

**Army University Telework:**

**A case study in organizational learning to promote rapid culture change**

Shanda Lauer, Steven Petersen, and Meredith Shafto

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Army University

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US government, the Department of Defense, the US Army, or Army University

### **Abstract**

Army modernization requires developing the Army as an adaptive learning organization, which in turn depends on cultivating the requirements for rapid and sustainable organizational learning such as workforce development and the integration of enabling technology. Early 2020 provided a case study in rapid modernization as Army University adapted to the COVID-19 Pandemic by creating Situational Teleworking opportunities to protect the health of employees who had previously worked on Fort Leavenworth. Nearly 2,000 leaders, educators, and support staff learned to do their jobs from home to continue to meet the Army University education and training mission. Following the rapid adoption of telework, Army University created sustainable telework practices by supporting organizational learning at the individual, group, and organizational level. This paper applies organizational learning models to uncover how the telework rollout at Army University was successful despite being abrupt, unprecedented, and incongruent with standing Army organizational culture. We outline the process of initial rapid change including learning and training requirements for individual and staff groups such as new vocabulary, communication plans, new technology, and new supervisor capabilities for leading hybrid or remote teams. We then discuss how Army University responded to sustain the initial cultural change through the process of organizational learning, to include: knowledge creation, retention, and transfer at individual, group, and organizational levels. Telework practices in Army University currently support a range of modernized learning approaches and, more broadly, the experience of Army University contributes to an understanding of how Army institutions can successfully enact organizational learning.

Army University Telework: A case study in organizational learning to promote rapid culture change

## Introduction

Army modernization requires developing the Army as an adaptive learning organization, which in turn depends on cultivating the requirements for rapid and sustainable organizational learning such as workforce development and the integration of enabling technology. As the Army's core educational institution, Army University must lead the way not only in modernizing educational practices, but also developing itself as a learning organization which continuously innovates institutional practices.

The current paper considers the implementation and sustainment of a successful telework policy across Army University as a case study in organizational learning. We highlight how Army University responded to the forcing function of the COVID-19 Pandemic to institute rapid culture change across the organization, and how a coordinated effort underpins the successful sustainment of that initial cultural change through the process of organizational learning, including knowledge creation, retention, and transfer at individual, group, and organizational levels.

## Army University as a learning organization

The Army University is located at Fort Leavenworth, KS, and "integrates all of the professional military education institutions within the Army into a single educational structure modeled after many university systems across the country." (About Army University, n.d.) Army University is responsible for the professional military education of Soldiers, as well as the professional and continuing education of the Army's civilian workforce. Two organizations within Army University are accredited. The Army Management Staff College is accredited by the International Accreditors for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) and the Command and General Staff College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). Tens of thousands of military and ACPs are enrolled in a course through Army University at any given time — either in the face-to-face (F2F), in-person modality or a virtual classroom environment. The Army University employs approximately 300 military members and over 800 ACPs.

The Army University was established in 2015, with the purpose of "creating a unified university system for the Army" (Brown, 2015), by blending traditional American university academic excellence with best practices and lessons learned in existing military education programs (Perkins, 2015). As a dual-hatted higher education institution and military entity, the Army University was well-poised to incorporate principles of a *learning organization*, in keeping with the aims of the wider Army (e.g., Gerras 2002).

Defining a learning organization is complex and not well synthesized. At the broadest, the term learning organization would encompass, "practically each and every organization in the world, in that at least some storing of knowledge into an organizational memory, some kind of learning facilitation or some learning from the customers could be said to occurring in any particular organization" (Örtenblad, 2018). However, a contextual approach (Örtenblad, 2018) may work best for our purpose, which defines a learning organization by a set of standards established for the organization that vary from organization to organization. Calton et al. (2021) highlights five key dimensions for the Army: Cultivate Learning Support, Orient toward a shared future, Explore new perspectives, Synchronize capabilities, and Manage

organizational knowledge. Learning organizations have forward-thinking leadership and cultivate collaborative learning, support a “lifelong learning” mindset, make room for innovation, and enable knowledge sharing. Becoming a learning organization takes time, effort, documentation, and careful evaluation.

One of the foundational steps to becoming a *learning organization* is to produce evidence of *organizational learning*, which involves the learning processes that occur within an organization (Tsang, 1997). As discussed in Calton et al. (2021), a learning organization is one “that continuously orients itself towards the processes or activities involved in organizational learning,” and organizational learning is necessary but not sufficient to create a learning organization. The Army Learning Concept 2030-2040 highlights the link between organizational learning and learning organizations: “A learning organization is one that values and rewards individual learning and that has explicit mechanisms to support organizational learning. In other words, it has processes to enable knowledge sharing and continuous organizational behavioral adaptation.”

The focus of this paper is not to specify the complicated relationship between becoming a learning organization through undergoing organizational learning, but rather, to showcase how the incorporation of principles of organizational learning through the COVID-19 Pandemic and the successful telework innovation has contributed to Army University development as a learning organization.

### **Army University Pandemic Response**

Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the overwhelming majority of Army University employees worked in a government-owned building, on site. The students of the Command and General Staff College were also on site. Telework, defined as, “an alternate work arrangement that permits Army Civilian Professionals / Service Members to perform officially assigned duties at designated locations away from the traditional worksite, including their homes and other preapproved worksites,” (Army University Policy Memo 5, 2022) was very rare. Remote work, defined as, “separate and distinct from telework, where Army Civilian Professionals and their conventional worksite are in different geographic regions,” (Army University Policy Memo 5, 2022) was only accepted on a case-by-case basis with overwhelming support from direct leaders. In the spring of 2020, that all changed as the institution was forced to react to the transformed operational environment caused by the rapid spread of COVID-19. In March of 2020, the Army University sent most, if not all, employees and students away from the physical office and classroom, and into a virtual or remote learning/remote working environment. Nearly 2,000 leaders, educators, and support staff and students learned to do their jobs from home to continue to meet the Army University education and training mission.

Early 2020 provided a case study in rapid modernization as Army University adapted to the COVID-19 Pandemic by creating situational teleworking opportunities to protect the health of employees and students who had previously worked and learned on Fort Leavenworth. Situational telework provided the opportunity to maintain the Army University mission by retaining the output of many Army Civilian Professionals (ACPs) and students as they worked from home. Over time, Army University leaders recognized that tasks, including critical missions were being successfully accomplished, and began gathering evidence to make decide whether to sustain this initial cultural change. A series of surveys

were developed and deployed to systematically evaluate the practice of telework and subsequent telework policies.

