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IMPLEMENTING POST-PANDEMIC, MAXIMIZED TELEWORK INITIATIVES WITHIN THE USTRANSCOM ACQUISITION DIRECTORATE

June 2021

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INITIATIVES WITHIN THE USTRANSCOM ACQUISITION DIRECTORATE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for maximized telework throughout the world, and this trend continues to evolve as the new standard. Due to system limitations, varying degrees of experience, and less than adequate supervision capabilities, this new normal has been met with some resistance; however, there has also been an overwhelming success in United States Transportation Command Acquisition Directorate's (USTRANSCOM-AQ) ability to execute their contracting mission while teleworking.

The current telework environment was implemented swiftly for safety reasons. After the pandemic, the world will see many lasting historical effects of this time, one being telework as a "new business practice" normal. Private industry will likely eliminate office space, thus reducing overhead, and move toward permanent telework. For the USTRANSCOM-AQ Directorate to recruit and retain the most talented contracting professionals, they will need to offer this benefit to compete with private industry. This analysis examines the current satisfaction rate of teleworking within USTRANSCOM-AQ and what additional policy elements, such as motivation and empowerment, IT resources and collaboration tools, and training, are needed to fully implement maximized telework initiatives post-pandemic.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BYOD	bring your own device
COOP	continuity of operations
COPE	company owned, personally enabled
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CVR	Commercial Virtual Remote
DAWIA	Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act
DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	Government Accountability Office
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IT	information technology
MSPB	Merit Systems Protection Board
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
OSBP	Business Support and Policy Division
PEO-T	Program Executive Office
TCAQ-C	Contract Airlift Division
TCAQ-DPO	Distribution Process Owner Support Division
TCAQ-I	Sealift Services Division
TCAQ-P	Business Support and Policy Division
TCAQ-R	Specialized Transportation and Support Division
USTRANSCOM-AQ	United States Transportation Command Acquisition Directorate
VOIP	Voice Over Internet Protocol
VPN	Virtual Private Network

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

In March 2020, there was an immediate need for the health and safety of the United States Transportation Command Acquisition Directorate (USTRANSCOM-AQ) to implement a maximized telework environment for all employees due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. This unexpected pandemic caused an almost immediate shutdown of the economy and changed the lives of everyone for the near and possibly long-term future. One of the main effects of the pandemic was the immediate need to social distance from each other and, at the very beginning of the outbreak, even isolate from the rest of the population. All non-essential workers were sent home and many essential workers, who had the ability, were told to immediately start teleworking until further notice. This group of essential workers, who immediately started teleworking, included the USTRANSCOM-AQ personnel. As of May 2021, USTRANSCOM-AQ is still in a maximized telework status and will continue in this environment at least until June 2021 with the potential for another extension dependent on necessity, vaccination availability, and a multitude of other factors. In the first 14 months under these COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and regulations, USTRANSCOM-AQ has successfully completed the mission but that has come with some struggles, as well as unexpected successes in the transition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for maximized telework throughout the world and will continue to progress as the new standard. The current telework environment was brought on by a worldwide pandemic and has been implemented swiftly, not always efficiently, for safety reasons. Due to system limitations, varying degrees of experience, and less than adequate supervision capabilities, this new normal has been met with some resistance from all levels. However, an improved work/life balance, reduced commuting times, and employee health and safety have also resulted in most of the workforce welcoming the new telework policies with open arms. Due to the pandemic, private industry will likely incorporate telework as a new business practice and benefit for employees going forward. After the pandemic is over, for USTRANSCOM-AQ to recruit

and retain the best and brightest employees in these contracting positions, a maximized telework environment will most likely be necessary for USTRANSCOM-AQ to compete with private industry telework policies.

B. PURPOSE AND LIMITATIONS

This study explores USTRANSCOM-AQ's current contracting workforce satisfaction level with the telework framework in response to the pandemic. It also ascertains the perception of the future post-pandemic telework environment, within USTRANSCOM-AQ, for use as a recruitment and retention tool. Federal News Network published an article regarding a new report, released on March 31, 2021, from the Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General. This report revealed telework had a positive impact for DOD employees during the pandemic with "88% of DOD employees shifted to telework" during this period (Maucione, 2021, para. 2). The article also stated, "A total of 47% of respondents said their productivity increased during maximum telework, 41.1% said their productivity stayed the same and only 11.9% said their productivity decreased" (Maucione, 2021, para. 4). Respondents also reported a high degree of "satisfaction with eliminating unnecessary meetings and cutting out distractions at the office, better sleep, less stress, and a better work-life balance" (Maucione, 2021, para. 5). It is not surprising with government system complexity, most of the adverse viewpoints of telework regarded IT support; and with home access, many respondents reported heavier workloads (Maucione, 2021, para. 5). This project examines whether USTRANSCOM-AQ personnel share the same satisfaction levels, motivation factors, and face the same challenges as found in the 2021 DOD Inspector General report, as well as what their perceptions are of implementing maximized telework post-pandemic. This project focuses on the analysis of private industry telework best practices, as they can be implemented within USTRANSCOM-AQ, and recommendations limited to USTRANSCOM-AQ job series, 1102 personnel, which does not include an analysis of the program management office.

C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question is, “To what extent does implementing a full-time, post-pandemic telework policy affect the contracting workforce’s satisfaction perceptions within USTRANSCOM-AQ.” The secondary research questions are, “What are the full-time telework policy elements that affect the contracting workforce satisfaction perceptions?” and “What are the full-time telework policy elements that can be utilized for implementation of maximized telework as a future recruitment and retention tool?”

D. RESEARCH STRUCTURE

The research includes a qualitative data analysis used in the form of personal experience to identify trends, strengths, and weaknesses of the current environment. Quantitative data analysis is used, in the form of a survey, to identify USTRANSCOM-AQ’s satisfaction level with the current maximized telework policy, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; motivation and empowerment satisfaction levels in the current telework environment; what additional IT resources or collaboration tools are needed to successfully execute USTRANSCOM’s contracting mission in a remote environment; and what additional training is available and sought after to improve employees’ ability to thrive in a full-time telework environment. Proven techniques, published studies, and surveys are analyzed to identify how to train and motivate employees in a remote environment. This analysis will determine if USTRANSCOM-AQ has the necessary resources to successfully implement permanent maximized telework, not only in response to the COVID-19 pandemic but post-pandemic to continue to compete with private industry in recruiting and retaining the most talented workforce.

E. SURVEY APPROVAL AND RELEASE RESTRICTION

The survey was approved by USTRANSCOM-AQ leadership and the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and determined it did not meet the federal definition of “research” and therefore did not require IRB review and approval. Being determined as “not research” allows for the results to only be shared within NPS and the sponsoring stakeholder and subordinate offices without restriction, and with other U.S. government agencies on a need-to-know basis.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to highlight USTRANSCOM-AQ's mission, organizational makeup, and the 1102, contracting job series requirements. Additionally, this literature review will identify reputable sources, articles, and research to support the analysis of current COVID-19 telework policies, practices, and procedures for the government and telework best practices of private industry.

A. USTRANSCOM-AQ

1. Mission

USTRANSCOM-AQ's overall mission statement is, "A world-class acquisition workforce partnering with industry and customers to develop and execute innovative acquisition solutions supporting the Command's full-spectrum, deployment and distribution mission" (United States Transportation Command [USTC] Military, n.d.). USTRANSCOM-AQ is broken down into six contracting divisions to include the Distribution Process Owner Support Division (TCAQ-DPO), the Business Support and Policy Division (TCAQ-P), the Office of Small Business Programs (OSBP), the Contract Airlift Division (TCAQ-C), the Specialized Transportation and Support Division (TCAQ-R), and the Sealift Services Division (TCAQ-I) and one program management division, Program Executive Office (PEO-T). The PEO-T Division will not be included in this study as they are not in the 1102, contracting job series. Each division has its own mission statement, and they are as follows:

- (1) **TCAQ-DPO** "Provides procurement and contract administration for software development and related IT support services; Advisory & Assistance Services; and management support services" (United States Transportation Command [USTC] Public, n.d.).
- (2) **TCAQ-P** is the "Business advisor for transportation and related procurements. Ensures USTRANSCOM maintains the highest ethical procurement standards to achieve world-class, global warfighter support.

Provides expertise on acquisition policy, procedures and strategies” (USTC Public, n.d.).

