA) defines telework as “a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of the employee’s position and other authorized activities from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work” (Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 [TEA], 2010, p. 1). Many federal agencies have increasingly explored authorizing telework for their employees to support their workforce and mission. According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), adopting telework has many advantages.

Over the years, telework has continued to receive attention due to its potential to improve employee morale, enhance employee work-life balance, improve the Federal Government competitive position for recruiting and retaining the best and brightest workforce, increase Federal capacity to achieve the mission and operational goals, and maximize organizational productivity. In recent years, the focus has expanded to view telework as a strategic management tool for coping with potential disruptions in the workplace due to severe weather or other emergencies and as a means to reduce the overhead costs and real estate footprint of the Federal Government while continuing to deliver timely services to the public (Office of Personnel Management [OPM], n.d.b, para. 1).

Telework helps ensure essential federal functions continue during natural disasters and emergencies, including mission-jeopardizing pandemic outbreaks. As OPM points out, “telework helps slow the spread of disease by keeping face-to-face contact to a minimum (referred to as “social distancing”) while maintaining operations as close to normal as possible” (OPM, n.d.a, para. 1).

RHCO-A headquarters located at Ft. Belvoir, VA, is the hub for the Atlantic region of the United States Army Health Contracting Activity (USAHCA). USAHCA awards and administers various healthcare services contracts supporting the Army Medical Department (AMEDD) (USAHCA, n.d.) and the Defense Health Agency (DHA). Specific USAHCA requirements include “nurses, transcription services, reference laboratory services, imaging maintenance services, physicians, dentists, pharmacists, ancillary services, and various medical-specific technicians” (USAHCA, n.d., para. 1). RHCO-A also supports the AMEDD through other healthcare-related requirements such as “hospital housekeeping, laundry, linen distribution, regulated medical waste, and contract advisory/assistance services” (USAHCA, n.d., para. 1).

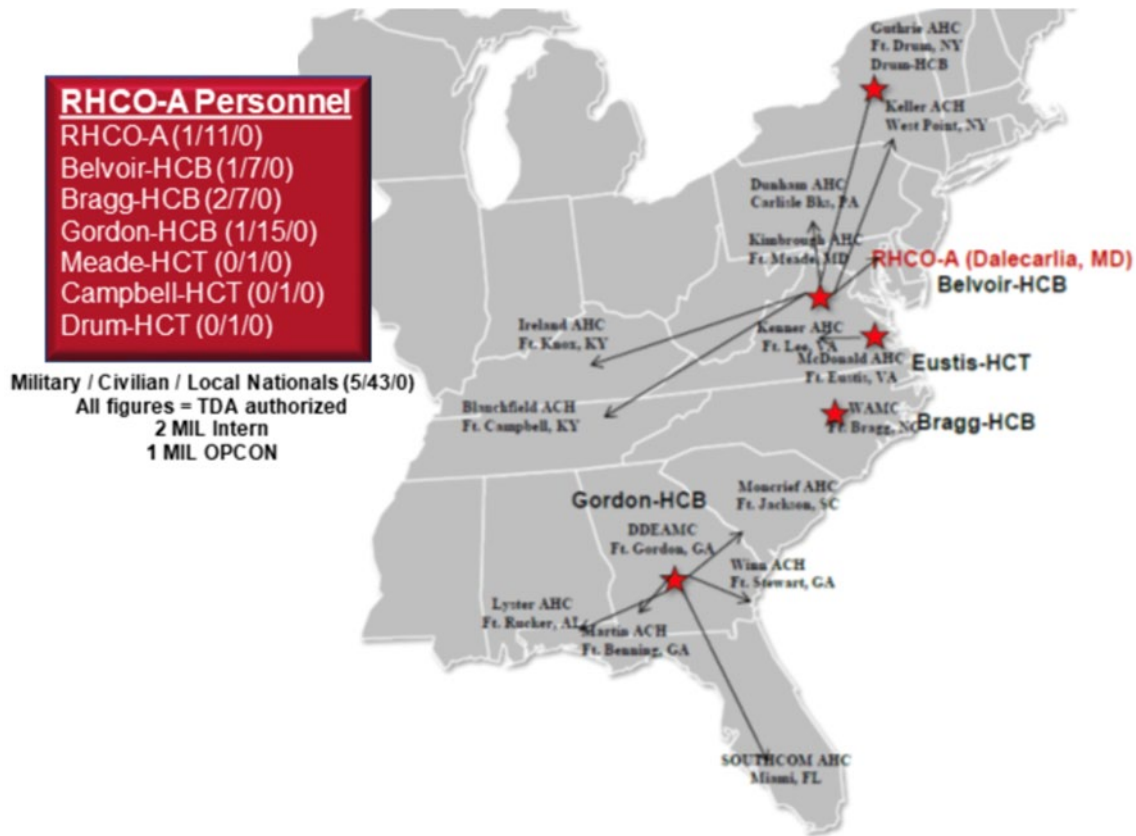


Figure 1. RHCO-A Organization and Locations. Adapted from C. Simon (personal communications, May 10, 2021) RHCO-A Organization and Locations

C. PROBLEM STATEMENT

RHCO-A has an active telework policy in place but is highly regulated and limited in scope. The onset of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic forced RHCO-A to rapidly shift from an environment with very few employees regularly teleworking to a nearly 100 percent full-time teleworking workforce. RHCO-A leadership must now evaluate the future of telework within the organization. Past research has highlighted various attributes of telework plans within the Department of Defense (DOD) in general. The research has explored using telework as a space-saving tool (Rectanus, 2018), recruiting new talent, and providing the workforce with an increased work-life balance (Maucione, 2020). While research on the implications of telework on the DOD workforce is robust, investigating the effects of a near 100 percent full-time teleworking environment on contracting efficiency metrics is an under-researched phenomenon.

D. PURPOSE

The TEA, signed into law on December 09, 2010, was a considerable first step in formally establishing telework within the Federal Government. The TEA, designed to provide Federal agencies greater flexibility in managing its workforce, also provides an invaluable tool in improving the work-life balance for the federal workforce and maintaining mission goals (TEA, 2010). The act compels each unit within the Federal Government to create and implement telework policies and training into their Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) (TEA, 2010). The act provides for the development and advancement of federal telework by outlining requirements and ensuring proper support structures and adequate training opportunities to achieve program effectiveness.

This research project intends to explore one contracting organization's telework matrixes before the COVID-19 pandemic and after the mass shift to near 100 percent full-time telework to determine the efficiencies during this period. Therefore, the purpose of this mixed-methods case study is to understand the implications of a near 100 percent full-time telework environment on contracting efficiency metrics and leadership perceptions of telework within the RHCO-A before and during the Fiscal Year (FY) 20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic. 1 October through 30 September is the FY which government funds

are aligned. Additionally, the research project aims to provide an in-depth analysis of telework within one specific contracting unit, RHCO-A, to better inform senior contracting leaders in establishing more effective telework policies.

E. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The scope of this study builds upon a previous RAND Corporation research study, “Understanding Government Telework, An Examination of Research Literature and Practices from Government Agencies” (Weinbaum et al., 2018). The RAND Corporation researched several government agencies to assess the factors contributing to successful telework programs and closely examined best practices observed across the United States Government. The research project uses the framework provided by the RAND Corporation to explore the RHCO-A Telework Program before and during the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic in which the agency shifted to near 100 percent full-time telework. The researchers will review telework barriers before the pandemic and the continuing barriers and provide recommendations to improve contracting performance, return on investment, employee retention, and greater management effectiveness.

Microsoft Excel and Word are the primary means of data analysis and organization for the study. Although this software does not provide the most robust data analysis capabilities, it provides a means to collect, filter, and assess the findings from the information provided by RHCO-A and USAHCA.

The research is limited to the data captured in the Army’s Paperless Contract Files (PCF) application and the ‘Army’s Virtual Contracting Enterprise Business Intelligence (VCEBI) reporting tool. PCF is a web-based application that serves as the central location of official Army contract files. VCEBI is a tool used to pull reports from PCF contract action data. The research contains data pulled from VCEBI on RHCO-A contract actions ranging from FY17 through FY20.

F. ASSUMPTIONS

The researchers assume the readers are familiar with DOD contracting organizations, the contracting mission, the variety of the DOD contracting workforce, and telework policies and procedures in most DOD contracting organizations.

G. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What were the contracting efficiency metrics in RHCO-A during a limited telework environment?
- What were the contracting efficiency metrics in RHCO-A during a mass shift to near 100 percent full-time telework during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How has the mass shift to near 100 percent full-time telework changed the RHCO-A leadership's perceptions of telework?

H. METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the contracting efficiency metrics in RHCO-A before and during the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers first created a contracting efficiency baseline metric. Multiple contracting metrics averaged from FY17 through FY19 form the baseline for this study. The researchers used this pre-pandemic average to compare and contrast the FY20 metrics collected after RHCO-A transitioned to near 100 percent full-time telework. To gain a baseline on RHCO-A leadership telework perceptions, the researchers sent structured interview questions to RHCO-A leadership. The questions focused on telework perceptions pre-pandemic and how these perceptions changed during FY20 and FY21. The researchers analyzed the RHCO-A leadership interview responses with the interview responses from supervisors in the RAND Corporation's 2018 study on telework within the Federal Government.

I. REPORT ORGANIZATION

Chapter I delivers an introduction to the project. In Chapter II, the researchers outline the history of telework within the Federal Government and the various legislation

and national strategies that dictate telework policy DOD-wide and within RHCO-A. Chapter III is a literature review of various reports on Government telework. In Chapter IV, the researchers discuss the methodology and analyze the data. Lastly, Chapter V offers the researchers' conclusions and recommendations for the DOD and contracting commands debating the continued use of near 100 percent full-time telework, returning to "business as usual," or hybridizing both options.

J. SUMMARY

Chapter I delivered the project motivation, the target research questions, the scope, and the overall organization of the project. Chapter II explores the background and history of the Federal Government telework program and RHCO-A.

II. BACKGROUND

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter furnishes readers with the foundation required to understand the history of telework within the Federal Government, the various legislation and national strategies that dictate telework policy DOD-wide and within RHCO-A. Furthermore, the “Understanding Government Telework” study from the RAND Corporation published in 2018 discusses assumptions on telework before March 2020.

B. BACKGROUND

The earliest inception of Government telework was in the late 1950s (Joice, 2000), so the researchers ask, “why did it take the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic for the DOD, and more specifically, the DOD contracting community to dust off their telework programs and put them into action?” Ironically enough, it was a natural disaster that put the early telework policies into practice. In 1989, the Loma Prieta earthquake brought San Francisco, CA, and nearly 800 employees of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 9 office building to a shattering halt. Studies of the EPA’s forced telework situation proved the feasibility and utility of telework as a workplace strategy as well as an emergency response strategy (Joice, 2000). Flash forward to 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic strikes, and the DOD must find a way to keep employees working via telework or face failing to meet mission requirements.

In November 2005, amidst the avian flu (H5N1) outbreak, President George W. Bush established the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza (Homeland Security Council, 2005). This national strategy served as an initial framework to help the country navigate a future global influenza outbreak. A National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan was subsequently issued to provide government agencies with high-priority steps to prepare for a future pandemic. In August 2006, the DOD established its plan, the Department of Defense Implementation Plan for Pandemic Influenza. Included in the plan are steps allowing employees to access alternative workstations via telework

whenever the outbreak of influenza warranted, limiting as much close contact as possible (DOD, 2006).

The National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza directed government agencies to utilize maximum telework during a possible influenza outbreak (Homeland Security Council, 2005). The TEA of 2010 framed telework within the Federal Government regularly and defines telework as “a work flexibility arrangement whereby an employee performs their duties and responsibilities and other authorized activities from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work” (TEA, HR 1722, 2010, p. 1). The TEA instructs that each executive agency shall establish telework policies and training and incorporate those policies into the ‘agencies’ COOP (TEA, 2010). The act transformed the Federal telework program to provide agency effectiveness, strategic intervention, and contingency planning. Most DOD agencies have now identified telework as a major piece of their unit’s COOP, a critical step in the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan (DOD, 2006).

The Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1035.01, Telework Policy of 2012 “establishes policy, assigns roles and responsibilities, and prescribes procedures for implementing DOD telework programs” (DoDI, 2012, p. 1). The Instruction highlights the benefits of telework, including employees’ quality of work-life balance, recruitment, retention, strategic mission accomplishment, and environmentally friendly reduced traffic congestion and energy consumption (DoDI, 2012).

DOD policy on telework shall be: Actively promoted and implemented throughout the DOD in support of the DOD commitment to workforce efficiency, emergency preparedness, and quality of life. Telework facilitates the accomplishment of work; can serve as an effective recruitment and retention strategy; enhance DOD efforts to employ and accommodate people with disabilities; create cost savings by decreasing the need for office space and parking facilities, and by reducing transportation costs, including costs associated with payment of transit subsidies. Authorized for the maximum number of positions to the extent that mission readiness is not jeopardized. Used to the broadest extent possible by eligible employees on a regular and recurring basis, up to and including full-time telework or a situational basis at an approved alternative worksite. Telework, however, is not an entitlement. Periodically exercised to ensure its effectiveness in continuing operations in the event of a crisis or national emergency (e.g.,

pandemic influenza). Finally, used to help create employment and return-to-work opportunities for veterans, people with disabilities, and spouses of service members and employees being relocated. (DoDI, 2012, p. 2)

Per DoDI 1035.01, agencies shall determine which employees can telework, along with how many employees can telework within their agency. The instruction states that “eligible employees shall be allowed to telework to the maximum extent practicable without reduced individual or organization performance. However, employee eligibility is discretionary and decided by the relevant commander or supervisor, consistent with this Instruction and component-specific guidance” (DoDI, 2012, p. 11). DOD leaders should implement telework eligibility fairly across the board and consistently without considering any prohibited factors. Employee telework arrangements are designed for a regular work schedule, on a situational or ad hoc basis, or a combination of these, as prescribed in agency regulations and approved by supervisors and commanders (DoDI, 2012).