### **Army University Telework Surveys**

The initial aim of the 2022 Army University Telework Survey was to collect feedback from Army University military and civilian employees on their experiences with telework during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The goals of the data collection were to find practices of value and to understand gaps and areas in need of improvement under current teleworking conditions. Another goal was to confirm or deny perceptions or misperceptions of telework, especially those held by leaders. The survey was conducted 25 April – 9 May 2022. Over 494 staff and faculty participated in the Telework Survey, resulting in a 42.6% response rate. The second survey was conducted 27 July – 11 August 2023. This time, 384 individuals answered the majority of questions on the Telework and Remote Work Survey, resulting in a 29.7% response rate. The high return rates for both surveys indicates a great level of interest in telework. The survey covered the topics of general satisfaction with and recommendations regarding the telework policy, resourcing to do their jobs, messaging and communication, effects of telework on employees and on the education and training of students, limitations of telework, work productivity impacts, and retention and recruitment. In addition to this range of topics, the second survey also targeted feedback specifically on the Army University Policy Memorandum 5, Telework and Remote Work (Army University Policy Memo 5, 2022), and implementation plans being utilized by Army University sub-organizations.

The results of the telework surveys were markedly positive. The areas of overall satisfaction with the policy were rated highly positive, to include elements of trust, communication, resourcing, and availability of technology. Additionally, concrete suggestions were provided for improvement, particularly on the second year's survey. Preference to telework was rated highly by employees, with individuals giving positive ratings to many telework-related quality of life aspects- improved mood, improved health, impacts on their time, and family life. Critically, employees reported almost no change to their yearly evaluation after teleworking, and those that improved cited increased productivity as the source. This finding was corroborated by supervisors, agreeing that their workers were productive at the same level or better while teleworking. Finally, employees also found the telework policy as an important retention and recruitment tool.

The positivity of the findings of both surveys are consistent with previous research on telework. For the most part, these studies find that employees want telework and it increases work-life balance, perceived productivity, and commitment to the organization (e.g., Harker Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Mullins, Scutelnicu, & Charbonneau, 2022; Ramirez, 2022; Vega, Anderson, & Kaplan, 2015; but see de Vries, Tummers, & Bekkers, 2019). Government-specific research on telework has been conducted by Kwon and Jeon (2018) who used FEVS data from 2008 and 2015 and found an increased satisfaction in telework programs linked to the 2010 Telework Enhancement Act, leadership commitment, and cultivating a performance-oriented culture. Likewise, Lewis, Pizarro-Bore and Emidy (2023) used FEVS data from before and during the pandemic to suggest that those institutions that switched to frequent telework during the pandemic had decreased turnover.

The employees and students themselves contributed a large portion to the success of telework, by remaining on mission and contributing to the organizational goals even while geographically distributed. However, perhaps an arguably larger contribution to the success of the telework initiative can be

attributed to Army University leaders. The leaders performed a strategic rollout of telework, while recognizing it may be more work on their part to communicate with their employees, and to lead from afar. Successful telework is a leadership issue (e.g., Contreras, Baykal, & Abid, 2020; Silva-C., 2019). From Offstein, Morwick and Koskinen (2010), “the single greatest variable in predicting telework success was rarely technology. Invariably, it was leadership.” Leaders who are to be successful with telework must cultivate trust (Brown, Smit, Arduengo, & Taylor, 2016), make communication more explicit, move to shared or distributed leadership, and have a results-based approach rather than a process-based approach (managing results rather than managing time) (e.g., Peters, Ligthart, Bardoel, & Poutsma, 2016; Sanders, 2022). Because many of the factors that determine the success of telework reside with leadership, we turn to models of organizational change that highlight important milestones through which leaders guide their organizations.

### **Applying Organizational Change Models to Telework Implementation**

Organizational change is notorious for being difficult to accomplish (Burnes, 2005) and if the change is seen as incongruent with the current culture of the organization, it is likely to fail (Petersen & Bartel, 2020). At Army University pre-COVID, telework was incongruent with the culture of the organization. While telework was available at an earlier time for some employees at Fort Leavenworth, it had not been regularly practiced, and wasn't commonplace in the early years of the Army University.

The successful adoption of telework within the organization despite being abrupt, unprecedented, and incongruent with current Army University culture may, in part, be due to the change occurring in a revolutionary way. “Almost all successful organizations evolve through relatively long periods of incremental change punctuated by environmental shifts and revolutionary change” (Tushman & O'Reilly III, 1996). The Army University, being a relatively new organization to the Army repertoire, had undertaken mainly subtle, incremental changes since its inception in 2015. However, at the onset of COVID-19, the Army University was forced to undergo a quick period of revolutionary change, due to environmental restrictions and dangers. This period was characterized by changes in organizational practices, strategy, communication structure, technology, and culture, all to remain viable and accomplish the education and training mission while protecting employees.