- (3) **OSBP** is “The advocate for small business utilization within USTRANSCOM and an important source of information tailored to assist small businesses” (USTC Public, n.d.).
- (4) **TCAQ-C** “Provides procurement and administration of domestic and international passenger and cargo airlift requirements in support of DOD during states of war and peace” (USTC Public, n.d.).
- (5) **TCAQ-R** “Provides responsive acquisition and business advisory support for specialized transportation and support programs serving DOD customers worldwide” (USTC Public, n.d.).
- (6) **TCAQ-I** “Provides business advice and procurement of sealift inter-modal ocean transportation services in support of DOD’s peace and wartime movement of cargo worldwide” (USTC Public, n.d.).
- (7) **PEO-T** “One Acquisition Team focused on cost, schedule, performance, and risk to develop, field, and sustain effective enabling capabilities supporting USTRANSCOM” (USTC Public, n.d.).

2. Contracting 1102 Requirements

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) provides the classification and qualification requirements for the 1102, Contracting job series. The basic requirements to become a contract professional in the 1102 job series for grades GS-5 through GS-12 are a 4-year bachelor’s degree, not major specific, or a minimal blend of 24 semester hours in the following focus areas: “accounting, business, finance, law, contracts, purchasing, economics, industrial management, marketing, quantitative methods, or organization and management” (Office of Personnel Management [OPM], n.d.).

The OPM website also outlines the minimum requirements to obtain a GS-13 and above 1102 position. Along with 4-years of experience in contracting, to include one year of specialized experience at or equal to the work performed at the next lower graded level, one must also complete any mandatory training assigned by the head of the agency (OPM, n.d.). As with all government positions, one must also possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to successfully perform in the position (OPM, n.d.). The same education

requirements, as mentioned in the previous paragraph for the GS-5 through GS-12 positions, also apply for a GS-13 and above 1102 position (OPM, n.d.).

3. USTRANSCOM-AQ Workforce Summary

USTRANSCOM-AQ is led by a two-star equivalent Senior Executive Service (SES) member who serves as the director and a one-star equivalent SES who serves as the deputy director. There are currently 135 contracting (1102 job series) employees assigned to USTRANSCOM-AQ and these individuals are spread out through each division identified in paragraph II.A.1., with the exception of the PEO-T Division. Each division is assigned a Division Chief, a Deputy Division Chief, and the necessary 1102 professionals, to include Branch Chiefs and Team Leads to execute its mission.

B. CURRENT GOVERNMENT TELEWORK POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND RECOMMENDED FUTURE PROCEDURES

1. Current Policies

“The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 defines telework as a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of their position and other authorized activities from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work” (Rosenberg, 2020). The Government Accountability Office (GAO) completed a study and testified before the U.S. Senate highlighting the benefits of telework to federal agencies (Rosenberg, 2020). These benefits included improving human capital with employee recruitment and retention, eliminating the overhead cost of “brick and mortar” office space, and the work/life balance telework provides employees and their families (Rosenberg, 2020). During disruptions, such as the current pandemic or natural disasters for example, telework is a proven method to execute the mission efficiently and effectively (Rosenberg, 2020).

2. Current Practices

The current USTRANSCOM-AQ telework practice in response to the pandemic is a 100% remote environment with maximized flexibility. This flexibility includes working outside of previous core hours to allow employees to tend to childcare needs and the ability

to use physical fitness time outside of the normal military base parameters. Although this did not happen immediately, USTRANSCOM-AQ personnel are now permitted to bring home office equipment to set up a dedicated workspace within their homes very similar to the office environment. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, employees and supervisors have learned to navigate communicating in a remote environment.

USTRANSCOM-AQ struggled at the beginning of our current telework status to get some leadership to trust the workforce to complete the mission in response to the pandemic. As the existing telework posture continued to be extended, now through June 2021, the organization was able to realize the success the workforce was able to achieve in a maximized telework status which led to senior managers offering more support to the maximized telework environment. Management support is not the only resource needed for a successful telework environment, adequate training for a remote workforce is also essential.

During this literature review, two immediately available Office of Personnel Management (OPM) interactive telework courses were identified for DOD employees, one for employees and one for managers. The first is “Telework Fundamentals – Employee Training” which “gives employees a brief, practical introduction to telework. It offers tools for deciding whether telework is a good fit for you and for the specific job you hold. It also teaches strategies for teleworking efficiently, staying “plugged in” to the office, and managing interactions with co-workers and customers” (Office of Personnel Management [OPM], 2020). The second training offered is, “Telework Fundamentals – Manager Training” which “introduces managers to basic telework concepts. It walks managers through the process of developing a program, selecting employees for telework, and managing effectively in a telework environment” (OPM, 2020).

3. Recommended Future Procedures

A statement by Michelle B. Rosenberg, Acting Director, Strategic Issues, identified “seven key practices that can help ensure the success of telework programs” (Rosenberg, 2020). Rosenberg’s recommended practices include appointing an individual to manage the telework program with “program planning” which includes setting goals and ensuring

there is necessary funding available to meet the needs of the program (Rosenberg, 2020). The second practice is establishing “telework policies,” which include formal telework agreements and establishing impartial telework approval guidance (Rosenberg, 2020). The third best practice federal agencies should implement is “performance management” which is enforcing the same performance standards for both teleworkers and non-teleworkers with established guidelines and expectations (Rosenberg, 2020). Another key practice is achieving “managerial support” from all levels of management; and if there is, in fact, opposition to telework from managers, identifying the reasons and making the necessary alterations to improve it (Rosenberg, 2020). The fifth practice identified was “training and publicizing” because education on telework best practices and transparency of the program by informing the workforce of all policies, changes, and expectations keeps everyone on the same page without ambiguity (Rosenberg, 2020). “Technology” is another success factor because inadequate technology will not allow teleworkers to perform in a remote environment efficiently or successfully (Rosenberg, 2020). The last practice the GAO identified was “program evaluation” from program inception and throughout the life of the program (Rosenberg, 2020). “Program evaluation” facilitates identifying problems and making adjustments for improvements to the program in a timely manner (Rosenberg, 2020).

C. PRIVATE INDUSTRY BEST PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

It is essential to identify what resources are needed to successfully implement a permanent maximized telework environment while still supporting USTRANSCOM’s mission to support the warfighter in their contractual needs. Support is imperative in making a telework program successful (Kowalski & Swanson, 2005). “For a teleworking program to be successful, support must come from all levels within the organization, starting at the top” (Kowalski & Swanson, 2005). Higher satisfaction levels are reported for teleworkers who are also provided technological support (Haines et al., 2002). It is also important for teleworkers to set up a home environment at least equivalent to their office worker counterparts. This requires a telework organization to fund and supply the necessary tools and office equipment such as phones and computers (Ward & Shabha, 2001, as cited in Kowalski & Swanson, 2005). Along with equipment, another resource for

teleworking involves the suitability of the home office space. “Findings indicate that the suitability of the working place at home strengthens all measured outcomes of telework (overall satisfaction with telework, perceived advantages of teleworking, career opportunities, and increases self-reported productivity). Therefore, the establishment of a dedicated workspace at home should be understood as an important issue in the telework framework” (Nakrošienė et al., 2019).

Commercial training programs were also identified through this research and “in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak,” findcourses.com stated, “organizations are adapting to the quickly changing professional landscape and employees are building the skills they need going forward. At the same time, people around the world are taking important measures to socially isolate which means that learning is rapidly moving from classroom-based courses to online formats” (Findcourses, 2020). This website provides their selection of the top online courses they think will help organizations stay successful to include a short synopsis of the training offered, contact information, and price information which is another resource of available training (Findcourses, 2020). “Support,” in itself, also includes training; and it is important both employees and all levels of leadership put an emphasis on allotting necessary time and resources to remote environment type training (Kowalski & Swanson, 2005). This form of “support” is critical to a telework program’s success (Kowalski & Swanson, 2005).

D. JOB SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT, MOTIVATION, AND HUMAN CAPITAL THEORIES

1. Job Satisfaction

Measuring employee job satisfaction in a remote environment can be difficult without the face-to-face communication USTRANSCOM-AQ has experienced in the past. Maximized telework within USTRANSCOM-AQ is an organizational change and senior leadership should routinely measure employee job satisfaction to ascertain the effect of any company operations and changes that might adversely affect employees (Brady & Prentice, 2019). When more attention is paid to employees, especially positive attention, attitudes

toward supervision improve, which can lead to increased productivity. This is also known as the Hawthorne Effect (Brady & Prentice, 2019).

