

“Hey, You’re Muted”: Lessons Learned on Remote Onboarding During the COVID-19
Pandemic.

by

PAULA INSELL

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY

Royal Roads University
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Supervisor: Dr. Irwin DeVries
OCTOBER, 2023

© PAULA INSELL 2023

COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Paula Insell's Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled "Hey, You're Muted": Lessons Learned on Remote Onboarding during the COVID-19 Pandemic and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Learning and Technology.

Dr. Irwin DeVries [signature on file]

Dr. Surita Jhangiani [signature on file]

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon the submission of the final copy of the thesis to Royal Roads University. The thesis supervisor confirms to have read this thesis and recommends that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements:

IRWIN DEVRIES [signature on file]

Abstract

This thesis aimed to explore the experiences of organizational newcomers to a suddenly virtual workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. A large Canadian employer granted me access to 12 individuals who remotely onboarded during the qualifying period, and a series of structured interviews took place.

From the interviews, an analysis took place and information was able to be themed in the following categories: Overall views on remote onboarding, understanding of roles and responsibilities, understanding of organizational culture, and onboarding challenges. As a result of this research, it is recommended that employers in similarly structured environments place a heightened emphasis on training their leadership to be present and engaged, creating space and time for newcomers to develop connection with the organization and their peers, and streamline the process for quick and efficient technical support.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Background to the Study.....	1
Description of the Workplace Pre-Pandemic.....	4
Description of the Workplace Post-Pandemic	5
Research Questions	6
Definition of Key Terms.....	7
Chapter 2 Literature Review	9
What is Onboarding or Organizational Socialization?	9
Related Theories on Adult Learning.....	11
History of Remote Work.....	13
Remote Work during the Pandemic	14
Perceptions of Remote Work – Pre-Pandemic.....	15
Perceptions of Remote Work – Post-Pandemic	17
Summary.....	19
Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework and Methodology	20
Data Gathering	23
Data Analysis	26
Limitations and Delimitations in the Study	26
Ethical Considerations	29
Timeline of Research Events	31

Chapter 4 Findings	33
Introduction to the Findings.....	33
Views on Remote Onboarding.....	38
Roles and Responsibilities	41
Understanding of Organizational Culture.....	41
Onboarding Challenges.....	44
Chapter 5 Discussion and Recommendations.....	47
Appropriately Trained Leadership Matters.....	47
Cultivating Connection	48
Timely and Clear Technical Support	50
Program Design	50
Conclusion	52
References.....	54

List of Figures

Figure 1 Timeline of the Research Events 31

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background to the Study

Much of the developed world rushed to create home offices during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the dust settles, leaders in many Canadian industries assert that this impromptu remote work experiment has exceeded their expectations through increased productivity and decreased meetings or other office-based distractions (Ozimek, A. 2020). Though the pandemic temporarily halted much in-office work, it did not stop the employee lifecycle of hiring and resignations. Some benefits of remote work were thought to be so great (Ipsen et al., 2021; Ozimek, 2020) that organizations are now planning to develop strategies for remote hiring, with many already having made the shift. Though some research has been done on remote work (Olson, 1983; Olson et al., 1997; Ozimek, 2020; Staples, 2001), it rarely discusses the experience from the perspective of a new employee at the onboarding stage, who is both learning to work and learning to navigate a new organizational culture, from a distance.

Effective onboarding not only increases the chances of employee productivity but also directly links to the likelihood of the employee staying with the organization (Caldwell & Peters, 2018; Hassan, 2020; Hillman, 2010; Snell, 2006). If well-managed, onboarding forms a psychological contract with new employees (Snell, 2006) based on understanding the company's business, mission, and values. Additionally, onboarding has a physical orientation component, familiarizing employees with access to resources, technology, mentorship, and support (Caldwell & Peters, 2018). While research has demonstrated the importance of the onboarding process, it has also shown that many organizational strategies lack effectiveness and focus more on

indoctrinating an employee to an organization's needs rather than socializing employees to the value their contribution provides (Cable et al., 2013).

Like the concept of onboarding strategies, remote work is not a new trend in human resources. In the early 1980s, researchers proposed strategies for telecommuting or working in the home (DeSanctis, 1984; Olson, 1983). Remote work has long been considered one tool that may increase employee satisfaction while simultaneously decreasing operational costs with the rising availability of home-based technologies such as computers and teleconferencing infrastructure (DeSanctis, 1984). Interestingly, though the concept of remote work has been discussed for decades, the same question appears to revolve around the topic continuously: Can employees be as productive, effective, and engaged if not in a shared physical workspace with their leaders and peers (DeSanctis, 1984; Galanti et al., 2021)? Before 2020, remote work was seen as an option for organizations, with specific industries such as information technology, insurance, or gig workers (freelance, contract, or short-term hire employees) being early, voluntary adopters of the concept (Thompson, 2019). In the post-pandemic world, many employers are now eyeing remote or hybrid work as a viable, long-term solution to issues surrounding the cost to operate and the ability to attract and retain top global talent.

A recent podcast featuring AirBnB's CEO Brian Chesky discussed the company's new "work from anywhere" policy (Knutson, 2022). From this policy, Chesky stated that he now has the potential to hire the best employees in the world without being restricted to the 30-mile area surrounding the offices' physical location in San Francisco. Airbnb claims to be working with governments throughout the world to create remote work visas to simplify the tax process, as not only will this boost their business, but many in the human resources field think that employment

that is not tied to locale will be a monumental shift in the next decade. My employment experience demonstrates the truth in this trend, with WestJet, a prominent airline in Canadian aviation, opting for all non-operational employees to be remote from anywhere within Canada. With this shift, it will be valuable for employers to consider the implications of remote work on their hiring and onboarding strategy. Expanding on the anecdotal example offered by AirBnB and other niche employers, one recent study shows that the Canadian preference for conventional office work has decreased, with only 20% of Canadian employees now preferring to perform most of their work in the office once the COVID-19 pandemic is over (Mehdi & Morissette, 2021).

Without prompt intervention and innovation, such as remote or flexible work arrangements, some research purports that Canada may soon see an impending worker shortage due to an aging workforce and the potential for mass retirement (Cronshaw, 2012; McDaniel et al., 2015), and remote work presents a plausible solution. While many acknowledge that the upcoming increase in retirements could have “apocalyptic effects” (Beach, 2008; Burke & Ng, 2006; Cronshaw, 2012; Lyons et al., 2014; Heaven, 2022) on our nation’s workforce, they also recognize that ‘enlightened’ management and adaptive leadership can help to mitigate the decreasing workforce issue (Cronshaw, 2012). Remote work allows organizations to seek candidates outside of their physical locale. It introduces the potential for some employers to create an expanded, national, or even global network of qualified candidates. To onboard newly hired remote workers, organizations must shift away from processes that rely on the physical presence in the workplace and understand how to onboard employees remotely in a manner that

nourishes competency adequately, creates a sense of community and commitment to the organization, and meets the new employees' needs for self-fulfillment and job satisfaction.

Description of the Workplace Pre-Pandemic

Using a case study of a large Canadian employer that adopted remote work during the 2020 pandemic, this research aims to investigate employees' lived experiences in a new role remotely and understand their perceptions of the remote and/or digital onboarding process. Superior Propane, North America's largest provider of propane and alternative fuels, hired over 200 employees remotely between April 2020 and May 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, Superior Propane only offered locale-based work opportunities. They hired call centre representatives, logistics personnel, and other administrative staff. Prior to April 2020, Superior Propane operated in a traditional, office-based work environment. Pre-pandemic, all knowledge worker positions were hired in the region where the administrative or operational office was located. In Canada, this included Calgary, Mississauga, and Cambridge. In the United States, this included Rochester, New York. Employment conditions for new hires into Superior Propane varied by role. Operational and administrative roles were typically hired on a one-off or as-needed basis and, following a brief orientation with a trainer local to their region, were partnered with a tenured mentor who shared a similar role, learning the ins and outs of their new position by in-person shadowing and trial under supervision until self-efficacy was achieved and they were competent and comfortable proceeding in their daily tasks on their own. Individuals in these operational and administrative roles were directly connected to a manager and a small team sharing responsibility for specific geographic regions.

Individuals hired into Superior Propane's Canadian contact centre experienced a very different onboarding process from their operational and administrative peers. Typically, previous contact centre or phone-based customer service experience was required for employment consideration, and even with that experience, new contact centre representatives were placed in a guided, self-directed group training program. In physical regional training centres, a learning specialist was charged with onboarding new agents over a period that ranged between two and four weeks. Training was conducted using a hybrid module, with 50% of the material delivered using self-directed eLearning programs and 50% of the material delivered in lecture style. Though some material was delivered using self-directed eLearning, the participants were in a physical computer training room, allowing for participant discussion amongst one another during their independent learning time. Lecture-style sessions were also delivered in the physical training room.

Near the tail end of the formalized training program, contact centre participants were partnered with a tenured agent, shadowing the agent for 36-48 hours (not concurrent) in person in the contact centre. Agents would first demonstrate calls with new hires, then switch, supervising the new agent to take their own calls. Regardless of role (operational, administrative, or contact centre), Superior Propane did not offer remote working opportunities or have a remote work or onboarding strategy.

Description of the Workplace Post-Pandemic

Like many employers, Superior Propane had to rapidly adjust its practices related to hiring and the work environment offered. Existing agents were sent to work from home, packing their existing computer equipment and re-establishing their workspace in their homes. While

some employees enjoyed the convenience of working from home, others struggled with the lack of oversight, connection, and the sudden combination of work and home life. Hiring during the pandemic rush of remote work also proved challenging for both Superior Propane and its new employees.

Interviews were completed remotely, a first for many of the interviewers and interviewees. Upon successful hire, new employees were shipped computer equipment and directed to log on to their PC on their start date. All mentoring was completed remotely, as were shadowing/mentoring components of the new role. Learners completed their self-directed learning independently in their own.

It has been anecdotally inferred that the world is increasingly accepting, even encouraging, of remote work for knowledge workers, and this shift calls for the increasing need to remotely onboard employees to their new organization. The realm of remote onboarding is still under-researched, and this research study calls for a better understanding of the elements, environments, and experiences that allow for the effective onboarding of newcomers to a workplace. Understanding the experiences of employees who recently experienced the phenomenon is an important first step in developing understanding and working to establish or improve the experience for all involved.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding the study is: What were the experiences of Canadian employees in a large company who were remotely onboarded during the COVID-19 pandemic? As part of this research question, I hope to investigate the following subsidiary questions:

1. What methods were used in the remote onboarding of the employees?
2. What were the employees' perceptions and experiences of these methods?
3. What reflections do employees provide about methods for remote onboarding of employees?