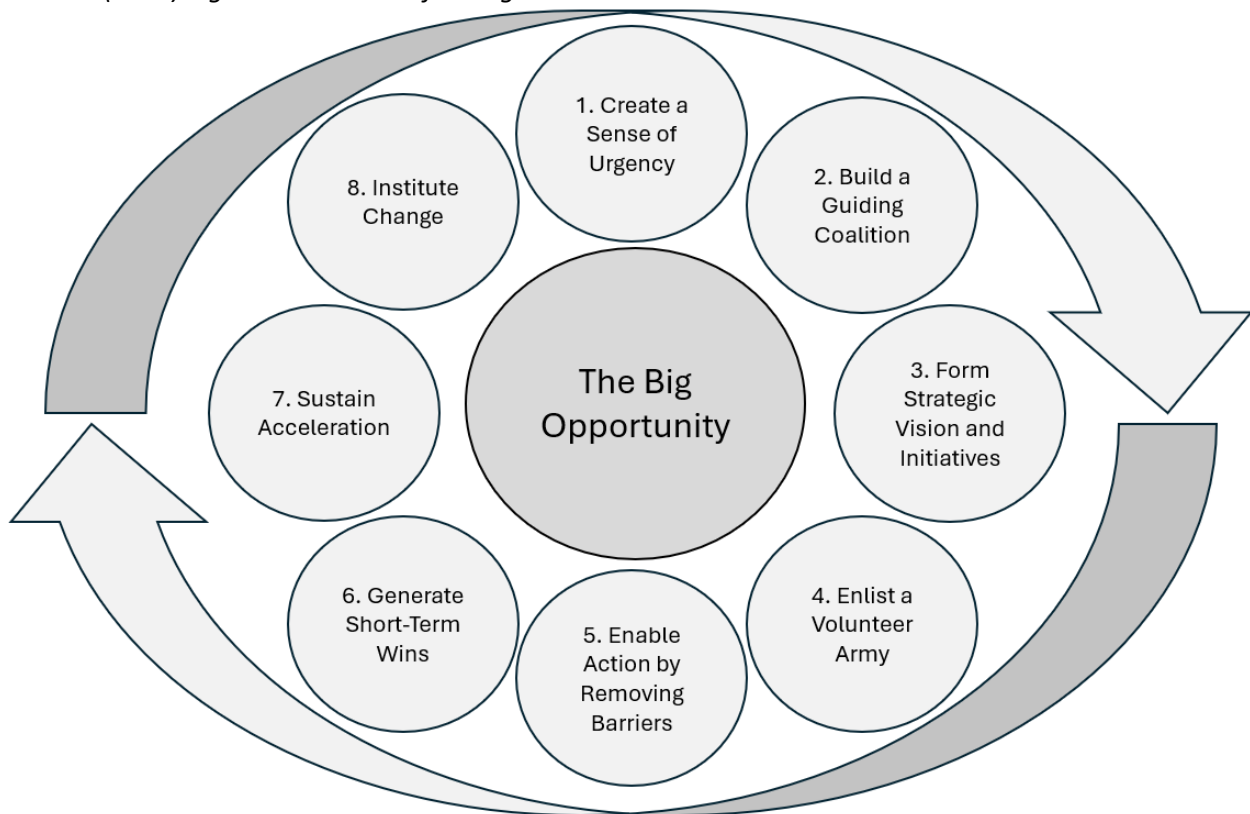
Frameworks for cultural or organizational change exist as a result of years of study and debate in the organizational and management science fields. Some change models, such as Kotter's (1996) eight step model and Buller's (2015) ten analytical lenses approach incorporate a number of steps and are viewed by some as rather prescriptive. Others, such as Lewin's (1947) three step model have considerably fewer steps or phases and are viewed by some as rather simplistic and not prescriptive enough.

Because the change being researched in this study was initially driven by the outside environmental impact of COVID-19, the authors decided to view this change through Kotter's eight accelerators of change. Kotter (2014) introduced eight accelerators for change as an update or addition to his earlier eight step change model. In his more recent work, Kotter recognizes that some changes are not the result of a leader's deliberate choice to make change, but rather their reaction to outside forces that make the change a necessity. This is what happened in 2020, with the Army University work model changing almost instantly from nearly 100% in-person to nearly 100% remote, as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Kotter posits that necessary changes, which eventually result in lasting organizational culture change, are made by and through eight “accelerators”. These accelerators (see Fig.1) are the drivers of a change effort, and though they generally arrive in sequence, it is not necessary that they happen sequentially. They can begin in any order, happen simultaneously, or even iteratively throughout a change process. These accelerators align closely with the eight steps of Kotter’s model from the mid-1990s, but in his more recent work, Kotter recognizes that change is rarely achieved by a leader dragging the organization through a prescribed set of steps. More often it is the result of a visionary leader who can grow support from multiple networks made of supportive people and teams inside the organization. These networks enable the change effort take hold and pull others into the fold to make the change stick. They are also the ones that are largely responsible for shepherding the organization through the change driven by the accelerators (Kotter, 2014). The accelerator model thus presents a more interactive vision of change, where several networks or sub-organizations can be working through different accelerators in any sequence at any given time. Similarly, evidence gathered in the current study provides evidence that results tied to one accelerator can also have connections to others.

**Figure 1**

*Kotter’s (2014) Eight Accelerators of Change*



As shown in Figure 1, the eight accelerators can be visualized around a central topic, goal, or change initiative, which Kotter refers to as The Big Opportunity. The first accelerator concerns itself with establishing and “maintaining a strong sense of urgency with as many people as possible.” (Kotter, 2014. P.27) The second accelerator initiates the momentum and leverages the heightened sense of urgency to establish a core of people or teams that will form the initial network of supporters for change and assist

in seeing the change through. In accelerator number three the coalition clarifies a vision and identifies strategic initiatives that can move the organization towards the vision. Key to this step is that the message and initiatives are consistent with senior leader goals, but formed by and will be carried out through the work of the coalition. This is important because the initiatives will be such that a management-driven hierarchy may be ill-equipped to handle at all, or well enough or fast enough on their own (Kotter, 2014). The perception of the ground up initiative that is built in the third accelerator facilitates the next – enlisting a volunteer army. In this step the coalition actively recruits others that are interested in the initiative to take a more active role; when the first three accelerators are in motion getting additional people to take part in the effort comes more easily. Others inside the already established network and even those outside of it start taking an interest and want to be a part of the change. This is the accelerator that starts to pull, as if by gravity, others into the network that is working on this change effort. Once the network has grown to sizeable force that is able to start taking action, the fifth accelerator becomes relevant, removing barriers that would either prevent the initiative from succeeding or slow the efforts down to a pace where people lose interest. Accelerator five is where the momentum for change picks up speed. Removing barriers to change sets the conditions for the sixth accelerator. As the change effort gains momentum it is critical to the success and continued forward progress to generate and celebrate short term wins. Publicly announced and celebrated wins show the organization that the change is gaining traction and provides those that are already among the network of change supporters some recognition and satisfaction that their work is succeeding. These shared successes encourage respect, understanding, and cooperation from those who may not yet be a part of the change but are growing increasingly interested. In the seventh accelerator those inside the network working towards the Big Opportunity, including senior leaders, continue to publicize the accomplishments of the people and success of the change effort thus far, and continue to seek additional opportunities to bring people and teams into the network by gaining their support and buy in. The eighth and final accelerator is to institute change. This is where the organization enacts or updates policy, guidelines, and standard operating procedures to account for and incorporate the change into what is “normal behavior” for the organization. This is the step that shows the organization the change surrounding the Big Opportunity was not a “one and done” initiative that was carried out because of some initial sense of urgency, but will fizzle out in time.