2. Motivation

In the Review of Public Administration report “The Telework Divide: Managerial and Personnel Challenges of Telework” the author investigated the advantages and disadvantages of telework using data reported by the OPM and the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) (Mahler, 2012). The MSPB reported 86% of employees who routinely telework report, “the experience had a positive impact on their satisfaction with their job and organization” (Mahler, 2012). Similarly, an OPM survey from 2011 found “compared with employees not able to telework, more teleworkers report greater levels of job satisfaction (76% vs. 68%), would recommend their organization as a good place to work (75% vs. 66%), and are less likely to express an intention to leave their current organizations (74% vs. 68%)” (Mahler, 2012). Regarding “the impact of work-life programs on motivation,” this report, “found that organizations are likely to have high levels of commitment when their employees are satisfied with teleworking arrangements” (Mahler, 2012).

OECD Publishing issued a working paper titled, “Telework Before the COVID-19 Pandemic: Trends and Drivers of Differences Across the EU.” Within this research it determined organizations’ decision to scale-up longer-term telework after the pandemic, would depend on the effect working from home had on workers’ productivity since the pandemic outbreak which is still largely unknown. Evidence suggests that in a non-pandemic world, working from home can sustain, or even enhance, worker’s perceived productivity by increasing their job satisfaction, autonomy, and motivation (Milasi et al., 2021). From another perspective, this paper indicated workers who struggled to perform in a telework environment during the pandemic could create a negative spiral in which managers, observing decreasing levels of productivity, could increase levels of close monitoring and control on workers, which could then lead to drops in employee motivation, further impairing productivity and the chances of more widespread telework in the future (Milasi et al., 2021).

3. Human Capital

In 2013, federal agencies were able to improve their human capital, by offering the flexibility telework provided, to over one million federal employees as an added benefit (Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2016). In 2016, the GAO conducted a study to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of these federal agency telework programs (GAO, 2016). The 2016 GAO report assessed a sample of six agencies based on “agency reported cost savings, identification as a telework leader by OPM, recipient of a 2013 Mobile Work Exchange Award, reported use of telework to achieve agency goals, core missions related to telework benefits, and agency size” (GAO, 2016). The results of the report identified “improved human capital (recruitment/retention), improved work-life balance, increased productivity, reduced utilities, reduced commuting costs/transit subsidies, reduced employee absences, continuity of operations, reduced real estate, and a positive environmental impact” were common benefits associated with the agency telework programs (GAO, 2016).

4. Conclusion

Based on the literature review, private industry has a long history of remote work in comparison to the government. The government can adopt many of its best practices, regarding motivation and empowerment, going forward. The most important aspect is learning proven leadership/motivation techniques that can be implemented in a workforce that, until recently, had an exceedingly small percentage of employees working in a remote environment.

With technology always evolving, I think there are gaps in studies and research with regards to the specific IT resources and tools teleworkers require in the current environment such as cameras and virtual platforms. Webcams, dual monitors, upgraded IT systems, and virtual platforms have proven to be more essential than fax machines during this current telework state. The government will also require additional security measures for these tools to protect sensitive information which is often not the case when researching telework in private industry.

There is a need for additional research on commercial training programs, beyond what the government currently offers for teleworking, that digs deeper into working in this environment while still making the DOD's mission a success. Identifying the most advantageous and cost-effective training programs offered in the commercial market will be beneficial so USTRANSCOM-AQ can offer a standardized and formal telework training program that goes beyond what OPM offers.

This project will focus on several of the seven key practices outlined by Ms. Rosenberg for a successful telework program. Through the following research, it will also identify the current satisfaction level, motivation and empowerment perceptions, additional IT resources and collaboration tools needed, and desired training to successfully implement a permanent maximized telework environment at USTRANSCOM-AQ.

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III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. INTRODUCTION

In addition to the qualitative data analysis in the form of personal experience, proven techniques, and published surveys to determine best practices for employee satisfaction and retention perceptions; this project also conducted quantitative data analysis, in the form of a survey (APPENDIX), to identify USTRANSCOM-AQ's satisfaction level with the current maximized telework policy, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; current motivation and empowerment satisfaction, additional IT resources or collaboration tools needed to successfully execute USTRANSCOM's contracting mission; and interest in additional training focused on a remote workforce.

B. GOALS

The goals of this analysis are to determine what USTRANSCOM-AQ's current satisfaction level is; if USTRANSCOM-AQ personnel feel motivated and empowered in the current COVID-19 telework environment; what, if any, additional IT resources or collaboration tools are desired; and to gauge interest in additional training focused on a remote workforce. This analysis will also determine if USTRANSCOM-AQ has the necessary resources to successfully implement permanent maximized telework, not only in response to the COVID-19 pandemic but post-pandemic to continue to compete with private industry in recruiting and retaining the most talented workforce.

C. SURVEY DESIGN, SUBJECTS, AND LIMITATIONS

1. Survey Design

The survey was created using Google Forms with the option to fill in a survey on a Microsoft Word Document. This survey included a total of twenty questions broken down into six multiple-choice questions, six "yes" or "no" questions, and eight short answer questions. The short answer questions allowed the respondents to expand and provide insight into their multiple-choice and "yes" or "no" answers.

2. Survey Subjects

The survey was emailed to a small sample of job series, 1102, personnel assigned to USTRANSCOM-AQ. This sample did not include non-1102 personnel assigned to the program management office within USTRANSCOM-AQ. Survey subjects had the option to remain anonymous if they used the Google Form option. Before reviewing answers on any Microsoft Word Document surveys, the surveys were saved as a number version, without any identifying markers to maintain anonymity.

3. Survey Limitations

This survey's limitations include answers from only a small percentage (23.7%) of the USTRANSCOM-AQ workforce which results in a margin of error of 15.19% with a 95% confidence level. There is also a limitation because the survey was anonymous and the ability to reach back to an employee for clarification or an example on an answer was not possible.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the survey design, subjects, and limitations, the following chapter will outline the results and analysis of the survey.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH

A. INTRODUCTION

This survey focused on the areas of employee satisfaction in the current telework environment and preferences on the future of telework, current motivation and empowerment satisfaction levels, IT/collaboration tools available and necessary to execute USTRANSCOM's contracting mission, and training available and desired to assist employees in the transition to maximized telework and enhance their capabilities. The results were compiled and a summary is included. Figures 1-12 contain results of the survey, with the exception of the short answer questions.

B. SURVEY PARTICIPATION

The research, to investigate the current telework environment and telework preferences for the future, was conducted utilizing a survey e-mailed out to a sample size of 46 out of 135 current USTRANSCOM-AQ, job series 1102 employees, and 32 responses were received which accounts for 23.7% of the workforce.

C. RESULTS OF SURVEY

a. *Overall Satisfaction*

- (1) How satisfied are you with USTRANSCOM-AQ's current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

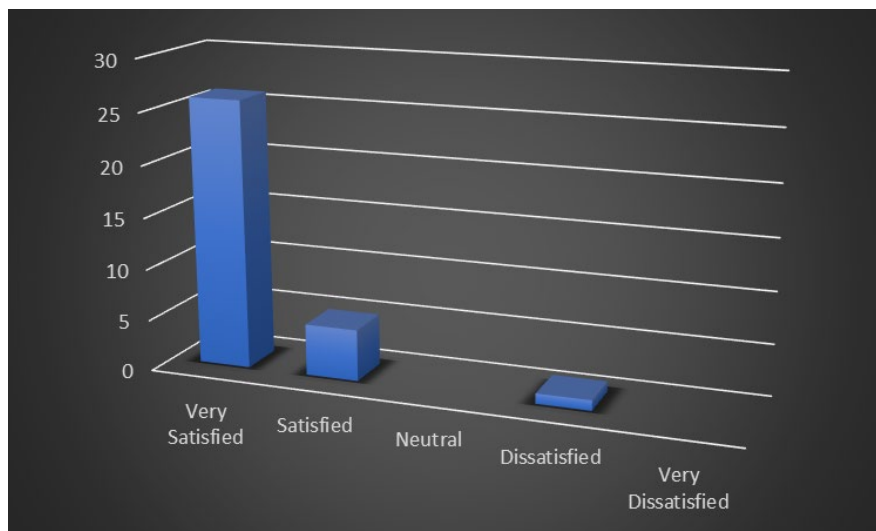


Figure 1. Current Satisfaction Level Survey Results

- (2) How satisfied are you with your direct supervisor's engagement during the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