In 2018, the RAND Corporation published the “Understanding Government Telework” study that examined telework among federal agencies with telework policies and many personnel actively teleworking. Of the agencies with successful telework programs in place, the study observed two commonly cited factors that play a significant role in the success of a telework program: adequate Information Technology (IT) infrastructure and management support of employees teleworking (Weinbaum et al., 2018).

Attributes of Successful Telework Programs

Category	Attribute	Definition
Technological	Security	Agencies provide teleworkers with security measures to access their work remotely. These include virtual private networks (VPNs), encryption, password-protected websites, smart cards, and other safe means to access information.
	IT support	Agencies provide clear access to on-site and off-site technological support to thwart software or hardware telework malfunction. IT support is also available to provide employees with proper technology training (see next row).
	Equipment	Agencies provide the necessary equipment for employees to telework. The type of equipment ranges in scope and varies by agency but typically includes software and hardware.
Legal	Compliance with the TEA	Agencies comply, in whole or in part, with the TEA. Compliance includes, but is not limited to, the establishment of a clear telework policy, a written telework agreement between employees and managers, interactive telework training for employees and managers, the collection of telework data, and annual reporting to OPM.
Policy	Performance management	Agencies provide clear and defined methods for managers to track teleworkers' performances. These include, but are not limited to, virtual time management, productivity trackers, and virtual meetings to ensure that employees are completing their work.
	Training	Agencies routinely provide telework training to both managers and employees. This includes training that is mandated by agencies; successful agencies have implemented additional training, such as IT, communications, and management training.
	Proportion of teleworkers	Agencies have significant proportions of eligible employees who telework.
Financial	ROI	Agencies have significant ROIs.

Figure 2. Attributes of Successful Telework Programs. Source: RAND Corporation (2018).

The RAND study found that a critical hindrance to telework success is a hesitance among supervisors to allow employees to telework. “This reluctance stems primarily from management anxiety about being physically unable to see employees working and, therefore, believing that they are unable to measure productivity and output” (Weinbaum et al., 2018, p. 43). The literature review from the RAND study observed many DOD agencies that were still not utilizing maximum telework and documented the hypothesized benefits and costs of telework from DOD supervisors.

Hypothesized Benefits and Costs of Teleworking

Level	Benefit	Cost
Employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct savings in transportation costs and time • Indirect savings that derive from the ability to optimize where and when work activities are performed • Work-life balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct costs of maintaining a home office • Indirect costs associated with the professional and social impact of being isolated from the office • Indirect costs of needing to balance work and family
Employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced employee absences • Direct savings from reduced real estate and other overhead costs • Indirect savings from higher worker productivity, better retention, the ability to recruit individuals independent of their places of residence • Indirect savings from maintaining COOP during designated emergencies or inclement weather 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct costs associated with fielding the infrastructure that makes telework possible • Potential direct costs of losing proprietary information, secrets, and data • Potential indirect costs associated with loss of line-of-sight supervisory control of employees • Potential costs in loss of the innovation and agility from ad hoc employee interactions
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct savings from wear and tear on roads • Indirect savings from better health from lower air pollution or the production of greenhouse gasses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These costs were not considered in any of the models we reviewed

Figure 3. Hypothesized Benefits and Costs of Teleworking Source: RAND Corporation (2018).

The Federal Government’s telework landscape changed quickly and dramatically when the COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States in March 2020. On March 18, 2020, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum stating that “all DOD Components would execute their pandemic plans, or portions of their plans, to ensure the Department’s ability to perform mission-essential duties” (DoDIG, 2021, p. 4). The Department of Defense Inspector General (DoDIG) released a report in March 2021 that observed what telework in the Federal Government was like before and after the onset of the pandemic. Only 6.2 percent of DoDIG survey respondents reported teleworking full-time before March 2020. However, the number of respondents teleworking full time increased to 59.5 percent once DOD agencies began executing their pandemic plans. Full-time telework among active-duty members also saw a sharp increase, with 4.4 percent of active-duty survey respondents teleworking full-time before the pandemic and 22.6 percent after the shift to maximum telework (DoDIG, 2021).

A formal telework policy was established for USAHCA when Colonel Christopher M. Todd signed the Telework Program Policy # 20–001 memorandum on October 16, 2019 (RHCO-A, 2019). This policy applied to all civilian employees within the USAHCA and did not apply to interns, contractors, and military personnel. The policy established requirements for a successful telework program within the USAHCA. Supervisors were allowed to approve requests for telework based upon mission requirements, position telework eligibility, and employee eligibility. Eligible employees could telework one day per pay period if on an alternative work schedule and one day per week if on a regular work schedule. A telework guide issued with the memorandum outlines telework eligibility, training requirements before teleworking, and performance and expectations (RHCO-A, 2019). In March 2020, shortly after DOD leadership authorized maximum telework, RHCO-A allowed all civilian and military personnel holding eligible telework positions to telework full time.

C. SUMMARY

This chapter presented the foundation on the history of telework within the Federal Government, the various legislation and national strategies that dictate telework policy

DOD-wide and within RHCO-A. Additionally, the chapter focused on the RAND Corporation's 2018 "Understanding Government Telework" study and the assumptions of telework from DOD supervisors on telework before the move to maximum telework DOD-wide in 2020. Chapter III presents a literature review of related studies and reports on telework within the Federal Government.

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III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a literature review of various studies and reports relating to contracting efficiency within the Army and telework within the Federal Government. This chapter first explores a report analyzing how Army leadership measures contracting efficiency and effectiveness. Next, the chapter captures a wide-ranging span of publications relating to the history, benefits, and scope of telework within the DOD and Federal Government as a whole. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of a RAND Corporation study analyzing leadership perceptions of telework within various federal agencies.

B. ARMY CONTRACTING EFFICIENCY

In 2017, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) was tasked with analyzing the contracting efficiency within the Army. The goal of the report was to analyze “(1) the efficiency and effectiveness of (RHCO-A) contracting operations and (2) the effects of organizational changes on contracting operations” (Mak, 2017, p. 2). Mak (2017) found that while Army leadership did conduct department-wide reviews of contract actions, Army leaders failed to consistently evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of their contracting operations (Mak, 2017). Instead of examining the efficiency of their operations, Mak (2017) describes a culture of leadership mainly focused on getting funds obligated before their expiration dates. Mak (2017) discovered that Army contracting had not established any data metrics that would evaluate contract actions based on their efficiency and effectiveness.