### **Army University Telework Adoption Through the Lens of Kotter’s 8 Accelerators**

#### **The Big Opportunity**

The Big Opportunity that was presented to Army University as a result of the forced remote work model for its employees and students in 2020, was that it could take the lessons learned from that experience and make its own hybrid model for employees and students that would allow them to work through telework or in person based on organizational needs and individual desires.

#### **Create a Sense of Urgency**

A sense of urgency is what drives people to buy into, or at least “try on” the change effort. Many people in mature organizations get caught up in doing things the way they have always done them because it is comfortable, it is the norm, and they have grown accustomed to doing things in a certain way. Maintaining the status quo is easier and it allows people to laurel in their expertise, gained from having done something for so long. Many people will continue to operate in their comfort zone unless they are forced to change, or feel a change is eminent. Because of this, creating a sense of urgency for any change

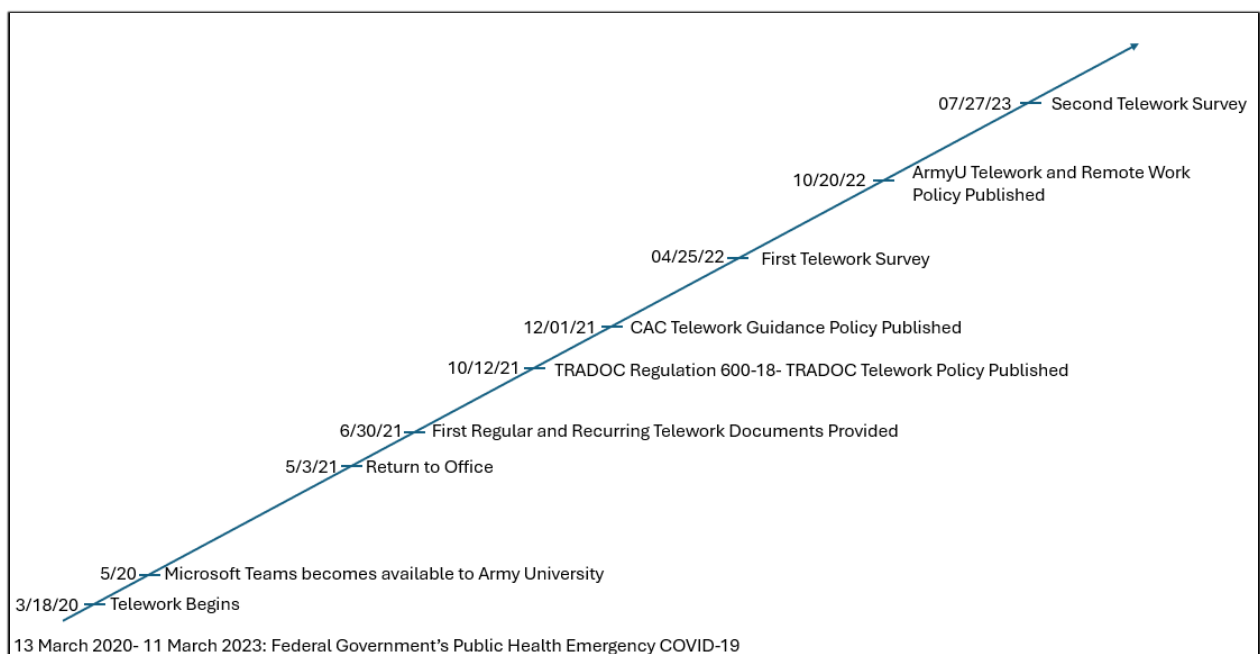


effort is an accelerator that should not be overlooked. Without a sense of urgency, people who resist change and those that are indifferent to change might take the position of "waiting out" the appetite for any new way of doing things. A sense of urgency to make change, "allows behavior to happen that many who have grown up in mature organizations would think unimaginable." (Kotter, 2014. p. 28)

The sense of urgency for the organization to become more receptive to remote and telework was initially created by the COVID pandemic forcing Army University employees to work from their personal spaces. Figure 2 is provided to orient the reader to the timeline of Army University telework implementation and associated milestones, beginning with the Public Health Emergency for COVID-19 declared on 13 March, 2020. However, as the pandemic dissipated and workers were being brought back to in-person work models, leaders recognized that the change forced onto the organization by the pandemic had some value, and to go back to the pre-COVID work model of presence in the office every day, might be a step in the wrong direction. The timing was critical, because if the rollout and implementation of regular and recurring telework took too long, momentum would be lost.

**Figure 2**

*Timeline of Army University Telework Implementation*



A strong advocate for leading the charge was identified in the Deputy Provost, who wrote an initial telework policy and circulated an early copy among Army University leaders to gauge appetite and interest. Incoming feedback from employees returning to the office indicated that productivity was significantly reduced during the period that the workforce was operating remotely. Supervisors also became champions of telework, stating they did not see a rapid decline in productivity, and employees bought in on the remote work environment increasing productivity, especially for tasks that benefitted from focus and lack of in-person interruptions such as coworkers dropping into their office to chat, or other office space background noise. Many employees felt gaining back the time they usually spent

commuting improved work-life balance, and a large number of employees stated that the opportunity to telework can assist in the recruitment and retention of talent for the organization.

It was the positive aspects gained by employees teleworking due to the COVID pandemic and the subsequent remission of the pandemic that threatened to bring all workers back into the office 100% of the time. This created the sense of urgency for Army University leaders to assume some risk, utilize some of the tools they previously had in place, and figure out a way to build on the positive gains learned throughout 2020 and take advantage of the “big opportunity” that lay in front of them to get the workforce to the future.

### **Build a Guiding Coalition**

To capitalize on the urgency created by the end of the pandemic, Army University leaders needed to build a coalition of supporters of the impending change. Support was required from a variety of places. The coalition required support of CPAC to ensure that any action taken to leverage the opportunity to continue to telework was not an infraction of labor laws or union guidelines. It required support of Army Senior Leaders at the CAC and TRADOC levels. Army University leaders had to be on board to some extent with this potential shift in the work model. And equally important, the supervisory leaders and the employees of the organization who would be living out this potential change had to be advocates for it. To determine the appetite for and interest in continuing telework, the Deputy Provost held touchpoints with Army Civilian Professionals and employees after the return to work to determine what went well with teleworking and what should be sustained in the future. There were true benefits to individuals uncovered during these sessions, as well as the realization that no collective missions failed during, so therefore, the organization should be able to incorporate this into the future workforce at Army University.