Definition of Key Terms

Many of the terms will be familiar to those with a heightened understanding of learning technologies. The following terms are defined here to guide their usage in this research. These definitions amalgamate multiple sources and have been paraphrased and simplified.

Remote Work. Remote work or telecommuting is defined as “to work at home by the use of an electronic linkup with a central office” (Meriam Webster, n.d.), and this definition will be leveraged for this research. One nuance of this research’s description of remote work is that it is not necessarily voluntary, as remote work in the past often was. This research will refer to onboarding for remote positions through the company’s organizational structure.

Onboarding. Onboarding, or organizational socialization, is “where employees move from organizational outsiders to organizational insiders” (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Onboarding for this research assumes that the new employee already has occupational experience and has been hired for their experiential merits. In this paper, onboarding refers to learning organizational nuances related to culture, performance, and general navigation.

Situated Learning. The term situated learning was initially presented in 1991 by Lave and Wenger and referred to the concept that learning occurs socially when learners can witness expert demonstrations of tasks and behaviours in an active environment or context. Like this, the theory of situated cognition expands on the initial definition of situated learning. It is social and

difficult to transfer to contexts or cultures outside the situation or environment (Brown et al., 1989). For this paper, situated learning refers primarily to active learning in the physical workplace environment, for example, in a training room or peer shadowing.

Community of Inquiry. Introduced by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer in 2000, Community of Inquiry (CoI) is an online learning framework that hinges on developing social, cognitive, and teaching presence in the learning process. Social presence refers to the level of connectivity participants feel for one another. Cognitive presence refers to the level to which participants can interpret and understand information. Teaching presence refers to the systematic delivery or design of learning experiences. While CoI is typically used in post-secondary learning environments, this research will focus on CoI development in remote workplaces.

Self-Efficacy. Psychologist Albert Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as the belief an individual has in their ability to achieve a task, goal or outcome. He further claims that self-efficacy is achieved by way of four distinct conduits:

- Mastery experiences: experience performance success after practice,
- Vicarious experiences: witnessing another's success at a task,
- Verbal persuasion: receiving positive feedback and encouragement, and,
- Affective state: physiological/emotional effects of performing a task.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this literature review, I examine research that has been done on employee onboarding, the history of remote work leading up to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic (predominantly from a Canadian perspective), and emerging research on remote work in the recently evolved atmosphere of work and hiring.

What is Onboarding or Organizational Socialization?

The organizational socialization period is a time during which a newcomer to a workplace learns to navigate their new work environment (Fang et al., 2011; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Van Maanen & Schien, 1977) and includes familiarization and navigation of cultural expectations, performance expectations, operational requirements, and resource seeking. Organizational socialization is sometimes referred to as onboarding. However, researchers dispute whether these terms can or should be used interchangeably. In the eyes of some, onboarding is one aspect of the more extensive organizational socialization process, and as such, the two are not the same (Klein & Polin, 2012; Wanberg, 2012). Researchers of this belief claim that onboarding is too narrow in scope and includes more procedural items like paperwork, taxes and payroll, first-day experiences, and role clarity. At the same time, organizational socialization is a more extensive process that occurs at an individual level within the new employee, revolving around information seeking, creating learning opportunities, establishing feelings of belonging, understanding the availability of support and mentorship, and creating a sense of group or organizational cohesion (Klein & Polin, 2012; Wanberg, 2012). Other researchers refer to

onboarding and organizational socialization as interchangeable terms (Ellis & Bauer, 2017; Korte & Brunhaver, 2015; Rogers, 2020).

Though the exact definition of onboarding or organizational socialization may be disputed, the common themes within the terms are similar. They can be best summarized by an emphasis on Bauer's (2010) 4Cs: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. Bauer's (2010) 4C's asserts that onboarding is a scaffolded process with four levels. Compliance is the lowest level and focuses on ensuring employees understand the workplace's legal and/or regulatory rules (Bauer, 2010). At the second level, clarification, employees are to be acclimated to the roles and responsibilities expected of their new position (Bauer, 2010). Once the procedural aspects of onboarding have occurred, Bauer (2010) states that the process should switch its focus to culture, allowing newcomers to understand the organizational norms through formal and informal socialization methods. The last and highest level of onboarding, according to Bauer (2010), is connection. She states that connection through interpersonal relationships and networks is vital to a newcomer's sense of belonging.

Regardless of the process's name, one agreed-upon aspect of bringing on new employees is that it is expensive when done wrong, and employers with well-strategized onboarding or socialization policies experience "competitive advantages" (Bauer & Erdrogran, 2011) over those who do not. Accurately, Caldwell and Peters (2018) refer to the socialization process as a psychological contract between an employer and an employee. Poorly thought-out agreements may result in an organization's inability to harness new hires' full talents, experience, and skills.

Related Theories on Adult Learning

In thinking of the organizational socialization process and the learning that must take place, it is essential not only to catalogue *what* must be learned in the new workplace but also to consider *how* the learning will take place. Situated learning, a theory coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), describes learning in a physical environment or situated Community of Practice (CoP). Situated learning makes the learner the focus of the knowledge distribution process and emphasizes four aspects of the situational environment:

1. Content
2. Context
3. Community of Practice
4. Participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991)

The content aspect refers to providing exposure to the new employee's knowledge requirements to navigate as part of their daily tasks or responsibilities (Stein, 1998). For example, for call centre representatives, this may mean exposure to the services offered by an organization, the limits and boundaries of their role as telephone agents, common reasons for calling, and different branches of escalation available to them. The content, however, means very little to a learner without context. Context brings the range to life by providing a setting for examining experience and adding full depth to the learning that has occurred (Stein, 1998). Using the same call centre representative example, context is added to their identified tasks and responsibilities once they can see policies in action and identify areas where exceptions may be required to standard operating procedures.

The CoP aspect allows learners to establish meaning and, through social interaction, reflection, and discourse, be exposed to diverse perspectives on a specific issue or procedure (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lastly, participation refers to the exchange of thoughts, allowing learners or newcomers to an environment to interact with one another and with the content provided to them for learning. Lave (1988) went so far as to state that learning occurs best in a social setting.

While it would seem that situated learning theory would be ideal in developing the informational and cultural awareness that is required for new employees, much of the theory appears to refer to learning that is happening onsite in the workplace in this instance and does not appear to have been wholesomely adjusted for remote learning. Another learning theory that seems to align more closely with the need to learn to work remotely is distributed learning. Like the four aspects researchers claim to make situated learning successful, Dede (1996) has described four distinct facets of distributed learning that can elevate its chances of success: instructional design (ID), knowledge webs, virtual communities, and shared synthetic environments.

Since Dede (1996) initially described distributed learning, the landscape, appetite, and technological capabilities of distributed learning have changed greatly. In addition to the four pillars for success described by Dede (1996), distributed learning has grown to include open licensing (such as open textbooks, creative commons licensing, or MOOCs), social learning, and information-sharing platforms (like Wikipedia or Google Scholar), and connectivism (Downes, 2016). With the pedagogical evolution of distributed learning occurring quickly in academia,

little research has been conducted on how those evolutions have translated to our distributed workplaces.

Remote onboarding requires a mix of techniques and strategies taken from situated learning theory and distributed learning theory. However, there is a lack of research on combining these two theories in our more modern workplaces.

History of Remote Work

Remote work was initially called telecommuting or telework, a term Nilles (1975) coined. This type of work is defined as that which takes place outside the typical or traditional work environment (office) and work that relies on computer-mediated communication and information sharing via virtual networks (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Remote work depends on the employees being knowledge workers and not traditional workers, with knowledge workers requiring increased communication, information, and data to perform their work as opposed to physical tools or machinery (Hesse, 1996). The terms remote work or telework have evolved and been adapted by workers, workplaces, and researchers and can include other identifiers such as work-from-home, home-working, and offsite work, with the variance in title meanings being identified as a stress point for researchers looking for commonalities amongst the concepts (Baruch, 2003). Teleworking, or remote work, has long been a potential solution to the problems of employee engagement and job satisfaction and has been on the precipice of formal popularity and employer acceptance for decades. Retrospectively, it is comical to see the various claims about the future of work being remote. The American Telegraph and Telephone claimed that all American workers would work from home by 1990 (Craipeau & Marot, 1984).

Further claims made by Olson and Primps (1984) stated that 50% of employees would be working from home in 1995. In Canada, teleworkers represented only 7% of Canadian knowledge workers in 2000, although this was an increase of 66% since 1993 Treasury Board of Canada, 2000). In the pre-pandemic employment landscape, researchers have asserted that interest in or accommodation for teleworking/working remotely has failed to meet the expected growth (Cooke et al., 2014).

Remote Work during the Pandemic

Moving into the mid and late 2000s, the growth of remote work opportunities appeared to have remained stagnant, with only 12% of Canadian workers reporting being offered remote work accommodations (Haider & Anwar, 2022). In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic catapulted employers to send their staff from their offices directly to remote work situations in their homes, with little time to transition. Knowledge workers in Canada were often required to work remotely in an effort for employers to continue operations while adhering to government-required policies surrounding social distancing (Lord, 2020). The influx of remote work peaked in April 2020, with over 40% of all Canadian workers working remotely (Haider & Anwar, 2022). The rush to remote work was a new concept to many, with men over 65 in age being twice as likely as other demographics to have previously been offered remote work opportunities (Haider & Anwar, 2022). In the post-pandemic economy, many employers assert that if employee jobs could be done remotely during the global health crisis, they can continue to be done remotely (Babapour Chafi et al., 2021; Kane et al., 2021). This realization from employers, coupled with the *newness* of remote work to most Canadian knowledge workers, will require the

slow and continuous development of a new set of workplace norms and expectations and a heightened focus on organizational connectedness or culture.

Perceptions of Remote Work – Pre-Pandemic

In reviewing the history and current state of remote work, it is also important to review the research on employer and employee attitudes and perceptions. Historically, remote work is a space that information technology workers have predominantly occupied (Staples et al., 2008), driven by a need for heightened flexibility among workers whose job tasks were relatively autonomous. From the perspective of employers, the growth of remote work or virtual offices has been stunted by the lack of skilled management personnel who are competent and capable of managing teams at a distance (Lucas, 1996; Staples et al., 2008). Through historical research, Staples et al. (2008) determined that key factors to effective remote work environments were high levels of employee self-efficacy, clear and compelling communication between employees and managers, and managers with extensive experience in remote work environments and remote subordinate management. What appears to be lacking in some literature is recommendations for how employers can expose their leadership staff to previously mentioned experiences without simply throwing them into a remote environment to gain such skills. It could be argued that these successful leaders would likely need to gain experience elsewhere to run in a new remote environment.