Mak (2017) concluded the report by recommending that the Secretary of the Army implement ‘Contracting Enterprise ‘Review’ metrics that would evaluate “the timeliness of contract awards, cost savings attributable to contracting activities, and the quality of contractors’ products and services” (p. 28). Mak also recommended that the Army adopt department-wide Procurement Action Lead Time (PALT) guidelines to track the efficiency of their contracting efforts. After the report’s release, the Army partially concurred with the GAO recommendations (GAO, n.d.). While the Army did not concur with establishing

Contracting Enterprise Review metrics, the agency did agree to implement department-wide PALT guidelines beginning in the 2nd Quarter of FY19 (GAO, n.d.).

This report serves as important background information for the analysis section of the project. The researchers were able to obtain various contracting metrics dating back to FY17. However, RHCO-A did not provide any PALT metrics before FY19, when the Army PALT guidelines were implemented.

C. TELEWORK IN EXECUTIVE AGENCIES

The Telework in Executive Agencies Congressional Research Service report addresses the pre-and -post-March 16, 2020, situation, which is vital to address and link the previous research with environmental impacts on policy and why the telework environment changed. Enacted on December 09, 2010, the TEA defines telework, authorizes its use within executive agencies, and establishes telework program requirements (TEA,2010, p.1). The law requires that each federal agency incorporate their telework policy into their COOP plans (TEA,2010, p.1). On January 31, 2020, the Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar declared a public health emergency for the United States in response to the emerging threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 07, 2020, OPM issued guidance to all federal agencies on COVID-19, urging agencies to review and update the COOP plan to ensure telework is fully incorporated (OPM, 2020). Hence, as many employees as possible are fully utilized in the event of a COOP activation. On March 15, 2020, The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued “Updated Guidance for the National Capital Region on Telework Flexibilities.” The guidance prompts the Federal Executive Branch departments to offer maximum flexibility for all telework eligible employees as long as their supervisors determine they can continue to meet their agency’s mission requirements while working in a remote location (Vought, 2020).

D. TRUSTING TELEWORK IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

“Trusting Telework in the Federal Government” dives into five areas that affect trust with teleworking, which suggests trust is the main reason government leaders have found it challenging to implement Telework policies into their workplace. This study will give us several lenses of trust to analyze and add to this body of work to prove or disprove the

presented theories. An additional lens may emerge through research of this period where the DOD shifted to near 100 percent full-time telework. We will gather data to add to this body of work to prove or disprove these areas of trust and provide additional recommendations to build trust at all levels that affect Government Contracting (Brown et al., 2018).

E. TELEWORK AS A SPACE-SAVING TOOL

The GAO released a report on March 22, 2018, tasked with examining the effects of telework on agencies' office space-saving efforts (Rectanus, 2018). The report detailed 23 different agencies that discussed using telework as a space-saving tool. Of the 23 agencies in the report, Rectanus (2018) examined the telework approaches of four agencies more closely: the General Services Administration (GSA); the Office of Justice Programs at the Department of Justice; the Centers for Disease Control at the Department of Health and Human Services; and the Bureau of the Fiscal Service at the Department of the Treasury (Rectanus, 2018). Each of the four agencies had successfully used telework to accommodate existing employees in smaller workspaces or used existing workspaces to accommodate additional employees without also expanding the workplace footprint. Rectanus mentions that other agencies in the report "discussed challenges in using telework to reduce space, including human capital issues, mission suitability, and measuring cost savings attributable to telework" (2018, p. 21). A majority of the agencies reported that it would be beneficial if there were measurement guidance on utilizing telework as a space saver. The report concluded that an updated resource to measure telework as a space-saving tool was necessary (Rectanus, 2018).

F. TELEWORK SURVEY DURING COVID-19

In a September 2020 Government Executive article, Senior Correspondent Eric Katz states "about three-quarters of federal workers remain in telework status, with 63 percent teleworking full time. Of those working remotely, nearly one-in-five expect to remain out of their offices for at least another year. Just 10 percent expect to return in the next two months" (Katz, 2020, para. 2). Since nearly 100 percent full-time telework implementation, federal employees are becoming more comfortable working from home. Many believe their agencies have experienced no significant disruptions due to the pandemic compared to earlier this year. "A slight majority of respondents—53 percent—said COVID-19 has a minimal or no impact

on operations, compared to just 15 percent who said the same in a Government Executive poll on April 03, 2020” (Katz, 2020, para. 5).

G. WE'RE NOT GOING BACK

In the article “We’re not going back,” Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Stephen Wilson said at the Air Force Association Virtual Air, Sea, Space and Cyber conference held September 16, 2020. “We have had an 800 percent increase in our ability to do this teleworking digital experience. Nobody wants to go back to what we were doing. So, how do we take this challenge and use it as an opportunity to move us forward?” (Maucione, 2020, para. 2). Top Air Force leaders agree that the Air Force will never look the same. There are many benefits in continued telework post-COVID-19, including cost savings, recruiting new talent, fewer permanent change-of-station, and hybrid learning which produces a better graduate by allowing for both in-person and tele-learning. The Air Force has gone to great lengths to ensure Air Force personnel have expanded virtual private network (VPN) capabilities and the technology needed to accomplish the mission (Maucione, 2020).

H. SUCCESSFUL TELEWORK PRACTICES

In GAO testimony on November 18, 2020, Acting Director Michelle Rosenberg spoke to Congress on critical practices that can assure success in federal telework programs. Rosenberg mentioned that her statement is based on the GAO’s body of work on federal telework issued from July 2003 through February 2017. In her statement, Rosenberg spoke about the TEA passed by Congress in 2010. The act added more structure and guidelines to federal telework. Rosenberg discussed vital practices that dictate successful telework programs. Two new studies were also recently initiated by the GAO to study federal telework during the COVID-19 pandemic: “One is examining the extent to which agencies have used telework during the pandemic, including the successes and challenges agencies experienced. The second is reviewing agencies’ telework IT infrastructure” (Rosenberg, 2020, p. 1).

I. DODIG REPORT ON TELEWORK DURING COVID-19

The DoDIG released a report on March 30, 2021, titled Evaluation of Access to Department of Defense Information Technology and Communications During the

Coronavirus Disease-2019 Pandemic. The DoDIG’s objective was to “determine the extent to which DOD Components provided access to DOD IT and communications during the COVID-19 pandemic” (DoDIG, 2021, p. i). DoDIG issued a survey that resulted in close to 55,000 responses from federal employees. 88.2 percent of respondents reported transitioning to full or part-time Telework after March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began affecting the United States. The audit found that the transition to maximum telework varied in success among the different DOD components. The Marine Corps, Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA), Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA), and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) were able to transition to maximum telework immediately. Conversely, the Army, Navy, Air Force, Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA), Defense Finance Accounting Service (DFAS), and DHA faced challenges implementing maximum Telework (DoDIG, 2021). Some challenges employees faced in the early days of maximum telework were a lack of network capacity and remote software and equipment, with most employees working in an alternative worksite. Some survey respondents mentioned using unsanctioned video communication tools and personal laptops and cell phones to accomplish their work. Overall, the audit found that “88.1 of respondents reported that their productivity levels remained the same or increased during the period of maximum telework” (DoDIG, 2021, p. 8). The audit recommended that DOD leadership “establish management oversight procedures to verify that DOD Components have performed the testing, training, and exercise requirements of the DOD Implementation Plan and the DOD Telework Policy” (DoDIG, 2021, p. 49).

