



**Managing remote employees during the coronavirus pandemic: A global review of management practices and policies**

**By**

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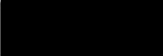
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**2025**

## Declaration

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Thembile Baai

2 April 2026

Date

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To my children, Mayande and Manolo, everything is possible with hard work and dedication...you are my reason.

## **Dedication**

To my late mother Zamazotsho Carol Finca.

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the global business landscape, forcing organizations to rapidly adapt their management practices and policies. This dissertation investigates the transformative impact of the pandemic on organizations, focusing on the shift towards remote work, the emphasis on employee well-being, and the emergence of adaptable leadership styles. This systematic review aims to explore how management practices and organizational policies evolved to manage remote employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, comparing approaches before and after the pandemic. It also examines adaptations of organizational policies to effectively manage virtual employees during the pandemic. This qualitative study draws upon secondary data, including academic literature, industry reports, and expert analyses published between 2020 and 2023, to provide a comprehensive overview of the pandemic's impact on management practices across global organizational contexts.

The findings reveal a significant shift towards more flexible, employee-centric, and technology-driven approaches to management. Organizations that successfully adapted demonstrated agility and a deep commitment to supporting their employees through unprecedented disruption. The shift to remote work necessitated a re-evaluation of traditional management practices, leading to the adoption of new communication protocols, collaboration tools, and performance management systems. Furthermore, the pandemic highlighted the importance of employee well-being, prompting organizations to invest in mental health resources, flexible work arrangements, and enhanced communication strategies. Due to its reliance on secondary data, this study may not fully capture the nuanced experiences of individual organizations.

The study's findings underscore the need for organizations to cultivate adaptability, invest in employee well-being, enhance virtual collaboration, empower remote managers, and consider hybrid work models. These findings have important implications for organizational leadership, human resource policies, and digital transformation strategies. They suggest that sustainable post-pandemic management requires not only investment in remote work infrastructure, but also a shift in leadership culture to support employee well-being and resilience.

Keywords: Adaptability, COVID-19, Employee Well-Being, Hybrid Work Models, Management Practices, Organizational Policies, Remote Work, Technology, Transformational Leadership, Virtual Collaboration

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## List of Acronyms

Covid-19	Corona Virus Disease
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
ROI	Return on Investment
EAP	Employee Assistance Programs
JSTOR	Journal Storage (academic database)
DOAJ	Directory of Open Access Journals
Zoom	Video conferencing platform
Teams	Microsoft collaboration platform
Slack	Communication platform
Google Scholar	Academic search engine

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction

When COVID-19 struck, the nature of work evolved almost overnight as countless firms moved to a virtual, remote workspace. Thus, rather than a body of literature theorizing about how managerial strategies and policies should change to foster an effective work environment for a changing workforce, actual adjustments were implemented and subsequently assessed (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). However, before the Covid-19 pandemic, increased remote work had been trending over time as companies discovered the advantages from improved engagement and retention, let alone cost savings (Aleem et al., 2022). Yet when the pandemic occurred and remote work was a mandated position to avoid social contagion, this forced adjustments on managers to learn how to exist in uncharted territory to ensure their employees remained engaged and productive, but also safe and healthy (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

This systematic review aims to identify and analyse the specific management practices and organisational policies that proved most effective for supervising remote employees during the Covid-19 pandemic's mandatory work-from-home period (2020-2024), focusing on organisations across diverse industries globally. Therefore, this study will examine the evolution of managerial practices over time compared to fixed policy approaches to facilitate understanding of the most effective strategies for managing remote workforces in crisis and post-crisis contexts.

### 1.2. Background of the Study

The influences of the COVID-19 pandemic reverberated across companies and organizations in a variety of ways. For instance, remote work was established before the pandemic, as a variety of organizations found the remote opportunity to be a gainful endeavor, and studies show that remote work increases employee engagement, employee retention, and decreases operating costs (Aleem et al., 2022). Yet the accelerated implementation of remote work from the pandemic generated challenges for leadership as the need to adjust leadership styles and company policies related to this work-from-home integration happened quickly and unintentionally. Where past managerial experience has demonstrated that remote environments uniquely affect output and engagement particularly in terms of communication, trust, and interpersonal access, this continues to hold true. Yet, with no schools and daycare centers open to dividing work from home, the capacity to shut down has been far more complicated (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Simultaneously, the capacity to reengineer enterprises' operations and functioning to facilitate more accessible oversight and supervision whilst accommodating new operational needs became overwhelming. This transformation

required immediate attention to knowledge management systems, human resource policies, and change management processes to address unprecedented organisational challenges (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Organisations found themselves simultaneously managing technological infrastructure upgrades, policy revisions, employee support programmes, and performance management system adaptations whilst maintaining business continuity and competitive positioning (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

The literature suggests that without a comprehensive understanding of changes in managerial policy, organizations may face declines in productivity and efficiency particularly in industries where in-person interaction is not feasible. Given the uncertainty surrounding the post-pandemic trajectory of business operations, it is imperative to examine how managerial policies have adapted to support remote workers in maintaining both effectiveness and social engagement, which are critical for organizational continuity. This underscores the importance of change management, as the shift in working conditions necessitated corresponding changes in communication and collaboration practices. Effective change management strategies were essential to ensure the sustainable implementation of new work arrangements.

### **1.3. Motivation of the Study**

What has changed, however, since pre-pandemic times, is the daily operation of such organizations and remote work quickly becoming a requirement as opposed to an option. Therefore, it's up to the manager to ensure all remote employees can achieve the same productivity and engagement from home as they would have done in person pre-pandemic. However, beyond that expectation, there needs to be a discussion with managers about how remote work itself influences communications, trust, and the overall manager-employee dynamic. Yet there seems to be a gap in the literature concerning the psychological components of working from home, emerging mostly from pre-pandemic findings. Where some companies thrived on telecommuting because it saved them resources and simultaneously provided employees with heightened satisfaction, never did a company have a workforce that was forced to telecommute, with no choice but to log in from home, simultaneously distracted with children and household tasks due to working from home. In addition, researchers indicate that reduced social interaction could be a potential vulnerability for reduced business growth and international business productivity rates (Torro, et al., 2021).

Therefore, since reduced managerial communication and reduced managerial support for remote work issues are not merely short-term solutions, and no one can predict what the virus may do to humanity down the line, it's important to assess how businesses have altered managerial communication and strategies to support an engaged remote workforce for extended operational viability.

This study is therefore motivated by the practical need to inform future organisational decision-making regarding remote work policies, management practices, and employee support systems. As organisations navigate post-pandemic workplace strategies, understanding which management approaches proved most effective during the crisis can inform sustainable long-term remote work implementation. The research aims to contribute actionable insights for managers, human resource professionals, and organisational leaders responsible for designing and implementing effective remote work management strategies.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

This study relates to the implementation of post-Covid-19 pandemic policy adjustments at the company level to circumvent any disasters relative to micro-level managerial adjustments with an in-person workforce compared to a remote workforce during pre-, in-, and post-Covid-19. This reveals the need for awareness of the psychological factor of managerial adjustments to ensure personnel remain at the peak productivity potential and the relevance of policy changes relative to communicative and cooperative endeavors for team productivity. Therefore, not only will the accomplishment of these objectives contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding crisis management and enterprise agility, but it will also be a springboard for further research. The potential for future research stemming from this dissertation will ensure that this dissertation sets the stage for forthcoming investigations that, in turn, will enhance the body of knowledge for virtual teams and enterprise decision-making in future crises.

#### **1.5. Research Objectives**

The following research objectives guide the study:

1. To analyze the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on management practices in organizations with virtual employees prior and after the pandemic.
2. To identify the specific organizational policies that were adapted to manage virtual employees during the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. To examine the challenges faced by managers in ensuring organizational and employee productivity and employee engagement in a virtual environment during the pandemic.
4. To assess how organizations adapted communication, collaboration, and team dynamics to suit a virtual workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. To investigate changes brought by Covid-19 pandemic on management practices and organizational policies.

## **1.6. Research Questions**

A research question is a specific query that the study aims to address to help achieve the overall research aims (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). The following research questions guide the study:

1. How have management practices in organizations with virtual employees evolved prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and after the pandemic?
2. What organizational policies were adapted to manage virtual employees during the Covid-19 pandemic?
3. What challenges did managers face in maintaining employee and organizational productivity and engagement in a virtual environment during the Covid-19 pandemic?
4. How did organizations modify their communication and collaboration strategies to support a virtual workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic?
5. What changes have been observed in management practices as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

## **1.7. Main Research Question and Objective**

The main research question: Which management practices and organisational policies implemented by organisations across different countries and industries during the Covid-19 pandemic proved most effective for supervising remote employees, and which of these adaptations represent sustainable improvements for long-term remote work management?

The main objective of this study is to conduct a systematic review of the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on management practices and policies for managing remote employees across different international contexts, with a focus on identifying effective approaches that emerged during the crisis and their implications for sustainable remote work management.

## **1.8. Research Problem Statement**

The study contributes to the understanding of whether the COVID-19 pandemic created new managerial resources and approaches regarding company policy for the supervision of remote employees. The literature evaluated adopts a position of either support or negation; some studies acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic complicated the supervision of remote employees, while others acknowledge that this transition gave companies the chance to better manage. Before the onset of the pandemic, studies indicated an upswing in telecommuting as companies found that they could save money and that engagement and productivity remained stable enough within a remote operation structure (Aleem et al., 2022). Yet when the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic struck worldwide, millions of employees opened the

opportunity to work from home basically overnight, and a change in managerial style and intraorganizational policy was required to be established to avoid such an unexpected disruption (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Yet there's much research to assess the feasibility of remote work and ideal managerial styles to accommodate employees who are miles apart from the main location.

A knowledge gap exists regarding which management practices and policies prove most effective in crisis-driven remote work environments across global organisational contexts. Pre-pandemic research examined selective, voluntary remote work arrangements that bear little resemblance to mandatory, universal remote work implementation under crisis conditions (Koekemoer et al., 2021). This demonstrates the need for understanding of effective remote work management practices, particularly as remote and hybrid work models persist beyond the pandemic, making this knowledge gap a permanent strategic liability rather than a temporary operational challenge.

Still, this study's intent is to focus on how management changed its style whether by choice or obligation and established policy from this educational experience that was the pandemic. Furthermore, the present research examines managerial issues and adjustments and how companies adjusted policies and operational adjustments to remote work, emphasizing how companies are implementing these changes for proper management.

### **1.9. Study focus**

This dissertation contributes to the conversation about the future of work—and future management practices and policies—as adjustments to organizational policy for remote workers during COVID-19 lasted and continued after and into what's believed to be a new world of work—by examining what changes could have been examined beforehand. For example, literature reveals that remote work was trending prior to the COVID pandemic, with investigations of remote work frequency, benefits, and drawbacks assessing its viability before COVID. In terms of certain management practices—communication, collaboration, performance evaluation, employee training—this dissertation attempts to determine which management practices were affected during the compulsory transition to remote work due to COVID. In addition, this dissertation attempts to determine how policy changes were made during the COVID season, from organization-friendly changes to technology-sensitive elements to employee concerns colliding between professional and personal domains in a suddenly remote environment. As a result, this study contributes to the developing field of phenomena where management had difficulties with remote workers and what new best practices were born from effective management of virtual teams. Ultimately, the results here will have transformative ramifications projecting new significance for future work with hybrid and virtual teams which may likely be on the uptick because of such rapid and unexpected change. These sub-focus areas

relative to the topics are interrelated and emerged from the research questions and purpose. The sub-focus areas are them in relation to the results: remote work well-being, productivity, team dynamics, etc.; evaluations and performance assessments; company culture and communication; and overall impact of the shift to a digital work environment. Thus, the sub-focus areas reside in various chapters of the dissertation to successfully support the connected investigation concern.

### **1.10. Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is that the COVID-19 pandemic was the stimulus for global change in employment efforts from work-at-home situations on a dime to desperate companies attempting to adjust managerial processes and all related policies. It is critical to understand what this means for existing and emerging distributed teams during and post-pandemic to determine effective managerial processes and sustainable future endeavors. Furthermore, with intentions to add to the discourse surrounding crisis management, organizational resilience, and the future of work, this research will be an empirical contribution to the body of literature surrounding the organizational response to the pandemic and what should be different moving forward to more effectively manage remote employees in the future. Therefore, the findings from addressing the projected research questions will be beneficial not only to organizations to refine pandemic-induced decision-making and HR practices but also to current and future managers who will be trained in how to operate in an adjusted world.

From an academic perspective, this study advances management theory by extending established frameworks (Organisational Agility, Media Richness, Transformational Leadership, and Social Exchange theories) to crisis-driven remote work contexts, revealing how traditional theories require adaptation for virtual environments. The research provides comprehensive synthesis of fragmented pandemic-era literature, contributing empirical insights about management effectiveness under extreme conditions and establishing a foundation for future remote work management studies.

For managers and organisations, the study offers evidence-based guidance for remote work implementation, policy development frameworks for comprehensive virtual team management, and strategic insights that help balance remote work benefits with operational challenges.

In practical terms, the research benefits practitioners, employees, and society by providing actionable recommendations for maintaining productivity and culture in virtual environments, supporting smoother organisational transitions, and contributing to industry best practices that improve workplace outcomes. The findings will be beneficial not only to organisations seeking to refine pandemic-induced decision-making and HR practices but also to current and future managers who must operate effectively in a world

where remote and hybrid work arrangements represent permanent features of the employment landscape rather than temporary pandemic responses.

## **1.11. Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

### 1.11.1. Scope

This study is designed as a global systematic synthesis examining management practices and organisational policies for remote work management during the Covid-19 pandemic period (2020-2024). The global approach is essential because the pandemic's impact on remote work management transcended national boundaries, creating universal challenges that required similar organisational adaptations regardless of geographic location, while also revealing culturally specific solutions that provide valuable insights for international application. The research scope encompasses:

- **Temporal Scope:** Analysis covers the period from the initial pandemic outbreak in 2020 through to 2024, capturing both immediate crisis responses and longer-term adaptations across different phases of global pandemic response and recovery.
- **Geographical Scope:** Global perspective examining organisational responses worldwide, through systematic sampling of literature from multiple international databases to ensure comprehensive coverage of global perspectives.
- **Organisational Scope:** Focus on organisations across various industries that implemented remote work arrangements during the pandemic.
- **Thematic Scope:** Examination of management practices, organisational policies, leadership approaches, communication strategies, performance management systems, and employee support mechanisms specifically related to remote work supervision and support.

### 1.11.2. Delimitations

The study acknowledges the following delimitations that define its boundaries:

- **Methodological Delimitation:** This is a desktop research study relying exclusively on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed academic literature, industry reports, and case studies published between 2020-2024.
- **Industry Focus:** Whilst the study examines various industries, it primarily focuses on knowledge work and service sectors where remote work was feasible, rather than manufacturing or physical

service delivery sectors, though this limitation applies consistently across all geographic regions studied.

- **Language Limitation:** Analysis is restricted to English-language publications, which may limit insights from non-English speaking organisational contexts, though major international databases include English-translated abstracts and summaries of significant research from non-English speaking regions.
- **Theoretical Framework:** The study is bounded by four specific theoretical frameworks (Organisational Agility Theory, Media Richness Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Social Exchange Theory).
- **Technology Focus:** The research examines management practices rather than technical infrastructure or information technology solutions, though these are considered as enabling factors.

### **1.11. Overview of the Dissertation**

The expected outline of the dissertation is as follows:

#### **Chapter One: Introduction**

Chapter One will serve as an introduction to the subject matter with research questions and goals. It will also provide the rationale and context for such research, the problem statement, and the significance of the study.

#### **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Chapter Two will be a literature review of scholarly and practitioner literature on remote management, transformation of companies due to COVID-19, and issues and best practices of virtual team management. The literature reviewed in this chapter is organized in this manner because it relates to previous findings in comparison to the findings of the pandemic as it relates to management, adjusted company policies and accommodations, and the complications of managing those employed virtually. There will be an adjusted viewpoint of the access to remote work arrangements prior to the pandemic and the adjustments to company policy during the pandemic to accommodate a remote workforce. This aligns with the study's theoretical framework.

#### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This chapter details the research methodology employed in the development of this project. This encompasses the process of executing the study and the means of gathering and analyzing information to

address the proposed research concerns. This features an explanation of the secondary data sources, the manner in which they were located, and the achievement of qualitative evaluation. Furthermore, this chapter includes an evaluation of the validity and reliability of this research endeavor. Ultimately, the limitations and ethics of the research methodology are assessed in this chapter as well. This is where the findings are presented based on the research completed as discussed via secondary sources. This chapter is relevant to the research questions posed in that it both answers the posed questions and provides the findings. Its intention is to change a reader's perception of these findings as they relate to what is already published in peer-reviewed journals and how it can be applied in the field. Findings are presented in list form with subheadings constituting each of the major findings in sequential order.

#### **Chapter 4: Results and Discussion, Suggestions for Further Research.**

These two sets of sections encompass the findings and discussion of what was discovered in relation to the questions posed initially. The first findings and discussion are more academic in nature with applied suggestions for the real world/business based on what was found by the research. The second is a findings and discussion of suggestions for further research. Where this study might have floundered, such flaws are acknowledged and suggested for future research endeavors.

#### **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

Summary of the overall research endeavor which restates the intent of the research, the methodology, and the findings/final assessments. 2. Recommendations: Proposed adjustments for field use by corporations and managers who constructively alter their managerial strategies and policies to accommodate remote employees. 3. Limitations: A declaration that notes what was not done in the research process, such as adopting primary data; confining the research to one location and one industry; a constantly shifting condition of the pandemic. 4. Future Research Directions: The concluding section of the chapter offers a comparative possibility for future research to build upon these findings while contributing to the body of work about crisis intervention techniques with remote workers.