In addition to the problems of management inexperience, researchers have highlighted other issues with remote work environments that require attention. Snizek (1995) comments on remote employees' feelings of isolation, the ineffectiveness of virtual meetings, and the present wage disparity between in-office workers and those who telecommute. Similarly, Johnson (2000)

analyzed remote work environments in many countries and identified other potential issues to the trend. First, as Klein and Polin's argument reiterated in 2012, remote work has a case of identity crisis, with no agreed-upon definition for use by researchers or practitioners of remote work. Johnson (2000) also brings up under-discussed issues with telework – such as a lack of adequate employment contracts, ambiguity around privacy or digital surveillance, and problems with workplace health and safety in the confines of one's own home, thoughts that were reiterated in one Latvian study conducted by Matisane et al. (2021). Johnson (2000) poses questions surrounding whose jurisdiction reigns supreme for employment contracts when the remote worker is located outside of the geographic region of the employer and who is responsible for ensuring the security of data and the ergonomic safety of the employees working virtually. Notably, Johnson (2000) appears correct in her concerns, as these administrative concepts are seldom discussed in the research on remote work.

Turning to the more affirming perceptions of remote work from the employer perspective, researchers have found positive correlations between remote work and improved productivity and job satisfaction. One study done on remote work and collaboration between researchers showed that the highly flexible nature of remote work can increase creativity and engagement among remote workers due to their ability to manage the balance of work and home more accurately in one location (Hunter, 2019). Additionally, another study showed that remote work arrangements increase job satisfaction due to decreased work-home conflicts and increased autonomous responsibility. However, this satisfaction was relational to the intensity (amount of time at work spent remotely compared to at an on-site location) of the work requirements (Schall, 2019). Interestingly, a study by Bellmann and Hübler (2020) refutes that remote work

does not impact job satisfaction, as respondents reported similar sentiments regardless of their working locale. These conflicting findings show that more research is required to understand remote work's impact on employees' perceptions of overall job satisfaction.

Perceptions of Remote Work – Post-Pandemic

With the COVID-19 pandemic presenting the most significant push for remote work that the world has seen, it is essential to evaluate more recent perceptions from both standpoints, employer and employee. These perceptions may be noticeably different from those before 2020 since previous attempts at remote workplaces were intentional, planned, and adjusted where possible; however, the 2020 push to remote work was unplanned and a reactive adjustment to a global crisis (Galanti et al., 2021). One Italian study noted that employees struggled at the onset of their sudden remote work. These struggles were widely focused on their inability to create clear separations of what was work and what was home, the sudden decrease in social engagement, and the possible lack of adequate remote workspaces in their homes (Galanti et al., 2021, p. 426). This study also identified that environmental distractions in the new remote work environment negatively impacted employees' productivity and sense of control. These environmental factors included navigating online schooling for their children, ergonomically inappropriate workspaces, and troubles related to sharing space with others performing work for another employer (Galanti et al., 2021, p. 427).

One common theme in both the pre-pandemic findings on remote work and the current state of the issue is that organizational management's quality and personal attributes play a prominent role in an organization or department's success (Taylor et al., 2014). Managers who prefer visual supervision of their employees may translate their lack of visibility into a hyper-

attentive managerial style, requiring their employees to be always present and available, which could decrease the longed-for work-life balance that is oft-promised with remote work arrangements (Parker et al., 2020). One study showed that managers felt ill-equipped to lead remote teams and lacked confidence in their team's ability to stay motivated remotely in the long term (Parker et al., 2020, p. 3). Similar to the omission of possible management training for remote work in Staples et al.'s (2001) research, Parker et al. (2020) reiterate that management inexperience and confidence are critical issues in remote work but do not suggest a training or preparatory solution. Leadership and management capacity was not the only theme researchers identified as having the potential to considerably impact the success of virtual teams or departments, with Swart, Bond-Barnard and Chugh (2022) identifying an additional 7 key themes out of an analysis of 31 articles written during the pandemic. These factors included trust, cultural diversity, collaboration, communication, psychological safety, communications guidance, and resource planning.

While much was left to be desired about the sudden transition to remote work, some researchers believe that the benefits outweigh the negatives (Alipour et al., 2021; Ozimek, 2020). With the changing climate and its related impacts in front of many investors' minds, many organizations are paying close attention to their environmental, sustainability, and governance policies. One study has gone so far as to tout remote work's benefits on the environment and bottom-line expenditures by consolidating work locations and expanding remote work opportunities (Choudhury & Foroughi, 2021).

Environment aside, critics of in-office knowledge work have emerged since the tapering of the pandemic-related remote work boom. Of particular interest to this study is the claim that

remote work can create equity and balance in an organization's workplace (Ameri & Kurtzburg, 2022). When offered remote work, employees with disabilities experience greater flexibility and accommodation, and marginalized employees are said to experience lessened social pressure or occurrences of inherent bias impacting their psychological wellbeing at work (Ameri & Kurtzburg, 2022, p. 3). Finally, Ameri and Kurtzburg (2022) assert that remote work removes the pressure on introverted personalities to compete with extroverts for acknowledgement, promotion, or performance praise, as individual contributors are recognized for the work performed instead of grandiose calls for attention.

A German study by Bellmann and Hübler (2021) found mixed outcomes when researching remote work in correlation to job satisfaction and work-life balance. They concluded that individual personality and opportunities for remote work, as opposed to remote work mandates, determine whether the benefits from remote work arrangements are positively or negatively impacted. Where employees have been given an option and accepted to work from home, job satisfaction and work-life balance reports are high. When employees are required to work remotely, the corresponding results are low. What is clear from the literature is that remote work can be advantageous or disadvantageous, depending on the organization's preparedness, having a high level of self-efficacy amongst the employee demographic, and ensuring that leadership is adequately trained to manage a remote workforce.

Summary

While much research has been done on remote work, nearly all the research and literature point to case studies, examples, or research groups already situated in their work before the commencement. There is a decided lack of research on the experiences or perceptions of remote

work from the eyes of a newcomer remotely joining the organization. This gap must be critically addressed. With many Canadian workplaces choosing to institute permanent remote or hybrid remote work environments, organizations must be prepared to start relationships with prospective employees from a distance. Independent from one another, the literature on onboarding shows that it is a critical time in an employee's organizational lifecycle. The literature on remote work highlights that it can positively affect employment, performance, and individual satisfaction if done correctly. What is lacking is the combination of these two concepts. How do we introduce newcomers to remote work environments that are vibrant, supportive, engaging, and productive? The proposed thesis research will address this gap by focusing on:

1. Newcomers' perceptions of the onboarding methods used.
2. Newcomers' perceptions of the onboarding methods' ability to establish culture and sense of place.
3. Newcomers to an organization's sentiment towards joining a new organization entirely remotely.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This research is guided by two theoretical frameworks: self-efficacy theory and engagement theory.

The theory of self-efficacy, first described by psychologist Albert Bandura (1977), refers to an individual's motivation or belief that they can successfully perform a task. Bandura's research shows that individuals can achieve self-efficacy through four factors: mastery

experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and affective states. The four factors are briefly described below.

Mastery experiences refer to an individual's experiences of first-hand success or the fact that one believes that they can perform because they have previously performed (Bandura, 1977). Vicarious experiences refer to an individual's belief that they can achieve based on witnessing a peer, equal, or like individual succeeds in a specific task, therefore mimicking that it is possible (Bandura, 1977). Verbal persuasion refers to an individual's belief that they can perform that relies on verbal assurances given by others; think of a parent telling their child, "you can do it", instilling confidence that they are capable of accomplishing the task at hand (Bandura, 1977) Lastly, affective states refer to the impact that one's emotional or physiological state can have on their perceived ability to perform, for example, the relationship that stress or depression can have on individual confidence (Bandura, 1977).

Self-efficacy theory is relevant to this research in that remote workforces must remain engaged and confident in their abilities to perform in the absence of physical work communities. Investigating ways employees achieve self-efficacy at a distance will contribute to the research on workplace learning and organizational effectiveness. More recently, the theory of self-efficacy has been adopted and morphed by many workplaces under other names, such as self-determination theory (SDT); SDT has emerged in research related to work motivation and organizational performance (Gagne et al., 2018), and some research points to the observation that in SDT, motivation can be either intrinsic (where the employee has an active interest in the task or responsibility), or external (where an employee is motivated due to factors outside of

themselves, such as a boss watching, or monitoring software on their working device) (Gagne & Desi, 2005).

Greg Kearsley and Ben Schneiderman (1999) introduced engagement theory to the teaching and learning landscape. This theory refers specifically to computer-mediated learning and proposes that meaningful engagement (through socialization, collaboration, or relevant tasks) can positively impact learner motivation and improve the learning experience (Kearsley & Schneiderman, 1999). Engagement theory is relative to this research as it has been well-researched that engaged employees are more frequently satisfied and high-performing (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Hazleton, 2014; Kelleher, 2011; Sundaray, 2011), so organizations who have turned their workforces remote will be required to rely heavily on computer-mediated engagement methods.

The hiring organization, Superior Propane, provided information on the research participants. Based on hiring data, participants invited to participate in the research included those hired between March 31, 2020, and October 1, 2022. This date range is used when the sponsor organization would have onboarded employees remotely instead of in-person or hybrid. The participants were all knowledge workers in the organization and represented a range of roles, work experience, education level, geographic location, and hierarchy. The study purposefully excluded industrial trades or labour employees hired within this time frame, as they would have in-person onboarding or training requirements due to the nature of their roles.

This research utilizes phenomenology as its methodological framework.

Phenomenological research is qualitative and hinges on the desire to understand the experiences of individuals within their worlds. Merriam (2002) explains that the world is not

experienced in one way by different individuals. Qualitative research investigates how experiences vary between individuals, groups, or communities based on their interpretations of a specific point in time. Qualitative research is an appropriate choice for a study of this nature, as the study aims to explore the participant's feelings, experiences, or perceptions, as opposed to quantitative research focusing on performance, attrition rates, or other measurable factors.