J. UNDERSTANDING GOVERNMENT TELEWORK

“Understanding Government Telework” by the Rand Corporation will be the foundational study from which the researchers will expand the research. It lays out an excellent literature review and background from the first Telework study by Jack Niles in 1976 through the 2010 TEA signed by Barack Obama and five different case studies for government agencies’ use of telework circa 2018. It is a phenomenal baseline that identifies many theories about what challenges telework may bring to the Government workforce in general to include cultural limitations and concerns of why telework has not become more mainstream. Most limitations involved management trust concerns and technology inhibiting

effective collaboration (Weinbaum et al., 2018). The researchers will compare the management perceptions of telework in the 2018 study against RHCO-A leadership telework perceptions before and during the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic. The scope and timing of the RAND study provide an ideal time frame to examine the effects of a near 100 percent full-time teleworking environment on management perceptions of telework.

K. CONTINGENCY THEORY OF ORGANIZATIONS

The book titled *Contingency Theory of Organizations* by Lex Donaldson explores the history of research behind the contingency theory, a theoretical lens used to assess organizations. Donaldson describes the theory of three types of contingencies in an organization: environment, organizational size, and organizational structure (Donaldson, 2001). The contingency theory of organizations is derived from the contingency approach in science, which states that “the effect of one variable on another depends upon some third variable, W” (Donaldson, 2001, Chapter 1, A formal definition of contingency theory, para. 2). Within organizations, there is not a simple relationship between two variables. The contingency theory contends that other variables called contingencies shape organizations and organizational decision-making. The third variable between RHCO-A leadership and their perceptions of telework is the COVID-19 pandemic. The project will use the contingency theory as a framework to review the effect of the mass shift of telework within RHCO-A and on leadership’s telework perceptions.

L. SUMMARY

This chapter conveyed a collection of research on contracting efficiency measurements and various attributes of telework within the Federal Government before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent mass shift to near 100 percent full-time telework. The next chapter presents an overview of the methodology and analysis of the project.

IV. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the project's methodology and analysis. First, the chapter will overview the researchers' methodology used for investigating the project's research questions. Next, the chapter will also provide an analysis of the project's data.

B. METHODOLOGY

The researchers' goal for this project is to analyze the implications of a near 100 percent full-time telework environment on RHCO-A contracting efficiency metrics and determine if RHCO-A management perceptions of telework changed due to a mass shift to telework. The researchers chose a mixed-methods case study for the 'project's methodology. A mixed-methods case study approach was deemed most appropriate because of the plethora of data received from RHCO-A along with access to all of the 'office's leadership. As Sylvie Chetty states in a 1996 journal article in the *International Small Business Journal*, "case studies explain events and deal with them over a period of time rather than with frequency of events" (Chetty, 1996, p. 78). The mixed-methods case study approach could allow the researchers to provide an in-depth look at RHCO-A during the 'office's shift to near 100 percent full-time telework in FY20 after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chetty (1996) explains that the case study approach illustrates "the reasons why decisions were made, how they were implemented and with what result, can be identified" (Chetty, 1996, p. 78). A baseline must be established for RHCO-A contracting efficiency metrics and RHCO-A management's telework perceptions to answer the researchers' questions.

To determine RHCO-A's contracting efficiency metrics before the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers obtained various contracting efficiency metrics from the Army's VCEBI web-based system from FY17 through FY19. Next, the researchers determined the contracting metrics included in the RHCO-A contracting efficiency baseline. The researchers' original intention was to use RHCO-A's PALT data as a baseline to measure RHCO-A's contracting efficiency. However, after examining the data pulled from the VCEBI, the researchers could not locate any reliable PALT data before FY19. The researchers

hypothesized that the lack of RHCO-A PALT data correlated with the lack of comprehensive Army PALT guidelines before FY19 (Mak, 2017; GAO, n.d.).

The researchers then filtered the data to include the following metrics for their baseline: total number of obligated dollars, the total number of obligated actions, forecasting compliance percentage, and contract file compliance percentage. The forecasting compliance metric assesses contract timeliness and refers to the percentage of milestones that met or exceeded their completion schedule. The contract specialists track milestones manually by entering each requirement’s milestone schedule in PCF upon receipt of the complete requirement folder, and all required documents are received. The contract file compliance metric refers to the percentage of contract files under inspection that had zero errors. The contract file is compliant when all Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) mandated documents are in the appropriate PCF location.

To ensure the date ranges in the FY17 – FY19 baseline average matched the onset of the shift to near 100 percent full-time telework, the researchers only included contract actions executed during March 01 through September 30 in FY17 – FY19. The researchers took the annual numbers for each of the selected metrics during FY17 through FY19 and divided them by three to determine a pre-mass telework contracting efficiency baseline average for each metric (Table 1).

Table 1. Contracting Efficiency Metric Baseline Calculation

MAR - SEP FY17 Total / %	+	MAR - SEP FY18 Total / %	+	MAR - SEP FY19 Total / %	=	Contracting Efficiency Metric Baseline
Divided by 3						

To determine RHCO-A’s contracting efficiency metrics during the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers scrubbed the data to only include contracting metrics from March 01, 2020, through September 30, 2020. The FY20 totals are then

compared to the FY17 - FY19 baseline average to determine the change in efficiency after a shift to near 100 percent full-time telework.

To analyze RHCO-A leadership's perceptions of telework before and during the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers compiled a list of three interview questions:

- What were the telework challenges before the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the current challenges working in a near 100 percent full-time telework contracting environment during the COVID- 19 pandemic?
- What have been the benefits of working in a near-full telework contracting environment?

In order to receive the most accurate picture of telework perceptions among the organization's leaders, the researchers requested to interview both USAHCA strategic level leaders and RHCO-A regional operational leaders and RHCO-A tactical supervisors. Upon receiving approval from the USAHCA Senior Contracting Official, the researchers emailed the questions to all three USAHCA strategic leaders and RHCO-A eight supervisors.

The researchers received responses from all 11 USAHCA leaders and RHCO-A, and supervisors. The researchers used the responses given by USAHCA and RHCO-A leadership in comparison to responses by management perceptions of telework mentioned in the 2018 RAND study. The RAND study serves as a structural guide to compare RHCO-A leadership's perceptions of telework before the shift to near 100 percent full-time telework in March 2020.

C. ANALYSIS

When comparing contracting efficiency metrics within RHCO-A before and during the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers first explored total obligated dollars from FY17 through FY19 during the March 01 through September 30 timeframe (Table 2).