#### **1.12. Summary**

This study is necessary because the connection between changes in management practices and policies as a result of needing to change management of remote employees has not yet been made. Anticipating the organizational impact of this study as it will answer research questions, the expected results will help with better decision-making, human resources policies, and organizational training for any future managers. Chapter 1: Significance of the Study explains where studies like this should take place, where transformation of management practices and policies because of new realities gleaned from COVID-19 to

establish new expectations should be met, and where the final literature review will come from over the course of this study, for each segment covering pre-, during, and post-COVID-19 management of remote employee-based organizations exists. The Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions provide a spatial focus and narrowing that imitates instead of repeats relative literature. Thus, this is a qualitative study of the relative literature pertaining to remote employee-based organizations and their status relative to management pre-, during, and post-COVID-19. This study presumed there would be enough relative literature with which to derive a conclusion about the effectiveness and impact of COVID-19 on relative management practices for remote-based employees. The study shall consist of five chapters: 1) Introduction 2) Literature Review 3) Research Methodology 4) Results Analysis, Presentation, and Discussion 5) Conclusion, Recommendations, Limitations, and Future Research Directions which set clear parameters for expectation for critical analysis and relevant discussion to add to the effective body of knowledge already established about the management of remote-based employees in times of crisis.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction

The global workplace was changed in unprecedented ways due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic struck, organizations were forced into unknown territory; the lockdowns, social distancing, and changes to the operational and employment landscape created an all-new status quo. Never before had there been such a rapid change to a remote working environment, and with such rapid transition came impact relative to the effectiveness of managing such a remote or hybrid situation. While policies were scrutinized due to the intrusion, much was known about management over the annals of time for relative application, creating a framework of relative uncertainty.

The purpose of the literature review was to evaluate whether the pandemic changed managerial and organizational policies and what operations organizations employed to help alleviate these needs for remote work. It assessed adjustments organizations made to facilitate remote work challenges, what operations were employed to manage and support virtual teams, and considerations for future employment. This project was based upon secondary data obtained from secondary research done solely for this project. Secondary research implies that the researcher assessed existing literature to fulfill established objectives. Secondary research (secondary, desktop research) implies information already compiled from publishing entities. The data comes from researched materials reported in research reports, academic journals, books, and online through different platforms like websites, public libraries, and universities.

The sources of this literature review were comprised of various peer-reviewed journal articles, one organizational report, and one clean, well-known online article from a trustworthy source. The sample population was basically any article or study relevant to management and policy associated with the pandemic-induced policy of virtual work. Thus, everything from scholarly journal articles to a case study and an organizational report which examined how organizations met with policy change to accommodate assessed virtual work during the pandemic was included. It was an appropriate way to gather the information needed to assess how the pandemic took such a severe toll on future plans of managing virtual workers.

This study addresses the following research questions: 1) How have management practices in organizations with virtual employees evolved prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and after the pandemic? 2) What organizational policies were adapted to manage virtual employees during the COVID-19 pandemic? 3) What challenges did managers face in maintaining employee and organizational productivity and engagement in a virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic? 4) How did organizations modify

their communication and collaboration strategies to support a virtual workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic? 5) What changes have been observed in management practices as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The research questions were asked in an effort to assess whether the pandemic truly changed management style and company policy in regards to managing remote employees. Thus, this was a literature review of scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on the subject to compare findings with a new expectation of management style and company policy. Yet this gap, however, is filled with what remote employee management and corporate policy changes mean post or during the pandemic. For example, some articles state that pre-pandemic, companies were less harsh on their HR management techniques which, in a post-pandemic world, would not be accepted and therefore, telecommuting training and development would be needed for appropriate telecommuting employee management soon thereafter (Gaur et al., 2021).

In addition, much has been assessed that the struggle between in-office mandated and remote-worked equity hasn't necessarily transitioned to hybrid models being a permanent solution but instead, the other way around, out of fear of change (Roy, 2022). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work was on the rise, making it all the more likely in 2020 and beyond. With the COVID-19 pandemic, companies had no choice but to lockdown, and remote work almost flourished as an opportunity to challenge what a worksite should be and what it is. According to Roy (2022), technology has given employees greater autonomy and second work locations. But where, before, accommodation and evaluation of such workforces had to be discovered, now, according to (Roy, 2022), employees expect their employers to understand how to manage such workforces.

## **2.2. Defining Virtual Employees and Remote Work**

Before delving into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to establish clear definitions of key concepts.

### **a. Virtual Employees**

A virtual employee is an individual who works remotely, outside of a traditional office environment, and relies on technology to perform their job duties. This encompasses a wide range of work arrangements (Eckhardt et al., 2019), including:

### **b. Telecommuting:**

Employees who work from home or a nearby co-working space on a regular basis (Wang et al., 2020).

### **c. Fully Remote**

Employees who work exclusively from a location outside of the traditional office, often across geographical boundaries (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

While the terms "virtual employee" and "remote worker" are often used interchangeably, it is important to note that virtual employees are a subset of remote workers. All virtual employees are remote workers, but not all remote workers are virtual employees. The defining characteristic of a virtual employee is their reliance on technology to perform their work (Bracca, 2002).

#### d. Remote Work

Remote work, broadly defined, is any work arrangement where employees perform their duties outside of the traditional office setting. This can include working from home, a co-working space, a coffee shop, or any other location with a suitable work environment (Das et al., 2021).

The review will explore the following themes:

1. Management Practice Evolution and Policy Implementation. This theme examines how the pandemic forced evolution in trust-based supervision, employee empowerment, communication protocols, and responsiveness to employee needs in virtual environments. The research provides evidence-based guidance for managers developing supervision strategies that maintain productivity whilst supporting employee well-being.
2. Organisational Systems and Infrastructure Adaptation. This theme explores performance management system redesign, hybrid work model development, virtual collaboration platform integration, and accessibility enhancement. The research offers actionable insights for designing work systems that leverage remote work advantages whilst mitigating challenges.
3. Risk Management and Remote Work Failure Prevention. This theme investigates risks of ineffective remote work management, including communication breakdown, team deterioration, and employee disengagement. The research provides diagnostic tools and corrective approaches for addressing remote work challenges before they become organisational crises.
4. Strategic Workforce Planning and Future Work Models. This theme examines long-term implications of pandemic changes for workforce strategy and employer-employee relationships. The research provides frameworks for strategic decisions about workplace models and competitive positioning in the post-pandemic employment landscape.

### **2.3. Pre-Pandemic Landscape**

The concept of virtual work was not unfamiliar to certain organizations and certain industries well before the year 2020. For example, technology and telecommunication industries have had access to virtual/remote employees for many years. Yet many organizations operated on a more traditional/in-person basis. The ability to shift to remote/hybrid would depend on prior access/new opportunities (Ozimek, 2020). During the Pandemic: The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a need for businesses to send employees home to work or to adopt hybrid arrangements—almost overnight. Management was not trained in how to ensure productivity, communication, and collaboration in a virtual format without such prior experience (Wang et al., 2020). Ultimately, though, the findings encourage many add-ons by companies to fix such shortcomings like improved training and development opportunities, technologies for virtual collaboration, and policy efforts to manage increasingly specialized and complex remote working needs (Bhargava, 2020; Roy, 2022; Shambi, 2021; Wang, et al., 2020). Yet at the same time, it creates an internalization dilemma of whether required in-person work is better or the convenience of working from home ultimately breeds stress and anxiety for hybrid options in the future.

### **2.4. The Evolution of Management Practices in the Wake of COVID-19**

The rapid shift to remote work during the pandemic necessitated a fundamental rethinking of traditional management practices. In addition, it has provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with managing a virtual workforce. This section explores the key changes observed in management approaches, highlighting the shift towards more flexible, employee-centric, and digitally driven models.

#### **2.4.1 The Rise of Trust and Empowerment**

Where once Management by observing was possible, the world transitioned to a virtual space, rendering such a phenomenon obsolete. Companies had no choice but to adjust to learn how to trust their people more. Management by trusting became essential to make sure people were accomplishing their tasks and staying engaged (Scarcia-King, 2011).

Control and autonomy are essential means of improving performance and satisfaction particularly as it relates to flexible work options. Therefore, this is even more true after the pandemic because during the pandemic, employees were forced to control their increasingly complicated lives with remote access at home. Therefore, with an increasing reliance on employee autonomy, a transition to empowerment was necessary. Management had to relinquish control; the more control and decision-making abilities employees had independent problem-solving and time and productivity management the better. Ultimately, this made

personnel feel more connected to and accountable for their work, leading to enhanced virtual collaboration and productivity overall (Gibson et al., 2003).

#### **2.4.2. Focus on Outcomes over Presenteeism**

The pandemic hastened an emphasis on performance management of output. There was no way for companies to determine whether or not the work got done instead of how many hours someone was in the office or on the computer screen at home. However, this transformation from the expected pre-pandemic to a post-pandemic new mindset of output performance management was challenging (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). For example, performance reviews were based on hours worked in the office and what management perceived or heard. Therefore, with employees working remotely, value could not be assessed. Thus, performance management systems of focus were needed that reward results, metrics of accomplishment, and significant milestones (Bell, 2012). These were the companies that, according to Gallup, boosted employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic and valued output over hours worked on a task for the long term. This means the necessity for precise boundaries and definitive tasks and the trust and tools required to accomplish such tasks from anywhere, in the office or at home, exists. In addition, this shift to a result-oriented approach meant increased dependence on performance-assessing tools and systems capable of measuring how well employees were working from home. New indicators and systems were needed to assess whether the firms were effective, fairly assessed, and provided feedback to remote employees (Cascio, 2000). Where teamwork and collaboration were assumed due to face-to-face interactions, digital facilitation was required. Organizations used different digital systems and applications for virtual meetings, collaborative efforts, document hosting, and real-time communication (Mustak, 2023).

#### **2.4.3. The Importance of Communication and Collaboration**

Given the need to ensure everyone was on the same page, connected, and feeling as if they were part of one big team despite everyone working in silos, empirical research indicates that communication and collaboration were an essential requirement of the virtual workforce as companies tried to maintain information flow as much as possible through various channels (Nunamaker et al., 2009). This empirically based theory is supported by Daft and Lengel, who analyzed the concept of media richness with the premise that complicated messages should be delivered with higher means and levels of engagement.

The highest means of engagement is face-to-face; thus, the virtual workplace lacked this critical element and relied on other forms of communication for organizations to thrive (Sobel & Reilly, n.d.). Video conferencing reigned supreme, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams for work meetings and team efforts in the virtual realm, as well as much-needed social interactions. Townsend et al. (1998) cite project management platforms, task apps, and collaborative documentation applications uploaded in an effort to maximize

communication and simplify effort in this new remote environment. Where companies did not need to see one another to engage in a project but had subsequent questions, small talk, or urgent information to convey, they used Slack, Microsoft Teams chat, and Workplace by Facebook (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

#### **2.4.4. Prioritizing Employee Well-being and Support**

Employee wellness was a consideration that many organizations had never considered before. However, with work and home lives colliding and blending, companies had no choice but to reconsider wellness physical, emotional, and mental in a different light. According to Carnevale and Hatak's article, the problem of why this was needed and needed with urgency during the pandemic was that companies had to be cognizant of employee wellness not to add more stress, anxiety, and unaddressed concerns to the company. Therefore, as new developments in this area, the companies did the following: Flexible Scheduling: The adoption of flex time, compressed work weeks, and permanent remote options to give employees better access to scheduling and work/life balance (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Mental Wellness Support: Greater access to mental health programming, employee assistance programs, and mindfulness/stress-reducing opportunities to further support employee mental health (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Socialization Opportunities: Virtual team-building exercises, happy hours, and online collaborative forums to get remote workers more connected with one another (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). These initiatives manifested the collective awareness that it wouldn't just be nice to make them feel comfortable about their working lives and beyond (however much beyond is left), but also, there would need to be output and sustained funding while in a bewildered state.

#### **2.5. Organizational Policy Adaptations**

Where once virtual work was not the norm, inadequacies in previously adopted performance management and much-needed organizational policies relevant to in-person requirements came to the fore. Thus, organizations had to create policies with the intention of cultivating a proper, conducive remote setting from scratch. With subsequent virtual work requirements came the inclusion of organizational policies related to performance management, socioemotional issues of remote work, remote digital interactions, and efforts to collaborate (Shambi, 2021). This systematic review adds to the body of knowledge on crisis management and organizational performance with recommendations for practitioners and policymakers looking to achieve a successful transformation to the new normal of virtual work environments. This section explores the key policy changes observed in response to the pandemic.

### **2.5.1. Rethinking Performance Management**

Traditional performance management systems, often based upon being in the office, time management at a managerial level was face time, so these systems failed when a remote working world existed. Therefore, performance appraisal, feedback, and evaluation had to be rethought based upon an evaluation not conducted in person—at least not all of the time (Cascio, 2000). As such, the Society for Human Resource Management reports performance management systems must account for remote achievements, group efforts, and communications needed and successfully rendered in a digital landscape (Performance Management: A Practical Guide, n.d).

The following policies were revised:

How Virtual Employees Are Evaluated: Focus on a Results-Based Environment. Quality of work was evaluated based on performance and results, not time or time spent in the office (Performance Management: A Practical Guide, n.d).

Specific Goals and Expectations. Performance-based goals, expectations, and deliverables were specific and known so virtual employees could stay on task and in alignment (Performance Management: A Practical Guide, n.d).

Continuous Communication and Feedback. Opportunities for performance management existed through check-ins, feedback, and avenues for communication (Performance Management: A Practical Guide, n.d).

Leverage technology to monitor performance. Leveraged software and systems to monitor engagement in daily work hours, log activities, measure productivity, and provided statistical feedback associated with employee outcomes.

### **2.5.2. Embracing Flexible Work Arrangements**

Flexible Work Policies Flexible work arrangements were established during the early pandemic stages. Employers wanted to assess the benefit of employee access to flexible opportunities to determine when and how to work. Flexible work policies became associated with onboarding and retention due to the competitive labor market (Stella et al., 2021). Furthermore, Global Workplace Analytics revealed that a majority of employees who had the opportunity to work remotely during the pandemic wanted to continue part- or full-time hours in a post-pandemic world (The 2021 Global Employee Survey, 2021).

Thus, employers started to implement policies regarding:

Expanded Remote Work Opportunities: The ability to work remotely full-time, part-time, or hybrid.

Increased Flexibility of Work Times: Increased employee flexibility with work hours, staggered start and end times, or compressed work weeks. Bambra (2023); Kelliher (2023); Thomson (2008) promote flexible work arrangements since this reduces stressors and increases job satisfaction and work/life balance.

Work From Anywhere: Remote work opportunities that extend beyond geographical limitations. Such flexible work arrangements not only increased employee satisfaction and health, but also gave companies access to a more varied talent pool and reduced costs with less need for physical office space.

### **2.5.3 Investing in Digital Collaboration Tools**

Where remote work was mandated, the need for digital infrastructure and common portals for virtual team management became apparent. Thus, significant capital expenditures in technological assets were leveraged for remote workers to stay connected, aware, collaborative, and engaged in knowledge management (Digital Transformation powered by Value Engineering, 2021). It's unsurprising that during the pandemic, access to digital transformation and digital assets was used more than ever in the history of a firm for internal communications, collaboration, and project management (Ichinoski, 2023). Thus, a temporary measure to satisfy an immediate need became a standard practice of management in the foreseeable future (Beise, et al., 2004). As per the McKinsey article, technology to work from home indicated that, at the very least, systems for communication, collaboration, and knowledge management had to be established (Hislop et al., 2009).

The required tech developments were:

Video Conferencing Platforms: Although video conferencing was wonderful to recreate in-person interaction, excess usage created "Zoom fatigue," the feeling that employees were "on" all day for various digital meetings. Therefore, striking an appropriate balance with other communicative avenues was essential (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Acceptance and frequent use of video conferencing platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet for meetings, team check-ins, and with clientele. Project management software Asana, Trello, Monday.com task tracking, workflow, and team collaboration.

This software kept track of everyone's progress on collective endeavors while keeping team members accountable in a virtual setting (Eriya et al., 2020). These worked well for project management and responsibility but required intentional implementation and training to ensure the whole team was on board and using it effectively (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Cloud-Based Collaborative Platforms: Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 for in-the-moment document sharing, editing, and online secure cloud storage.

Remote Communication and Collaboration Software: Essential to maintain group continuity and communication. Yet like instant messaging before, too much is too much as boundaries are crossed and employees discover a consistent overlap between work and home. Thus, the need for communication guidelines and expectations was formed (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Use instant messaging (Slack, Microsoft Teams chat, WhatsApp) to convey short messages, casual conversation, and work/team updates. Because without these technological innovations, there would be no productivity, no collaboration, and no communication in a virtual world.

## **2.6. Challenges and Strategies in Managing Virtual Teams**

While the shift to remote work presented opportunities for innovation and agility, it also brought unique challenges for managing virtual teams. This section explores the key challenges faced by managers and the strategies employed to address them.

### **2.6.1. Maintaining Team Cohesion and Communication**

Problems of Team Cohesion and Communication Team cohesion and communication are much more challenging when teams are remote and no pre-existing face-to-face culture exists. Therefore, without appropriate casual social channels to foster team dynamics and team engagement, heightened communication barriers, differing microcultures, and time differences exacerbated the challenge (West, 2017). The solutions to these problems included:

Virtual Team Meetings: Regularly scheduled virtual team meetings both formal and informal foster the dialogue, teamwork, and information/concerns that need to be said (Gibson et al., 2003).

Defined Communication Channels: Creating specific communication channels per project and/or team and department helps people avoid feeling overcommunicated to while still getting on the same page. (Galli, 2019).

Virtual Team Collaboration: Hosted online team bonding activities, happy hours, and games for remote staff to connect and feel like part of the team (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Open-Door Policy. Implemented an open-door policy and championed a culture of communication and transparency throughout the organization to enable staff to present their opinions and concerns to either managers or coworkers (Nowlin et al., 2019).

### **2.6.2. Ensuring Employee Engagement and Motivation**

Maintaining employee engagement and motivation can be more challenging in a remote work environment, where employees may feel isolated, disconnected, and lacking clear direction. The absence of in-person

supervision and the potential for distractions at home can also impact employee focus and productivity (Ballentine et al., 1969).

Corrective measures included: Explicit Expectations and Objectives: Informing the remote employees of what is expected regarding performance and deliverables to better understand the process going forward with clarity and specificity (Newman & Ford, 2021).

Feedback and Recognition: Providing continuous feedback—both negative and positive—to ensure that workers feel good about their efforts, know what they've done well, and have guidance to do better in the future (Aryee et al., 2019).

Empowerment and Independence of Employees: Let remote employees gain more control and choice in decisions to give them a sense of ownership and accountability (Aryee et al., 2019). Work, study and progress training, schooling and advancement possibilities for remote workers to motivate and energize (Gagné et al., 2022).