Additionally, two sub-organizations contained many workers whose duties lent themselves easily to teleworking rather than being face to face in the office every day. Both took a progressive approach to implementing regular and recurring telework. These two organizations were then looked at early and often for issues and key indicators that may signal problems for other organizations.

Not everyone in the organization has to be a willing participant in telework, but finding enough strong supporters across the numerous stakeholders inside the organization that see the value of the change, are determined to make change happen, and will help to make it happen will facilitate the change being more rapidly and readily accepted by the organization as a whole.

### **Form Strategic Vision and Initiatives**

The strategic vision and its associated initiatives enable change agents in an organization to get people to understand the purpose of the change or project being undertaken. Garnering support for change is easier if stakeholders understand the reasons for it, and what the organization is trying to accomplish – the purpose.

Army University's vision for the change to allow more telework opportunities was to maintain and build upon the momentum acquired through teleworking during COVID. The initial drafts of the Army University regular and recurring telework policy were permissive, not prescriptive, with the goal of reviewing the policy after the first year. Importantly, higher level leaders empowered the division level chiefs and supervisor cohorts in suborganizations to implement telework. Subordinate organizations

created their own implementation policies based on their leaders, organizational requirements, and their culture. The flexibility built into the organizational policy allowed ownership of the policy by suborganizations. Middle managers and chiefs were then able to implement, resulting in the employees themselves having a clear vision of responsibilities and requirements. Army University Senior leaders believe that if you meet people where they are and have flexibility, they will give more back to the organization.

**Table 1** provides some evidence from the employee’s point of view that the effort to create a coherent vision for the telework policy was successful: the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that they understand what is expected of them when they are teleworking.

**Table 1**

*Army University Telework Survey Responses Relevant for Kotter Accelerator, Form the Strategic Vision and Initiatives*

Question	Positive responses	
	2022	2023
I understand the work requirements of the Army University Telework and Remote Work Policy.	NA	99.6%
I understand the duties required of me while teleworking or working remotely.	97.6%	98.8%
My leadership clearly communicated the repercussions of failing to maintain my telework or remote work agreement.	90.8%	88.6%
My leadership clearly communicated telework or remote work expectations.	91.2%	89%

**Enlist a Volunteer Army**

“In the fourth accelerator, the guiding coalition, and others who wish to help, communicate information about the change vision and the strategic initiatives to the organization in ways that lead large numbers of people to buy into the whole flow of action.” (Kotter, 2014, p.31). The value this accelerator brings to the process is that it broadens the acceptance and visibility of the change effort across the organization. Army University did this in a number of ways, but highly impactful were the development and implementation of the annual telework survey, and subsequent reports out on the data collected to a variety of audiences. The researchers who designed and administered the survey briefed the results to Army University Deputy Provost, Chief of Staff, and policy and program analysts within their staffs. All analyses were provided to these key leaders to utilize the findings and disseminate widely throughout higher organizations like CAC and TRADOC, as well as subordinate organizations during site visits and discussions on telework. Army University Leaders briefed results of the survey showing its positive aspects during quarterly supervisor professional development training sessions, meetings with division chiefs, and during workforce sessions with all the employees. This process spread the word about the

opportunity presented by the new telework policy, and resulted in more people gaining interest, which ultimately created leverage and momentum for the change.

**Table 2** indicates that in addition to leadership support for the development and implementation of the Army University telework policy, employees are also members of the “volunteer army,” endorsing their satisfaction with the policy.

**Table 2**

*Army University Telework Survey Responses Relevant for Kotter Accelerator, Enlist a Volunteer Army*

Question	Positive responses	
	2022	2023
I am satisfied with the current Army University Telework and Remote Work Policy.	78.7%	75.9%
The current Army University Telework and Remote Work policy has been fairly implemented in my unit	NA	72.6%

**Enable Action by Removing Barriers**

This accelerator is critical because any barriers, or things that might be seen as barriers, to successfully implement the desired change can be capitalized on by those people who are resisting or not yet fully supportive. Fence-sitters and nay-sayers who do not want to be a part of the change process can use barriers as incentive to continue to maintain the status quo. At the onset of COVID, Army University removed barriers to telework, which in turn also removed barriers to working remotely. By improving infrastructure and technology, ensuring employees had the proper hardware and issuing laptops for work purposes rather than desktops and enabling widespread VPN access, employees could securely connect and conduct their work from alternative worksites. Telephone and Video Teleconference Capability (VTC) were main sources of communication pre-COVID and did not initially have a replacement. Collaborative software was purchased, and each employee was given a license for MS Teams software on their laptops, so they could video call, or chat with colleagues and collaborate on documents in real time just as if they were in the office. Army University also removed barriers by offering MS Teams training to individuals who were unfamiliar with the collaborative software. Additional advancements included the Army “Bring Your Own Device” program enabled by the Army Virtual Desktop, which allows users to stay connected with their email, collaborative software and shared documents, while being less dependent on government-issued infrastructure.

After COVID-19, and employees returned to work, barriers in mentality regarding regular and recurring telework existed in the form of employee or supervisor disagreement that telework fit with Army culture. After coming out of isolation, many employees were glad to return to the office, and wanted telework to be a thing of the past. Others were confused about the requirement to come back full time to the office, citing their individual productivity had not decreased during COVID. Leaders recognized individuals needed autonomy to make the choice right for them. Supplementary information on the merits of telework, and the objective data that had been collected became more widely available. Workforce sessions became opportunities for open dialogue and for individuals to express concerns and

receive guidance. They were also an opportunity to dispel myths, follow-up on issues, and improve communication among employees and leaders.

Additional barriers included a lack of specific regular and recurring organizational telework policies existing in higher organizations. Neither Department of the Army, TRADOC, or CAC had policies in place for telework long term, which meant that Army University did not have the higher guidance under which to begin drafting the new policy. With the situational telework guidance they did have, they were able to craft their own regular and recurring telework policy in October 2022 to meet their needs and those of their employees.

Identifying barriers is the first step that must be accomplished to remove them. The initial barriers of technological shortfalls were easily recognizable, but Army University continued to identify and remove barriers and obstacles to working from locations other than the office by systematically evaluating the results gained from the annual telework surveys.