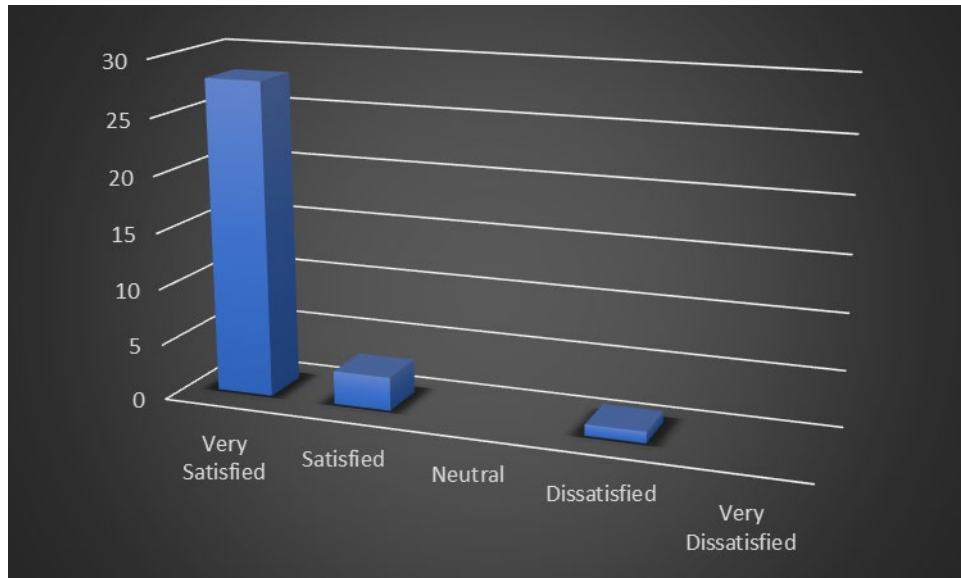


Figure 2. Current Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor Survey Results

- (3) How satisfied are you with upper management's engagement during the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

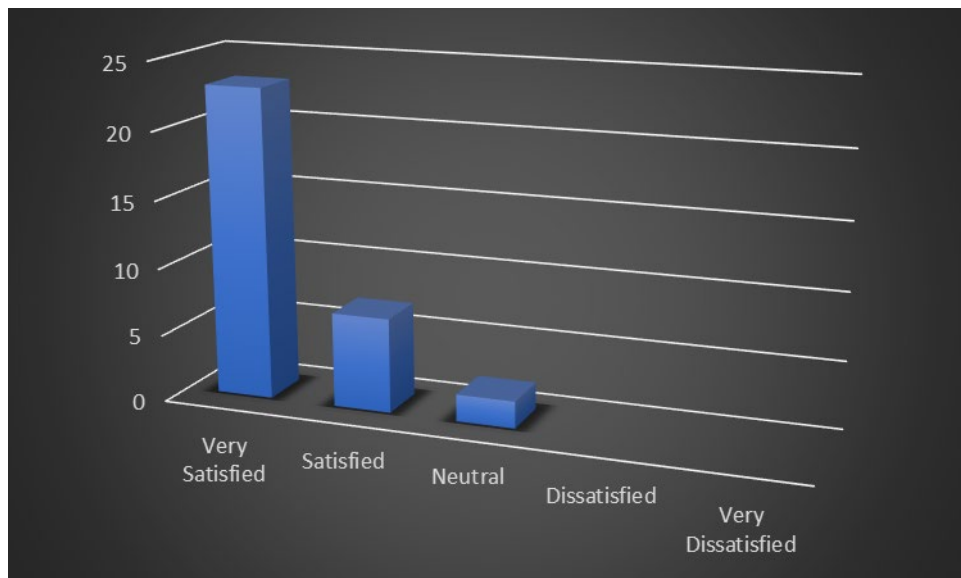


Figure 3. Current Satisfaction with Upper Management Engagement Results

- (4) If given the opportunity, after the COVID-19 pandemic, would you choose to stay in a maximized and/or permanent telework status?

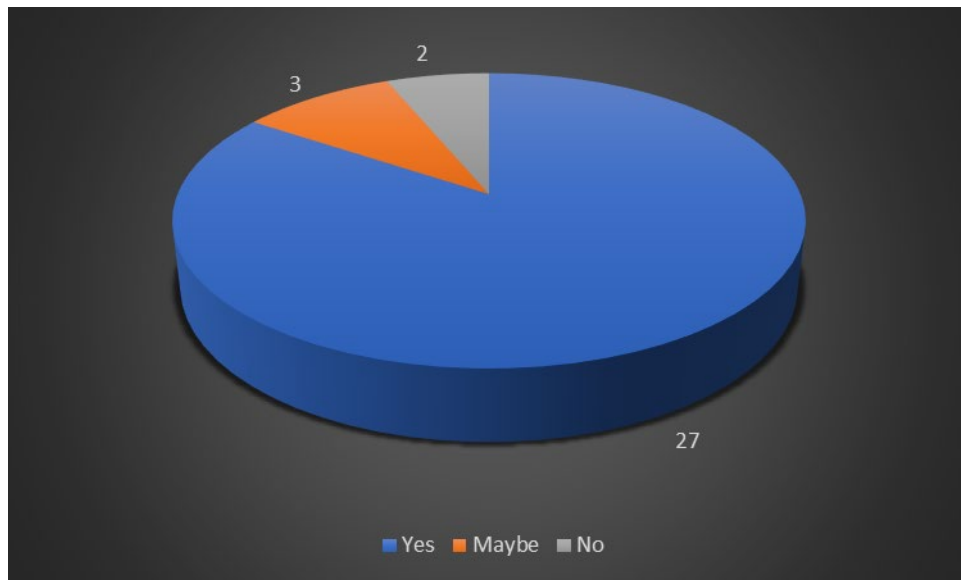


Figure 4. Future Telework Preference Survey Results

- (5) Has the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic improved your work/life balance? If so, in what way?

This was a short answer response and the respondents provided the following examples on how their work/life balance has improved: Less commuting time; ability to keep up with home responsibilities during the lunch break; with less time traveling comes more time with family, ability to complete personal life activities with ease; flexibility for school-aged children drop off and pick up from school; available for home package delivery and repairman appointments; more flexible work schedule for running errands and working different hours to account for the time; physical fitness and preparing healthier meals at home has improved personal health; more relaxed dress code; less leave needed for medical appointments and unplanned leave; employees able to make more time for themselves; and less interruption from outside sources than when in the office.

The following examples, regarding their work/life balance not being improved, were also provided: Uncertainty about accepting and being trained for a new position or a new project while juggling children's current school schedule due to COVID; often

“checking in” with work after hours, on weekends, and on leave because of the accessibility of the work computer; lacking the socialization of being in the office; having a home office makes the option to work overtime very easy to use and very hard to decline.

- (6) If given the opportunity to stay in maximized and/or permanent telework status, after the COVID-19 pandemic, you would choose to not telework, please briefly explain why.

This was a short answer question and preferences ranged from staying in maximized/permanent telework; going into the office once a month; going into the office once on a biweekly basis; going into the office once or twice a week. The reasons provided for going into the office were to get a break from teleworking, being engaged with teammates, face-to-face interaction, and socialization.

b. Motivation and Empowerment

- (1) Has your leadership implemented any morale boosters for your division during the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

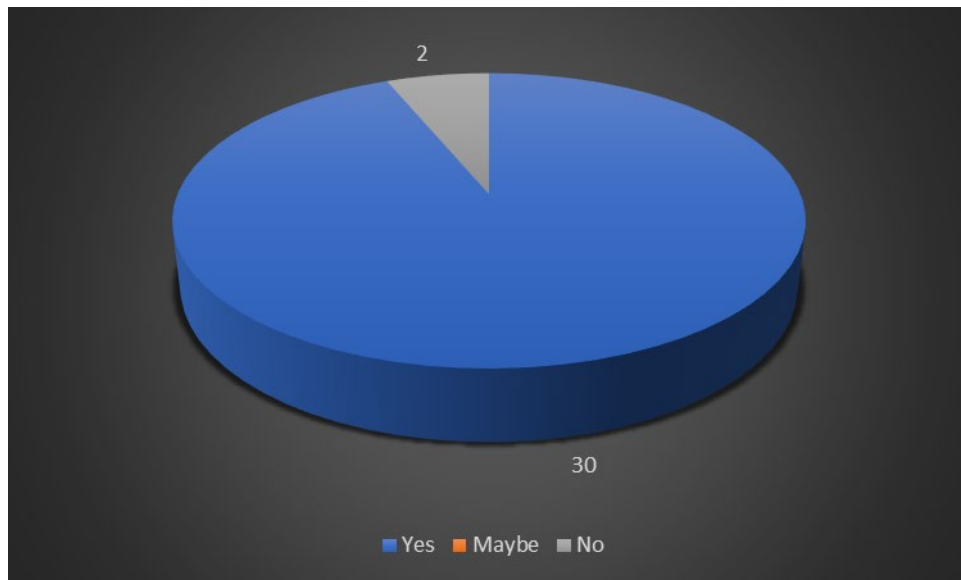


Figure 5. Current Morale Boosters Survey Results

- (2) If your leadership has implemented any morale boosters, can you provide examples?