Phenomenological research was first described by Edmund Husserl in the 1900s and is focused on understanding how individuals experience life and how individuals who have lived through or experienced a phenomenon interpret and reflect upon their experiences (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Unlike ethnography, where participants are studied based on group or community involvement, phenomenology studies participants based on their shared but unique experience of a specific event (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In this study, participants in the more extensive analysis had the opportunity to self-disclose interest in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Once an interview had been agreed to, their experiences were shared, reflected upon, and interpreted further. As this research was conducted with no stated assumptions or hypotheses of the participant's experiences, it took place through interpretive or exploratory phenomenology methodology, where the goal was the unravelling and fulsome understanding of the phenomenon in its "lived entirety" (Heidegger, 1963). In this study, the phenomenon being explored is the experience of individuals onboarded with a new organization company entirely remotely.

Data Gathering

While qualitative research focuses on experiences, perceptions, and 'meaning making' (Krauss, 2005), quantitative research aims to understand and explain phenomena by collecting and analyzing data in a mathematical sense (Creswell, 2003), put more simply, quantitative

research aims to answer questions like “how much”, or “how often”, and is less focused on experience or causality. The research study kicked off with a five-question exclusionary survey that the host organization electronically distributed to the individual research participants. This survey was used only to confirm that participants met the criteria identified for the study (remove onboarding) and to record their initial consent to participate. Following confirmation that participants met the criteria, the study then aimed to schedule individual open-ended interviews with each participant, using open-ended, guided questions. The open-ended nature of the survey questions will allow participants to clearly express their perceptions and experiences with the phenomenon of joining a new role remotely without being forced to fit their experiences within the confines of ranked questions. Braun et al. (2021) posit that open-ended qualitative surveying allows the researcher to capture “a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and sense-making.” They also assert that these wide-scope surveys are particularly useful when the study population is large or diverse, which was certainly the case in this research (Braun et al., 2021). An open-ended survey was appropriate for this research as the research interests were not generating statistical data or generalizing experiences but rather gaining a richer understanding of the human experience during the phenomenon. Lastly, given the nature of the study, being remote work, this method allowed me to collect experiences from individuals from various geographic regions at an affordable cost. The initial exclusionary electronic survey was sent to approximately 50 participants, and 14 participants consented to participate in the study through a further interview with the primary researcher. This equated to a 28% participation ratio, which, although lower than the anticipated 40%, still resulted in rich data collection and learning. This

research aimed to better understand the 14 participants' experiences through one-on-one interviews conducted solely by video conferencing.

Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) state that qualitative interviewing can be conducted using three formats: conversational, guided, and standardized.

Conversational interviewing is casual and does not set out with prescribed questions in mind. Rather, the researcher pivots their questioning spontaneously and questions the participant at the moment, basing further questions on the responses received (Turner III & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2010).

Guided interviewing has some structure but allows the researcher to adjust the questioning based on the interaction with the participant. It allows for consistency in the approach to questioning but flexibility in how the questions are delivered, allowing for personalization and rapport development with the interviewee (Turner III & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2010). Lastly, standardized interviews are highly structured in regard to the wording and delivery of the questioning. Using this interview technique, each participant is asked the same question in the same way; however, their responses are open-ended. Turner III & Hagstrom-Schmidt (2010) state that standardized interviews are likely a research favourite for conducting qualitative interviews, given the participant's ability to express their experiences and perceptions fully, in rich detail. However, they also note that given the large amount of qualitative data collected using this interview method, it can be challenging to pull out themes when decoding the findings.

This research utilized a guided interview approach, with the intent and nature of the questions asked to each interviewee being similar, with slight adjustments where appropriate for relationship, trust, and rapport building.

Data Analysis

This research also utilized data analysis as a method. Thematic data analysis sees the researcher first collect and analyze data and then code and sort the data into interpretive themes (Ahlojailan, 2012). Researchers have determined thematic analysis to be an appropriate research method for data that is interpretable and not exactly or explicitly detailed (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). By utilizing a categorized survey distributed to a larger group of research participants, a thematic analysis allowed me to code, categorize, and generalize sentiments toward the remote experience of new employees in an organization. Phenomenology is an appropriate research method for this study because the impressions of these employees were unique, personal, and varied based on several individual factors and attributes – leading the research to draw out themes or categories, but not absolutes shared amongst the experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic thrust individuals around the globe into a swirl of unknowns and abrupt pivots, and the phenomenon of joining a new organization while the world is in a state of disarray is one that must be studied intently, using the experiences of those who experienced the phenomenon of onboarding virtually during that specific point in time.

Limitations and Delimitations in the Study

Limitations are weaknesses or exclusions in a research study that are outside the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Considering the scope of the proposed research, the following limitations were identified: Time, participants ability to separate pandemic-related emotions from new-employer-related emotions, and access to onboard employees who exited the organization before the commencement of research.

As this study aimed to understand the unique perspectives of individuals who joined a new company in an entirely remote work environment, some perspectives may have been marred by the experience of living through a pandemic *while* joining a new organization. The pandemic introduced a heightened level of uncertainty, fear, and job loss to the lives of Canadian workers (Como et al., 2021), and this stress, coupled with the experience of starting a new job, could have led participants to link the two phenomena together as one, impairing their ability to focus solely on the aspects that relate to the onboarding experience. While guided questioning aimed to have participants focus solely on their onboarding and work-related experiences, the two phenomena will likely remain forever linked in many instances.

The last limitation in this study must be called out was the exclusion of employees onboarded remotely who have since left their new employer. It could be inferred that those who joined and since left after a remote onboarding experience may have had more negative experiences than those who joined an organization and stayed. As this study used only one organization, it was not possible to include employees who exited the organization before the commencement of this research due to organizational apprehension and privacy concerns, and as such, the research may be interpreted as leaning more heavily toward positive remote onboarding experiences.

Delimitations are factors (or constraints) within a study that the researcher knowingly imposes (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). An identified delimitation in this proposal is the small sample size and the very specific nature of the organization whose employees will be studied. By focusing on only one employer, one cannot surmise that the findings will reflect *all* new employees' experiences. This large, national organization may have approached remote hiring

differently than others not included in the study, and their policies (or lack thereof) may have directly impacted the employee's perception of the phenomenon.

This proposal's additional delimitations are phenomenology and data analysis as methodology and method. Dukes (1984) claimed that phenomenology does not provide a path to clear research results and requires the researcher to possess a heightened ability to be flexible and self-regulate their time and patience. A more recent journal on phenomenological analysis identifies other inherent issues with the methodology: researchers' ability to separate experiences from opinions, the limitation of understanding the experience but not what caused one to experience a phenomenon in such a way, and the misunderstood role of cognition in phenomenological studies (Tuffour, 2017). Additionally, Dukes (1984) has pointed out that phenomenology cannot produce empirically factual statements. Regardless, this methodology is appropriate for the study, given the continuation of remote work post-pandemic and the desire to *understand* how some new workers perceive the experience.

That phenomenology cannot produce factual statements leads to the delimitation related to the small sample size and the resulting findings being unable to be generalized across multiple types of organizations. While the study did code and categorize the onboarding experience of participants, the analysis and corresponding results from this coding are unlikely to be replicated, given the individual and unique perspectives of only the participants included in this study. It is reasonable to assume that if the same study was completed elsewhere or on two other organizations in Canada, the results would differ from what is uncovered here. Though generalization or replication is not possible in this study, readers may be able to make connections to elements of the study, such as the workplace, the methods used, or the employee's

perceptions through transferability. In considering this delimitation, I decided the methodology is appropriate as this study aimed to share the experiences of the few with the larger academic and organizational development communities so that further studies can be recommended and conducted on efficacy and experience in remote onboarding.

Ethical Considerations

Phenomenological studies rely on in-depth and often personal interviews with study participants. Cilesiz (2011) reminds phenomenological researchers that through the proposed questions and corresponding interviews, participants often reveal personal, highly intimate details about their lives that impacted their specific experiences. He further mentions that these intimate details may include commentary and discussion on procrastination, addiction, fear, and other anxieties or vulnerabilities that impact their reflective perspectives (Cielesiz, 2011). Considering this and the personal nature of the participants' experiences, the participant's employment is the subject of questioning, and as such, these intimate details must be protected, and the privacy and anonymity of the respondent's contributions must be secured. It is important to note that these participants are vulnerable persons, not in the traditional academic sense, but in relation to their employment as relative newcomers to their organization. This is especially important as the results and final thesis paper will be shared with the research participants and the sponsoring organization. Cielesiz (2010) recommends various approaches for protecting participants' privacy. I chose to adopt two: eliminating any personally identifying information such as names and locations and altering interview participants to being identified in writing only by a pseudonym.

Another ethical consideration is the ethics of qualitative research itself. Brinkman & Kale (2004) point out several potential shortcomings in qualitative ethicisms:

- Asymmetrical power relationships result from the format and topic of discussion the researcher sets, resulting in the research interest and agenda ruling the “relationship” with the participant.
- Potential for manipulative dialogue where a researcher has a hidden agenda or wants to “prove” a hypothesis or experience has or will occur. And,
- Interviewers have a monopoly on interpreting experiences as transcribed by the participants.

To acknowledge these shortcomings, I chose to:

- Inform the participants of the exact aim and intention of the study so that reciprocal understanding is achieved.
- Put aside any hypothesis I may have of the remote onboarding experience using the epoche-bracketing method and embark on an exclusively exploratory research project.
- Synthesize and summarize experiences with the individual participants during the interview to ensure their sentiments are understood and interpreted accurately before coding and categorizing.