**Table 3** suggests that the way the Army University telework policy has been implemented anticipated and addressed many typical barriers to successful telework. These include concerns about how teleworking may impact evaluations or career progression, having clear expectations, and having responsive support and training for both subordinates and supervisors.

**Table 3**

*Army University Telework Survey Responses Relevant for Kotter Accelerator, Enable Action by Removing Barriers*

Question	Positive responses	
	2022	2023
It is my perception that teleworking had a neutral or positive influence on my current DPMAP or evaluation rating.	99%	98.4%
It is my perception that telework or remote work has limited or will limit my promotion potential or upward mobility for my career.	5.9%	4.4%
While teleworking or remote working, my supervisor holds me accountable to the same productivity standards as when I am in the office.	95.5%	96.4%
Any issues I faced while teleworking or remote working were resolved promptly by my leadership.	83.8%	85.4%
I have been given the appropriate training to be confident supervising telework and remote employees.	89.9%	98.1%
My employees are lacking resources to be successful while teleworking or working remotely.	25.4%	1.9%
As a supervisor of teleworking or remotely working employees, I find myself having to work harder to maintain the same level of communication compared to when they are in the office.	40.7%	38.9%

**Generate Short-Term Wins**

Generating, as well as publicizing and celebrating, short term wins helps to spread the message through an organization that the change is taking place, and it is working. As more success is publicized and celebrated, the more likely that others will see the change as urgent, inevitable, or promising, and more people will volunteer to be pulled into the process.

Army University celebrated short term wins by using the first year’s survey data to spread awareness regarding the successful implementation and benefits of telework, and the second year’s data to show the policy was written well and implemented fairly. The collaborative infrastructure put in place also generated wins by allowing individuals to attend meetings without requiring conference room reservations or large auditoriums. In-person attendance was not required, thus increasing inclusivity and representation. This had the added benefit of helping communication flow faster and directly through the organization, even if employees were not physically present in the room.

During the lockdown, another short-term win became very clear when inclement weather occurred, resulting in a delay and closure of post. The poor weather meant treacherous driving conditions and potential car accidents or student and employee harm on their way to and from post. However, with the vast majority of individuals teleworking, the mission continued, with instructors, civilian professionals, and students remaining productive the entire day. Instead of administering administrative leave to hundreds of people, Army University continued the mission with little disturbance.

Documentation and dissemination of short-term wins is also important. The momentum, successes, best practices, and TTP’s of supervisors in suborganizations were solicited in both telework surveys. These practices were consolidated, written, and reported to leaders, who promulgated these strategies for success to other organizations to demonstrate short term wins. A large win came when CAC and TRADOC utilized portions of the Army University Telework Policy and survey results to include within their policies. Receiving buy-in and support from the higher-level organizations was a confidence builder that this policy and the program were on the right track for the organization.

**Table 4** suggests that the first time the Army University survey was administered, employees were positive about key issues such as preferring telework, and performing their duties including teaching. Supervisors responding to the 2023 survey also agreed that telework did not negatively affect their team’s morale.

**Table 4**

*Army University Telework Survey Responses Relevant for Kotter Accelerator, Generate Short Term Wins*

Question	Positive responses	
	2022	2023
Weighing both positive and negative aspects above, I prefer to telework or remote work rather than work in the office every day.	64.2%	68.4%
I was provided the necessary training to be confident and capable instructing or training students online.	70%	79.2%
I have been provided with the resources my position requires to be successful in performing my duties while teleworking or working remotely.	90.6%	91.8%

As a supervisor, it is my perception that telework or remote work has not <b>influenced or improved</b> the morale of my unit.	86.5%	88.7%
--	-------	-------

**Sustain Acceleration**

"Accelerator 7 keeps the entire system moving despite a general human tendency to let up after a win or two." (Kotter, 2014. p. 33) It is an extension of generating the short-term wins in that it continues to build on all the previous accelerators and maintain the momentum of the change effort over a long period of time, and it leads to the final step of instituting change.

The Army University sustained acceleration by using the data to identify aspects of the policy that weren't working and made changes and publicized them. A four-hour training course was created by CAC, and instituted with the Army Management Staff College. This course titled, "Leading Hybrid Teams", capitalized on available TTP's and successes reported, becoming a requirement for all supervisors. This course reiterates supervisory practices that are critical to maintaining an effective telework program and environment. Creating the training and expanding to all supervisors meant that even those who were uncertain about telework or unsupportive were still set up for success in their roles. At the OPM level, tools and policies have been expanded to normalize telework, with the strategy to leverage telework as a recruitment tool to entice younger workforce generations, a cohort with which it has notoriously struggled to garner interest.

As the intensity of getting the telework program off the ground has dissipated, some regression has been noted. Remember, the telework policy was created by Army University, but the implementation of the policy is done at the division level. This strength in flexibility of a policy for a large organization does lead to downstream delegation that differs among suborganizations, potentially introducing inequities. As the status quo is reached and the battle rhythms occur day in and day out, some supervisors have regressed back to strongly preferring or requiring their employees be in the office more frequently. This is a danger to the telework program, despite the momentum generated, and without maintained vigilance, could default some teams, divisions, or entire suborganizations back to the previous culture of 100% face-to-face in the office, despite a lack of requirement.

**Table 4** and **Table 5** provide evidence that the earlier wins have been sustained or increased, and that the use of telework has started to have broader implications, including affecting retention and recruitment. Telework has been integrated into generalized work practices, with supervisors using available face to face time effectively and employees agreeing that telework does not negatively impact their productivity or work ethic.

**Table 5**

*Army University Telework Survey Responses Relevant for Kotter Accelerator, Sustain Acceleration*

Question	Positive responses	
	2022	2023
Because of the ability to telework, I am more likely to recommend working at the Army University.	69%	88.1%*
The teleworking policy has increased my willingness to continue working for Army University.	NA	74.6%

Because I telework or work remotely, my work ethic is that I work the same amount or harder for the organization as I did when I was in-person.	NA	99.2%
While teleworking or working remotely, I complete the same amount or more work compared to when I am in the office.	74.9%	72.4%
My leadership takes advantage of the time together in the office to effectively utilize face-to-face interaction.	NA	87.5%
My students are able to communicate with me as effectively or more effectively while I telework or remote work, compared with classroom face-to-face instruction or training.	43.7%	42.6%
My students are receiving the same quality of education or training in the online environment as when they would if they were being taught face-to-face in my classroom	41.3%	56.2%

*Note. \* Denotes a scale change from 5-point Likert in 2022 to True/False scale used in 2023. May appear more positive.*

**Institute Change**

“Accelerator 8 helps institutionalize wins, integrating them into the hierarchy’s processes, systems, procedures, and behavior – in effect, helping to infuse changes into the culture of the organization.” (Kotter, 2014, p.33) This final accelerator is incredibly important, as it is the one that codifies the change in policy and practice and turns what is new into the norm over a period of time.