Table 2. FY17 – FY20 RHCO-A Obligated Dollars

Obligated Dollars			
March 01 through September 30			
FY17	FY18	FY19	Average
\$84,419,861	\$77,638,525	\$63,733,559	\$75,263,982
March 01 through September 30			
FY17 - FY19 Average	FY20	Delta % Change	
\$75,263,982	\$77,638,525	3.15%	

RHCO-A had a relatively consistent total amount of obligated dollars year to year from FY17 through FY19. The researchers observed a three-year decline in obligated dollars and calculated an FY17 – FY19 baseline average of \$75,263,982. The researchers then compared the baseline average to the metrics from FY20. RHCO-A did not continue to see a drop in total obligated dollars in FY20 and obligated 3.15% above their baseline average from March 01 through September 30, 2020.

After seeing a slight increase in obligated dollars in FY20, the researchers then examined the total number of obligated actions from FY17 through FY19 during the timeframe of March 01 through September 30 (Table 3).

Table 3. FY17 – FY20 RHCO-A Obligated Actions

Obligated Actions			
March 01 through September 30			
FY17	FY18	FY19	Average
1618	1621	1644	1628
March 01 through September 30			
FY17 - FY19 Average	FY20	Delta % Change	
1628	1578	-3.05%	

RHCO-A maintained a consistent number of obligated actions in FY17 through FY19. The total number of actions from the researched period never exceeded 1700 actions but never fell below 1600. The researchers calculated an FY17 – FY19 baseline average of 1628 obligated actions. The researchers compared the baseline average with the number of actions within RHCO-A from March 01 through September 30, 2020. Obligated actions did drop during the research period of FY20, but only slightly to 1578 actions equating to a 3.05% decrease. The decrease in actions in FY20 compared with an increase of over \$10,000 in obligated dollars from FY19 suggests that perhaps the actions executed in FY20 were of higher dollar amounts requiring additional milestones to complete.

After analyzing contract obligated dollars and actions, the researchers sought additional metrics to understand the contract efficiency within RHCO-A better. To better understand the timeliness of contract actions executed with RHCO-A, the researchers analyzed RHCO-A’s forecasting compliance percentage from FY17 – FY19 (Table 4). The forecasting compliance metric provides the percentage of milestones that met or exceeded their scheduled completion date.

Table 4. FY17 – FY20 RHCO-A Forecasting Compliance Percentage

Forecasting Compliance %			
March 01 through September 30			
FY17	FY18	FY19	Average
54.75%	67.88%	93.26%	72%
March 01 through September 30			
FY17 - FY19 Average	FY20	Delta % Change	
72%	90.42%	25.65%	

The researchers observed a significant variance of results when analyzing RHCO-A’s forecasting compliance percentage from FY17 – FY19. Forecasting compliance was relatively low in FY17 and FY18, with percentages ranging from 54.75% in FY17 and 67.88% in FY18. These results changed dramatically in FY19, with RHCO-A’s forecasting compliance increasing to 93.26%. This sharp increase resulted in an FY17 – FY19 baseline

average of 72%. After further examining the increase, the researchers determined that forecasting compliance was a metric included in the Army PALT guidelines established in 2019 (GAO, n.d.). RHCO-A had not been thoroughly tracking forecasting compliance metrics before FY19. The researchers hypothesized that the numbers pulled from the VCEBI did not accurately reflect actual forecasting compliance until the Army formally implemented PALT guidelines. As a result, a more accurate baseline metric for RHCO-A forecasting compliance would instead be the FY19 average of 93.26%, even if it is just one year of data as the 25.65% increase from the FY17 – FY19 average may be artificially high due to a lack of reporting in FY17 and FY18. The forecasting average dropped slightly from FY19 to FY20, from 93.26% to 90.42%. However, this slight decrease only equates to 2.84%, almost identical to the FY19 baseline average.

With the amount of RHCO-A obligated dollars, obligated actions, and forecasting compliance percentage metrics virtually identical in FY20 to the FY17 – FY19 baseline average, the researchers finally looked at contract file compliance metrics (Table 5). Where forecasting compliance is related to contract timelines, contract file compliance measures RHCO-A’s contract execution and administration accuracy.

Table 5. FY17 – FY20 RHCO-A Contract File Compliance Percentage

Contract File Compliance %			
March 01 through September 30			
FY17	FY18	FY19	Average
93.96%	94.11%	99.57%	95.88%
March 01 through September 30			
FY17 - FY19 Average	FY20	Delta % Change	
96%	98.73%	2.97%	

The RHCO-A contract file compliance was reasonably consistent each year from FY17 – FY19. Each year RHCO-A’s contract file compliance percentage was above 90%, with a low of 93.96% in FY17 and a high of 99.57% in FY19, equating to an FY17 – FY19 baseline average of 95.88%. RHCO-A contract file compliance in FY20 was almost

identical to the FY19 percentage and was roughly 3% higher than the FY17 – FY19 baseline average.

When looking at all the metrics together, RHCO-A has increased its contracting efficiency each year from FY17 – FY19. The RHCO-A metrics all steadily increased to a peak in obligated actions, forecasting compliance, and contract file compliance. As the workforce shifted to near 100 percent full-time telework, RHCO-A maintained an almost equal efficiency level with 3% maximum deltas in all FY20 researched metrics. Even with a sudden, significant disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic to the workplace, the RHCO-A workforce maintained an efficient contract file compliance rate.

This section analyzed contracting efficiency metrics with RHCO-A before and during the onset of the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis provides objective data to answer the project’s first two research questions. The following section will analyze RHCO-A leadership perceptions of telework before and during the onset of the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic.

As mentioned in the study on telework in the Federal Government, Weinbaum et al. (2018) state that two of the key barriers to implementing telework successfully in a federal agency are inadequate IT infrastructure and management hesitance among supervisors to allow employees to telework. The researchers sought to explore the telework perceptions of RHCO-A leadership before the shift to near 100 percent full-time telework. The 12 USAHCA and RHCO-A supervisors interviewed shared similar perceptions of telework before FY20. When asked to describe telework challenges before FY20, all 11 respondents identified management resistance, inadequate technological support, and a lack of trust in employees accomplishing mission requirements while teleworking. Other challenges mentioned were restrictive telework policies, difficulty training new employees, and the general fear of the unknown. These perceived challenges of telework match up directly with responses from management interviewed in the 2018 RAND study. RHCO-A Chief during FY20 LTC Clark Simon elaborated on the challenges to telework before FY20.

There were two challenges to telework before the pandemic; adequate understanding of IT support and applicable policies for more extensive and

flexible use of telework. The IT support issues were more anecdotal rather than formulated problem sets. I personally observed and knew people who worked 100 percent full-time telework; however, I had no knowledge of any organization using this work structure on a large scale. During my initial attempts to expand telework prior to the pandemic, I discovered that there was a lack of knowledge for IT support over VPN (i.e., security patches and software updates). At the time, the current equipment and infrastructure in place theoretically could support a telework environment, which later became fact. Moreover, I believed the greater challenge lay in overcoming the restrictions within the governing policies. The current policies are less flexible than the OPM and DoDI policies and guidelines. From my perspective, the current policies are influenced by a bias toward risk aversion of workload management, which presume there is an increase of risk to the mission, command, while teleworking. These perceived risks and assumptions are addressable; the data points analyzed in this paper provide a counterargument to the previous risk assumption, which I recommend exploring further. Telework is not just plausible; it is part of the future for the acquisition workforce. (C. Simon, interview with author, June 06, 2021)

The researchers then explored USAHCA and RHCO-A's perceptions of telework after the onset of the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic. When asked about the current telework challenges, leaders most frequently stated the difficulty of training new employees as a current challenge. Other challenges listed were managing difficult employees, lack of social contact, and monitoring employee health and welfare. Chief Lt. Col Clark Simon addressed the following current challenges to telework within RHCO-A.