Another ethical consideration in this research undertaking was my personal bias on the process of onboarding remotely. Having also joined a new organization remotely during the pandemic, I have had my own unique experience, and it is integral to separate my experiences from those who consent to participating in this study. Bednall (2006) explains that a key ethical

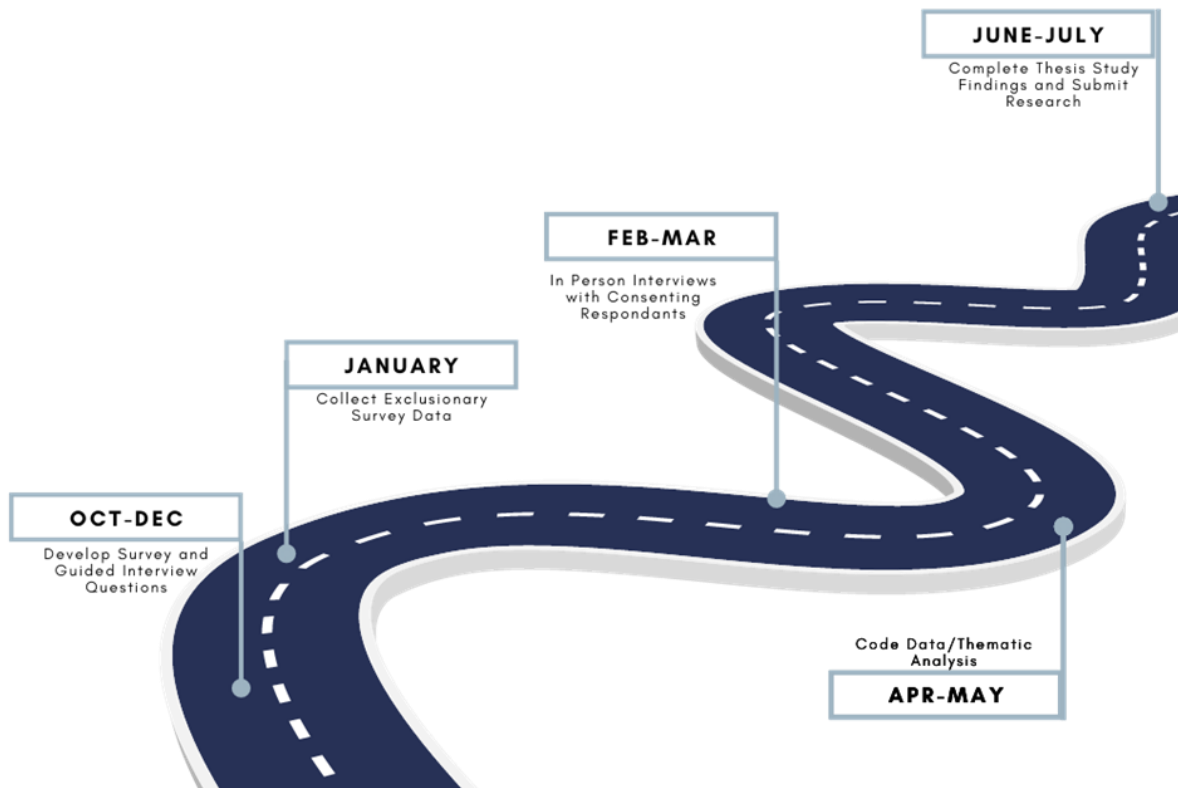
challenge for any phenomenological researcher, particularly a researcher who has shared an experience with research participants, is allowing “the voices of subjectively to emerge authentically in coming to an understanding” and that this can be achieved by intentional epoche or bracketing. Bracketing refers to setting aside any assumptions one may have about a phenomenon and holding them in “epoche” (a separate, distinct place in the researcher’s mind outside of the research confines) (Bednall, 2006). Epoche and bracketing allow the researcher to acknowledge that there may be existing bias but assert that their preconceptions are being placed in limbo until reintegration occurs at the study's conclusion. Reintegration allows the researcher to take their experiences out of the epoche and use them to synthesize the findings and experiences of the study participants from a place of knowing.

Timeline of Research Events

The timeline of the research is as follows:

Figure 1

Timeline of the Research Events



Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction to the Findings

At the outset, this research set out to learn about varied experiences related to remote onboarding in response to the following research questions:

1. What methods were used in the remote onboarding of the employees?
2. What were the employees' perceptions and experiences of these methods?
3. What reflections do employees provide about methods for remote onboarding of employees?

In total, 14 individual employees consented to participation in the study. Superior Propane Canada employed all, and these participants represented a broad range of demographic representation and perspectives. They were geographically dispersed and varied in age, gender, experience level, and position classification. As participants consented to the survey under the promise of anonymity, they will be referred to only as participants 1 through 14 when referencing direct quotes.

Through the analysis of the interview data, the following six codes appeared:

- Methods of Remote Onboarding
- The remote onboarding interview experience
- Views on remote onboarding
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Understanding of Organizational Culture
- Onboarding Challenges.

These codes emerged through the process of open and then axial coding, which is used to align the similarities between categories that have emerged through the open coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This paper will discuss the codes when detailing the findings related to the three research questions.

Research Question 1: What methods were used in the remote onboarding of employees?

Research Question 2: What were the employee's perceptions and experiences of the onboarding methods?

Research Question 3: What reflections on the methods of onboarding used do employees have?

RQ 1: What methods were used in the remote onboarding of the employees?

There were both common and divergent methods used in the remote onboarding. Superior Propane deployed a systematic approach to remote onboarding that included a mix of online self-study, workbook activities, simulations, and guided learning. With a tenured learning "coach", shadowing, reverse shadowing, and informal support teams are ready.

Once participants had completed their generalized learning, they were moved into role-specific onboarding plans. This produced divergent experiences based on different role-specific learning plans. Five participants onboarded to contact-centre roles experienced a wide range of variety in the self-study program, including text-based review, audio, video, and recorded calls. Participants moved through these self-study aspects at their own pace.

Employees outside the contact-centre track spent much of their role-specific learning time with a learning coach. The role of the learning coach was to provide targeted one-on-one instructional time detailing the key processes for their role and teaching the required keystrokes

in the system. Following their one-on-one instructional time, they spent a considerable period virtually shadowing a mentor who performed the same role they would eventually fill.

One aspect of onboarding that all participants had in common was using the job interview process. Commonly used between all departments were the technological platforms. Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Outlook, Axonify, and SharePoint were key in each employee's journey. Where divergence occurred was the deployment of those technologies.

Some groups heavily used the Microsoft Teams videoconferencing functionality to simulate in-person meetings for employee one-on-ones, larger group meetings, check-ins, and even to answer questions. Others only utilized the chat function, and an emphasis was not put on simulating the person-to-person interaction.

Axonify, an artificial intelligence corporate learning platform, was used extensively by all groups who participated in the study to gauge competence and confidence on topics related closely to their role.

SharePoint (known as the Knowledge Management Site, or simply KM at Superior Propane) was also used heavily to onboard employees. This platform contained a glossary of industry and business-specific terms and links to key process guides and references. SharePoint also housed telephone contact lists that could be utilized for assistance and issue escalation.

In addition to the technological approach that Superior Propane took, they also implemented several sets of instructional/mentoring roles with specific responsibilities to acclimate the new employees to their workplace. The identification of several roles emerged through interviewing the participants: Learning Coach, Team Lead, and Manager/Supervisor.

The learning coach was a member of the Superior Propane learning and development team, with specific experience in the area where the new employee would be working. They provided early targeted support to the new hires if a question arose or clarity was required on a role-specific item. Learning coaches were responsible for guiding multiple new employees at a time. While the role of the learning coach was evident throughout the interviews, participants did not refer to them as key to their onboarding, more so referencing the team lead or supervisor roles as their "go-to's" for support.

Team leads were an existing role at Superior Propane and were proficient members of operational teams. The team leads assigned to each new employee would gradually become their formal team lead once they had exited the onboarding program and were fulfilling the duties of their role. Like the role of the learning coach, the team leads had more than one new hire to support while supporting the existing roster of tenured employees.

Each participant expressed having formal and informal interaction with their supervisor or manager during the onboarding process, but the level of interaction and engagement varied between participants.

RQ 2: What were the employee's perceptions and experiences of onboarding methods?

To fully understand the participants' perceptions, experiences, and reflections on the methods used for their onboarding, this research focused on the seven codes that emerged because of the interviews.

The Remote Onboarding Interview Experience

“...I had a couple interviews that were all online, and I think the most hard part was that I wasn’t used to speaking English online without body language. So sometimes, I had to ask the questions to be repeated, and it made me shy because I wanted to look good and smart. Even though I felt like I was able to have a good relationship with my interviewers.” (Participant 9)

“This was actually my first time using teams, so it was very awkward for me. I didn’t have a computer at Teams, so I had to do the interview on my phone propped up on a pile of boxes to try and get the right angle to look professional, so it was very awkward.” (Participant 2)

“...Ok, on the second interview, we had to just talk, they couldn’t see me, and I couldn’t see them, so I was wondering like, how do they know who I really am? They can’t see me and how I am dressed and professional, and it’s hard to get my personality from just an empty screen, but I got the job, so I guess it was ok.” (Participant 8)

For many participants, this experience of remotely interviewing for a position was a first in their career. While little focus was spent on the interview experience, key findings included barriers to technology, barriers to the interpretation of language, and an appreciation for the alignment between the description of the workplace in the interview and the actuality of the workplace once employed.

Barriers to technology occurred in 4 of the 14 participants’ interviews. Having been abruptly exited from their previous positions, two participants did not own personal computers and were required to participate in their interviews on their cell phones. Participant two stressed that completing the interview on a cellphone contributed to heightened interview anxiety and

fear of a ‘less than professional’ presentation. They had also never used the Microsoft Teams meeting technology and felt they stumbled through the login experience. Other technological barriers included issues with sound and picture quality. One participant completed their entire interview “in the dark” without being able to see the interviewers and the interviewers were unable to see them. This led to concerns that the interviewers did not pick up their level of professionalism. This also contributed to a feeling of unknowingness concerning the interviewers’ reactions to their responses to questioning. Naturally, the participant was pleased with being offered employment, although they did not have a clear impression of how the interviewers felt towards them.

Language barriers were exacerbated for the bilingual participants. Some bilingual participants were interviewed in English as required to speak in both English and French for their role. Participant 9, a first-time remote interviewee, expressed that they had discounted the value in-person interaction adds to inter-lingual communications. They indicated a lack of confidence in their interviewing skills due to the inability to notice social or physical contextual cues that typically aid in their ability to respond promptly. The theme of interlingual challenges occurred in more than one coding category.

Views on Remote Onboarding

As the overarching goal of this research was to understand the remote onboarding experience, most of each interview was spent specifically on the various methods of remote onboarding and the corresponding perceptions.

“The biggest benefit was that I was still able to access all of the software that I required to do my job, but at home.” (Participant 1)

“It was hard for me to do the training virtually. I didn’t expect it to be that hard, but learning to navigate all of the various systems on my own or with online help was intimidating.” (Participant 2)

“Actually, the onboarding here as pretty fantastic. There was a good mix of independent work and guided work as well as interaction with my team lead or trainer, not other learners but with the support team.” (Participant 14)

“It was really confusing because we were being told because I would message like, let’s say like a team lead and say, hey, is this something that we’re going to learn in service, and they’re like, oh, no, no, no, no. Like, you’re not going to do that ever. So, I was like, oh wait, what?” (Participant 6)

“Once I knew what I was doing and how to access all the different places, it was nice to have many different types of tasks. It would have been hard and draining if I just had to read the knowledge management page, and that was it.” (Participant 3)

“I was never bored. There were different ways to stimulate my brain between platforms. I enjoyed the discussion or group time the most to ask questions and hear how other newbies were doing.” (Participant 11)

“Being on the wall of the fly on the wall too, you know, there every day where you know you don’t necessarily get to see that when you’re sitting beside someone. Someone’s going to act differently. Someone’s going to work differently where they’re in their own space. They’re doing their own thing. And that was probably the best thing in that time.” (Participant 2)

One participant in this group stated that shadowing was the most valuable part of their onboarding, and that “being a fly on the wall and watching it all happen through the screen” was integral to their learning. Another disclosed that they felt shadowing was “invasive and intruding in the flow of their colleagues work.”