The Army University has worked to institutionalize change in many different ways and at different levels. Critically, the updated telework and remote work policy is currently in the publication process, solidifying the lessons learned from the second telework survey into perpetuity. Supporting this policy is an alignment of champions for change at each echelon helping to institutionalize this organizational change. To do this, investment in organizational leaders continues in the Leading Remote and Hybrid Teams training course. At the time of this writing, half of all supervisors in CAC have completed the course, with the remainder to be complete by the end of the calendar year. The process of incorporating telework into the Army University is also presented as a case study during the Strategic Leadership Course taught by the Army Management Staff College, to educate Senior Army Leaders on the possibilities and paths to culture change. And notably, the employee face-to-face sessions with the Deputy Provost are still occurring at a rate of about 1x/year during site visits, ensuring employees have access to higher level leaders, and among other topics, that teleworking and remote work needs of the supervisors and employees of suborganizations are continually being addressed.

By making the telework policy available to all employees at the very beginning of their employment, the program and requirements can be showcased as an element of the existing organizational culture. Educating employees about telework at the earliest opportunity, ensures understanding and transparency. The telework survey and results are continually briefed during New Employee Orientations. The telework contract and the telework training requirements are on the New Employee Required Checklist and available on the CAC website, demonstrating permanency and leader support of the program.

The Army University is currently investing in new capabilities and expanded technology for both hardware and software. These innovations will make better use of the in-person spaces and classrooms



it does provide, while streamlining for future use of technology, such as Army wi-fi. Simultaneously, software upgrades to include rollouts of Windows 11, will continue to enhance or augment telework and remote work capabilities into the future.

**Table 6** highlights some of the positive employee responses that reflect an ongoing cultural change in Army University in embracing the use of telework and remote work. For example, a majority of respondents expressed an interest in remote work, and a sizeable minority agreed that the quality of online instruction is improving year on year (another 56.7% were neutral). Respondents are also generally positive about telework being good for Army University. Finally, while supervisors' feeling about telework are often a key stumbling block to long-term success, supervisor respondents to the survey indicated they support the policy and that supervisors and their subordinates trust each other. These measures suggest not only a positive attitude towards the experience of telework but provide support for a cultural change.

**Table 6**

*Army University Telework Survey Responses Relevant for Kotter Accelerator, Institute Change.*

Question	Positive responses	
	2022	2023
Please indicate your interest in future (or continued) remote employment by the Army University.	NA	84.3%
Compared to last year, my instruction or training online has improved	NA	38.8%
I see the Army University Telework and Remote Work Policy as a step in the right direction for our organization.	89.6%	86.1%
It is my perception that my leadership trusts me to telework or remote work.	88%	80.8%
I trust my leadership to telework.	90.9%	89.5%
As a supervisor, I am in support of the Army University Telework and Remote Work Policy.	86%	83.7%

## Discussion

The COVID-19 Pandemic required radical rethinking of working practices, with little lead time. While many workplaces adopted telework during the emergency, successfully transitioning to permanent change requires both capitalizing on the benefits and overcoming the challenges of telework. Data from the two Army University Telework surveys suggest the benefits and challenges for Army University employees and leadership are typical of those identified in previous research: telework can be seen positively by employees (Ameen, Papagiannidis, Hosany, & Gentina, 2023; Mullins et al., 2022; Ramirez 2022) and improve retention (Lewis et al., 2023), but leadership attitudes and flexibility play a major role in whether telework adoption is successful (Ropke 2023; Adekoya, Adisa, & Aiyenitaju, 2022; Mullins et al., 2022; Sanders 2022; Contreras et al., 2020).

Evidence from both telework surveys indicates positive findings, but the surveys were not completed by every individual within the organization. This means there may be sizeable pockets of individuals who were not represented in the survey and thus did not share their opinions or experiences. Perhaps a silent

contingent exists, who are not in favor of telework, but recognized the momentum of change. This is a limitation of survey research, and despite widespread communication and advertisement on the availability of the survey, to include social media posts on the Army University website, the choice to participate in any survey, telework or otherwise, ultimately rests with the individual. Organizational learning requires the organization to accurately see itself and to leverage collected empirical data to sustain the momentum and fix needed issues, while bringing all employees onboard. Systematic removal of barriers and innovative problem solving to create organizational change cannot be deployed if the issue is not brought forth by employees and then actioned by leaders.

### **Telework as organizational learning for a learning organization.**

Given the challenges involved, the adoption and sustainment of the Army University Telework Policy can be seen as an important example of innovative organizational learning in support of the broader goal for the Army of being a *learning organization*.

This paper has highlighted the ways in which Army University telework adoption followed key steps needed for successful organizational learning. We can also consider the complementary evidence that telework adoption has supported the dimensions of a learning organization. As described earlier, the five key dimensions of a learning organization denoted by Calton et al. (2021) revolve around themes of *innovation* and *collaboration*: Cultivate Learning Support, Orient toward a shared future, Explore new perspectives, Synchronize capabilities, and Manage organizational knowledge. The Kotter Accelerator steps that supported telework adoption echo some of these dimensions, such as Cultivate Learning Support (Build a Guiding Coalition), Orient toward a shared future (Form Strategic Vision and initiatives), and Manage organizational knowledge (Institute Change).