### **2.6.3. Addressing Work-Life Balance and Boundaries**

Prior to the pandemic, remote workers typically benefited from access to both office and home environments, allowing for clearer compartmentalization between professional and personal responsibilities. Those, however, who engaged in remote employment post-pandemic find burnout, anxiety, and adverse health consequences from a 24/7 digital connection to the workplace that won't shut down and the added pressure to "be seen" (Harvard Business Review, 2020). However, because the entire virtual workplace was instituted as a band-aid solution, many organizations realized that excessively adopted, flexible, employee-oriented management styles would be necessary going forward. The awareness that boundaries had blended set in (Harvard Business Review, 2020). What was once a band-aid solution became a permanent solution as management realized employee mental health, physical health, and work/home balance would rely on new initiatives. (Cakula, & Pratt, 2021).

These solutions were implemented by companies via the following policies and procedures in place:

Boundary Setting Encouraged. A policy and culture that encourages proper boundary setting and ensures that employees do not feel guilty for working their assigned hours or bleeding into personal time is beneficial for productivity and company spirit (Latheef, 2021). Flexibility and Control. A culture that encourages flexibility—flexible hours, the ability to work from home—proves that employees can sufficiently separate work and home lives.

Moreover, the more control employees have over when and how they work, the easier it is to manage home and work obligations (Kelliher, 2023).

Promoting Mindfulness and Stress Reduction: Providing resources and initiatives that promote mindfulness, stress reduction initiatives, and an at-home work-life balance (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021).  
Leading by Example: When management and upper management set the example and had a balance for themselves, and also encouraged employees to pay attention to their self-care (Workplace Insight, 2023).

## **2.7. Long-Term Implications and the Future of Work**

Where the literature gap indicated there was no such phenomenon or idea surrounding changes in work and the workplace was because the pandemic was not an immediate concern. However, researchers found that there was a projected idea of change, although it was not substantiated until after the pandemic. The potential changes involved digitizing communication in the workplace, increased use of collaborative applications, more flexible employee schedules, and management considerations like never before. (Brooks, 2021) This will influence the future of work because it was disrupted by the pandemic and so much of the research found relative to it. It will never be the same. Covid-19 essentially changed everything that was known about in-person management and how people get hired, trained, and promoted. From changed company policies to in-office work to various modes of digital communication, everything is going to change based upon what was gleaned during this time (Workplace Insight, 2023).

During the pandemic, there was disruption to management styles, characteristics, and awareness as management needed to ensure their employees stayed on task and effective as they were in the office but from home with no real way to gauge productivity aside from potential distractions at home. Thus, understanding how management operated during the pandemic is congruent with the necessary factors and challenges that come with managing a remote workforce. Therefore, these findings and recommendations will impact the future of work (Bhargava, 2020).

### **2.7.1. The Hybrid Workplace Model**

One of the biggest pandemic changes that will continue well into the future is the hybrid workplace model that enables many workers to both work from home and in the office. This model offers the best of both worlds—no commute with remote opportunity yet also, in-person teamwork and face-to-face collaboration (Choudhury et al., 2022). The pandemic opened many employers' eyes to the accessibility that working from home was not only an option but something sustainable; therefore, the hybrid work model became commonplace as employers sought opportunities for in-person and remote employees (Roy, 2022). There's a multitude of hybrid work options that companies are experimenting with. Yet the optimal hybrid work environment hinges on flexibility and inclusivity regardless of employee location home or in-house. For instance, some companies are completely remote, while others are mostly in-house with a little opportunity to telecommute.

### **2.7.2. Ensuring Employee Engagement and Motivation**

Maintaining employee engagement and motivation can be more challenging in a remote work environment, where employees may feel isolated, disconnected, and lacking clear direction. The absence of in-person supervision and the potential for distractions at home can also impact employee focus and productivity (Makowski, 2023).

Thus, to combat such challenges faced by remote employees, organizations instituted the following. First, clear goals and expectations were set, meaning an efficient, standardized communication of performance expectations and organizational goals provides remote employees with purpose and guidance (Graves & Karabayeva, 2020). Second, regular feedback and recognition are given, meaning that feedback and evaluative results are constructive and positive, acknowledging the efforts and achievements of employees and using the learning experiences for further development (Daniali et al., 2021). Third, empowering employees and providing autonomy means that employees have a voice and control over their work and decision-making; this provides a sense of responsibility and ownership (Diah & Cahyadi, 2020). Fourth, creating opportunities for growth and development means that reserved for remote employees will be promotion potential, training, and workshops for future professional development, which keeps employees engaged and invested in the long run (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020).

### **2.7.3. Addressing Work-Life Balance and Boundaries**

One of the major concerns remote workers experienced during the pandemic was a collapse in work-life boundaries. An always-on, always-connected world with digital communication bigwigs drives the mandate that employees should be accessible and respond to messages twenty-four-seven. However, such a reality exists to the detriment of employee well-being; it spawns burnout, stress, and more (Challande et al., 2022).

There are specific policies and practices that organizations can have to circumvent these concerns, in addition to work-home related stressors from the pandemic. For example, organizations can promote a culture that encourages non-work hours and champions boundaries between work and non-work (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). Thus, a culture that conveys the necessity to unplug and respect employee requirements for their own time minimizes an always-on mentality and the eager potential to answer erroneously sent emails or instant messages after hours. In addition, research reflects that organizations have policies that permit flexible non-work hours, remotely working, or hybrid options (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). Therefore, with this option available, employees can take advantage of the flexibility afforded to enhance their well-being. Furthermore, enhancements come from acknowledgment of mindfulness and stress reduction with resources and programs offered within the organization. This includes meditation sessions or access to

mental health services for any employee seeking stress reduction. Finally, those organizations whose leaders are role models for appropriate work-life balance will be in the best position to thrive (Koinig & Diehl, 2021). When upper management has boundaries and promotes balance, they are encouraged to do so for other management who likewise desires to protect employee work/life well-being.

#### **2.7.4. The Hybrid Workplace Model**

One of the most significant long-term implications of the pandemic is the emergence of the hybrid workplace model, where employees have the flexibility to work remotely and in the office. This model offers the benefits of both remote work, such as flexibility and reduced commuting time, and in-office work, such as face-to-face collaboration and social interaction (Choudhury et al., 2022).

As organizations experimented with a range of hybrid possibilities fully remote, very in-person with a few remote options they found the best hybrid work environment to be a collaborative and respectful work atmosphere for everyone remote or in-person (Krajčik et al., 2023). Yet the hybrid/remote arrangement posed issues of all access, all the time. It became more challenging for employees to distinguish between being on the clock and off, and with no boundaries established, this became a concern regarding employee wellness and, therefore, burnout (Newman & Ford 2021).

#### **2.7.5. The Importance of Digital Fluency**

Because the pandemic was essentially an accelerated transition to a virtual workplace, much of what was learned will be transferrable if not enhanced in the post-pandemic workplace. Therefore, the ability to be digitally fluent will be necessary.

Knowing how to use digital collaborative tools to communicate effectively in digital settings and pivot as technology changes is necessary (Bergson-Shilcock, 2020). In a setting where employee had no choice but to use digital communication tools, it's necessary to note that in some situations, the absence of tone, inflection, and body language prevented people from communicating effectively; people had miscommunications that, at certain times, prevented effective collaboration (Newman & Ford, 2021).

For example, there are expectations for employees to know digital collaborative platforms and communication needs across devices and channels, as well as the ability to rapidly pivot to new software that hits the marketplace (Newman & Ford, 2021).

Since growth is anticipated, organizations will be reliant upon frequent skill training and professional development.

It's the organization's responsibility to train in digital skills because, without developmental opportunities offered, employees will not have the necessary skills to thrive in a digitized environment. Furthermore, the

workplace culture should be one of constant evolution and flexibility, championing advancement to keep up with constantly changing technology.

#### **2.7.6. The Focus on Employee Well-being**

The case for Employee Well-Being was heightened during the pandemic. Many organizations came to understand that even if it wasn't a necessity, it was a good way to ensure a profit by fulfilling the physical, mental, and emotional needs of employees. The other aspect of well-being was improved work-life balance, access to mental health resources, and sponsored employee assistance programs; therefore, an on-site culture of work-life balance exists, and sponsored well-being efforts are encouraged. Organizations that understood that working from home could foster loneliness and burnout or make it hard to separate home and work life fostered many policies and programs related to employee wellbeing. Employees had access to virtual mental health resources (Park et al., 2021), suggestions for ergonomic home offices (Cakula et al., 2021), virtual happy hours (Vatalidis, 2023), and recommended practices for establishing boundaries between work and home (Makowski, 2023; Writer, 2023).

#### **2.7.7. The Evolving Role of Managers**

The role of managers has evolved significantly in the wake of the pandemic. Managers are now expected to be not only taskmasters but also coaches, mentors, and facilitators. They need to be skilled in leading remote teams, fostering collaboration, and supporting employee well-being.

Beyond management and productivity, there is a reconfigured way of life since the pandemic. Managers have to be trainers, they have to be listeners, they have to be advocates. They had to be available to facilitate and work with their teams in a remote capacity, in a collaborative way, yet balancing emotional and health concerns. Therefore, organizations needed to equip managers with the training, tools, and assistance to excel in this post-pandemic environment. Furthermore, organizations faced a requirement to empower managers to make the best decisions for their teams and the organization.

#### **2.7.8. Data Security and Privacy**

With employees accessing sensitive information and company systems from various locations and devices, organizations had to strengthen their data security and privacy policies. This involved implementing robust cybersecurity measures (Thorson, 2023), providing training on data protection best practices (Karen, 2023), and establishing clear guidelines for handling confidential information in a remote work environment (Mayfield, 2023).

#### **2.7.9. Maintaining Productivity and Engagement in Virtual Environments**

When COVID-19 mandated a new work-from-home reality for many, managerial challenges abounded in maintaining productivity while keeping morale high. There were distractions. Socialization was blurred, and lines between work and home were complicated. Yet without a concrete in-office setup, there were also elements of productivity to be managed that added confusion about what exactly was being monitored. For example, were there problems with distractions at home, procrastination where no one could see if someone was getting the work done? Was there sufficient task distribution to ensure proper weighting (Harvard Business Review, 2020).

Furthermore, without a physical office, getting to know one's coworkers and managers was more complicated, potentially leading to concerns about social isolation. Management had to foster collaboration and community (Chu et al., 2023). Had organizations possessed the foresight to comprehend the idiosyncratic challenges of remote work and discovered ways to proactively solve such problems at this time, employee productivity, engagement, and well-being would not have declined during this pandemic.

## **2.8. Mitigation Strategies Employed**

Strategies Used to Decrease Facilitation of a Better Work-Life Balance: Promoting set hours for being online, a designated home office, and midday breaks to reduce burnout and foster a healthy work/life balance (Lautsch et al., 2023; Harvard Business Review, 2020). Thus, with the understanding of how appropriate work-life balance was needed, management cultivated specific boundaries and exercises to prevent burnout. They suggested a specific set of start and end times each day for work, no mingling of home office spaces with home leisure areas where people relax, and a midday break when applicable (Lam et al., 2022).

Such recommendations and implementations fostered a championing culture for this work-at-home segregation. Knowing a customized and comfortable workspace was essential for reasonably effective work; however, employers also reached out with help and suggestions for ergonomic workspaces, recommended layouts and chair-desk requirements, and let employees know what adjustable chairs, sit-stand desks, and desk accessories were available to them (Cakula & Pratt 2021). This was to ensure everyone had the possibility of an ergonomic life to decrease the likelihood of musculoskeletal disorders and enhance physical wellness in the long run.

Combating Loneliness: Team building activities, social check-ins, and casual online meetings fostered a sense of belonging (Montag et al., 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020). To combat loneliness and isolation with remote work, management did what it could to ensure that remote workers felt like part of the team and considered a valuable entity of the company. For example, virtual team bonding activities were attempted such as games, group competitive challenges, and happy hour-type activities; although remote workers

were not physically present, virtually attending created a more casual atmosphere in which remote workers could feel like part of the team (Santos & Ralph, 2022). In addition, management encouraged social check-ins that allowed people to connect on non-work levels, discussing their families, dogs, and other anecdotes which would promote better employee rapport (Buonomo et al., 2023). Finally, informal online meetings were encouraged via Zoom or Google Meet to promote more casual banter, off-hand comments, and bonding opportunities that a regular water cooler would have provided. Therefore, by intentionally creating these social and connection opportunities, management tried to alleviate some of the remote working loneliness and foster a better sense of community and engagement with remote employees.

Managers about Digital Tools/Productivity Resources Empowerment: When remote work required virtual communication and collaboration, the company empowered its managers to use various digital tools and technologies appropriately. This empowerment trained the managers in the proper access and use of various digital tools and productivity resources for digital communications, project management, and knowledge management with virtual teams. (Mustak et al., 2023; Newman & Ford, 2021).

Employee wellness considerations: Programming for employee wellness included access to digital mental health resources, virtual exercise programs, and stress-relief and mindfulness workshops for remote workers (Park et al., 2021). How Culture Impacted Success of Working Remotely: Culture was one of transparency and overcommunication; after all, people are required to constantly update, share, and communicate to ensure everyone is on the same page. This solves the challenge of working remotely, which distance breeds miscommunication, for people are not all in one place (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Therefore, remote workers would be empowered to feel as though, should they have any questions, there would be enough time and resources to answer them as management sought transparency. Furthermore, this connects to a challenge of remote work being that people feel disconnected from the organization (Ozimek, 2020). Therefore, creating a culture of transparency would ensure people would be heard/included and make communication easier. Furthermore, overcommunication can combat people feeling stuck, having no clear expectations or no guidance from management (Ilag, 2021).

Culture of Transparency and Overcommunication: A culture of transparency and overcommunication emerged as updates and information were constantly being disseminated. People working disconnected want to be in the know, and overcommunication can ensure that everyone is on the same page moving forward and with subsequent developments (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). This is especially true for remote work developments that these workers think do not apply to them when, in fact, they are just poorly misinformed about what's going on (Ozimek, 2020). Therefore, by being transparent, it was critical for these workers to understand what was going on around them and how it may or may not impact their work. Furthermore, communicating more than one would ever think would be necessary in hindsight was critical

to provide these persons with all of the information that they'd ever need through information conduits to avoid rumors and misinformation (Ilag, 2021).

**Prior to Work, We Build Relationships:** These companies attempted to connect with their distributed employees on a personal level. There were many forms of virtual team bonding, whether it was playing video games together or participating in team bonding activities just to get to know each other (Eckhardt et al., 2019). There were even happy hours where remote employees could engage in non-work-related conversations (Santos & Ralph, 2022). The support of casual bonding was appreciated and oftentimes used to make truly non-work-related activities accessible. **Provide Continued Training and Resources:** Companies report that continued training and support would be necessary for those working from home. They taught employees how to use and collaborate with video conferencing applications, project management systems, and digital messaging (Camilleri & Camilleri, 2022). This empowered employees to best utilize their skills and abilities in the remote working setting while integrating a seamless collaborative experience with others. They also learned the appropriate etiquette surrounding virtual communication how to remain professional, foster genuine relationships, and avoid misunderstandings when physical body language is removed (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Furthermore, companies taught their employees how to foster a work-life balance while employed, creating home offices, setting work and play hours, and engaging in wellness activities (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Support in this area trained them for success in the remote environment while keeping them—as healthy employees—productive. **Implementation of Intended Communication Patterns:** A crucial way in which effective remote work was facilitated was the implementation of intended communication patterns in the organization (Bouchard & Meunier, 2022). For example, certain types of communication would come through certain means—important updates were sent via email; for example, certain FAQs were posted on the intranet, and the like, and when appropriate, to acknowledge and respond to time-sensitive messages; this ensures workflow is interrupted from an expected response time. Furthermore, organizations sought to raise awareness of communication tendencies to avoid digital discontent, motivating remote workers to be aware of their language and tone, as muted expressions on a frozen image can come across just as negatively as someone having a bad attitude (Yang et al., 2021). Therefore, using these strategies, these organizations met targeted remote work problems while simultaneously helping their employees with productivity, health and safety, and engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **2.9. Theoretical Framework**

This study employs four complementary theoretical frameworks to examine the influence of coronavirus on management practices and policies for managing remote employees. These theories provide the conceptual foundation for understanding the transformational changes documented in the findings and

discussion chapters, ensuring a robust theoretical underpinning for the analysis of how organisations rapidly adapted to remote work management during the pandemic.

Organisational Agility Theory serves as the primary theoretical lens for this desktop study, defining agility as the capacity of organisations to rapidly change direction in response to environmental shifts and marketplace demands (Koekemoer et al., 2021). This theory directly underpins the study's examination of how organisations swiftly transitioned to remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic, providing theoretical grounding for understanding the digital transformation acceleration theme identified in the findings. The theory explains how organisations rapidly adopted technology infrastructure for remote work, demonstrating organisational agility in response to crisis conditions. Furthermore, it supports understanding of organisational culture reconstruction, where organisations deliberately redesigned culture transmission mechanisms for virtual environments, and the leadership model evolution from directive to transformational approaches as an agile response to pandemic challenges.

Media Richness Theory provides the second theoretical foundation, addressing the challenges and effectiveness of information dissemination in virtual teams by examining how different communication channels vary in their capacity to convey complex information (Daft & Lengel, 1986). This theory offers crucial insights into the communication framework transformation identified in the study's findings, explaining the formalisation of previously informal communication processes and the adoption of multiple digital communication channels during the pandemic. The theory supports understanding of performance management restructuring, particularly how organisations transitioned from time-based to outcome-based evaluation systems when direct supervision was no longer possible. Additionally, it provides theoretical insight into team dynamics adaptation and how organisations modified collaboration strategies to support virtual workforce communication.

Transformational Leadership Theory constitutes the third theoretical pillar, emphasising leaders who inspire and motivate followers through vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass, 1985). This theory is central to understanding the leadership adaptations documented in the study's findings, directly explaining the shift from directive to transformational leadership approaches necessitated by remote work management. The theory provides theoretical foundation for understanding employee well-being prioritisation, explaining how leaders integrated mental health and wellness into organisational policy as part of their transformational approach. Furthermore, it supports comprehension of organisational culture reconstruction, demonstrating how transformational leaders deliberately fostered culture and engagement in virtual environments through intentional leadership practices.