A common theme that occurred during the period in which the employees were onboarding was the feeling of being well-supported through the learning journey. With few exceptions, employees felt that the organization, their leaders, and mentors “had their backs” with support as it was needed. Open lines of communication were typical between the new employees and a team lead or more tenured member of the same team. One employee noted that while help was always available, it was not always delivered in an encouraging manner. The quality of support provided was closely related to the level of assistance and openness offered by the mentor. One participant mentioned they felt uncertain about asking for help because they would receive “one-word responses with no explanatory assistance” when requesting assistance over Microsoft Teams.

Two opposite reactions emerged from discussions on the available support systems. During the interview, Participant 6 said, “On day one, Superior said they had our back and to reach out whenever you needed help, just like you would in an office environment working alongside your peers, and they did not fail on that promise.” However, Participant 9 (representing the other perspective) stated, “asking questions felt like going to war but both armies’ are wearing the same clothes, you don’t know who is willing to help you and who is not.”

Roles and Responsibilities

“You know you could just ask for a team lead or whatever, right? It’s just like if you were in the office, you’d call your supervisor or whatever. It’s the same because the person is there online to help you so that they didn’t, they did not fail to do that. There was always this backup system (Participant 8).

The role of the manager/supervisor was not consistent across the experiences of the new hires. Some participants detailed having an opportunity to connect with their manager many times throughout the course of their onboarding and that an effort was made on the managers’ part to provide support and seek out resources for employees throughout the course of their progress and sentiments towards their new role. Other participants mentioned the perceived absence of any management presence, with no contact made to inquire about onboarding progress and employee comfort. The participants who noticed the managerial absence also felt uncertain or feelings of being intentionally excluded as they noted that their peers were establishing relationships at a higher level.

Three participants referenced during their interview that they appreciated the opportunity to form an early relationship with the individual who would eventually supervise them in the life role environment. Two participants stated during their interview that they could tell the team leads were busy helping everyone, and sometimes they felt bad adding to their busy workday.

Understanding of Organizational Culture

“It was last week I met the president and I all. I mean, meeting the president was that I was going through the door, and he was coming through, and we, like, almost had a clash, and then hello cash my mic. That’s the person only because he had a picture, right?”

Oh, that's the president, and he has an office in the building. He has an office a few beside me is office. So, when I came, I was saying to my one of the persons in my in my group, and like so, the president lives in Calgary, he said oh yeah, this office is right there. I was like, oh my god. So, if you didn't have a picture there, I wouldn't even have known is the president. I might be walking there seeing people out there, and I wouldn't even know that we work in the same company." (Participant 7)

"...missing the informal cues at work, the things people do when maybe they they're walking, or they're talking to a colleague, which are ways that people learn also."
(Participant 1)

Levels of understanding regarding the organizational culture at Superior Propane varied between participants, and the relational sentiments seemed closely aligned with the level of relationship that the participants had with their support team.

Participants who were able to develop healthy relationships with their leaders or supervisors were able to reflect more positively on the state of the culture as they see it. These individuals almost unanimously shared that the culture they experienced mimicked the culture they were promised during the interview phase in that they were sold a true picture of the work environment and atmosphere. These employees felt that the level of communication, support, and cultural guidance from their direct leaders and overarching organizational leadership was positive. "Open, flexible, and personal" is how participant one described the culture. At one point, this participant provided notice of resignation to their leader, advising them that working remotely was too challenging and that they did not feel they could continue in the role. Their leader then reached out directly to develop strategies for adjustment and success, described as

showing heightened commitment to their psychological well-being. This participant asserted that this level of leadership commitment and willingness to work with employees transcended departments and was the overall ‘tune’ of the organization.

Other participants echoed these thoughts by sharing that the peers' open, welcoming, and approachable nature throughout their department felt like a positive culture shock, having come from a previous in-office environment where interaction between peers was limited.

As it relates to an understanding of the organizational culture, one negative theme that emerged from interviews was the “palpable perception of a caste system” (Participant 6) as it relates to the hierarchy of roles. More than one participant reflected on their perception that some jobs were seen as more important or prestigious than others and that message carried through informally in written and verbal communications.

Lastly, concerning organizational culture, participant 4 noted that the absence of pleasantries-related socialization was noticeable. Typical in-office environments are Petrie dishes for organic socialization through hallway banter, water-cooler chats, or unscheduled group lunches. Superior did not provide a vehicle for peer socialization or relationship forming outside of task or project-oriented meetings. Participant 4 indicated that it was evident who had worked together “in the real world” by way of their ability to communicate socially and their knowledge about their peers socially, while those who onboarded during the pandemic and post-pandemic remote period were not allotted opportunities to socialize for relationship building strictly.

RQ 3: What reflections on the methods of onboarding used do employees have?

Onboarding Challenges

While the general sentiments towards the remote onboarding experience at Superior Propane were generally positive, not one participant had an onboarding journey immune from challenges—the challenges related to technology, workspace, communication, supervision, and feedback.

The technology presented challenges for most participants in the early weeks of their onboarding journey. The root of these challenges was varied. Some participants, having never worked remotely before, had inadequate internet connectivity in their place of residence. One participant indicated that although they were informed of the type of internet connection that they needed, they had no point of reference as to what that meant and did not know whom to ask for guidance. Some participants could collect their technology equipment from Superior Propane offices. In contrast, others had their equipment shipped to them, but all were required to set up their workstations independently in their homes. This caused considerable challenges for those participants who described themselves as “not technically inclined.” Other technology challenges are related primarily to inconsistent audio and/or video connectivity. Each participant was provided with a “technology quick guide,” but most found it hard to navigate alone during workstation setup.

Onboarding challenges related to finding an adequate space to work were expressed by 5 of the participants. They reflected that they did not anticipate how much space would be required in their home. During the interview, little discussion was spent on determining what was appropriate versus inappropriate. One participant shared during their interview that they spent

the entire duration of their remote employment working at their kitchen table, as that is where the closest ethernet cable was located.

Communication was a considerable challenge for some participants, primarily those for whom Canada was not home and English was not the native language. Two participants shared that reading and listening to feedback or corrective guidance was challenging when they could not view the corresponding body language to add context to the framing of the discussion. One of these participants, a non-native English speaker, shared, "...Canadians always say no worries if you ask a question, but I didn't understand what that means. Should I be worried, because now I sure am after reading that response?" (Participant 5). Another indicated that during a group session, the learning coach did not have their camera on, and this caused distress when asking questions. "I couldn't see their face when I asked a question, so if there was silence afterward, I couldn't tell if they were rolling their eyes because I didn't understand or if they were thinking carefully about how to answer" (Participant 9). Another common statement on challenges related to communication in a remote onboarding environment related to not understanding the personality behind the communication. In a typical office environment, participants expressed that they have been able to deduce personal communication styles by watching their peers interact with others in person. In a remote environment, text communication was occasionally perceived to come across as "short or impatient," but participants did acknowledge that perhaps that individual(s) just had short communication styles.

Reflections on the online self-study and workbook activities were mixed. Some participants indicated that the wide range of topics covered in the general learning material (aimed at orienting the employee to the business) was impactful and helped to establish a deeper

understanding of how the different business groups operated towards one unified goal. Others found reviewing learning material irrelevant to their direct role confusing and irrelevant to their success as individual contributors. The role-specific onboarding plans, which produced divergent experiences based on different role-specific learning plans, were noted by five participants onboarded to contact-centre roles as offering a wide range of variety in the self-study program, including text-based review, audio, video, and recorded calls. One participant stated in their interview that the independent nature of the study/onboarding made them anxious that they were not moving at a pace comparable to their peers. Another indicated that they felt uncertain about their understanding of the material due to the isolated nature of the onboarding journey and stated, “It would have been easier if we were all in an area together learning.”

Lastly, challenges related to supervision and feedback varied by participant. Participants who felt they had a strong and positive leadership presence also considered their supervision. The level and rate of feedback were adequate and met their development needs. However, participants who failed to connect with their supervisor or leader felt that the supervision and feedback levels were ineffectual or “highly disciplinary” rather than constructive.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Four themes emerged from this research as having a great impact on the onboarding experience for newcomers to an organization: 1 – Appropriately trained Leadership matters, 2 – Connection is critical, 3 – Support must be clear and timely, and 4 – Intentional program design is required for remote onboarding.

Appropriately Trained Leadership Matters

What was evident from the shared reflections of the study participants is that the quality and level of engagement and support from their immediate leader directly contributed to their perceptions of their onboarding experience and their level of confidence that they were performing well in the early weeks of their employment. The recurrence of this theme and the relationality of onboarding experience to leader presence supports the CoI (Garrison et al., 2001) belief that teaching presence (in this instance, leader-as-teacher presence) closely relates to an individual perception of the effectiveness and meaningfulness of their learning experience. Participants whose leader was highly engaged, responsive, and available (exhibiting a quality or present teaching presence) expressed a sense of commitment and buy-in to the organization's culture, while simultaneously feeling safe in asking questions and growing within their role. Conversely, participants who had minimal contact with their leader (low or ineffective teaching presence) felt as though they were “on an island” (Participant 6), alone to navigate the learning landscape, expectations, and responsibilities of their role independently. Organizations that are considering remote work, particularly remote hiring and onboarding, should look at the leadership capabilities of their management teams. Employers should be encouraged to

emphasize building leadership capability (teaching presence) in their people leaders, as working in a remote environment requires a different skill and leadership approach due to the ability to form casual connections through office run-ins being removed. Hiring and mentoring a new employee remotely requires a higher level of intentional engagement, a skill that may not come naturally to all leaders. Given this, a recommendation for employers considering remote hiring and onboarding is to invest in leadership training that focuses on cultivating engaged teams remotely.