This was a short answer response and personnel provided many examples of morale boosters in the current telework environment to include: virtual yoga; trivia challenges; sharing favorite recipes and vacation ideas; meeting as a group outside where social distancing was an option; show and tell; virtual lunches and happy hours; a “pet parade” to celebrate Mardi Gras with prizes; a virtual division holiday party; holiday scavenger hunt; and weekly social “check-ins.” One respondent stated they were disappointed there was not a Zoom holiday or end-of-year party.

- (3) Do you feel motivated to complete daily tasks in the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

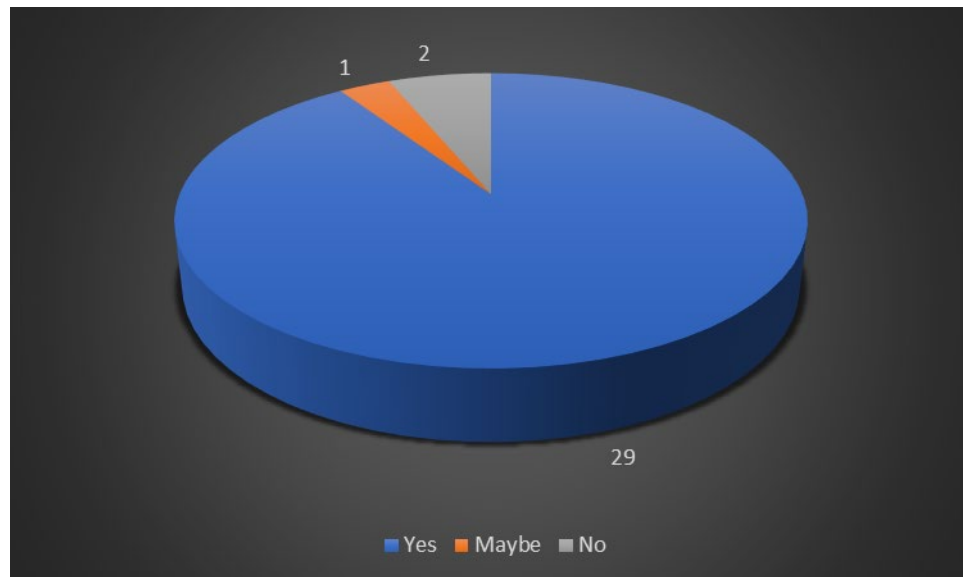


Figure 6. Current Motivation Survey Results

- (4) What could USTRANSCOM-AQ do in a maximized and/or permanent telework status to ensure you are motivated and empowered?

This was a short answer response and personnel recommended ideas on how to keep the workforce motivated and empowered in a telework environment. Responses included: not micromanaging or “clock-watching;” flexibility and focus on accomplishments/goals; recognizing achievements and efforts; challenging employees

with projects outside of their comfort zone; cross-division collaboration and morale boosters; face-to-face socialization and/or office visits once COVID restrictions are lifted; continuing to allow decisions to be made at the Contracting Officer and/or Branch Chief level, when appropriate; constant communication and frequent conversations on workload; all-hands calls, full division staff meetings, and sharing other division's biweekly updates; encourage mental health breaks; cultivating the mentorship program to a virtual environment.

- (5) Do you feel motivated to go “above and beyond” and tackle new challenges in the current telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

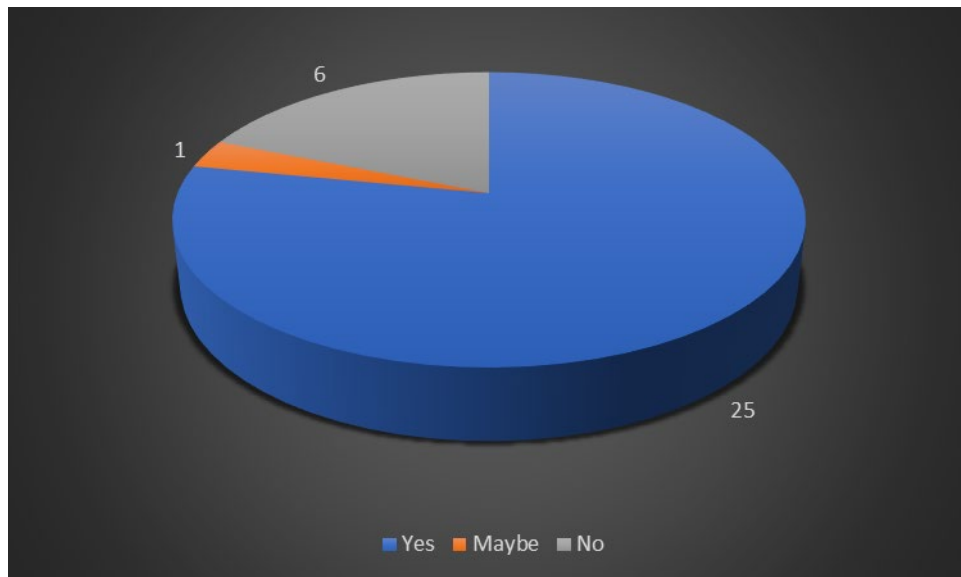


Figure 7. Current Motivation to Go “Above and Beyond” Survey Results

- (6) Do you feel empowered during the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

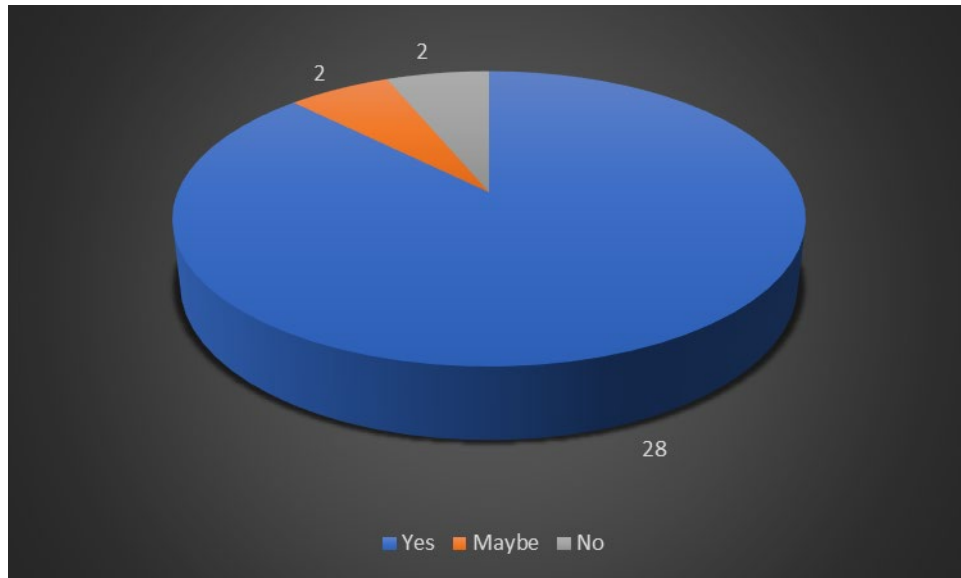


Figure 8. Current Empowerment Survey Results

c. IT Resources/Collaboration Tools

- (1) How satisfied are you with the IT resources/tools (i.e., computers, screens, headsets, cameras) you've been provided during the current telework status?