Leading in a remote environment is possible, yet it will be significantly challenging for most leaders. Telecommunication platforms need further expansion to support large groups. The Microsoft Teams platform struggles to hold large-scale operations such as town hall meetings, regional or local level training events, and events with more than 20 participants. Team building and cohesion are more complicated, requiring additional time to establish rapport from a remote environment. Leader soft skills are difficult to master and are even more challenging in a non-interpersonal environment. As a result, leaders require more time to build trust, develop teams and cultivate positive working relationships. There may be additional health risks and higher chances for burnout. I believe a few employees are vulnerable to potentially experiencing isolation fatigue. Some employees show signs of decreased grooming, reluctance to participate on camera, and not taking appropriate breaks from the workspace. Supervisory management may potentially

pose an increased risk for supervisors of teams greater than four (C. Simon, interview with author, June 06, 2021).

RHCO-A leaders mentioned many different current benefits of telework, including improved employee morale, a better work-life balance, less sick leave taken, less in-office social loafing, and improved focus.

The researchers then analyzed the difference in responses among USAHCA and RHCO-A leaders before and after the onset of the shift to near 100 percent full-time telework. While every respondent mentioned inadequate technology support as a previous challenge, only one expressed concern about technology, stating occasional inconsistent VPN connectivity. A majority of respondents mentioned a lack of trust in employees accomplishing mission requirements before the onset of the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic. No respondents mentioned a lack of employee trust as a current concern after the shift to near 100 percent full-time telework.

After analyzing all interview responses from USAHCA and RHCO-A leaders before and during the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers determined that a sustained period of nearly full-time telework had a clear impact on leadership perceptions of telework. FY20 provided a perfect test case for leaders on the efficiency of telework. While initially hamstrung by inadequate IT infrastructure while operated in a limited telework environment, it is clear from the interview responses that additional IT support provided to the RHCO-A workforce in FY20 helped ease technological concerns of telework from leadership. In FY20 and FY21, USAHCA and RHCO-A leaders observed employees meet mission requirements after shifting from a limited teleworking environment to nearly 100 percent full-time telework. This observation helped build leadership trust in employees successfully meeting the mission while teleworking. When comparing RHCO-A's FY20 contracting efficiency metrics with the current perceptions of telework among RHCO-A leadership, it is clear that all levels of leadership witnessed that employees objectively met mission requirements on par with past fiscal years and changed their perceptions on telework in the process. When drafting future telework policy, USAHCA and RHCO-A leadership must continue to use objective contracting efficiency metrics to guide policy decisions.

D. SUMMARY

This chapter first provided the methodology the researchers used to explore the project's three research questions. Additionally, the chapter focused on analyzing the data and the information provided to the researchers. The RHCO-A contracting efficiency metrics, along with USAHCA and RHCO-A leadership perceptions of telework before and during the onset of the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic, provide valuable insight into RHCO-A's contracting efficiency in a near 100 percent full-time telework environment. The following final chapter of the project provides the researchers' conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis of the RHCO-A contracting efficiency metrics and leadership perceptions on telework.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research project is to explore one contracting organization's contracting efficiency metrics before the COVID-19 pandemic and after the mass shift to near 100 percent full-time telework. Additionally, researchers analyze the implications of a near 100 percent full-time telework environment on leaderships' perceptions of telework within the RHCO-A before and during the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter will discuss our findings and provide recommendations.

A. RESEARCH QUESTION CONCLUSIONS

(1) Research Question Number One

What were the contracting efficiency metrics in RHCO-A during a limited telework environment?

The efficiency focus areas in this study are obligated dollars, obligated actions, forecasting compliance, and contract file compliance from FY17 through FY20. To measure contracting efficiencies most accurately in FY20 after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the date parameters for FY17 – FY19 were March 01 through September 30. After analyzing the complete data set, the accurate data dates back to FY17 in three metrics. Forecasting compliance, one of the more useful metrics for tracking contracting efficiency through successful milestone achievements, only had reliable data in FY19 and FY20. The researchers established a baseline average for each of the four metrics, but only three metrics: obligated dollars, obligated actions, and contract file compliance, are based on a three-year average. For forecasting compliance, the researchers used FY19's percentage as it is the only year with accurate data after the Army established formal PALT guidelines in 2019 (Table 6).

Table 6. RHCO-A FY17 – FY19 Average Baseline Overview

Obligated Dollars	Obligated Actions	Forecasting Compliance Percentage	Contract File Compliance Percentage
\$75,263,982	1628	93.26%*	95.88%

* FY19 Only

The researchers concluded that contracting efficiency remained fairly consistent within RHCO-A from FY17 through FY19. Besides the lack of accurate forecasting compliance, all other metrics remained relatively consistent year to year, and there were no outliers in the data researched. While obligated dollars and obligated actions are not quality metrics to measure contracting efficiency by themselves, they can accurately measure output by a contracting office. In RHCO-A, contracting dollars never increased by more than \$10,000 year to year, and contracting actions remained between 1600 and 1700 actions each year in FY17 through FY 19. Combining forecasting compliance and contract file compliance with obligated dollars and actions provides a better look into RHCO-A’s contracting efficiency. Adding multiple years of data across multiple efficiency metrics creates a strong efficiency baseline compared to future years. As the metrics in three of the four categories researched did not contain any outliers, the researchers can conclude that the efficiency baseline for obligated actions, obligated dollars, and contract file compliance provides an objective assessment of RHCO-A’s FY20 contracting performance metrics.

(2) Research Question Number Two

What were the contracting efficiency metrics in RHCO-A during a mass shift to near 100 percent full-time telework during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To mirror the research from FY17 – FY19, the researchers analyzed obligated dollars, obligated actions, forecasting compliance percentage, and contract file compliance percentage in FY20 from March 01 through September 30. Each of the four metrics

remained relatively consistent with each metric’s baseline average, and no identifiable outliers (Table 7).

Table 7. RHCO-A FY20 / Baseline Average Comparison

Metric	Obligated Dollars	Obligated Actions	Forecasting Compliance Percentage	Contract File Compliance Percentage
FY20	\$77,638,525	1578	90.42%	98.73%
FY17 - FY19 Delta	3.15%	-3.05%	2.84%*	2.97%

*FY 19 - FY20

Three of the four metrics researched increased by roughly three percent in comparison to the baseline average. Only obligated actions fell slightly below the baseline average from March 01 through September 30, 2020. The researchers conclude that perhaps total contract actions, of all metrics researched, were impacted the most by an abrupt shift to near 100 percent full-time telework. As additional technological support became available to the workforce, contract actions almost reached the metric’s baseline average, falling just 3.05% short of the FY17 – FY19 average.