Cultivating Connection

The second theme unanimously reflected upon was the challenge and/or importance of creating meaningful connections with colleagues throughout the business during the remote onboarding experience. Some comments referenced the lack of informal social experiences, for example, ‘water cooler’ chats or company events; others referenced the absence of ice-breaker moments, like dropping a pen, leaning over a cubicle to ask someone a question, or having ‘get to know you’ conversations based on personal effects on an individual’s desk or workspace. This theme relates directly to the situated learning theory of Lave & Wenger (1991), where legitimized and supported proximity to experienced workers can support learning. The participants interviewed for this study expressed a yearning for context, engagement, and authenticity throughout their onboarding journeys, three concepts situated learning relies on. Those participants who were given opportunities to socialize and understand context, particularly through job shadowing, expressed heightened confidence in their roles at the end of their onboarding program. As noted in self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977), such conduits as witnessing the success of others in task performance, receiving constructive feedback, and

experiencing the satisfaction of successful task performance contribute to building a person's belief in their ability to achieve the desired levels of success and achieve self-efficacy.

Another interesting but specific outcome was the importance of 'face time' (meaning cameras on during virtual meetings) for participants for whom English was not their native language. "Faces Matter" was highly important for non-native English speakers and was also referenced as important for those where English was their native language, showing that the unspoken communication that comes easily in an office environment is still sought after remotely. This 'faces matter' theme ties into situated learning, where the 'faces' provide the contextual, unspoken information being delivered, and engagement theory, where the 'faces' provide employees with the emotional and motivational connection to their teacher and their learning. With these theories in mind, employers should consider methods to encourage or require cameras during virtual meetings, particularly during the onboarding process. The last aspect of cultivating connection that appeared frequently was a reference to the somewhat inconsistent approach to "together time," which was time spent with peers or colleagues altogether. The CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2001) suggests that three aspects contribute to a learning experience: social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence, and the lack of clarity or consistency surrounding the social presence appears to have been underemphasized in this research. Social presence relies on the individual's ability to project themselves as an identity in the learning environment, engage in meaningful and purpose-driven communication, and build impactful relationships. Participants who had more fulsome team engagement appeared to have experienced a more robust social presence than those who felt isolated from their team and leaders. The same participants whose experiences had strong social presence also appeared

to have been more engaged. Some Superior Propane teams appeared to have successfully implemented Kearsley and Schneiderman's (1998) "Relate, Create, Donate" approach to learner engagement by allowing employees to learn actively in an authentic environment while contributing to one another through shadowing. In considering the CoI and engagement theory frameworks, employers should investigate how to stimulate vibrant and meaningful engagement among remote teams, particularly those where the workforce has a high percentage of newcomers.

Timely and Clear Technical Support

Another recommendation involves ensuring that employees who are going to be working remotely have easy-to-access and understanding of technical resources. Many participants expressed frustration and confusion during their technical setup and initially navigating the various systems and platforms required for their roles. The absence of direct access to technical support or a leader who could physically walk through the setup or troubleshooting process can lead to productivity delays and impede their ability to socialize with the organization at the speed of others. Employers should investigate opportunities and avenues to provide employees with self-serve support resources. These could be tailored to the needs of the business and/or technology in question. However, options include one-pagers, how-to videos, detailed instruction guides, or a dedicated support line for new hire setup.

Program Design

The final recommendation from this study is that organizations design remote onboarding programs with clear intentions and a goal in mind. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented experience, and organizational human resource and training teams had limited

time to pivot their approaches to bringing on new employees. This research and the experiences of the participants interviewed showed a relation between the program design organization and the new employee's experience. Participants who joined early in the pandemic, when the organization was still in 'pivot' mode and trying to adapt to the new working conditions, experienced a more disjointed onboarding process. From technological uncertainty to expectations surrounding home-office setup and on-the-fly adaptations for job shadowing, the early days felt less organized to some. Those who joined later in the pandemic or the hybrid post-pandemic environment experienced a smoother transition to remote work. When technology was well planned for, expectations were clear. When leaders had an established sense of how to lead digital teams, participants expressed heightened feelings of security and confidence, which begs the question, 'Does an employer's level of confidence and organization in their onboarding program relate to an employee's sense of confidence and organization in their ability to perform in their role?'. As noted by Caldwell and Peters (2018), a lack of well-planned onboarding experiences can lead to a loss of ability to harness the full potential of new employees.

In the early days at Superior Propane, structure and confidence in their onboarding program were missing. However, it appears through the interviews to have been strengthened as the remote work period continued. What appeared strong for some participants was the level of feedback received from their leaders, learning coaches, and peers. Where the feedback loop was intentional and strong, participants felt increased perceptions of their belonging and capability within the organization.

Employers should think of the onboarding period not as a time when they are simply training employees to perform job tasks but as a time when they are instilling organizational

values and creating the foundation for a lasting culture within their workforce. Onboarding programs should be designed using a combination of learning theories and approaches to allow for self-efficacy, engagement, and effective knowledge transfer. Employers can look to research on remote program development in higher education for empirical guidance on developing distance programs that cultivate connection while delivering on organization outcomes.

Conclusion

This research was not without limitations. With a small sample isolated to one company and one country, the findings cannot be generalized as applicable to all work environments and all new employees working in remote settings. This study was also during a worldwide social crisis, where emotions were high and uncertainty was common. The nature of the time was extraordinary in the world of work and surely has impacted the perceptions of the participants interviewed. However, the literature supports some of the broader gaps in the research related to remote work and remote onboarding. This research also solidified existing research that ties levels of engagement and feelings of community or belonging to the methods of instruction used. Research on CoI and engagement theory lays out clear frameworks and guidelines for successfully driving learner motivation. This research highlights both where those theories were applied and where they were lacking, as well as the need for more thorough consideration of each in future iterations of onboarding design. Future research consideration should be given to the following topics:

- What could a hybrid onboarding experience look like? How could companies best maximize together/collaborative time?
- What could incentive-based remote work look like?

- How do we create influential leaders in remote work environments?
- How can we best create meaningful, collaborative, and productive social experiences in a remote work environment?

These lines of research would help guide employers toward empirically proven strategies for maximizing self-efficacy in new remote employees while also increasing the time to productivity and creating the foundations for a culture of collectiveness and engagement.

While this research did contribute new perspectives to the realm of organizational socialization and remote work, much more work should be done to determine how organizations can find the right balance between remote work, employee engagement, and creating a productive social environment from a distance. A final note for organizations striving to create impactful onboarding experiences remotely: Learning theories, such as engagement theory, a community of inquiry, and situated learning, are not just to be considered when developing academic programs. These theories have tangible guidance that can be used to build and maintain vibrant, engaged, and productive remote teams.

References

- Alhojailan, M. I. (2012). Thematic analysis: A critical review of its process and evaluation. *West End Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(1), 39–47.
<https://repository.radenfatah.ac.id/18949/6/dpustaka.pdf>
- Alipour, J. V., Fadinger, H., & Schymik, J. (2021). My home is my castle—The benefits of working from home during a pandemic crisis. *Journal of Public Economics*, 196, 104373.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2021.104373>
- Ameri, M., & Kurtzberg, T. R. (2022). Leveling the playing field through remote work. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 63(3), 1–3.
<https://business.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/documents/leveling-the-playing-field-through-remote-work-ameri-kurzberg-mit-sloan.pdf>
- Babapour Chafi, M., Hultberg, A., & Bozic Yams, N. (2021). Post-pandemic office work: Perceived challenges and opportunities for a sustainable work environment. *Sustainability*, 14(1), 294. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14010294>
- Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2008). Positive organizational behaviour: Engaged employees in flourishing organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(2), 147–154. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.515>
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>
- Bauer, T. N. (2010). *Maximizing success. SHRM foundation's effective practice guidelines series*. SHRM Foundation.

<https://www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/resources-from-past-initiatives/documents/onboarding%20new%20employees.pdf>

- Bauer, T. N., & Erdogan, B. (2011). Organizational socialization: The effective onboarding of new employees. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA handbook of industrial and organizational psychology, Maintaining, expanding, and contracting the organization* (Vol. 3, pp. 51–64). American Psychological Association.
- Beach, C. M. (2008). *Canada's aging workforce: Participation, productivity, and living standards* (pp. 197–218). Bank of Canada.
- Bednall, J. (2006). Epoché and bracketing within the phenomenological paradigm. *Issues in Educational Research, 16*(2), 123–138. <https://iier.org.au/iier16/bednall.html>
- Bellmann, L., & Hübler, O. (2021). Working from home, job satisfaction and work–life balance—robust or heterogeneous links?. *International Journal of Manpower, 42*(3), 424–441. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-10-2019-0458>
- Bloor, M. & Wood, F. (2006). *Keywords in qualitative methods* (pp. 129-130). Sage Publications.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L., & McEvoy, C. (2021). The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 24*(6), 641-654.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2005). Confronting the ethics of qualitative research. *Journal of constructivist psychology, 18*(2), 157–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1805550>

- Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, 18(1), 32–42.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X018001032>
- Burke, R. J., & Ng, E. (2006). The changing nature of work and organizations: Implications for human resource management. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16(2), 86–94.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2006.03.006>
- Cable, D. M., Gino, F., & Staats, B. R. (2013). Reinventing employee onboarding. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 54(3), 23–28.
<https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=52249>
- Caldwell, C., & Peters, R. (2018). New employee onboarding—psychological contracts and ethical perspectives. *Journal of Management Development*, 37(1), 1–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-10-2016-0202>
- Carter Jr, R. A., Rice, M., Yang, S., & Jackson, H. A. (2020). Self-regulated learning in online learning environments: strategies for remote learning. *Information and Learning Sciences*, 121(5-6), 321–329. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ILS-04-2020-0114>
- Choudhury, P., Foroughi, C., & Larson, B. (2021). Work-from-anywhere: The productivity effects of geographic flexibility. *Strategic Management Journal*, 42(4), 655–683
- Cilesiz, S. (2011). A phenomenological approach to experiences with technology: Current state, promise, and future directions for research. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 59(4), 487–510. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-010-9173-2>