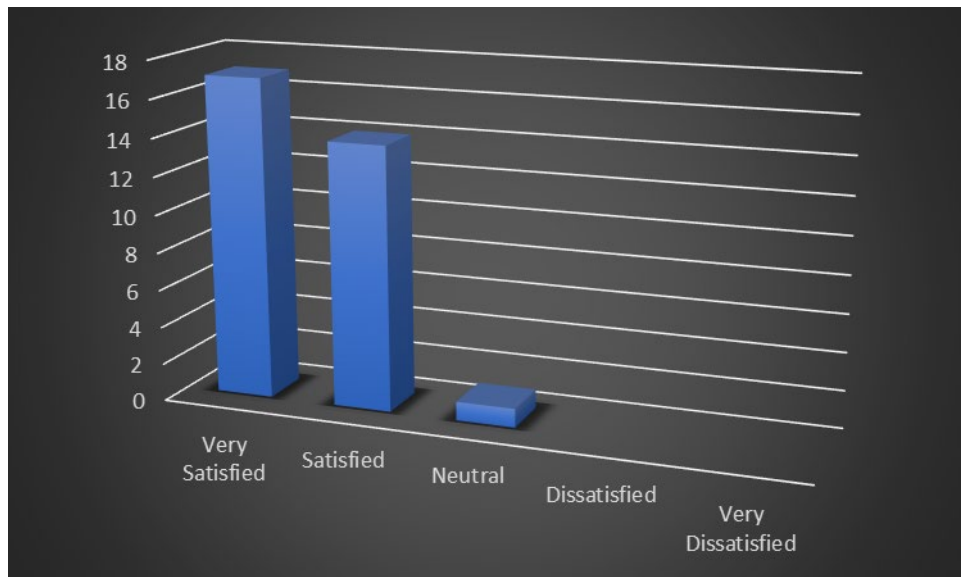


Figure 9. Current Satisfaction with IT Resources/Tools Survey Results

- (2) How satisfied are you with the provided collaboration tools (i.e., skype, TEAMS, etc.) you've been provided during the current telework status?

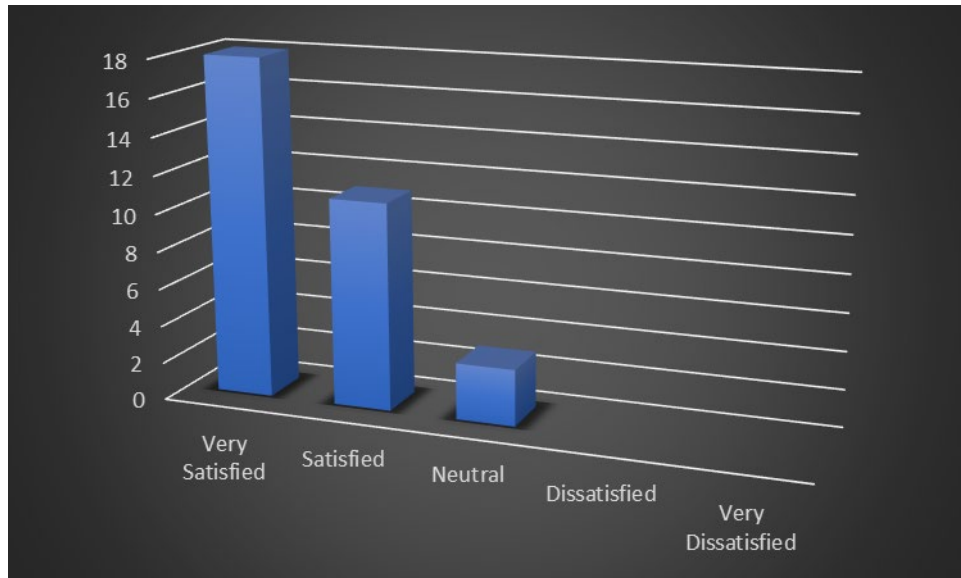


Figure 10. Current Collaboration Tools Survey Results

- (3) Are there any additional IT resources/tools, in which you haven't been provided, that you would recommend USTRANSCOM-AQ provide to improve daily tasks, time management, etc.?

This was a short answer response and employees proposed the following resources/tools to improve the telework environment: automated timecards; government-issued cell phones for both supervisors and employees so they don't have to use personal cell phones; Google Drive, Dropbox, and Google Docs to share documents; classified reader tablets to read situational awareness emails when no response is required; internet hotspots or a stipend for internet; docking stations for both the office and home; bigger monitors; Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) approval on government computers; quicker/improved Virtual Private Network (VPN) access; Microsoft TEAMS application on the computer; and training on how to maximize Microsoft TEAMS, Skype, etc.

- (4) Are there any collaboration tools in which you haven't been provided, that you would recommend TCAQ provide to facilitate effective cross-

communication between internal USTRANSCOM-AQ staff, customers, and/or industry partners?

This was a short answer response, and the workforce recommended the following collaboration tools and/or improvements: a synchronized communication platform across all government agencies; and Zoom because it is widely used with private industry.

d. Training

- (1) How satisfied are you with training offered in the current maximized telework status?”

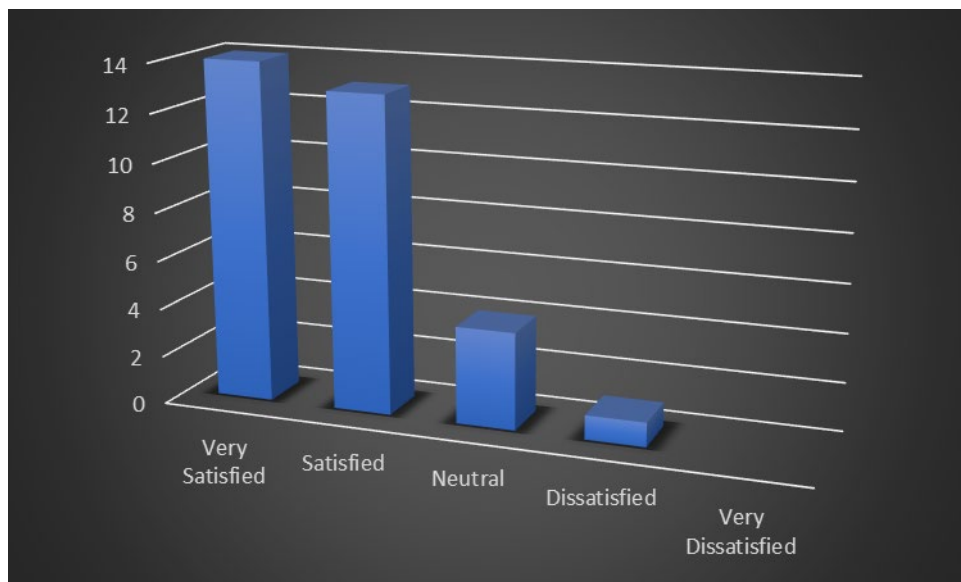


Figure 11. Current Satisfaction Level with Training Offered Survey Results

- (2) If given the opportunity, would you take additional training on working and collaborating in a remote environment?

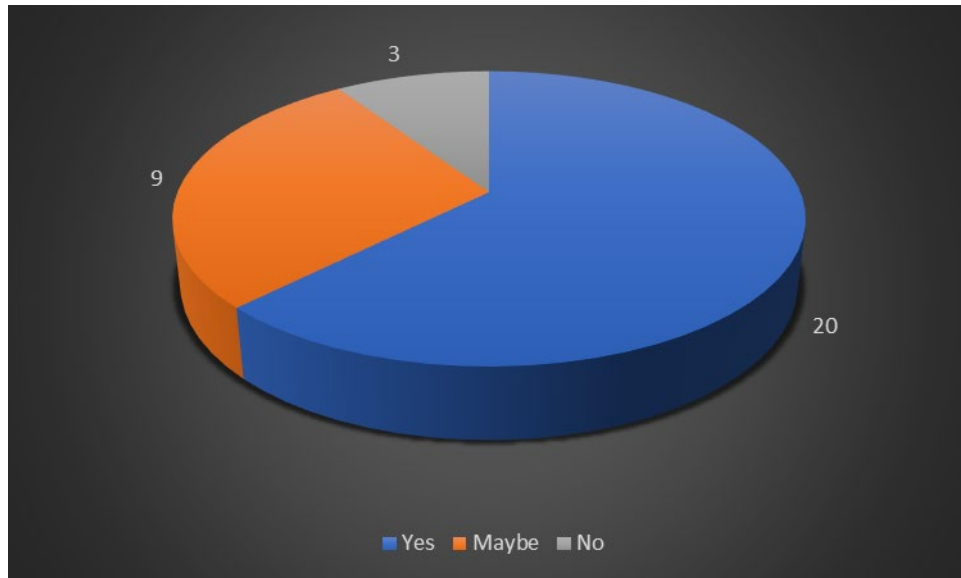


Figure 12. Future Training Interest Survey Results

- (3) Are there any training subjects you feel would be beneficial to the workforce in a future maximized and/or permanent telework status?

This was a short answer response and those surveyed requested the following training subject matters: cohesive teams in a virtual environment; remote interaction and acceptable protocols and etiquette; source selection policy training; leadership classes focused on virtual teams and improving morale and motivation; collaboration tool training; Microsoft TEAMS and Skype training; mental health and mindfulness practices training; managing remote employees; and work/life balance and time management training.

e. Overall Feedback

- (1) Please provide any additional feedback on the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic or feedback on what you would like to see USTRANSCOM-AQ's future telework posture look like after the COVID-19 pandemic is over."