Additionally, telework adoption benefits the Army as a learning organization through its second order effects. Army University is a distributed organization, with locations across not only the United States, but also the world. Army University is also a hierarchical organization, with nested structures based on military hierarchy for both educational and administrative practices. The advent of telework has created or expanded available technology for working, managing, meeting and teaching in virtual or hybrid environments. This new infrastructure has enabled better communication and collaboration both laterally across the institution and vertically through levels of seniority: Adopting technologies such as Microsoft Teams has not only allowed individuals in remote locations to meet more easily but has also provided greater ability to identify potential collaborators and contacts with relevant interests. Teams has also enabled the creation of distributed working groups, communities of interest and committees with a size and diversity not possible before the pandemic. High-level meetings are available for attendance via Teams that would have previously been closed to many levels of the organization. Large-scale hybrid meetings are possible for both administration and for the exchange of innovative ideas that would not have previously been considered. Virtual learning has increased the scale of PME and Army Civilian educational opportunities and has offered opportunities such as speakers from remote locations who otherwise could not participate. Many of these collaborative innovations *could* have been possible without widespread telework and virtual instruction, but the reality is that the infrastructure required was not created or maintained until the tipping point of organization-wide telework.

### **Conclusions**

For the Army to thrive as a learning organization, it is critical to support organizational learning opportunities. Given the success of telework adoption across the Army University, we suggest that the lessons of this case study be considered in the continued drive for the Army to be a learning organization. In short, successful organizational learning underpins the successful learning organization. This case study may be used by higher level organizations or re-applied at Army University during times of required rapid organizational learning and culture change (e.g., the widespread rollout of Artificial Intelligence applications). However, even as we highlight the success of telework adoption, we have no evidence that Kotter's Accelerator steps or any other model of organizational learning was considered or applied during telework implementation. Rather, we see the connections to key steps in successful organizational learning only in retrospect. Moving forward, it is critical for Army University and the wider Army to not leave organizational learning to chance. Successful innovation is unlikely to occur without systematic guidance and strong leadership, especially when significant culture change is required.

## References

- About Army University: Army University*. About Army University | Army University. (n.d.). <https://armyuniversity.edu/About>
- Adekoya, O. D., Adisa, T. A., & Aiyenitaju, O. (2022). Going forward: remote working in the post-COVID-19 era. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 44(6), 1410-1427.
- Ameen, N., Papagiannidis, S., Hosany, A. S., & Gentina, E. (2023). It's part of the "new normal": Does a global pandemic change employees' perception of teleworking?. *Journal of Business Research*, 164, 113956.
- Brown, R. B. (Feb, 2015). The Army University White Paper.
- Brown, C., Smith, P., Arduengo, N., & Taylor, M. (2016). Trusting telework in the federal government. *The qualitative report*, 21(1), 87.
- Burnes, B. (2005). Complexity theories and organizational change. *International journal of management reviews*, 7(2), 73-90.
- Buller, J. L. (2015). *Change leadership in higher education: A practical guide to academic transformation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Calton, M. A., Freeman, T. E., Cronin, C.B. Thompson, Chelsey, Warner, Karyn, Morath, Ray, and Smith, M. (March, 2021). Development and Validation of the U.S. Army Learning Organization Maturity Model. (Technical Report 1395) Army Research Institute and ICF International.
- Contreras, F., Baykal, E., & Abid, G. (2020). E-leadership and teleworking in times of COVID-19 and beyond: What we know and where do we go. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, 590271.
- De Vries, H., Tummers, L., & Bekkers, V. (2019). The benefits of teleworking in the public sector: reality or rhetoric?. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 39(4), 570-593.
- Gerras, S. J. (2002). *The army as a learning organization* (p. 0029). Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College.
- Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Kotter, J. P. (2014). *XLR\*: Accelerate*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Kwon, M., & Jeon, S. H. (2020). Do leadership commitment and performance-oriented culture matter for federal teleworker satisfaction with telework programs?. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 40(1), 36-55.
- Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics: concept, method and reality in social science; social equilibria and social change. *Human Relations*, 1, 5-41.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001872674700100103>
- Lewis, G. B., Pizarro-Bore, X., & Emidy, M. B. (2023). The impact of telework on the satisfaction of US federal workers. *Public Management Review*, 1-17.
- Harker Martin, B., & MacDonnell, R. (2012). Is telework effective for organizations? A meta-analysis of empirical research on perceptions of telework and organizational outcomes. *Management Research Review*, 35(7), 602-616.
- Mullins, L. B., Scutelnicu, G., & Charbonneau, É. (2022). A qualitative study of pandemic-induced telework: Federal workers thrive, working parents struggle. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 46(3), 258-281.
- Offstein, E. H., Morwick, J. M., & Koskinen, L. (2010). Making telework work: leading people and leveraging technology for competitive advantage. *Strategic HR review*, 9(2), 32-37.
- Örtenblad, A. (2018). What does "learning organization" mean?. *The Learning Organization*, 25(3), 150-158.
- Perkins (March, 2015). The Army University Strategic Business Plan.

- Peters, P., Ligthart, P. E., Bardoel, A., & Poutsma, E. (2016). 'Fit' for telework'? Cross-cultural variance and task-control explanations in organizations' formal telework practices. *The International Journal of human resource management*, 27(21), 2582-2603.
- Petersen, Steven A. and Bartel, Susan M. (2020) When Culture and Change Collide In Higher Education: A Case Study at One University. *Administrative Issues Journal*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 2 , Article 2. Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/aij/vol10/iss2/2>
- Ramirez, S. A. (2022). *Exploring Productivity and Workplace Satisfaction Outcomes for Employees Participating in Telework at the Air Force Acquisition Management and Integration Center (AMIC)* (Doctoral dissertation, Acquisition Research Program).
- Röpke, A. K. (2022). Managerial factors influencing long-term Work From Home adoption in small and medium-sized enterprises post-pandemic. (Master's Degree dissertation, Information systems and Technologies Management, Universidade Nova de Lisboa)
- Sanders, G. (2022). *Leadership Strategies and Behaviors that Support Career Advancement for Teleworkers*. Liberty University.
- Silva-C, A. (2019). The attitude of managers toward telework, why is it so difficult to adopt it in organizations?. *Technology in Society*, 59, 101133.
- The Army University Policy Memorandum 5, Telework and Remote Work (October 20, 2022)
- Tsang, E. W. (1997). Organizational learning and the learning organization: a dichotomy between descriptive and prescriptive research. *Human relations*, 50(1), 73-89.
- Tushman, M. L., & O'Reilly III, C. A. (1996). Ambidextrous organizations: Managing evolutionary and revolutionary change. *California management review*, 38(4), 8-29.
- Vega, R. P., Anderson, A. J., & Kaplan, S. A. (2015). A within-person examination of the effects of telework. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 30, 313-323.