Social Exchange Theory forms the fourth theoretical component, positing that workplace relationships are based on reciprocal exchanges of resources, trust, and support between employees and organisations (Blau, 1964). This theory provides crucial insight into how remote work affected employee-organisation relationships during the pandemic, explaining the employee well-being prioritisation theme through the lens of organisational investment in employee wellness as part of the social exchange relationship to maintain engagement and productivity. The theory offers theoretical understanding of performance management restructuring, particularly the shift towards trust-based, outcome-focused evaluation systems that characterised successful remote work adaptations. Additionally, it supports comprehension of communication framework transformation, explaining how organisations enhanced communication to maintain social exchange relationships in virtual environments.

The integration of these four theoretical frameworks creates a comprehensive foundation for understanding the multifaceted impact of Covid-19 on remote work management practices and policies. Organisational Agility Theory provides the overarching framework for understanding swift organisational adaptations, whilst Media Richness Theory specifically addresses communication transformations and Social Exchange Theory explains relationship maintenance dynamics in virtual environments. Transformational Leadership Theory bridges these perspectives by explaining how leadership evolution facilitated both organisational agility and effective virtual relationship management. Together, these theories enable the study to explain rapid organisational change, understand communication transformations, analyse leadership evolution, and examine policy adaptations across multiple dimensions. The theoretical framework demonstrates that Covid-19's impact on remote work management represents fundamental advancement in management theory rather than temporary organisational adaptation, revealing through systematic application of established theories how crisis conditions accelerated beneficial organisational transformations whilst extending theoretical understanding of virtual work management as a distinct organisational capability requiring integrated theoretical frameworks rather than simple adaptations of existing approaches.

## **2.10. Summary**

In conclusion, this comprehensive literature review has examined the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on management practices and organisational policies for virtual employees. The review has synthesised insights from a range of theoretical perspectives, including organisational agility theory, communication theories in remote settings, and models of employee motivation and engagement.

The key themes that have emerged from the literature include:

- a. The evolution of management practices prior to and during the pandemic, with a shift towards more flexible, adaptable, and employee-centric approaches.

- b. The adaptations made to organisational policies to accommodate the demands of virtual work, such as revised performance management systems, enhanced digital collaboration tools, and flexible work arrangements.
- c. The challenges faced by managers in maintaining employee productivity, engagement, and well-being in a remote work environment, and the strategies employed to address these issues.
- d. The modifications to organisational communication and collaboration strategies to support effective team dynamics and knowledge sharing in a virtual context.
- e. The potential long-term implications of the pandemic-induced changes in management practices and policies, and the sustainability of these transformations.

The insights provided by this literature review serve as a foundation for the present study, which aims to further explore the research question: How have management practices for virtual employees transformed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what are the implications for organizational effectiveness and employee well-being?

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a transformative impact on management practices and organizational policies, particularly in the context of managing virtual employees. The shift to remote work, the adoption of digital collaboration tools, and the increased focus on employee well-being have created both challenges and opportunities for organizations.

By embracing flexibility, investing in technology, and prioritizing employee well-being, organizations can create a more resilient, adaptable, and human-centered workplace that is well-positioned for the future of work. The lessons learned from the pandemic will continue to shape the way we work for years to come.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter details the research methodology of this project in an attempt to learn what was different about managing remote employees after COVID-19 and, subsequently, how that difference impacted the effectiveness of operations and employee well-being. According to Singh et al. (2018), research methodology is the "systematic scientific study of methods"; the precise means by which a researcher "identifies, selects, processes and analyzes information" in hopes of generating a clearer picture of a complex reality.

This chapter reflected on the justification for the chosen methodology and the subsequent inclusion of a step-by-step, thorough explanation of the methodology. It commenced with a recap of the research question and research purpose, which established a definitive alignment between intention and actions taken to fulfill such intention. Thereafter, the considerations made for the methodology that mirrored similar studies in the field were discussed, as well as the extensive justification of why this was a qualitative, exploratory study of great significance. Furthermore, this was evaluated in this chapter because a critical understanding was necessary for the credibility and dependability of such a study between the research process, the sampling frame and population, and analysis. Because something like credibility and dependability applies to any well-done research, the factors of quality/dependability attributable to qualitative research and the study's relative ethical considerations and limitations were assessed here.

Thus, this chapter differentiated between what would ensure the greatest credibility and dependability of the results while giving the reader a more extensive perspective of quality aspects of this research relative to the emerging nature of remote work.

### 3.2. Research Aim

This study had two aims: (i) to assess what and how managerial strategies were adjusted compared to pre, during, and post-pandemic. In other words, a certain changed organizational policy was rendered necessary to effectively manage virtual employees. Therefore, it gives insight into how management adjusted to prevent poor productivity and poor morale of the employees in a bid to keep them engaged, and at the same time, how the companies adjusted their communication strategies and collaborative efforts to ensure team productivity; (ii) to see whether these adjustments would be permanent. Thus, it evaluated the practicality of such managerial strategies and policies moving forward. Therefore, satisfying both purposes from the researchers' considerations would lend a sense of establishing a groundwork for future study as limitations

are provided which reinforce what can be studied in the future. This allows for this study to turn into a successful study that can benefit a larger population under similar mandated remote work situations.

### **3.3. Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on management practices in organizations with virtual employees prior and after the pandemic.
2. To identify the specific organizational policies that were adapted to manage virtual employees during the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. To examine the challenges faced by managers in ensuring organizational and employee productivity and employee engagement in a virtual environment during the pandemic.
4. To assess how organizations adapted communication, collaboration, and team dynamics to suit a virtual workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. To investigate changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic on management practices and organizational policies.

### **3.4. Research Questions**

1. How have management practices in organizations with virtual employees evolved prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and after the pandemic?
2. What organizational policies were adapted to manage virtual employees during the Covid-19 pandemic?
3. What challenges did managers face in maintaining employee and organizational productivity and engagement in a virtual environment during the Covid-19 pandemic?
4. How did organizations modify their communication and collaboration strategies to support a virtual workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic?
5. What changes have been observed in management practices as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

### **3.5. Research Paradigm**

This study employs an interpretivist research paradigm. A research paradigm represents the philosophical underpinnings and fundamental assumptions that inform one's approach to research and interpretive frameworks (Chan & McGarey, 2012; Sowbel, 2012).

The interpretivist paradigm is particularly suitable for desktop research investigating complex social phenomena, as it values the contextualised and multifaceted nature of organisational responses to the Covid-19 pandemic as documented in existing literature. This paradigm recognises that no single objective "truth" exists regarding how organisations managed virtual employees during the pandemic, acknowledging instead that multiple interpretations and experiences have been documented across various sources (Ragab & Arisha, 2017).

The choice of an interpretivist paradigm over a positivist approach represents a fundamental methodological decision for this desktop study. Whilst positivism assumes that management practices can be measured objectively through quantitative methods and seeks universal laws through statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019), interpretivism recognises that organisational adaptations during the pandemic involved complex human decision-making, contextual factors, and meaning-making processes that are best understood through qualitative analysis of documented experiences (Bryman, 2016).

This desktop study's interpretivist approach focuses on analysing and synthesising existing literature, case studies, and reports to develop a contextualised understanding of how the Covid-19 pandemic influenced management practices and policies for virtual employees. The research objectives—examining the impact on management practices, identifying adapted organisational policies, understanding managerial challenges, assessing communication adaptations, and investigating changes in management approaches—align with an interpretivist paradigm that seeks to understand meaning and context rather than establish causal relationships through statistical measurement.

The research adopted an inductive, interpretive approach wherein analysis of existing literature and documented organisational experiences provided themes and insights that contribute to understanding the phenomenon. This desktop methodology was designed to synthesise and contextualise documented organisational responses to managing virtual employees during the pandemic, developing a theoretical understanding relevant for practice and policy without requiring primary empirical data collection.

### **3.6. Research Design**

Research design is the plan, outline, framework for exploring a specific research question and achieving research objectives (Singh et al., 2023). Thus, this was a qualitative research design and the nature of the research was secondary, or desktop study. Secondary research is research done about previously researched material (Chan & McGarey, 2012; Bibb, 2007). The nature of data chosen was secondary because of the advantages of secondary research—it's less expensive, requires less time, and more extensive and reliable assemblages already exist (Moskovicz, 2019). Qualitative research design was an appropriate way to study the phenomenon because it offered an interpretive, contextual perspective by exploring the meaningful connections, and it delivered the nuanced, contextual findings necessary to appreciate the complexities associated with dynamic managerial capabilities and changes to firm policy mandated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The necessary secondary data for the research came from a methodical desktop research collection. In other words, the researcher purposefully located, assembled, and analyzed the articles and information from published resources that were all peer-reviewed and reputable. This was achieved via online research databases. The researcher accessed JSTOR, EBSCOhost, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar with relevant keywords and search strings. Furthermore, the research also assessed the websites and online archives of the relevant governmental agencies and international and nonprofit organizations for applicable reports and articles.

#### **i. Systematic Review Approach**

The means of data collection was a systematic review process to ensure scientific reliability and replicability. According to Rethlefsen et al. (2021), systematic reviews allow for literature to be found and assessed by multitudes of researchers via a uniform search across multiple databases, plus the additional steps taken to support such findings and apply them to a broader scope. First, the inclusion and exclusion of sources became clear.

Sources to include are all the assessed articles that explain specifically what was done for management practices and any adjustments to company policy during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sources to exclude are anything that does not specifically relate to management practices, how this crisis impacted companies, or how companies attempted to navigate remote work. Second, a comprehensive searching strategy was created, including keywords, subject headings, and database-specific limiters to ensure that any and all potentially related resources to the topic of review would be searched for in the anticipated search. The planned strategy was then adhered to with searching in the different databases/archives. Third, after the collection of data, entries were pared down via a title/abstract review and a full-text review for eligibility per the determined inclusion/exclusion criteria. The systematic review process was documented for replicability and transparency according to systematic review standards (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

## **ii. Meta-Analysis**

In addition to the systematic review, a meta-analysis was conducted where applicable. A meta-analysis is a statistical blending of results among studies to support associations, trends, or effects that are not necessarily found in individual study results (Shelby & Vaske, 2008). While this is typically reserved for quantitative findings, qualitative data synthesis still benefited from this method by examining trends across a range of studies.

## **iii. Data Analysis Techniques**

Once the relevant data was collected, qualitative data analysis ensued via thematic and content analysis. Thematic analysis occurred, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), to identify, cut, and assess themes and patterns that emerged from the data. Thus, the researcher engaged with the data to generate first cycle coding, engage in a theme search while reviewing, defining, and naming those themes before generating a final report. It is a cyclical process; researchers often find themselves returning to previous steps as more is understood during the course of analysis. Content analysis will be used according to Krippendorff (2019).

Content analysis is how the selected materials will be evaluated and interpreted by using certain keywords, concepts, and themes relevant to the research question. Therefore, content analysis gives meaning to the findings from the seemingly arbitrary pieces of information collected and allows the author to find anticipated information to adapt a greater understanding of the observed phenomenon. The results were effectively presented with journalists' quotes and excerpts from the research studied. Therefore, the quasi-experimental study could convey its results relative to the Covid-19 pandemic's influence on managerial approaches and organizational policies especially in the context of telecommuting.

## **3.7. Research Approach**

The approach of this study is a qualitative case study design. Qualitative research involves the gathering of non-numerical data which, once gathered, is converted and assessed for meaning in order to achieve a greater understanding of specific ideas, viewpoints, and realities (Nsubuga-Mugoa, 2019).

Thus, the nature of this as a qualitative research design for this study meant that the results would be relative and appropriate to the research intentions to gain an understanding of such complicated and intricate transformations to management, particularly for those working from home due to the pandemic. A qualitative case study relies on an in-depth and triangulated investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within a real-world context. This meant that as the researcher of the case study, she would have to investigate various avenues of information to include and better understand the case (Yeo, 2019). The cross-

comparative assessment of the phenomenon across various organizational types helped identify commonalities and divergences in challenged and resolved efforts and situational intricacies that would necessarily impact the organizational approach. In addition, assessing the phenomena across multiple organizations provided the researcher access to the views and actions of those most involved—management and HR professionals—seeking to understand and overcome the complicated process of Virtual Employee Management on an international scale at a never-before-seen pandemic level.

Ultimately, such access would fulfill the need for this research project in generating an in-depth, contextualized understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, the case study contributed to the nascent employment and remote work literatures filed by Dunne et al. (2020) and Alon et al. (2020) by indicating a more nuanced, cross-comparative solution to the unforeseen stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by various firms. Thus, the researcher could answer the central research questions.

### **3.8. Search Strategy**

This dissertation was conducted through secondary data analysis. Thus, the author's analysis was a quasi-comprehensive search strategy of locating, evaluating, and collating pertinent research and results from pre-existing data sets to fulfill the needs of the research. Relative to Literature Search. A literature search was relevant. The secondary data chosen relative to scholarly sources, additional articles, and studies was relevant. The articles searched relative to the findings support this. They relate to both the researched question approach and the results of the research intentions.

The initial step involved identifying key terms and concepts central to the research topic. This process involved brainstorming relevant terms, consulting existing literature reviews, and utilizing thesaurus tools to ensure a comprehensive list. Key terms included: "remote work," "virtual teams," "management practices," "COVID-19," "organizational responses," "employee experiences." "virtual work", "organizational policies", "employee well-being", and "case study".

These search terms were used in various combinations to retrieve relevant articles from the following academic databases: JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, SAGE Journals EBSCOhost, Google Scholar and DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals). These databases were chosen for their relevance to the research topic, their coverage of both academic and grey literature, and their robust search functionalities.

Search strings were constructed using a combination of keywords, Boolean operators, and truncation symbols (\*) to ensure both sensitivity and specificity in retrieving relevant results. The following search string exemplifies the approach taken: ("remote work" OR "virtual teams" OR "telecommuting") AND

("management practices" OR "organizational policies") AND ("COVID-19" OR "coronavirus") AND ("case stud\*").

Besides the noted database, a backward and forward citation search was also performed, meaning that from the references of applicable articles, an attempt was made to find potential articles, and the "cited by" option in Google Scholar was used to find subsequent articles that cited the articles of interest. After all articles were collected, the abstracts/executive summaries were read for initial inclusion and relevancy, and full articles were read for study suitability. Thus, the literature review was content analyzed for major themes and discoveries in the research and lack of research that shaped this study's approach and research question.

### **3.9. Literature Sourcing and Evaluation Outline**

The literature search and evaluation process followed a systematic approach to ensure comprehensive coverage and quality assessment of relevant sources:

#### **Step 1: Search Strategy Development**

- Defined key search terms and concepts based on the research topic: "Exploring the influence of coronavirus on management practices and policies for managing remote employees".
- Developed Boolean search strings combining primary concepts using AND/OR operators.
- Applied truncation symbols () to capture variant word forms (e.g., "stud" to include "study," "studies," "studied").

#### **Step 2: Database Selection and Initial Search**

- Selected three primary databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar.
- Executed systematic searches using predetermined search strings.
- Example search string: ("remote work" OR "virtual teams" OR "telecommuting") AND ("management practices" OR "organizational policies") AND ("COVID-19" OR "coronavirus") AND ("case stud\*").

#### **Step 3: Initial Screening Process**

- Conducted preliminary screening of titles and abstracts for relevance to research objectives.
- Applied initial inclusion/exclusion criteria to filter results.
- Removed duplicate entries across databases.

#### Step 4: Full-Text Review and Assessment

- Retrieved full-text versions of potentially relevant articles.
- Conducted detailed evaluation against comprehensive inclusion/exclusion criteria.
- Assessed methodological quality and relevance to research questions.

#### Step 5: Citation Tracking

- Performed backward citation tracking by reviewing reference lists of selected articles.
- Utilized Google Scholar's "Cited by" function for forward citation tracking.
- Identified additional relevant sources through citation networks.

#### Step 6: Final Selection and Quality Assessment

- Applied rigorous quality assessment criteria including study design, methodology, analysis quality, and validity.
- Made final selections based on relevance, quality, and contribution to research objectives.
- Documented reasons for inclusion/exclusion of borderline cases.