- Como, R., Hambley, L., & Domene, J. (2021). An exploration of work-life wellness and remote work during and beyond COVID-19. *Canadian Journal of Career Development, 20*(1), 46–56. <https://cjscd-rcdc.ceric.ca/index.php/cjscd/article/view/92>
- Cooke, G. B., Chowhan, J., & Cooper, T. (2014). Dialing it in: A missed opportunity regarding the strategic use of telework?. *Relations Industrielles, 69*(3), 550–574. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1026758ar>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design* (pp. 155–179). Sage publications.
- Cronshaw, S. F. (2012). Aging workforce demographics in Canada. In *The Oxford handbook of work and aging*. Oxford University Press.
- Dede, C. (1996). The evolution of distance education: Emerging technologies and distributed learning. *American Journal of Distance Education, 10*(2), 4–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08923649609526919>
- DeSanctis, G. (1984). Attitudes toward telecommuting: Implications for work-at-home programs. *Information & Management, 7*(3), 133–139. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-7206\(84\)90041-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-7206(84)90041-7)
- Downes, S. (2017). New models of open and distributed learning. In *Open education: From OERs to MOOCs* (pp. 1–22). Springer.
- Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. *Journal of Religion and Health, 23*(3), 197–203. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00990785>

- Ellis, A. M., & Bauer, T. N. (2017). How do We get new entrants 'On 9 Board'? Organizational socialization, psychological contracts, and realistic job previews. *An introduction to work and organizational psychology: An international perspective* (pp. 159–175).
- Fang, R., Duffy, M. K., & Shaw, J. D. (2011). The organizational socialization process: Review and development of a social capital model. *Journal of Management*, 37(1), 127–152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310384630>
- Gagné, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(4), 331–362. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.322>
- Gagné, M., Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2018). Self-determination theory applied to work motivation and organizational behavior. In D. S. Ones, N. Anderson, C. Viswesvaran, & H. K. Sinangil (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of industrial, work & organizational psychology: Organizational psychology* (pp. 97–121). Sage Publications.
- Gajendran, R. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2007). The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(6), 1541–1524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.6.1524>
- Galanti, T., Guidetti, G., Mazzei, E., Zappalà, S., & Toscano, F. (2021). Work from home during the COVID-19 outbreak: The impact on employees' remote work productivity, engagement, and stress. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 63(7), e426–e432. <https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000002236>
- Gall, M. D., Borg, W. R., & Gall, J. P. (1996). Educational research: An introduction. Longman Publishing

- Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T. & Archer, W. (2001). Critical thinking, cognitive presence, and computer conferencing in distance education. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 15(1), 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08923640109527071>
- Haider, M., & Anwar, A. I. (2023). The prevalence of telework under COVID-19 in Canada. *Information Technology & People*, 36(1), 196–223. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-08-2021-0585>
- Hassan, S. H. (2020). *Impacts of implementation of extensive onboarding process on employee retention-a casestudy from transferwise* (Master's thesis, Tallinn University of Technology). TalTech. <https://digikogu.taltech.ee/et/Download/248005d6-b8f5-43e5-9feb-a88fe661a482>
- Hazelton, S. (2014). Positive emotions boost employee engagement: Making work fun brings individual and organizational success. *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 22(1), 34–37. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-01-2014-0012>
- Heaven, P. (2022, April 27) Canada faces record wave of retirements as it grapples with historic labour shortage. *Financial Post*. <https://financialpost.com/news/economy/canada-faces-a-record-wave-of-retirements-as-it-grapples-with-historic-labour-shortages>
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford University Press.
- Hesse, B. W. (1996). Using telework to accommodate the needs of employees with disabilities. *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce*, 6(4), 327–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10919399609540283>

- Hillman, J. (2010). *Planning for employee onboarding: Finding ways to increase new employee success and long-term retention* [White Paper]. Noel-Levitz, Inc.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED536856>
- Hosmer, L. T. (1987). Ethical analysis and human resource management. *Human Resource Management, 26*(3), 313–330. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.3930260302>
- Ipsen, C., van Veldhoven, M., Kirchner, K., & Hansen, J. P. (2021). Six key advantages and disadvantages of working from home in Europe during COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(4), 1826.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18041826>
- Johnson, N. (Ed.). (2000). *Telecommuting and virtual offices: Issues and opportunities: issues and opportunities*. IGI Global. <https://www.igi-global.com/book/telecommuting-virtual-offices/983>
- Kane, G. C., Nanda, R., Phillips, A., & Copulsky, J. (2021). Redesigning the post-pandemic workplace. *MIT Sloan Management Review, 62*(3), 12–14.
<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/redesigning-the-post-pandemic-workplace/>
- Kearsley, G., & Shneiderman, B. (1998). Engagement theory: A framework for technology-based teaching and learning. *Educational Technology, 38*(5), 20–23.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/44428478>
- Kelleher, B. (2011). Engaged employees= high-performing organizations: Disengaged employees have been found to be I of the biggest threats 10 successful businesses, whereas engagement--building a mutual commitment between employer and employee--results in just the opposite. *Financial Executive, 27*(3), 51–54. <https://www.shrm.org/hr->

today/trends-and-forecasting/special-reports-and-expert-views/documents/employee-engagement-commitment.pdf

- Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131. *Medical teacher*, 42(8), 846-854.
- Klein, H. J., & Polin, B. (2012). Are organizations on board with best practices onboarding?. In *The Oxford handbook of organizational socialization* (pp. 267–287). Oxford University Press.
- Knutson, R. (Executive Producer). (2017-present). *The Journal* [Audio podcast]. Gimlet Media. <https://www.wsj.com/podcasts/the-journal/>
- Korte, R., Brunhaver, S., & Sheppard, S. (2015). (Mis) interpretations of organizational socialization: The expectations and experiences of newcomers and managers. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 26(2), 185–208. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21206>
- Krauss, S. E. (2005). Research paradigms and meaning making: A primer. *The Qualitative Report*, 10(4), 758–770. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol10/iss4/7/>
- Lave, J. (1988). *Cognition in practice: Mind, mathematics, and culture in everyday life*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lyons, S. T., Ng, E. S., & Schweitzer, L. (2014). Changing demographics and the shifting nature of careers: Implications for research and human resource development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 13(2), 181–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484314524201>

- McDaniel, S. A., Wong, L. L., & Watt, B. (2015). An aging workforce and the future labour market in Canada. *Canadian Public Policy*, 41(2), 97–108.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2014-057>
- Mehdi, T., & Morissette, R. (2021, October 27). Working from home in Canada: What have we learned so far? Statistics Canada. <https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202101000001-eng>
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Telecommute. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved September 18, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/telecommute>
- Nilles, J. (1975). Telecommunications and organizational decentralization. *IEEE Transactions on Communications*, 23(10), 1142–1147. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TCOM.1975.1092687>
- Olson, J. S., Olson, G. M., & Meader, D. (1997). Face-to-face group work compared to remote group work with and without video. In K. E. Finn, A. J. Sellen, & S. B. Wilbur (Eds.), *Video-mediated communication* (pp. 157–172). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Olson, M. H. (1983). Remote office work: Changing work patterns in space and time. *Communications of the ACM*, 26(3), 182–187.
<https://doi.org/10.1145/358061.358068>
- Ostroff, C., & Kozlowski, S. W. (1992). Organizational socialization as a learning process: The role of information acquisition. *Personnel Psychology*, 45(4), 849–874.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1992.tb00971.x>

- Parker, S. K., Knight, C., & Keller, A. (2020). Remote managers are having trust issues. *Harvard Business Review*, 30, 06–20. <https://hbr.org/2020/07/remote-managers-are-having-trust-issues>
- Ragins, B. R., Cotton, J. L., & Miller, J. S. (2000). Marginal mentoring: The effects of type of mentor, quality of relationship, and program design on work and career attitudes. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(6), 1177–1194. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1556344>
- Rogers, A. M. (2020). Avoiding the Issue: A critique of organizational socialization research from feminist and minority perspectives. *Organization Development Journal*, 38(1), 75–88. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2399871913>
- Schall, M. A. (2019). *The relationship between remote work and job satisfaction: The mediating roles of perceived autonomy, work-family conflict, and telecommuting intensity* (Master's thesis, San Jose State University). SJSU ScholarWorks. https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/5017/
- Sloan, A., & Bowe, B. (2014). Phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology: The philosophy and methodologies and using hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate lecturers' experiences of curriculum design. *Quality & Quantity*, 48(3), 1291–1303. <https://doi.org.10.1007/s11135-013-9835-3>
- Snell, A. (2006). Researching onboarding best practice: Using research to connect onboarding processes with employee satisfaction. *Strategic HR Review*, 5(6), 32–35. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14754390680000925>

- Staples, D. S. (2001). A study of remote workers and their differences from non-remote workers. *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing*, 13(2), 3–14.
<https://doi.org/10.4018/joeuc.2001040101>
- Staples, D. S., Hulland, J. S., & Higgins, C. A. (1999). A self-efficacy theory explanation for the management of remote workers in virtual organizations. *Organization Science*, 10(6), 758–776., <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1998.tb00085.x>
- Stein, D. (1998). *Situated learning in adult education* (No. 195). ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education Columbus OH.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED418250.pdf>
- Stein, D. (1998). *Situated learning in adult education* (pp. 640-646). ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, College of Education, the Ohio State University.
- Sundaray, B. K. (2011). Employee engagement: a driver of organizational effectiveness. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 3(8), 53–59.
<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234624106.pdf>
- Swart, K., Bond-Barnard, T., & Chugh, R. (2022). Challenges and critical success factors of digital communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing in project management virtual teams: a review. *International Journal of Information Systems and Project Management*, 10(4), 84-103.
- Taylor, C. M., J. Cornelius, C., & Colvin, K. (2014). Visionary leadership and its relationship to organizational effectiveness. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 35(6), 566–583. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-10-2012-0130>

- Theofanidis, D., & Fountouki, A. (2018). Limitations and delimitations in the research process. *Perioperative Nursing-Quarterly scientific, online official journal of GORNA*, 7(3 September-December 2018), 155–163.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2552022>
- Thompson, B. Y. (2019). The digital nomad lifestyle: (remote) work/leisure balance, privilege, and constructed community. *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, 2(1), 27–42. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41978-018-00030-y>
- Treasury Board of Canada. (2000). *Telework: Balancing work/life demands*. Ottawa.
- Tuffour, I. (2017). A critical overview of interpretative phenomenological analysis: A contemporary qualitative research approach. *Journal of Healthcare Communications*, 2(4), 52. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2472-1654.100093>
- Turner III, D. W., & Hagstrom-Schmidt, N. (2022). Qualitative interview design. *Howdy or Hello? Technical and professional communication*. Pressbooks.
- Van Maanen, J. , & Schein, E. H. 1979. Toward a theory of organizational socialization. In B. M. Staw (Ed.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 1, pp. 209–264). JAI Press.
- Wanberg, C. R. (Ed.). (2012). *The Oxford handbook of organizational socialization*. Oxford University Press.