This was an overarching short answer question requesting feedback on the current and future telework posture in USTRANSCOM-AQ. Employees offered the following viewpoints: 100% happy with USTRANSCOM-AQ's response to the pandemic;

leadership took full advantage of USTRANSCOM-AQ's ability to procure/manage contracts virtually; amazing job of keeping the directorate informed of Command updates and always keeps us posted on the telework extensions; feels fully empowered/trusted and not "watched" by bosses; would like to go back to the office one day a week to see co-workers and work on group projects; thriving in the telework process and would like to see USTRANSCOM-AQ move to permanent telework status; home office adds flexibility to workday; less distractions at home office; easier to learn in a remote environment because the trainer can provide more hands on learning while walking through processes; recommend holding in person monthly meetings with the division first, then break into branch groups to socialize with team; allowing employees to come into the office as needed after the COVID restrictions; implement "remote" status so employees can work from any location; directorate gatherings to develop and continue personal relationships; weekly or biweekly time in the office for each team; allow those who prefer it, to work from home 100%; everything is pointed in the right direction, no changes; go to the office 1–2 days a week; weekly or biweekly chats/small talk among teams to improve the disconnect with not seeing people in person; would like to see a program implemented for new employees to provide an overview of USTRANSCOM-AQ; the team is as productive, if not more, when working from home; interest in a hybrid schedule but not interested in going back to the office fulltime; permanent telework is not optimal for new employees; lack of face to face involvement and isolation within one's own team can be detrimental; not everyone is a self-starter and able to perform in fulltime telework; and employee feels seen, cared for, and safety and work life is a priority with maximized telework in response to the pandemic.

D. OVERALL ANALYSIS

1. Employee Satisfaction

Through quantitative data analysis using the survey results, the research indicates the satisfaction level regarding USTRANSCOM-AQ's implementation of maximized teleworking in response to the pandemic is overwhelmingly positive which is important because it shows the directorate is on its way to the successful implementation of permanent maximized telework. Of the personnel surveyed, 97% were either satisfied or

very satisfied with the current telework posture and their direct supervisor's engagement, and only 3% were dissatisfied in these two areas. Similar to the previous numbers, 94% of employees were satisfied or very satisfied with upper management's engagement during maximized telework in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and only 6% were neutral. If given the opportunity, 85% of those surveyed said they would choose to stay in maximized and/or permanent telework status after the pandemic has passed with 9% undecided and 6% choosing, not to telework. The polling resulted in many benefits to work/life balance as well as a few negative effects to work/life balance. While the positive survey responses are encouraging for full implementation of maximized telework after the pandemic risks are alleviated, the negative responses should not be ignored because it gives USTRANSCOM-AQ signals on where improvements to the current environment can be made.

Focus areas where enhancements can be identified and applied post-COVID-19 include, but are not limited to, management setting clear expectations on deadlines and ensuring workload is distributed evenly and team members are effectively managing their time. Through my own experience, without this clear guidance, employees might feel the pressure to work many hours on their personal time which could eventually lead to job burnout. The pandemic has made face-to-face socialization very difficult worldwide and has led to employees feeling isolated and not as connected to their coworkers as before. USTRANSCOM-AQ employees have a history of being a close-knit community and this new telework environment and COVID restrictions have hindered in-person gatherings. I have worked within USTRANSCOM-AQ for twelve years and consider many of my coworkers as close friends, but it has been difficult juggling work duties and family responsibilities with making time for my coworkers without being in the office. It is imperative that implementation of permanent/maximized telework, post-pandemic risks, must include opportunities for in-person gatherings regularly to facilitate the work relationships previously formed as well as making new team members feel like part of the community.

2. Motivation and Empowerment

Through quantitative data analysis using the survey data results, the research indicates most USTRANSCOM-AQ personnel polled feel motivated and empowered and the directorate has conducted many morale boosters to help the workforce stay engaged with each other during the current COVID restrictions and maximized telework status. Of those individuals surveyed, 91% feel motivated to complete daily tasks and 88% feel empowered in the current telework posture. A more concerning statistic from the survey indicates only 78% feel motivated to go “above and beyond” to tackle new challenges. When asked what USTRANSCOM-AQ could do to ensure the staff stayed motivated and empowered, the key recommendations centered around flexibility, recognition, face-to-face socialization, and communication. Another recommendation involved morale boosters. The survey indicated 94% of the personnel’s leadership had conducted morale boosters in their respective divisions and 6% stated their leadership had not.

Motivation in a remote environment is a new concept to USTRANSCOM-AQ. Through my personal experience, I noticed early during the COVID-19 caused telework shift, employees were lacking interaction with their teammates. I created a monthly morale booster program to help the team interact, outside of work talk, every month. Some of the activities seemed quirky on the surface but I found most of my division was excited to participate to facilitate getting to know each other better despite the remote situation. The activities I planned required minimal effort to participate such as sharing favorite holiday recipes which I turned into a division cookbook and revealing planned vacations and bucket list items. The most influential motivation tactic I have used is sending personal thank you cards with a small gift card to recognize employees going above and beyond. The employees who received these cards were very appreciative.

According to Score.org, there are four ways to get remote employees locked in, or fully engaged, which could be incorporated with ease into the management styles within USTRANSCOM-AQ. The first is to foster face-to-face contact with video conferencing used as a regular communication and collaboration device and even used for casual conversation to simulate personal relationships as they were historically formed in the office (Score, 2020). The second is to establish clear objectives and goals by

communicating the expectation that teleworkers are still required to deliver results in this flexible environment (Score, 2020). All employees are unique, have different family and life responsibilities and leadership should make an effort to accept different work habits and schedules (Score, 2020). Management should do its best to accommodate employees' different schedules and embrace the benefits teleworking provides versus resisting the change (Score, 2020). Accountability among individuals and teams for achieving identified objectives and goals is another way to engage employees and "peer-to-peer accountability will organically form and be a powerful driving force for the business" (Score, 2020).

3. IT Resources/Collaboration Tools

With the same quantitative analysis as in the previous two sections, the survey posed questions about the IT and collaboration tools provided amid the maximized telework posture in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, feedback was positive with 94% of those surveyed being satisfied or very satisfied with the resources provided.

Of all the survey responses received, the item that was repeatedly requested in the short answer part of the survey, to improve the workforce's capability to complete the mission, was government-issued cell phones. The immediate need for maximized telework in March 2020, did not provide ample time to plan for telephonic communication other than the use of personal cell phones with our work lines forwarded. USTRANSCOM-AQ supports global transportation contracting missions and international calling is often required to coordinate these efforts. International calling plans are an additional monthly expense that most employees do not need for personal use. The current workaround is to email our overseas counterparts and request they call us during duty hours. This can result in mission delays.

There are pros and cons to providing government-issued cell phones. In private industry, company-issued cell phones are often referred to as "Company Owned, Personally Enabled" or COPE and used when additional security measures are needed for communication. The Balance Small Business website offers insight into this issue with three pros including compatibility, cost savings, and 24/7 access. This article also identifies three cons to include requiring employees to carry multiple phones, more work for IT

departments, and upgrade costs (Bucki, 2019). According to the Abacus Blog, another way to compensate employees for their cell phones used for official business is referred to as “Bring Your Own Device” or BYOD. “The expense and hassle of providing corporate-owned cell phones are what have led to the rise of BYOD reimbursement plans” (DeFranko, 2020). If USTRANSCOM-AQ decides to provide this additional asset, they would need to weigh the benefits and costs of either issuing government cell phones or reimbursing employees for the cost of their personal cell phones.

Another tool requested multiple times in response to the survey was a synchronized collaboration program. USTRANSCOM-AQ has provided access to web-based Microsoft TEAMS but without the ability to download the application, Skype for internal USTRANSCOM use only, and a more secure collaboration program, Commercial Virtual Remote (CVR) which requires two-factor authentication. Zoom is widely used in private industry but is not available on our government computers. Providing a collaboration program that could be used across government agencies, as well as with private industry, would enhance vital communication among all stakeholders.