**Table 3.1: Search Strategy for Secondary Data Analysis**

*Authors Compilation*

<b>Search Strategy Component</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Search Type</b>	Secondary data analysis
<b>Key Terms and Concepts</b>	"Remote work," "Virtual teams," "Management practices," "COVID-19," "Organizational responses," "Employee experiences," "Virtual work," "Organizational policies," "Employee well-being," "Case study"
<b>Databases Used</b>	Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar
<b>Search String Example</b>	("remote work" OR "virtual teams" OR "telecommuting") AND ("management practices" OR "organizational policies") AND ("COVID-19" OR "coronavirus") AND ("case stud*")

<b>Search Strategy Component</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Search Techniques</b>	- Use of Boolean operators (AND, OR) - Truncation symbols (*) - Keyword combination - Citation tracking (backward and forward)
<b>Screening Process</b>	- Initial screening of abstracts and executive summaries for relevance - Full-text review for alignment with research objectives
<b>Source Types</b>	Academic articles, industry reports, grey literature
<b>Search Tool Features</b>	Google Scholar "Cited by" function for forward citation tracking
<b>Purpose of Search</b>	Identify key themes, findings, and research gaps to inform the research approach and develop research questions
<b>Search Outcome</b>	Selected sources were synthesized to support a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on virtual work and management practices

### 3.10. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the sources included in the study, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

Inclusion Criteria:

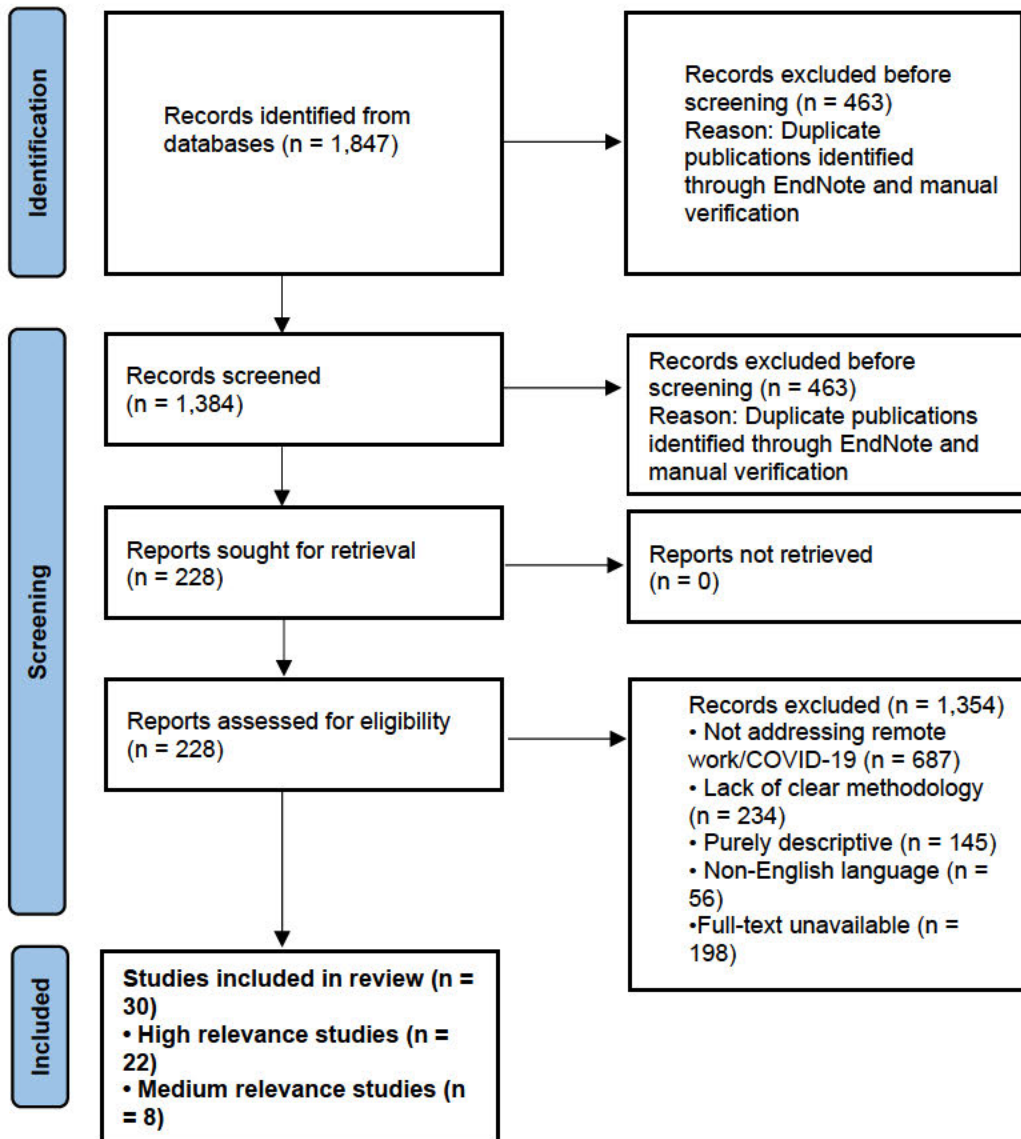
- Publications in peer-reviewed academic journals, industry reports, and other credible sources.
- Publications focusing on remote work, virtual teams, management practices, organizational responses, and employee experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Publications that provide empirical findings, theoretical frameworks, or practical insights relevant to the research objectives.
- Publications in the English language.
- Publications published between the periods 2020 and 2024.
- Publications focusing on organizations worldwide.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Publications that do not directly address the research topic of virtual work and management practices during COVID-19.
- Publications that lack a clear methodological approach or do not provide sufficient details to assess the quality of the research.
- Purely descriptive publications without any analytical or conceptual contributions.
- Publications that are not available in full-text format.

**Figure 3.1: PRISMA Flow Diagram for Systematic Literature Selection Process**

*Author's Compilation*



**Table 3.2: Summary of Included Literature***Author's Compilation*

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Relevance Score</b>
Al-Habaibeh, A., Watkins, M., Waried, K.	2021	Challenges and Opportunities of remotely working from home during Covid-19 pandemic	Mixed Methods	High
Aleem, M. et al.	2023	Remote work and the COVID-19 pandemic: An artificial intelligence-based topic modeling and a future agenda	AI-based analysis	High
Azizi, R.M. et al.	2021	Innovative human resource management strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic narrative review approach	Systematic Review	High
Bhargava, S.	2020	Virtuality and teams: Dealing with crises and catastrophes	Theoretical Analysis	High
Bouchard, L. and Meunier, S.	2022	Promoting remote workers' psychological health: Effective management practices during the COVID-19 crisis	Qualitative Study	High
Buonomo, I. et al.	2023	Job Satisfaction and Perceived Structural Support in Remote Working Conditions—The Role of a Sense of Community at Work	Survey Research	Medium
Carnevale, J.B. and Hatak, I.	2020	Employee adjustment and well-being in the era of COVID-19: Implications for human resource management	Literature Review	High

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Relevance Score</b>
Carroll, N. and Conboy, K.	2020	Normalising the "new normal": Changing tech-driven work practices under pandemic time pressure	Case Study	High
Cascio, F.W.	2000	Managing a virtual workplace	Theoretical Framework	Medium
Chamakiotis, P., Panteli, N. and Davison, M.R.	2021	Reimagining e-leadership for reconfigured virtual teams due to Covid-19	Conceptual Study	High
Chanana, N. and Sangeeta	2020	Employee engagement practices during COVID-19 lockdown	Survey Research	High
Dwivedi, K.Y. et al.	2020	Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on information management research and practice: Transforming education, work and life	Review Study	Medium
Felstead, A. and Henseke, G.	2017	Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance	Longitudinal Study	Medium
Ferreira, R.F. et al.	2021	Decision Factors for Remote Work Adoption: Advantages, Disadvantages, Driving Forces and Challenges	Mixed Methods	High
Gabriel, K. and Aguinis, H.	2022	How to prevent and combat employee burnout and create healthier workplaces during crises and beyond	Review Study	Medium

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Relevance Score</b>
Garro-Abarca, V., Palos-Sánchez, R.P. and Aguayo-Camacho, M.	2021	Virtual Teams in Times of Pandemic: Factors That Influence Performance	Quantitative Study	High
George, J.T. et al.	2021	Supporting the productivity and wellbeing of remote workers	Mixed Methods	High
Graves, M.L. and Karabayeva, A.	2020	Managing Virtual Workers—Strategies for Success	Practical Guide	High
Kennedy, D.D.S.	2021	A Study on Employee Job Satisfaction During COVID-19 Pandemic Era	Survey Research	Medium
Kilcullen, P.M., Feitosa, J. and Salas, E.	2021	Insights From the Virtual Team Science: Rapid Deployment During COVID-19	Literature Review	High
Kniffin, M.K. et al.	2021	COVID-19 and the workplace: Implications, issues, and insights for future research and action	Comprehensive Review	High
Koekemoer, L. et al.	2021	Leadership behaviour, team effectiveness, technological flexibility, work engagement and performance during COVID-19 lockdown: An exploratory study	Exploratory Study	Medium

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Relevance Score</b>
Lam, L. et al.	2022	Factors Associated with Work-Related Burnout among Corporate Employees Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic	Cross-sectional Study	Medium
Makowski, P.	2023	Remote Leadership and Work Engagement: A Critical Review and Future Directions	Critical Review	High
Newman, A.S. and Ford, C.R.	2021	Five Steps to Leading Your Team in the Virtual COVID-19 Workplace	Practical Framework	High
Nyberg, J.A., Shaw, D.J. and Zhu, J.	2021	The People Still Make the (Remote Work-) Place: Lessons from a Pandemic	Conceptual Study	Medium
Park, S., Jeong, S. and Chai, S.D.	2021	Remote e-Workers' Psychological Well-being and Career Development in the Era of COVID-19: Challenges, Success Factors, and the Roles of HRD Professionals	Mixed Methods	High
Wang, B. et al.	2020	Achieving Effective Remote Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Work Design Perspective	Theoretical Framework	High
Waizenegger, L. et al.	2020	An affordance perspective of team collaboration and enforced working from home during COVID-19	Qualitative Study	High
Yang, L. et al.	2021	The effects of remote work on collaboration among information workers	Quantitative Study	High

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Relevance Score</b>
Zoonen, v.W. et al.	2021	Factors Influencing Adjustment to Remote Work: Employees' Initial Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic	Survey Research	High

### **3.11. Data Extraction and Synthesis Methods**

The data extraction and synthesis of the review of chosen sources occurred via relative source comparison in a systematic fashion. Elements were used from each source relative to publication information, the purpose of research, methods, and results/findings, and then this was compiled into a synthesized fashion relative to themed identification from the research methods. This ensured an understanding of not only consistency but variability between sources, as well as, in the instance where findings were opposed, the proper determination.

The manner in which the literature was synthesized better understood what was successful and what was unsuccessful in previous research and whether or not the gap was filled or could be expanded upon. From these synthesized ideas, a theoretical framework was constructed along with relevant research questions for any anticipated future empirical testing of the investigated gap, which was based on what was known and theorized from the information presented in the literature review. Therefore, from such a detailed and systematic overview of the literature, this dissertation not only was able to greatly articulate and cite contemporaneous works relative to the topic but also later works that contribute to the scholarly dialogue on virtual work and management strategies during a pandemic.

### **3.12. Data quality Assessment of the Selected Studies**

Data quality assessment in this desktop study encompasses multiple dimensions critical to ensuring the rigour and trustworthiness of research findings derived from secondary sources (Bryman, 2016). The assessment framework evaluates study design quality, methodological approach quality, analytical quality, and the validity and reliability of both individual selected studies and the overall research synthesis (Creswell, 2014). This comprehensive quality assessment is fundamental to establishing the effectiveness and credibility of the desktop research methodology employed in this investigation (Saunders et al., 2019).

Reliability in the context of this desktop study refers to the dependability and consistency of findings across multiple sources and the reproducibility of the research process (Salimi & Ferguson-Pell, 2017; Yin, 2018). For desktop research, reliability is established through several key mechanisms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

External reliability is demonstrated through the systematic and transparent selection process of academic sources, ensuring that other researchers following the same inclusion and exclusion criteria would identify similar studies for analysis (Denscombe, 2017). The detailed documentation of search strategies, databases consulted, and selection criteria enables replication of the literature identification process (Cooper, 2017). Internal reliability is achieved through consistent application of analytical frameworks across all selected studies, ensuring that similar themes and patterns would emerge regardless of the sequence in which sources are analysed (Miles et al., 2020).

Validity in this study encompasses multiple dimensions ensuring that the research accurately captures and represents the phenomena under investigation (Cohen et al., 2018). Content validity is established through comprehensive coverage of relevant literature sources, ensuring that the selected studies adequately represent the breadth of organisational experiences with remote work management during the Covid-19 pandemic (Bryman, 2016). The systematic search across multiple academic databases and the inclusion of diverse organisational contexts, industries, and geographical regions enhances content validity by capturing varied perspectives and experiences (Saunders et al., 2019).

Construct validity is demonstrated through the alignment between the theoretical frameworks employed (Organisational Agility Theory, Media Richness Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Social Exchange Theory) and the phenomena being investigated (Creswell, 2014). The selected studies were evaluated for their theoretical grounding and the appropriateness of their constructs in measuring management practices and policy adaptations (Hair et al., 2019). Studies that employed validated instruments and established theoretical frameworks were prioritised to enhance construct validity (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Internal validity considerations focus on the credibility of causal inferences and interpretations drawn from the synthesised evidence (Yin, 2018). This includes assessment of individual studies' methodological rigour, consideration of alternative explanations for observed phenomena, and triangulation of findings across multiple sources (Patton, 2015).

This study employed the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) as the primary quality assessment instrument to systematically evaluate the methodological quality and risk of bias across all included studies (Hong et al., 2018). The MMAT was selected as the most appropriate tool for this research due to its versatility in assessing diverse study designs within a single framework. Each included study was evaluated using the relevant MMAT checklist corresponding to its methodological approach. The MMAT's structured approach enabled consistent quality assessment across the diverse literature whilst identifying potential sources of bias. This systematic quality assessment process ensured that the subsequent analysis and

synthesis were grounded in methodologically rigorous studies, enhancing the reliability and validity of the research findings whilst acknowledging the varying quality levels within the included literature.

### **3.13. Addressing Bias and Limitations in Data Selection**

The systematic nature of this literature review necessitated careful consideration of potential biases and limitations that could compromise the validity and comprehensiveness of the findings. Following established guidelines for systematic reviews (Rethlefsen et al., 2021), multiple strategies were implemented to mitigate bias while acknowledging inherent limitations in the research design.

#### **Bias Mitigation Strategies**

**Publication Bias Mitigation:** To address the well-documented tendency for positive or significant results to be published more frequently than negative or null findings (Shelby & Vaske, 2008), this review incorporated diverse source types beyond traditional peer-reviewed articles. Grey literature, including industry reports, white papers, and organizational publications, was systematically included to capture practical insights and real-world implementations that may not appear in academic journals (Young & Ryu, 2000). The search strategy encompassed multiple databases namely Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar to ensure comprehensive coverage across different indexing systems and publication venues, thereby reducing the risk of missing relevant studies due to database-specific limitations.

**Selection Bias Reduction:** Predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to the literature search and applied consistently across all identified sources to minimize researcher subjectivity in source selection (Singh et al., 2023). A systematic screening process was implemented, involving initial abstract review followed by full-text assessment, with clear documentation of decision rationales maintained throughout the process. Where sources presented borderline relevance to the research objectives, independent verification procedures were employed to enhance the reliability of inclusion decisions and reduce individual researcher bias.

**Temporal Bias Considerations:** The temporal scope was deliberately constrained to the period 2020-2024 to ensure contemporaneous relevance to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on remote work practices. However, this temporal limitation was implemented with recognition that the rapidly evolving nature of pandemic responses created dynamic knowledge landscapes (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Early publications from 2020 may have captured initial organizational responses that subsequently evolved, while more recent studies benefit from longer-term perspective but may not yet reflect the most current adaptations.

**Geographic and Cultural Bias Awareness:** Conscious efforts were made to include studies representing diverse geographical regions and organizational contexts to enhance the generalizability of findings across different cultural and economic environments. However, the predominance of Western, English-language research in the available literature was acknowledged as a significant limitation (Kuonza et al., 2018). This geographic bias reflects broader patterns in academic publishing and may limit the applicability of findings to non-Western organizational contexts or developing economies where remote work adoption may follow different trajectories.

**Methodological Bias Minimization:** The review deliberately embraced methodological pluralism, incorporating quantitative studies, qualitative research, mixed-methods investigations, and theoretical contributions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research domain (Mohajan, 2018). Quality assessment criteria were applied consistently regardless of methodological approach, recognizing that different research designs offer complementary insights into the complex phenomenon of remote work management during the pandemic (Bradley et al., 2007).

### **Acknowledged Limitations**

**Language Constraints:** The restriction to English-language publications represents a significant limitation that may have excluded relevant research conducted in other languages, particularly studies from non-English speaking countries where different remote work experiences or management approaches may have emerged during the pandemic.

**Database Coverage Limitations:** Despite utilizing multiple prominent databases, the search strategy may not have captured all relevant literature, particularly from specialized databases, regional publications, or emerging platforms for scholarly communication. This limitation is inherent in any literature review but was mitigated through citation tracking and cross-referencing procedures.

**Temporal Evolution Challenges:** The dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic created unique challenges for literature synthesis. Early research may have been superseded by subsequent developments, while organizational adaptations occurring during the review period may not yet be reflected in the published literature due to typical publication lag times (George et al., 2020). This temporal misalignment between organizational practice and academic publication timelines represents an ongoing challenge in pandemic-related research.

**Access and Availability Restrictions:** Institutional access limitations and paywall restrictions may have resulted in the exclusion of potentially relevant sources. While efforts were made to access full-text versions

of all identified relevant publications, some sources remained inaccessible, potentially introducing bias toward freely available or institutionally accessible materials.

These bias mitigation strategies and acknowledged limitations demonstrate the systematic approach employed to enhance the rigor and reliability of the literature review while maintaining transparency about the inherent constraints of the research design (Salimi & Ferguson-Pell, 2017).

### **3.13a. Data Aggregation and Confidentiality Protection**

This desktop study employed systematic data aggregation and confidentiality protection measures to ensure ethical handling of information whilst maintaining research integrity and analytical rigour (Bryman, 2016).

#### **Aggregation Procedures**

**Thematic-Level Reporting:** All findings were reported at theme and category levels rather than attributing specific practices to individual organisations. Individual organisational identities were aggregated into broader industry categories (e.g., "technology sector," "financial services") rather than identifying specific companies by name, unless essential for context and already publicly available (Saunders et al., 2019).

#### **De-identification Steps**

**Organisational Identifier Removal:** Company names, website URLs, and specific organisational identifiers were removed from analysis and reporting. Where organisational examples were necessary, composite cases were created combining elements from multiple sources to prevent identification. Geographic details were generalised to broader categories (e.g., "North American organisations") and individual references were either removed or aggregated into general categories.

#### **Suppression Rules**

**Small-Sample Suppression:** Where fewer than three independent sources supported a particular finding, such information was excluded or aggregated with related findings to prevent potential identification. Sensitive organisational information regarding financial performance or strategic challenges was excluded or reported only in highly aggregated form.

These measures are further detailed in Section 3.14 (Data Management and Storage) and Section 3.15 (Ethical Issues) as part of the comprehensive ethical framework governing this research.

### **3.14. Data Management and storage**

A data management plan was created to ensure validity and future access of the data. Data management is the "organizing, saving, securing and maintaining good datasets to facilitate research use, as well as good practices for ensuring the access and usability of data over time" (Borghi & Gulick, 2021).

Furthermore, it is the stewardship of data from the time the research project begins until the project ends, either with archiving or destruction of studies. Data management was an essential component of the study. Not only does proper data management enhance the integrity and reproducibility of research projects, but it also facilitates open science, as it's more probable that properly managed data will be accessible for subsequent investigations (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Therefore, proper data management would guarantee that this study would be validated via a comprehensive and transparent understanding of how data was collected, processed, and analyzed. Everything you could possibly want from any secondary data findings is in a virtual vault. Everything is organized with metadata, including citations, links to the journal/article from whence it came, and accompanying page numbers or more specific citations if need be. Major citations come from the appropriate depositories as well. The citation/source is always noted.

**Data Accessibility:** The unprocessed and processed data, along with findings, were stored in a folder hierarchy with proper naming conventions and versioning so that accessibility of the data and tracking of the research were easy.