The project explores the impacts of a shift to near 100 percent full-time telework on an organization’s contracting mission efficiencies. When looking at the FY20 metrics compared to the FY17 – FY19 averages, the physical work location may have changed dramatically for most of the RHCO-A workforce; however, the contracting efficiency metrics hardly changed. Despite a global pandemic and complete physical transformation in how the organization accomplished its mission, the RHCO-A workforce maintained an equal to modest growth in most of its contracting efficiency metrics. The Deputy SCO for USAHCA also noted, “The contract workload has not suffered, and the workforce has met the challenge of teleworking” (N. Stevens, interview with author, May 24, 2021)

(3) Research Question Number Three

How has the mass shift to near 100 percent full-time telework changed the RHCO-A leadership's perceptions of telework?

Trending similar to the federal agencies mentioned in the 2018 RAND study on telework in the Federal Government, USAHCA and RHCO-A leaders shared similar perceptions about telework before FY20. The researchers discovered that all of the 11 USAHCA and RHCO-A leaders listed three of the same pre FY20 telework challenges: management resistance, inadequate technological support, and low confidence in accomplishing mission requirements while teleworking. In addition to the belief that current technology could not handle most employees' teleworking, leaders in RHCO-A also expressed low confidence in employee mission accomplishment while in a full-time teleworking environment. Initial leadership perceptions centered on increasing teleworking opportunities for the RHCO-A were near impossible from a technology standpoint and a contract execution perspective. If leadership thought employees were less productive teleworking than in the physical office, increasing the amount of telework access in RHCO-A would lead to an efficiency decrease and threaten mission success.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a unique opportunity to test the validity of these initial perceptions. The scale and timeframe of the COVID-19 pandemic allowed RHCO-A to test the telework efficiencies accurately and observe if leaders change their perceptions of telework in the process. In the contingency theory framework (Donaldson, 2001), would the shift to near 100 percent full-time telework in FY20 be impactful enough to serve as the "conditioning variable" between USAHCA and RHCO-A leaders and alter their perceptions on telework? (Donaldson, 2001). As the data from the project's first two research questions indicate, there was no decrease in contracting efficiency in FY20 once the RHCO-A workforce transitioned to near 100 percent full-time telework. The RHCO-A workforce, operating in a mass telework environment, maintained almost identical output and efficiency levels compared to past years where the workforce was overwhelmingly working in the office.

The researchers found that the shift to telework in FY20 changed USAHCA and RHCO-A leader perceptions on telework. While almost all leaders expressed concerns about IT infrastructure and employees meeting mission objectives while teleworking before FY20, no leaders listed either issue as a current concern. The RHCO-A workforce proved to leadership month after month that achieving mission requirements in a telework environment is feasible and successful. The contingency theory (Donaldson, 2001) identifies the nearly 100 percent full-time telework shift in RHCO-A as a strong “environmental contingency” that provided tangible evidence to leadership and insight with objective truths on efficiencies via telework versus simply basing telework decisions on initial leader perceptions. These results from FY20 near 100 percent full-time telework have completely reshaped RHCO-A leadership’s perceptions on telework and organizational performance outcomes.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the conclusions provided in the previous section, the researchers propose the following two recommendations.

1. Develop objective measurement tools for capturing the contracting efficiency of contract management to aid the development of telework policies for the RHCO-A contracting workforce.

It is difficult for leaders to make accurate decisions without objective data to support a decision. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, RHCO-A leaders had very little objective data on employee’s contracting efficiency while teleworking. A small number of RHCO-A were regularly teleworking before FY20, and if so, they were only authorized to telework a couple of days per week. USHCA telework policy restricted RHCO-A from teleworking full time before FY20. As a result, there was no way to measure the effects of telework on contracting efficiency metrics objectively. The FY20 through FY21 acquisitions processed in the COVID-19 pandemic provide an excellent source of telework efficiency data in a telework environment. RHCO-A leaders should use the project’s baseline average calculation and review FY20 results in the four metrics studied and any additional available contracting metrics.

Metrics are only available if they are collected and input accurately. Some metrics (obligated dollars and actions) can be collected automatically at award; others (forecasting compliance and contract file compliance) rely on RHCO-A contracting employees to update the data on their contract actions through PCF in an accurate and timely manner. To collect data from all available metrics accurately, leadership must clearly define and enforce the data entry processes required to track each metric. As witnessed within RHCO-A, the forecasting compliance percentage metric became more valuable to assess contracting efficiency after guidelines and enforcement mechanisms were put in place in 2019. As RHCO-A chief LTC Clark Simon states, “we can’t fix what we can’t see” (C. Simon, interview with author, June 06, 2020); RHCO-A leaders need to continue to build objective measurement tools to track contracting efficiency and enforce the collection of data among the workforce to ensure accurate results.

2. Continue to utilize telework within RHCO-A to the maximum extent practicable.

As previously discussed in the project, there are numerous employee and organizational benefits of telework. RHCO-A leaders interviewed mentioned their employees reporting higher morale as a result of a better work-life balance. Teleworking eliminates lengthy daily commutes, which result in valuable time and cost savings for the employee. From an organizational perspective, telework can help organizations save space and transition to a smaller office footprint (Rectanus, 2018). Telework can also make employees more productive for the organization by cutting back on in-office social loafing. Surveyed RHCO-A leaders point out that new employee training and a lack of social gatherings among coworkers are ongoing challenges. New plans will need to facilitate occasional situations where face-to-face is either required or more effective. Outside of these situations, authorizing maximum telework is the most prudent decision for the workforce. The RHCO-A workforce objectively proved in FY20 that a shift to near 100 percent full-time telework would not result in a drop in contracting efficiency. This period has transformed RHCO-A leadership’s perceptions of telework and has dramatically increased the supervisory trust of employees teleworking. With over a year of objective data to support the benefits gained from the shift to near 100 percent full-time telework,

USAHCA and RHCO-A leadership should draft a new telework policy for a post-COVID-19 environment authorizing telework to the maximum extent practicable.

C. AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The researchers understand that the project is limited to analyzing one contracting office during the FY20 through FY21 COVID-19 pandemic. Additional studies on other DOD contracting offices during this time period would add to the project's reach. Future researchers have opportunities to investigate how contracting efficiency metrics in other contracting offices changed before and during the near 100 percent full-time telework in FY20. Additionally, future researchers may also find interest in exploring the change in telework perceptions among senior contracting leadership across the DOD before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These additional areas of future research will better identify trends and perceptions in DOD contracting offices.

D. SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the research questions for the project, proposed conclusions for each of the three questions, and provided areas for future research. The questions answered in this chapter relate to the findings located in Chapter IV, which clarified the researchers' data on the impacts of a near 100 percent full-time telework environment on contracting efficiency metrics and leadership perceptions of telework within RHCO-A.

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