4. Training

The quantitative analysis results regarding training were overall positive but there seemed to be more uncertainty than in the previous topics. From personal experience, training is often met with resistance in USTRANSCOM-AQ because it is hard to carve out time away from daily workload to complete the annual and quarterly training requirements and even harder to make time for optional training. When asked how satisfied those surveyed were with the training offered during this pandemic telework status, 84% were either satisfied or very satisfied, 13% were neutral, and 3% were dissatisfied. When asked if they would be interested in additional training to learn more about working and collaborating in a remote environment, 63% stated they would be, 28% stated they were unsure, and 9% said they were not interested.

Fully or maximized remote work is relatively new to USTRANSCOM-AQ as previously telework policies only allowed one to two days a week for telework. A short answer question was proposed asking for training subject recommendations for a

maximized telework workforce and most of the suggestions centered around additional training on virtual environments. As stated in the literature review in Chapter II, the government offers fundamental training on the subject for both employees and managers but there are many training courses available in the commercial market that would provide more in-depth instruction on successfully working in this newly adopted telework status. The key to having employees buy-in, to take these additional training courses, is leadership making it a priority for not only employees, but managers as well, and allotting the necessary time to complete it.

5. Overall Feedback

The survey gave the opportunity, for those polled, to provide overall feedback on the current telework status as well as what they would like USTRANSCOM-AQ's telework stance to look like post-COVID-19. The consensus was they were satisfied with the current telework guidelines in response to the pandemic, feeling empowered and trusted, and most would like to see the directorate move to a permanent maximized remote workforce. It was almost unanimous that employees do miss the face-to-face interaction and comradery with coworkers and hoped after the COVID risk is mitigated, USTRANSCOM-AQ would implement periodic social gatherings or meetings in person. Post pandemic, employees would also like to see the flexibility teleworking provides to continue, which also includes the ability to go into the office, as needed, to complete tasks, have meetings, and network. Another challenge identified is onboarding new employees in a remote workforce and providing necessary training to get started in their government contracting careers.

E. CONCLUSION

The vast majority of the survey results were positive regarding the current telework posture within USTRANSCOM-AQ. The research also indicates personnel are in favor of implementing maximized telework in a post-pandemic environment. However, some survey results recognized some shortfalls within the current telework position that should be addressed. Chapter V outlines the conclusions and recommendations for the future of USTRANSCOM-AQ's telework program and its ability to recruit and retain a satisfied workforce in a remote environment.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION AND ANSWER

The primary research question was, “To what extent does implementing a full-time, post-pandemic telework policy affect the contracting workforce’s satisfaction perceptions within USTRANSCOM-AQ.”

Considering the swift implementation of 100% telework, within USTRANSCOM-AQ in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall workforce satisfaction level is very high with many of the trials and tribulations already overcome. These survey results support the directorate fully implementing permanent maximized telework after the COVID risk has passed while equipping the workforce with the tools, resources, and training necessary to complete their contracting mission. This implementation will ultimately increase morale and support the recruiting and retention of the most talented workforce for this specialized, 1102 series, contracting career field.

B. SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The secondary research questions are, “What are the full-time telework policy elements that affect the contracting workforce satisfaction perceptions?” and “What are the full-time telework policy elements that can be utilized for implementation of maximized telework as a future recruitment and retention tool?”

USTRANSCOM-AQ has already allowed employees to transition critical office equipment to their home office to include a laptop, docking station, keyboard, mouse, camera, and dual monitors. The missing and highly requested IT resource from the current home office tool kit is a phone. I recommend the directorate implement a reimbursement program for cell phone use, similar to the private industry’s BYOD stipends, with the option to add an international calling plan when the position warrants. I make this recommendation over private industry’s COPE method, often used for security reasons, because any secure or classified information must be done with government classified communication devices and this approach would be less labor-intensive for USTRANSCOM’s IT department. USTRANSCOM-AQ employees do not need to check

their email or share information from their cell phones because they are issued government laptops for those purposes. It is essential for employees to make calls to customers and industry partners, sometimes internationally, on cell phones to execute their mission and this would augment the maximized teleworker's tool kit.

The 100% virtual environment is relatively new to the government, including USTRANSCOM-AQ, and was fast-tracked for the health and safety of both leadership and employees, with little to no guidance or training. I recommend making the OPM fundamental training mandatory for both management and employees upon implementation of permanent telework. Private industry has offered this benefit to employees for years and there are commercial training programs available. I also recommend offering one of the top ten courses for working remotely from the findcourses.com website, in particular, "Remote Teaming for Success" from Steward Leadership because it is a half-day of remote instruction for only \$495 per student and offers a one-on-one personal coaching session after course completion, which is both time and cost-effective (Findcourses, 2020). This focus on educating the entire staff on telework best practices would only improve the virtual team.

C. OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The full implementation should also allow for continued flexibility regarding work schedules, reporting to the office on an as-needed basis, team morale boosters, and encouraging time outside of the workplace to have social gatherings to increase morale and foster existing and new working relationships. I also encourage USTRANSCOM-AQ leadership to stay engaged with the workforce and continue to research private industry best practices, new training opportunities, and cutting-edge IT resources available to improve the workforce capabilities. These additional recommendations would support and improve the continued progression towards a 100% remote workforce in USTRANSCOM-AQ and its successful implementation while also recruiting and retaining the most talented professionals.

D. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Areas for further research should include surveying other USTRANSCOM directorates to identify any concerns with cross-directorate collaboration in a remote environment. Additional perceptions on how a remote workforce impacts mission execution could advance the current discussion on maximized teleworking environments. At the end of this study, other USTRANSCOM directorates were in a pre-decisional phase on full implementation of their own telework initiatives. This expanded approach could highlight perceptions in potential collaboration shortfalls and assist in applying corrective measures to counteract the shortfalls. Similar to surveying other directorates, future research should also include surveying USTRANSCOM's stakeholders such as end-users and our commercial partners. USTRANSCOM's ultimate end-user is the warfighter, and we would not be able to deliver a vast amount of personnel and cargo without our commercial partners. Collectively, these additional research inputs could provide a more comprehensive picture of workforce perceptions as leaders consider a maximized initiative within USTRANSCOM.

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APPENDIX. MAXIMIZED AND/OR PERMANENT TELEWORK IN TCAQ SURVEY

Maximized and/or Permanent Telework in TCAQ

Instructions: Questions 1–12, please highlight your answers and questions 13–20, please provide a brief written response.

1. How satisfied are you with TCAQ's current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. Very Dissatisfied
 - b. Dissatisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Satisfied
 - e. Very Satisfied
2. How satisfied are you with your direct supervisor's engagement during the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. Very Dissatisfied
 - b. Dissatisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Satisfied
 - e. Very Satisfied
3. How satisfied are you with upper management's engagement during the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. Very Dissatisfied
 - b. Dissatisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Satisfied
 - e. Very Satisfied
4. How satisfied are you with the IT resources/tools (i.e., computers, screens, headsets, cameras) you've been provided during the current telework status?
 - a. Very Dissatisfied
 - b. Dissatisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Satisfied
 - e. Very Satisfied

5. How satisfied are you with the provided collaboration tools (i.e., skype, TEAMS, etc.) you've been provided during the current telework status?
 - a. Very Dissatisfied
 - b. Dissatisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Satisfied
 - e. Very Satisfied
6. How satisfied are you with training offered in the current maximized telework status?
 - a. Very Dissatisfied
 - b. Dissatisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Satisfied
 - e. Very Satisfied
7. Has your leadership implemented any morale boosters for your division during the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Do you feel motivated to complete daily tasks in the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Do you feel motivated to go "above and beyond" and tackle new work challenges in the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. Do you feel empowered during the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
11. If given the opportunity, would you take additional training on working and collaborating in a remote environment?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

12. If given the opportunity, after the COVID-19 pandemic, would you choose to stay in a maximized and/or permanent telework status?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
13. Are there any additional IT resources/tools, in which you haven't been provided, that you would recommend TCAQ provide to improve daily tasks, time management, etc.?
14. Are there any collaboration tools, in which you haven't been provided, that you would recommend TCAQ provide to facilitate effective cross-communication between internal TCAQ staff, customers, and/or industry partners?
15. If your leadership has implemented any morale boosters, can you provide examples?
16. What could TCAQ do in a maximized and/or permanent telework status to ensure you are motivated and empowered?
17. Are there any training subjects you feel would be beneficial to the workforce in a future maximized and/or permanent telework status?
18. Has the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic improved your work/life balance? If so, in what way?

19. Please provide any additional feedback on the current maximized telework status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic or feedback on what you would like to see TCAQ's future telework posture to look like after the COVID-19 pandemic is over?
20. If given the opportunity to stay in maximized and/or permanent telework status, after the COVID-19 pandemic, you would choose to not telework please briefly explain why.

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