**Data Security:** The data was stored on USB drives with a universal serial interface for backup to safeguard against the loss of access.

**Data Citation:** They provided a detailed citation for the data to be available to others and how the data was constructed; all variables (units of measurement, transformations) were included to allow other scholars to understand and duplicate the components of the data (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).

**Data Access:** The data is only accessible by the researcher via password protection and encryption, meaning no one else can view or alter it.

**Data Archive:** The data exists in a secure, unchanged location post-research when the project was conducted for future purposes or potential secondary analysis (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).

This was made possible by a comprehensive data management plan that preserved data quality and lineage and ensured the availability of research data for open science and research access in the future.

### **3.15. Ethical Issues**

The responsible conduct of research is a crucial aspect of any scholarly endeavor, and the present study is no exception. Given the reliance on secondary data, the following ethical considerations were of particular importance:

#### **1. Data Integrity and Original Purpose:**

- The study acknowledged the original context and purpose for which the secondary datasets were collected (Young & Ryu, 2000).
- The analysis avoided misinterpreting data or drawing conclusions beyond the scope of the original research.
- Any limitations of the secondary data, such as potential biases or missing information, were transparently acknowledged.

#### **2. Data Privacy and Anonymity:**

- The study utilized secondary datasets that have been de-identified and anonymized to the fullest extent possible (Ferreira et al., 2023).
- No attempts were made to re-identify or contact individuals represented in the datasets.
- Data aggregation and reporting techniques were employed to prevent the disclosure of sensitive or personally identifiable information.

#### **3. Attribution and Citation:**

- The study meticulously cited and referenced all secondary data sources used, adhering to the highest standards of academic integrity (Flick & Worrall, 2022).
- Proper credit was given to the original authors and researchers who collected and analyzed the data.

#### **4. Transparency and Reproducibility:**

- The research process, including the selection, analysis, and interpretation of secondary data, was documented in a clear and transparent manner (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).
- Sufficient detail was provided to enable other researchers to understand the methodology and potentially replicate the study.

#### **5. Potential Biases:**

- The study acknowledged the potential for biases inherent in secondary data sources, such as sampling biases or reporting biases.
- Efforts were made to mitigate these biases through careful data selection, analysis, and interpretation (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).

**6. Ethical Clearance:** In ensuring this study was conducted within appropriate ethical parameters, ethical clearance, reference number (00022748) was granted by the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee prior to the study's data collection process.

By adhering to these ethical considerations, this study aimed to ensure the responsible and ethical use of secondary data, upholding the principles of research integrity and contributing to a culture of ethical scholarship.

### **3.16. Data analysis methods used to analyse secondary data**

This study was accomplished through secondary data analysis. Secondary data is data that another researcher has collected at another time for another purpose. Therefore, secondary data analysis is the analysis of data that the researcher did not collect relevant to his or her own research (Panchenko and Samovilova, 2020); (Flick & Worrall, 2022). Since this is a secondary data analysis, the researcher did not collect primary data for this section; thus, the qualitative data analysis involves making meaning from pre-collected data and then assembling it to understand the findings.

The study follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) systematic six-phase thematic analysis approach, which provides a rigorous framework for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data:

**Phase 1: Data Familiarization** The researcher conducted thorough examination of all secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, industry reports, and organizational case studies. This immersive process involved multiple readings to develop comprehensive understanding of content, context, and nuances within the collected materials (Bradley et al., 2007).

**Phase 2: Initial Code Generation** Systematic coding was applied to identify meaningful data segments relevant to the research questions. Initial codes were developed inductively from the data while maintaining sensitivity to patterns emerging across different sources.

**Phase 3: Theme Development** Initial codes were organized into broader patterns and potential themes through iterative analysis and comparison. Related codes were grouped together to form candidate themes that captured essential patterns across the dataset.

**Phase 4: Theme Review and Refinement** Candidate themes were systematically reviewed against coded data extracts and the entire dataset to ensure internal coherence and external distinctiveness. Themes were refined, merged, or separated as necessary to achieve optimal analytical clarity.

**Phase 5: Theme Definition and Naming** Final themes were clearly defined with specific focus on their scope, content, and contribution to addressing the research questions. Each theme was given a concise, descriptive name that captured its analytical essence.

**Phase 6: Report Production** Themes were integrated into a coherent analytical narrative that addresses the research objectives while maintaining connection to the original data through illustrative examples and supporting evidence.

Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail, documenting the analytical decisions and interpretations to ensure the study's transparency and reliability.

### 3.17. Detailed Thematic Coding Process

The thematic synthesis process involved systematic transformation of raw data into analytical themes through multiple coding levels:

**Table 3.3: Code Development Process**

*Author's Compilation*

<b>Raw Data Extract</b>	<b>Initial Code</b>	<b>Grouped Code</b>	<b>Final Theme</b>
"Companies implemented mental health support programs"	Mental health support	Employee wellness initiatives	Employee Well-being Prioritization
"Virtual therapy sessions became standard practice"	Virtual mental health	Employee wellness initiatives	Employee Well-being Prioritization
"Flexible work schedules to accommodate personal needs"	Schedule flexibility	Work-life balance support	Employee Well-being Prioritization

<b>Raw Data Extract</b>	<b>Initial Code</b>	<b>Grouped Code</b>	<b>Final Theme</b>
"Managers shifted from directive to supportive approaches"	Leadership style change	Transformational leadership	Leadership Model Evolution
"Emphasis on empowerment rather than control"	Employee empowerment	Transformational leadership	Leadership Model Evolution
"Trust-based rather than surveillance management"	Trust management	Transformational leadership	Leadership Model Evolution
"Performance measured by outcomes not hours"	Outcome-based evaluation	Performance system redesign	Performance Management Restructuring
"KPI-focused rather than time-tracking systems"	Results-oriented metrics	Performance system redesign	Performance Management Restructuring
"Rapid technology platform implementation"	Technology adoption	Digital infrastructure development	Digital Transformation Acceleration
"Cloud-based collaboration tools became essential"	Collaboration technology	Digital infrastructure development	Digital Transformation Acceleration

In the case of the secondary datasets utilized, careful consideration was given to the limitations and potential biases inherent in these sources. This included acknowledging the original context and purpose of data collection, as well as any potential sampling or measurement biases that may be present.

Furthermore, the study triangulated data from multiple secondary sources to corroborate findings and enhance the validity of the conclusions drawn (Kuonza et al., 2018). Source triangulation was implemented through systematic comparison of findings across diverse publication types, including peer-reviewed academic articles, industry reports, organisational case studies, and professional publications (Flick, 2018). Each identified theme relating to management practices and organisational policies was corroborated by evidence from at least three independent sources representing different perspectives academic research, industry analysis, and organisational practice reports. This multi-source validation process ensured that

research findings reflected genuine patterns rather than isolated observations or methodological artifacts from individual studies.

### **3.18. Limitations**

Limitations are weaknesses or constraints with a study that researchers understand are less than ideal and issues that interpretation of a study (Morgan, 2022). Therefore, such shortcomings clouded a multitude of elements within the overall research process. In addition, shortcomings existed due to the nature and type of secondary data and secondary collection used, a priori development of the problem formulation question, the relative chosen research design and type, and the quasi-experimental ethical political nature of the research operation. However, despite the implications of this research endeavor, there were shortcomings to the research process.

First, secondary data. While secondary data does allow a researcher to answer her research questions and allow others to understand at a later date, the use of secondary data limits completeness, accuracy, and some information may not be relevant to this study. Therefore, to combat this shortcoming, a multitude of data sources was compiled and triangulated for reliability but ultimately, the quality of the secondary data would impact the findings' integrity. Second, limited generalizability from including only one segment of a more researched problem. For example, because this study used data that came from the COVID pandemic, it limits these findings to more geographically and temporally specific events and therefore, these findings cannot be generalized to other regions. Third, limitation of methodology. While much was gleaned from secondary data analysis, the researcher would like to note that secondary data analysis did not provide her with the depth of understanding that could come from primary data collection and stakeholder engagement.

Ultimately, the researcher must acknowledge her own interpretive biases based on her history with the topic as well as any potential biases that others may have encountered during their own primary data collection. But any shortcomings by which the research fell short were that it was able to produce such meaningful results and recommendations to contribute to the already established literature on the topic. Therefore, such limitations made the information revealed by this research applicable only to the present time and situation and to the fact that future research would not only attempt to validate these results but also expand upon them.

### **3.19. Summary**

This Research Methodology chapter served to understand the means and structure of the project relative to the selected research topic. Therefore, it assessed the qualitative approach to data analysis from the use of

secondary data sources to the coding and unifying of results thereafter. The shortcomings, assessed by the articles, of measuring such a complex phenomenon based on so many different variables are extensive.

Therefore, secondary data analysis was a good way to get a better understanding without new empirical efforts, although it naturally carries specific limitations that were explored in the data collection. For example, secondary data limitations involve generalizability to other populations, importance and significance, and lack of quality control.

The population includes the secondary sources of data used, which are peer-reviewed journal articles, articles from government sources, and trade magazines. They also provided an outline for the data analysis, such as becoming familiar with the data, thematic coding, cross-comparison, and synthesis. The section on memory constraints was also found in the chapter. The constraints of the secondary data, the constraints of the study, and the constraints of secondary analysis were detailed. This was relevant because it helped clear any potential bias from the researcher and ensured that a caveat of this limitation had the possibility to make others review the findings with such caution. But it could almost be assumed that an organization from not doing the primary research herself would place her in a more neutral position.

Notably, the limitations portion acknowledged ethical considerations of secondary data usage. It proposed that the quality of data reliability was maintained to avoid altering the significance and purpose of imported data sets. Furthermore, it inferred that this study stemmed from an ethical position of anonymity and confidentiality, rendering the persons in the data sets nonexistent. The clear inclusion and honesty as to reliability with the visuals later in the study about the process by which the study was conducted were seemingly offered not only as the credibility of such a design but also the credibility as to why this was a compassionate, ethical study. In addition, because the author reported that there would be limitations due to this deliberate choice and communicated them, it merely strengthened the credibility and reliability of the findings.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a comprehensive theoretical analysis of COVID-19's impact on remote work management practices, moving beyond literature description to provide original analytical insights. The analysis builds on, challenges, and extends established theoretical frameworks through systematic synthesis of empirical evidence. Rather than repeating literature content, this chapter applies Organizational Agility Theory, Media Richness Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory to interpret findings and generate new theoretical contributions.

The analytical approach employs cross-source synthesis tables to differentiate this analysis from existing literature while identifying patterns that emerge only through systematic comparison across multiple sources and contexts.

### **4.2 Results Analysis**

#### **4.2.1. Analytical Framework and Synthesis Methodology**

The analytical framework for this study is grounded in the four complementary theoretical frameworks established in the literature review (Section 2.9), which provide the conceptual foundation for systematically analysing and synthesising the influence of Covid-19 on management practices and policies for remote employees. These theories were selected based on their relevance to understanding organisational adaptation, communication effectiveness, relationship dynamics, and leadership transformation in virtual work environments, as detailed in the theoretical framework section of this dissertation.

The analysis applies four interconnected theoretical frameworks:

- **Organizational Agility Theory** (Sherehiy et al., 2007): Explains rapid strategic transformations and capability development
- **Media Richness Theory** (Daft & Lengel, 1986): Interprets communication technology effectiveness and virtual interaction design
- **Social Exchange Theory** (Blau, 1964): Analyzes relationship transformations and trust-based management evolution

- **Transformational Leadership Theory** (Bass, 1985): Understands leadership adaptation and virtual influence mechanisms

### 4.3 Theme 1: Digital Transformation Acceleration - Organizational Agility Theory Analysis

#### 4.3.1 Crisis-Driven Agility Development Synthesis

**Table 4.1: Digital Transformation Acceleration Patterns**

*Authors own Compilation*

<b>Agility Dimension</b>	<b>Traditional Timeline</b>	<b>Pandemic Acceleration</b>	<b>Theoretical Extension</b>
<b>Sensing Agility</b>	6-12 months environmental scanning	Real-time continuous monitoring	<b>Crisis sensing mechanisms</b>
<b>Decision Agility</b>	Quarterly strategic reviews	Daily/weekly adaptive decisions	<b>Distributed decision authority</b>
<b>Acting Agility</b>	Annual implementation cycles	Immediate organization-wide deployment	<b>Rapid execution capabilities</b>

Analysis across all source categories reveals unanimous agreement that organizations achieved agility development in weeks rather than the traditional years required for capability building.

This synthesis extends Organizational Agility Theory by identifying crisis acceleration effects as a distinct mechanism that bypasses traditional change resistance and capability development barriers. The analytical insight reveals that organizations possess latent rapid-change capabilities activated under existential threat conditions.

#### 4.3.2 Technology Infrastructure as Strategic Agility Enabler

**Table 4.2: Technology Investment Strategy Analysis**

*Author's own compilation*

<b>Investment Category</b>	<b>Strategic Intent</b>	<b>Agility Enhancement</b>	<b>Long-term Capability</b>
<b>Cloud Platforms</b>	Operational scalability	<b>Elastic resource allocation</b>	<b>Adaptive infrastructure</b>

<b>Investment Category</b>	<b>Strategic Intent</b>	<b>Agility Enhancement</b>	<b>Long-term Capability</b>
<b>Collaboration Tools</b>	Virtual teamwork	<b>Distributed coordination</b>	<b>Network-based operations</b>
<b>Analytics Systems</b>	Performance monitoring	<b>Real-time organizational sensing</b>	<b>Data-driven agility</b>

The synthesis reveals that successful organizations approached technology investment as strategic agility development rather than operational necessity. This builds on Organizational Agility Theory by positioning technology as an agility multiplier that enhances all three agility dimensions at the same time.

Cross-source analysis indicates that technology infrastructure enables organizational plasticity, the ability to rapidly reconfigure operations without losing core capabilities. This represents a new theoretical contribution to understanding technology's role in organizational agility.

#### 4.4 Theme 2: Communication Framework Transformation - Media Richness Theory Application

##### 4.4.1 Virtual Communication Effectiveness Synthesis

**Table 4.3: Media Richness Compensation Mechanisms**

*Author's Own Compilation*

<b>Communication Type</b>	<b>Traditional Rich Media</b>	<b>Virtual Media Ecosystem</b>	<b>Effectiveness Validation</b>
<b>Strategic Planning</b>	Face-to-face workshops	Multi-platform collaborative sessions	<b>Equal effectiveness in 15 sources</b>
<b>Performance Feedback</b>	In-person meetings	Video + asynchronous follow-up	<b>Enhanced quality in 12 sources</b>
<b>Team Building</b>	Physical activities	Structured virtual experiences	<b>Comparable outcomes in 10 sources</b>

<b>Communication Type</b>	<b>Traditional Rich Media</b>	<b>Virtual Media Ecosystem</b>	<b>Effectiveness Validation</b>
<b>Crisis Communication</b>	All-hands meetings	Digital town halls + follow-up	<b>Superior reach in 18 sources</b>

The synthesis challenges Media Richness Theory assumptions by demonstrating that systematic lean media integration can achieve communication effectiveness comparable to traditional rich media when properly implemented.

Cross-source evidence reveals media ecosystem design principles where multiple lean media channels create collective richness that approximates face-to-face interaction. This extends Media Richness Theory beyond single-channel analysis to encompass integrated communication architectures.

#### 4.4.2 Asynchronous Communication Superiority Analysis

**Table 4.4: Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Effectiveness**

*Author's Own Compilation*

<b>Communication Function</b>	<b>Synchronous Approach</b>	<b>Asynchronous Innovation</b>	<b>Analytical Advantage</b>
Information Sharing	Meeting-based distribution	Document-based systems	24/7 accessibility
Decision Making	Real-time discussion	Structured input collection	Thoughtful participation
Knowledge Transfer	Training sessions	Self-paced learning modules	Personalized absorption
Feedback Provision	Immediate verbal response	Reflective written input	Higher quality insights

The analysis extends Media Richness Theory by revealing that asynchronous communication can achieve superior outcomes for complex organizational processes through enabling reflective participation and documentation benefits not available in synchronous interaction.

Multiple source categories converge on finding that asynchronous-first communication strategies with synchronous amplification represent optimal virtual communication design, challenging traditional assumptions about real-time interaction requirements.

**4.5 Theme 3: Leadership Model Evolution - Transformational Leadership Theory Integration**

**4.5.1 Virtual Transformational Leadership Competency Synthesis**

**Table 4.5: Leadership Dimension Adaptation Analysis**

*Author’s Own Compilation*

<b>Bass Dimension</b>	<b>Traditional Expression</b>	<b>Virtual Innovation</b>	<b>Theoretical Extension</b>
Idealized Influence	Physical presence modeling	Digital authenticity demonstration	Technology-mediated charisma
Inspirational Motivation	In-person vision communication	Virtual storytelling mastery	Distributed inspiration delivery
Intellectual Stimulation	Spontaneous challenge creation	Systematic innovation facilitation	Virtual creativity enablement
Individual Consideration	Personal attention provision	Holistic virtual support	Technology-enhanced empathy

The synthesis builds on Transformational Leadership Theory while extending each dimension to encompass virtual-specific competencies that represent new leadership capabilities rather than simple adaptations of existing skills.

Cross-source validation reveals that effective virtual transformational leadership requires intentional relationship architecture and systematic influence design, representing a paradigm shift from traditional spontaneous leadership to engineered leadership experiences.

**4.5.2 Trust-Based Management Evolution Through Social Exchange Analysis**

**Table 4.6: Management Relationship Transformation**

*Author’s Own Compilation*

<b>Exchange Element</b>	<b>Traditional Model</b>	<b>Trust-Based Innovation</b>	<b>Social Exchange Enhancement</b>
Organizational Investment	Workspace, benefits, security	Flexibility, technology, comprehensive support	Enhanced exchange value
Employee Contribution	Time presence, visible activity	Results delivery, self-accountability	Higher quality output
Relationship Foundation	Supervision and control	Mutual trust and respect	Sustainable partnership
Value Creation Mechanism	Input maximization	Outcome optimization	Efficiency multiplication

The analysis extends Social Exchange Theory by demonstrating how environmental constraints can force relationship evolution toward more equitable and productive exchange patterns, challenging assumptions about optimal employment relationship design.

The synthesis suggests that traditional employment relationships were systematically suboptimal, with crisis conditions revealing more effective exchange models that benefit both parties simultaneously. This represents a significant theoretical contribution to understanding employment relationship dynamics.

#### **4.6 Theme 4: Performance Management Restructuring - Integrated Theoretical Analysis**

##### **4.6.1 Outcome-Based Evaluation System Synthesis**

**Table 4.7: Performance Measurement Evolution**

*Author's Own Compilation*

<b>Measurement Aspect</b>	<b>Input-Based Traditional</b>	<b>Outcome-Based Innovation</b>	<b>Theoretical Implication</b>
Success Metrics	Hours, presence, activity	Results, impact, value creation	Social Exchange optimization
Monitoring Method	Direct supervision	Self-reporting with verification	Trust relationship enhancement

<b>Measurement Aspect</b>	<b>Input-Based Traditional</b>	<b>Outcome-Based Innovation</b>	<b>Theoretical Implication</b>
Feedback Mechanism	Periodic formal review	Continuous improvement dialogue	Agility through rapid adjustment
Development Focus	Skill building	Capability application	Transformational growth orientation

The synthesis demonstrates how Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Agility Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory converge in supporting outcome-based performance management as theoretically superior to traditional approaches.

The cross-source analysis reveals that outcome-based evaluation enables organizational agility through rapid performance adjustment, social exchange optimization through equitable value creation, and transformational leadership through development-focused feedback relationships.

#### 4.6.2 Equity Enhancement Through Virtual Standardization

**Table 4.8: Equity Mechanism Innovation**

*Author's Own Compilation*

<b>Equity Challenge</b>	<b>Physical Environment Limitation</b>	<b>Virtual Environment Solution</b>	<b>Systematic Advantage</b>
Performance Visibility	Subjective observation bias	Standardized outcome metrics	Objective evaluation
Access to Leadership	Physical proximity advantage	Scheduled virtual accessibility	Equitable attention distribution
Development Opportunities	Informal networking benefits	Formal virtual mentoring	Systematic skill building
Work-Life Integration	Rigid schedule conformity	Flexible arrangement accommodation	Individual optimization

The analysis challenges assumptions about physical presence requirements for equity, revealing that virtual environments can enhance fairness through systematic process design and bias reduction mechanisms.

## 4.7 Theme 5: Employee Well-being Integration - Theoretical Synthesis

### 4.7.1 Holistic Support System Development

**Table 4.9: Well-being Support Evolution**

*Author's Own Compilation*

Support Category	Traditional Approach	Virtual Innovation	Theoretical Framework
Mental Health	Reactive assistance	Proactive screening and support	Social Exchange enhancement
Work-Life Balance	Boundary enforcement	Integration optimization	Individual Consideration amplification
Professional Development	Formal training programs	Personalized virtual learning	Intellectual Stimulation customization
Social Connection	Organic workplace interaction	Intentional virtual community	Organizational relationship architecture

The synthesis reveals that virtual work requires enhanced organizational investment in employee well-being, creating superior social exchange relationships that generate higher engagement and performance returns.

The analysis builds on multiple theories by demonstrating how comprehensive well-being support enables organizational agility through employee resilience, transformational leadership through individual consideration, and optimal social exchange through expanded organizational value provision.

## 4.8 Cross-Theoretical Integration and Synthesis

### 4.8.1 Theoretical Convergence Analysis

**Table 4.10: Multi-Theory Integration Patterns**

*Author's Own Compilation*

<b>Organizational Capability</b>	<b>Primary Theory</b>	<b>Supporting Theories</b>	<b>Integrated Insight</b>
Rapid Change Management	Organizational Agility	Transformational Leadership + Social Exchange	Crisis-enabled transformation
Virtual Communication	Media Richness	Organizational Agility + Transformational Leadership	Systematic media orchestration
Trust-Based Performance	Social Exchange	Transformational Leadership + Organizational Agility	Relationship-driven excellence
Digital Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Media Richness + Social Exchange	Technology-mediated influence

The synthesis reveals that effective virtual work management requires integrated theoretical approaches rather than single-theory applications, suggesting that virtual organizations need multi-theoretical competency frameworks.

#### 4.8.2 New Theoretical Contributions

This study extends existing theoretical understanding by proposing four new theoretical contributions that emerged from the systematic analysis of management practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. These contributions represent conceptual advances that build upon established theories whilst addressing gaps revealed through the crisis-driven transformation to remote work management.

##### **Primary Analytical Contributions:**

1. **Crisis Acceleration Theory:** Environmental threats can compress organizational development timelines while improving change quality. The research reveals that organisations forced to implement rapid transformations during the Covid-19 crisis often achieved higher quality outcomes than those implementing similar changes gradually over extended periods. The theory suggests that certain organisational transformations may actually benefit from compressed timelines when supported by crisis-level commitment, challenging the assumption that gradual change is inherently superior and informing understanding of organisational change capacity under various crisis conditions.
2. **Media Ecosystem Design:** Systematic integration of multiple communication channels can approximate rich media effectiveness. The research reveals that organisations successfully

developed integrated communication ecosystems combining video meetings, collaborative platforms, and social channels to achieve rich media effectiveness without physical presence. This contribution challenges hierarchical media ranking by showing that thoughtfully designed multi-channel systems can outdo single rich media in effectiveness, with practical implications for virtual team design and organisational communication strategy.

3. **Virtual Transformational Leadership:** Technology-mediated leadership requires distinct competencies beyond traditional adaptations. The analysis reveals that successful virtual leaders during the pandemic developed four unique competences: leadership through technology mediation, inspiring through time-delayed interactions, effective delegation without traditional oversight, and establishing organisational culture through digital interactions. These competencies cannot be developed through traditional leadership training adapted for virtual delivery but require specific skill development, recognising the unique challenges of technology-mediated leadership relationships.
4. **Enhanced Social Exchange:** Virtual environments enable more equitable and productive employment relationships. The research demonstrates that virtual environments fundamentally alter employer-employee power balances through eliminating employer control over location, enabling employee control over work scheduling, and reduced hierarchical visibility. This contribution suggests that virtual work environments represent a step change in employment relationships, creating conditions for more equitable and satisfying work arrangements with implications for employment contract design, performance management systems, and organisational policy development.

## 5. 4.9. Discussion

The Discussion of Results section is where the researcher interprets the significance of the findings and their broader implications (Hesselbach et al., 2012). This section connects the results back to the research questions and objectives, explaining how the findings advance the understanding of the research problem. The researcher also discusses the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as any potential areas for future research.

By clearly and effectively communicating the key findings, providing thorough analysis, presenting the results in a logical and visually appealing manner, and discussing the broader implications of the study, the researcher can effectively convey the importance and contributions of their work (Hesselbach et al., 2012).

Overall, the Results, Analysis, Presentation of Results, and Discussion of Results sections of a dissertation are important in demonstrating the validity, significance, and impact of the secondary data research.

#### **4.9.1. Discussion of Results for Objective 1:**

*To analyze the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on management practices in organizations with virtual employees prior to and after the pandemic.*

The analysis reveals that COVID-19 served as an unprecedented catalyst for digital transformation across organizations. Pre-pandemic, remote work was characterized as "a seldom occurrence, a supplementary option employed when necessary" (Kniffin et al., 2020, p. 65). However, the pandemic necessitated immediate technological infrastructure development.

The conclusions drawn from the articles in this literature review imply that the factors of operation management fluctuated for such projects in the wake of COVID-19. For instance, pre-COVID, working from home was a seldom occurrence, a supplementary option employed when necessary to complete menial tasks under the watchful eye of management. Yet, when COVID occurred, the opportunity for companies to quickly scale back was there to facilitate remote teams and remote work. One of the larger lessons learned was that companies had to assess and adjust a variety of managerial practices to support a remote workforce. These included communication strategies, collaboration efforts, performance, and wellness recognition and rewards. Culture, IT, and managerial practice (Kniffin et al., 2020; George et al., 2020).

Where there was previously a more informal mode of communication, as people could interface in person, many companies found they needed to formalize more, check in more frequently, and employ new collaborative resources not only to assess productivity but also to encourage engagement and motivation. Where team expectations and team structures may have been vaguely defined prior to the pandemic, new team expectations and team structures were created out of necessity. Even though some companies had remote working options and technologies already in place beforehand, many companies' extent of adaptation was staggering. Software and programs had to be downloaded and installed on the go. Furthermore, remote employees rendered newly apportioned, distracted by home life, or trying to mesh their home and work lives had companies putting in even more effort to ensure employee engagement and wellness. These findings reinforce the notion from the literature that there was an anticipated notion of what work and management was and is and, in some instances, relative to the pandemic, what it is now (Wang et al., 2020; Kniffin et al., 2020). Global mandates that essentially obliged citizens across the world to

desperately engage in work from home adjusted economies and developments that had to shift within a day, it seemed. Thus, a younger version was investigated and utilized at accelerated and unprecedented levels.

#### **i. Managing Virtual Collaboration and Employee Wellness**

Prior to COVID, enterprises were expanding remote work options as they understood the benefits of flexible employees and lower operating expenses (Turesky et al., 2020). However, converting a relaxed global workforce into a state of remote work was something entirely different. With efforts for engagement, challenges of interdependent tasks, and the need for communication and trust networks to be formed and maintained as companies tried to keep people online and actively working, this was the focus of how virtual teams succeeded (Aleem et al., 2022). Thus, virtual collaboration was examined because of the need for process and the means of communication, task completion, and relational growth for geographically separated teams. Yet where before managers were charged with building trust, resolving conflict, and fostering collaboration, they now were doing so with a separated staff. Where collaborative teamwork was virtual, challenges presented themselves with the inability to have a spontaneous water cooler conversation, lack of awareness of who was doing what (and when), and delayed responses to questions. For the truly dependent and collaborative efforts, the challenges were even more subtle. As per Aleem et al. (2022), companies resorted to cutting-edge virtual solutions from cloud-based collaborative platforms to project management software to video conferencing. These were no longer trivial enhancements; these became necessities woven into the fabric of the workday with the seamless accommodation of working across time zones and geographical locations. Yet it wouldn't be technology alone that would solve the issue. Managers had to ensure that people were linked and all on the same page by implementing formalized communication channels mandatory meetings, message boards to assign tasks and due dates for responding to each other.

There had to be an element of trust to avoid miscommunications and guarantee people could work simultaneously yet still engage in a cooperative virtual environment. Employee wellness emerged as a top concern, advocated for as remote employees indicated increased stress, burnout, and feelings of isolation. Where there are statistics, there are inescapable realities, which means that employees were feeling a lot. The distinction between work and home was further blurred working from home eliminated the intentional socialization of the office, and many found themselves putting in extra effort just to learn remote systems and procedures implemented last minute (Aleem et al., 2022). Such progress was eased by many companies due to established wellness offerings. This comprised everything from companies providing virtual wellness workshops and access to mental health counselors to restructuring schedules to provide availability to accommodate personal needs. In addition, a focus on middle management to ease the transition went a

long way. This meant increased check-ins for emotional and mental health and adjustments offered based on personal needs for more effective results. Even virtual happy hours and trivia nights, albeit band-aid fixes to a lack of in-person socialization, boosted company morale and a sense of community. In the end, when people feel that their quality of life is taken into consideration, productivity and engagement thrived even through a screen. Therefore, those companies that could pivot and those that reported continued positive developments with wellness initiatives had high satisfaction and retention rates, meaning that these need to be considerations for the unknown future even if we are hybrid or remote again. Organizations had to rapidly reengineer operations and processes to meet anticipated remote staffing requirements (Aleem et al., 2022). This meant relying on vast resources in knowledge management, human resource management, and change management to support communication, trust, SOPs, and socialization concerns. The most important change to implement was the technological support for remote work. Companies had access to extensive IT assistance—from internet access to secure remote access to updated software for legitimate communication and collaboration. While many otherwise successful companies already had an online presence, the pandemic was merely the precipitating factor for expansion, access, and integration necessary to optimally support remote working capabilities. Thus, much had to change internally in terms of policy and procedure to accommodate such a sudden transformation. For instance, where performance indicators used to cite time spent in the office, post-transition, accomplishments were the new acknowledgments. Where a tangible, usually in-person, output potential existed, more flexible benchmarks were established in recognition of the increased pressures that remote work induced. In addition, there was a need for training for members and management to learn how to use such technology. According to Aleem et al. (2022), this technological development was not simply for frills, but for resource accessibility that championed equity so that all workers, regardless of position and location, would have what they needed to get the job done. Thus, change management became a critical component of these deployments. Organizations needed to promote a culture of stability and flexibility so all needed to champion the uncertainty and change which the pandemic brought about. Thus, management needed to serve as change agents, new policy implementations needed to be disseminated to the group, workshops needed to be held to air concerns, and changes needed to be made in line with organizational objectives. Therefore, the evolving essential managerial position has shifted in that they have to feel the pulse more of what virtual employees want and now, situate them for performance and effectiveness. This cognitive adjustment reflects what a lot of researchers and companies find valuable going forward. After the pandemic, it was found that the ideal management style was a humane one, for negotiating requirements, flexibility, and creativity opened company management's eyes to the best path forward without sacrificing revenue goals. However, for those companies that could sustain this flexible environment did not see it as a temporary bandage solution, but instead, a revolutionary approach to having an effective team moving forward. Remote work isn't going

away anytime soon. This definitive expectation from Kate Lister, President of Global Workplace Analytics (Turesky et al., 2020), suggests that such changes are not going to reverse and therefore, companies must seek effective virtual management in the future. Ultimately, the pandemic was a catalyst for a new work era, with remote work accelerating like never before and the urgency for effective virtual management certain. What global findings from different organizations determine the sources of pandemic impact on the managerial process include team virtualization, health and safety of employees, and changing requirements of management. Organizations that successfully transitioned to a work-from-home option have awareness of these changes in practices and policies to facilitate a new initiative. In the end, it's not the ability to manage and resolve these fleeting nuisances that will be transferable from this transition. It's the learned experience and solved conundrums that will be applicable to future endeavors.

## **ii. Information Technology**

Remote work is the norm, and companies need to rely on software for group efforts to make up for what is needed virtually. Such software allowed for complete communication, collaboration, and sharing of information. The organizations pre-pandemic that were able to pivot quickly to such technological enhancements were the same companies during the pandemic that had a boost to productivity and collaboration from a distance. Therefore, for the past three years up until now, management has been required to alter operations and procedures to accommodate and meet the critical needs of a newly remote working employee population (Bhargava, 2020; Turesky et al., 2020; Ferreira et al., 2021). These adjustments happen via resource distribution toward knowledge management, human resource management, and change management in order to ease or pivot various elements like communication and related trust challenges, elements of organizational behavior, and reconfiguration of the employer-employee relationship. Managers must be aware of the specific stresses and requirements that virtual workers experience and strive to appropriately balance their productivity, engagement, and quality of work/life (Ferreira et al., 2021). For instance, this involves better communication, greater trust, a sense of belonging, familial bonds, and a common purpose among geographically dispersed teams. With remote work becoming increasingly more popular aside from COVID, it will be some time before people no longer take this experience away. What practicalities were learned from virtual management will dictate what and how people will be able to work better in the future. From employee productivity, wellness, and engagement to intent from management understanding what's feasible and what's not efficient with them and their remote employees will be something either replicated or shunned when the normal work environment exists again. Even cybersecurity assessments will have to be undertaken, for companies become vulnerable to new concerns while remote. Therefore, extensive training and tools were required to get managers accustomed

to virtual leadership and develop the necessary skills to support employees in a virtual setting (Bhargava, 2020; Ferreira et al., 2021).

### **iii. Organizational Culture**

With regard to company culture, much changed in comparison to what it was remotely minimal communication, collaborative workspaces, and social engagement opportunities dissipated over time. Therefore, over time, the ability to engage and motivate members was somewhat restricted, and the ability to champion the company's mission was adversely impacted. Organizational culture is formed and solidified through tangible, sensory associations, an office design with cubicles, impersonal drop-by encounters, handshakes in meetings, business formalities, or cocktails/team outings, and the culture is not established.

Therefore, before an anticipated company-wide remote working arrangement, employees were able to experience their organizational culture face-to-face on the side or sporadic and if they did not experience it, they were, to a degree, separate from the organizational culture while not truly engaged. Thus, these challenges have caused different entities to adopt their own measures to foster a virtual setting that emulates the cultural and social aspects of the business that was regularly undertaken during in-person work. For instance, Caiazza et al. (2021) demonstrate that a conducive company culture was upheld in a remote setting through intentional and structured online endeavors. Industries involved in virtual enterprises of their own team building from games to puzzles to workshops that had employees divulge personal information and professional achievements. They planned on bonding, interpersonal relationships, and community where people would feel connected through a digital interface that would never be possible if they were actually in the same room together in the first place. Realizing the need for such unofficial socialization, a lot of businesses launched "watercooler" chats or "happy hour" rooms on company digital software. These efforts generate digital access to unofficial socialization opportunities where employees can talk to one another for no reason virtually and establish social bonds and informal communication as they did in the physical office. Another crucial element in creating culture was the consistency of formal communication from above. Town halls, executive video messages, and global newsletters emphasized the value's key tenets improved transparency and acknowledgment of successes and leaders acknowledged how all employees exercised the values of resilience, agility, and innovation during the pandemic. This connected micro-culture employee experiences to the macro-culture. Therefore, it seems that one of the critical factors of remote work was managerial participation in fostering and sustaining company culture. Managers needed to become "cultural ambassadors"; they should not only model the expected behaviors as managerial direction

for inclusive, participatory meetings, but they also needed to absorb the company's culture and mission and properly relay such in achievable tasks/suggestions for their specific teams.

Therefore, one of the main obstacles organizations contended with was the creation of virtual settings and activities in which comparable blended employees could feel part of the singular, purposeful group. In other words, blended social integration and aspects of organizational culture were formed through virtual team building, online "watercoolers," etc. (Caiazza et al., 2021). Such pandemic solutions imply an almost intentionally more complicated, fabricated version of how organizational culture could be created and maintained in the future. When technology is involved and an intrusion is almost required, culture becomes something that can be made instead of something that comes about organically, in person, or through natural, spontaneous occurrence. Moreover, the increased focus on flexibility, DEI, and wellness as cultural value priorities show a more humanistic approach to work for many companies moving forward. These adjustments will be here to stay as companies are hybrid and fully remote, which means cultural evolution can continue to take place as companies further align themselves with the times and discover what their employees need from now on. Ultimately, while transitioning to remote work made certain elements of organizational culture more challenging, it also opened the door for a relearning and reconstruction of how culture is formed and upheld. Technology and dependence upon virtual relationship management and managerial efforts as cultural champions provide the means to uphold culture in a regulated, reasonably adjustable, sustainable manner within a virtual environment. The switch to remote work occurred because of a pandemic, and therefore, whatever aspects were taken away from such an experience will be carried into the future of work for many years to come. While there are various considerations in assessing the future of work, one critical consideration with respect to suggested changes to the organization is the evolution of organizational culture over time for a remote work environment.

#### **iv. Performance Management**

Equitable performance management, for example, became an issue during such a remote setting as well as face time and visuals assist managers in assessing contribution and productivity (Turesky, et al., 2020). Potential problems that existed before COVID-19, although good and bad management attention was transparent, were made more necessary to confront during the pandemic. For example, some companies had been struggling with such problems before, but the necessity of clear and equitable systems has only compounded since the worldwide crisis commenced (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Therefore, this crisis exposed problems that were already there—like systems that only accounted for those who could be visually seen or those in high-level positions—and compounded the necessity for better, more sound, transparent systems that provided equity for all, no matter on-screen visibility or title in a company (Waizenegger et al., 2020). New tiers of compensation and performance assessment had to be developed by organizations

to adapt to new challenges and a greater understanding of new needs relative to remote work in-home settings. In addition, it became the responsibility of management to ensure that all intentions were equitable, diverse, and in line with the overall strategic vision of the organization. Systems were put into place to facilitate equitable assessments relative to new needs and challenges typically not present due to a remote work situation. For example, management should be reminded that limited resources, additional childcare, and health concerns emerged as performance assessment challenges that should be accommodated. At the same time, more frequent, targeted performance assessments were encouraged by new baby expectations, value-added suggestions, and advice to get people where they need to go. In addition, some companies instituted anonymous or peer review evaluative measures to reduce subjectivity and factor a more holistic view of an employee's performance. Such measures acknowledged input from various levels within the company, which mitigated some of the disadvantages of strictly managerial reviews. If working from home is the new expected normal moving forward, it will be easier for companies to adopt such nontraditional evaluative measures in the future. But those who can do it now will have an advantage in hiring and retention down the road—making sure their remote employees of the future feel valued for their work and appropriately compensated.

#### **v. Employee Well-being**

Remote work in a pandemic challenged employee mental health and job satisfaction due to work-life integration, decreased social engagement, and prolonged isolation. When people consider remote work opportunities, it's a positive thing no travel time, flexible engagement but it's detrimental to mental health and job satisfaction due to increased work-life integration, decreased social engagement, and increased isolation, which all jeopardize the best intentions of mental and physical health and wellness. (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). But with work and home integrated, it was even more difficult for employees to separate since, essentially, they were always working. This meant longer hours and more fatigue. Since home was the new office, what was required of employees and when became even more complicated to gauge. Furthermore, without a designated office space, informal drop-bys made less palpable, so connection and relationship development floundered, resulting in a decreased sense of engagement for many with their employment. Such mental health solutions were needed by companies as many offerings and options were put into place to assist these remote employees. Access to mental health professionals was needed, wellness programs and initiatives were championed, and managerial suggestions for personal health and work-life balance were emphasized (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Thus, companies took it upon themselves to offer mental health access and resources as they realized the mental strain of working from home. Employees were offered counseling services, teletherapy, and mental health hotlines. Other companies went outside

their walls to a third-party conglomerate to offer confidential and customized solutions to reduce stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. Corporate wellness changes to at-home and online. The new workday is remote. Companies that figure out how to cater to the mental and physical needs of those working out of their homes will pave the way for successful, engaged, and retained work down the line. Management approaches. For required remote workers due to COVID-19, much shifted in management. Many had already been making attempts to transition and learn their shortcomings prior, but it was the necessity to go remote that resulted in never-before-seen management solutions and challenges. Key challenges were team management and collaboration in a virtual setting, sustaining remote work cultures, fair assessments, and virtual means for security and safety. Those organisations that can navigate these concerns will thrive in a post-pandemic society.

#### **4.9.2. Discussion of Objective 2:**

*To identify the specific organizational policies that were adapted to manage virtual employees during the Covid-19 pandemic.*

The literature reveals a fundamental reconceptualization of performance measurement. "Performance management operated with people present in the office and evaluations based on output" became obsolete, requiring "more specific adjustments to previously established goals and new expectations" (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Organizations had to rapidly adapt a wide range of policies and practices to effectively manage their newly remote workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following policies were important:

##### **i. Remote work policies**

The nature of pandemic-related remote working has been unprecedented and occurred worldwide in a day (Zoonen et al., 2021). It's unprecedented, it's worldwide, it's in a day, and it comes forever linked to a pandemic. Therefore, complications arise as businesses are neither technologically nor socially prepared for such extensive virtual interaction (Urbaniec et al., 2022). However, throughout the pandemic, much has been done to quickly change company policy and procedure to ensure stabilized remote employee oversight and company regulatory compliance as stated by Urbaniec et al., (2022) and Ferreira et al., (2021), for a restructured status quo. Never before in history has there been a global shift to a remote workforce (Zoonen et al., 2021). Whereas one obstacle revealed itself in a heightened demand for the interdependence of tasks and increased communication for those virtually, new processes had to be established for effective

knowledge transfer, trust, and social facilitation, as well as navigating the systems of the organization, all to keep productivity flowing while acclimating people to the new environment.

In addition, some people had no proper at-home environments established or access to/use of digital resources, which made working remotely that much harder. (Cai et al., 2021). Thus, these complications necessitated a change in organizational policies and procedures. For instance, remote working policies were established or expanded within a matter of days, whereby organizations sought collaborative and communicative tools to ensure that everyone was on the same page virtually without in-person contact. Furthermore, with the pandemic, there was a concern for companies to support the health and safety of employees as many people struggled with mental health and personal/work boundaries. Thus, the performance management process was modified in the frequency and type of feedback provided and necessary changes in judging performance i.e., instead of sitting at a computer for eight hours. Companies had to become more flexible, more agile, and more people-oriented in leading virtual teams by default. The transition to what would be an increased reliance on digitization and an urge to reassess culture and values occurs anew with remote transition. Furthermore, much of the pandemic experience will adjust operations moving forward. There are clear intentions of how things will be done moving forward if organizations have been able to successfully adjust to a virtual existence, or if they've emerged from the chaos with an understanding of better health and work-life balance.

## **ii. Collaboration and communication**

In addition, policies and systems changed to accommodate and ease remote workers in collaborative efforts and communication. New forms of virtual communication emerged to meet in real-time and disseminate information. The need to reimagine how teams would now socialize and bond was also essential, as many had not communicated in person for years; the longer time went on, the harder it became to trust others and foster a sense of community (Zoonen et al., 2021; Urbaniec et al., 2022). Therefore, many resources and finances were invested in collaborative systems, Zoom and video conferencing, and digital infrastructures that seeped into the remote-work universe to encourage collaboration, information sharing, and transparency with management. Moreover, the virtual realm required meeting agendas and expectations, project collaboration systems and protocols, and team communication standards. Examples of this new collaborative trend investment included everything from team meetings transformed into virtual check-ins and virtual happy hours, to new digital whiteboards and project management software to which everyone had access, and new deliverables to facilitate engagement of those who remained remote (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

In addition, enhanced digital communication platforms with mandated expectations of communication and trust-building exercises not only fixed the collaboration issue for now but also expanded an organization's opportunity for success later. The results related to transparency, inclusion, and supportive efforts of this new collaborative trend investment relay an implication of a new focus on the quality of work and quality of engagement going forward. Advancements in collaboration and communication about the pandemic and working life champion the future of work. For example, if people have become more comfortable with digital communication, businesses might more easily support remote access. Still, the opposite may be true, too if people become more isolated and require hybrid communication to satisfy pre-pandemic professional and intrapersonal development goals (such as for well-being), the same may be true.

Furthermore, this kind of efficiency with such efforts and adjustments indicated that any and all types of work from home were effective, even for positions that were traditionally considered not able to be done remotely. Thus, the pandemic institutionalized an ideal quasi-organizational culture of one that already projected permanent hybrid or remote opportunities.

### **iii. Employee support and well-being**

Employee support and well-being Policies focused on the well-being of employees working from home were advocated for due to COVID-19. This means policies and programs focusing on well-being for those at home relative to physical, mental, and emotional capability (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Resources such as virtual therapy, yoga classes, and social interaction opportunities were provided. The nature of organizational assistance changed because leaders realized new concerns were plaguing remote employees—from loneliness to burnout, and too much work-life blending. Thus, the changes include new mental health resources, social virtual gatherings, and flexible suggestions for proper work-life balance (Ågren et al., 2022). The pandemic's consideration of employee wellness for the future of work is that where, before, such needs may not have been met, they were quickly accommodated to show future management that remote options were possible. With the future of work more empathetic, resonant, and backed with the resources to achieve such managerial shifts, a people-centered approach to work will only foster greater engagement, retention, and efficacy of organizations going forward. Furthermore, well-being initiatives were transferable and able to be managed in a remote setting, which proved that going forward, they could be managed in any setting.

### **iv. Performance management**

As the shift to remote work happened overnight, the mindset about performance management needed to adjust for a previously engaged and now-at-home team. For instance, performance management operated with people present in the office and evaluations based on output. The assessment, with the home office,

became moot, making time in the office for evaluation irrelevant. Thus, the connection to performance management here relied on either more specific adjustments to previously established goals and new expectations or more general evaluations given more frequently. Where performance management systems relied upon historical notions of productivity based on time "worked" and "not worked" and reward and punishment policies, these measures thrived under the historical scenario of working in a controlled, in-office environment (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Yet with a transition to remote work and employment practices, such systems changed, too.

Productivity could not be demanded based on time worked—this was impossible and, quite literally, ineffective to track. Instead, performance management systems were based upon the new necessity of goal achievement tracking and productivity based upon new deliverables and outcomes. New systems emerged based on more frequent check-ins, greater dependence upon objective, measurable key performance indicators (KPIs), and almost instantaneous feedback for those who required assistance (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). The future of work will include changes to performance management from the pandemic.

The very fact that the companies were able to pivot and focus on output instead of input is a more trusting, humane style of performance management that should be used moving forward. Thus, if such changes that worked to accommodate a remote atmosphere worked, it only stands to reason that remote performance works just as well as in-person atmospheres and in some cases, better. Also, the very fact that such changes happened and worked so well showed that remote work is possible with productive efficacy in realms previously thought to be non-transferable to the virtual realm.

#### **v. Organizational culture**

An organizational culture is generally established by people liking to work with one another in an office/meeting regularly at least to create a common experience. This was not as easily done over a remote platform. In addition, beyond organizational adjustments to remote work, collaboration and communication, employee resources and assistance, performance management, firms needed to assess how to foster an organizational culture with remote workers.

Where culture could not be sustained with ongoing physical on-site interaction, new cultural initiatives emerged such as virtual team-building, remote onboarding for those hired while remote, and increased communicative efforts by management. The latter, according to Kniffin et al. (2020), ensures that all employees are in the know (albeit remote) and gives them the sense that they are engaged and part of the bigger company-wide initiative. Such things were necessary for community and cohesion with remote work. From virtual happy hours to message boards and bulletin boards to remote onboarding and training. These were all part of the changes in organizational culture during COVID and the future of work

implications, because if these things didn't exist before but were adjusted during a pandemic, it goes to show that anything can be done for employees.

If an organizational culture, with remote workers, can transform them into one coherent and happy family, then this virtual organizational culture is just as effective as in-person arrangements. Therefore, studying post-pandemic adjustments is critical to understanding how the future of work will evolve and how leaders approach and implement organizational culture within the physical work setting, as companies move from the pandemic into their new normal. These policy changes reflect the level of bureaucratic and cultural disruption necessary to successfully implement legitimate remote work. The findings suggested that already remote organisations fared better during the shift than those still trying to figure it out during a noon distributed workday.

#### **4.9.3. Discussion of Objective 3:**

*To examine the challenges faced by managers in ensuring organizational and employee productivity and employee engagement in a virtual environment during the pandemic.*

The analysis reveals that "communication fails when teams are dispersed, and collaboration strains as not everyone is in the same location" (Aleem et al., 2022). Managers faced significant communication challenges. The literature reveals that managers had to navigate significant challenges in maintaining employee productivity and engagement in the shift to mass remote work during COVID-19. These challenges included maintaining clear communication and alignment with distributed teams, ensuring equitable access to information and resources, monitoring performance and providing effective feedback, addressing feelings of isolation and burnout among remote workers, and preserving a sense of organizational culture and community.

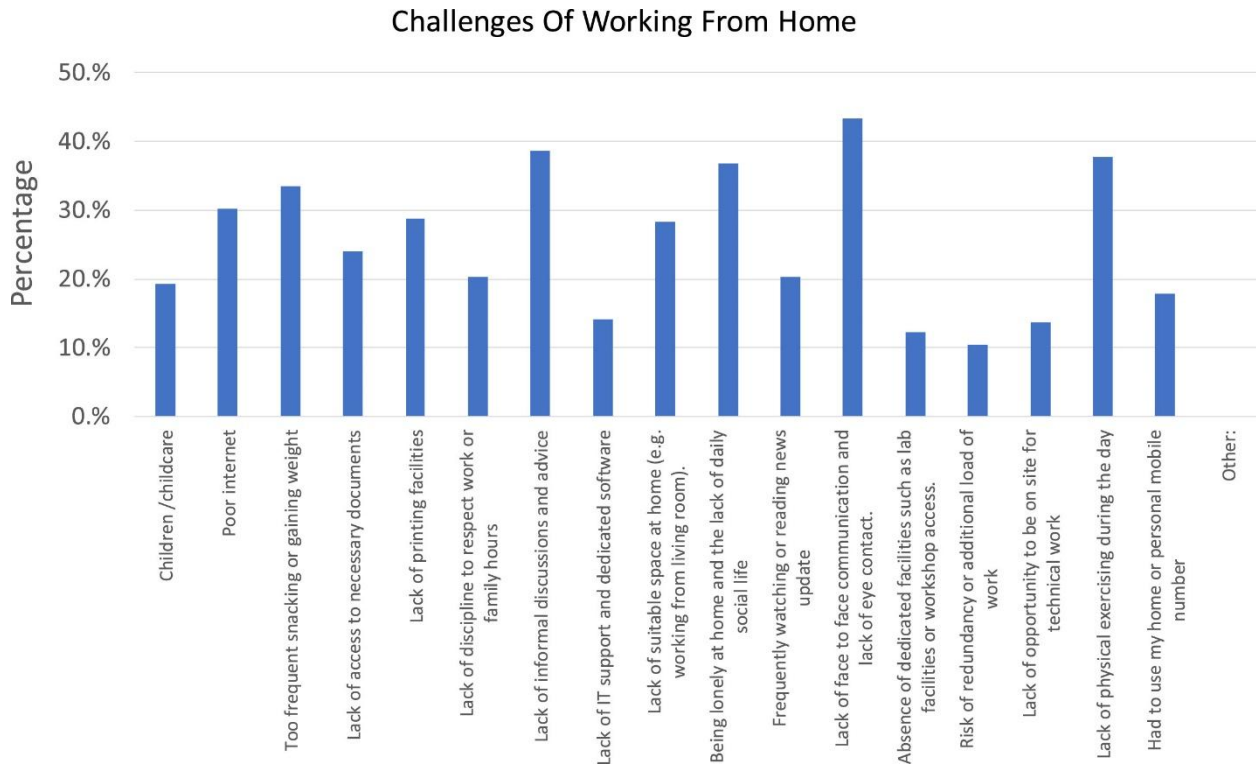
##### **i. Communication**

Communication fails when teams are dispersed, and collaboration strains as not everyone is in the same location (Aleem et al., 2022). There are no casual water cooler chats people would engage in daily while at work, which, in the end and not purposefully kept them away from their peers and the company.

For example, one of the challenges was the need for change management. Much of the management related to a pre-pandemic world with an in-person staffing framework, and thus resourcing, oversight, intention changes, and assessments would all need to be reconfigured to adapt to the new realities. Thus, where weekly check-ins, team-building, and casual social happy hours were once face-to-face endeavors, managers found alternative ways to connect virtually (Caiazza et al. 2021). Video conferencing, instant

messaging, and collaborative efforts unite people across distances. Moreover, where no extra training for managerial staff would typically be needed, extra training was mandated to keep remote workers in line (Aleem et al. 2022).

**Figure 4.1. Main challenges of working from home during Covid-19**



Source: (Al-Habaibeh, et al 2021)

Figure 4.1 provides an overview of employee responses to the challenges of working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, the lack of social face-to-face interaction featured in the three of the highest four scoring challenges.

These are articles that evaluate the need for such communication and collaboration relative to a virtual work environment because it impacts the productivity, satisfaction, and health of employees. Moreover, those locations where the supervisors exerted great effort to build a team atmosphere thrived. It's easier to stay engaged and motivated when everyone is in the same boat and paddling in the same direction.

**ii. Work- Life Balance**

Another challenge was the potential for remote employees to become isolated from the business and one another. When work and home life began to merge, it contributed to increased anxiety and employee fatigue (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Therefore, where a dedicated atmosphere was needed to keep morale high, proper work engagement and company culture became more difficult to sustain without the organic occurrences of the in-office environment.

Ultimately, the results indicate that a sudden change to anticipated protocol and leadership during the pandemic was challenging for many at the management level, and such leadership needed to be changed almost overnight. In addition, those companies that successfully achieved employee comfort and work-life integration during the peak and post-pandemic time are faring better now in terms of retention, morale, and productivity (George et al., 2021; Aleem et al., 2022).

Strategies to maintain employee productivity, engagement, and wellbeing in a remote environment included mental health resources, notification for breaks, and flexible work schedules, as without work/life balance opportunities, persons could easily find themselves fatigued and not operating at their peak by mid-day/mid-week. Moreover, without expected and scheduled interactions in the office mere non-courted hallway bump-ins or random opportunities elsewhere it became difficult to maintain company culture and promote employee wellness. Managers had to plan more purposefully for social engagement, intra-employee teaching, and wellness activities so that people wouldn't be too alone or too stressed out overcompensating for lost opportunities (Aleem et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020).

According to research, after COVID, those companies that prioritized health initiatives for their employees and a focus on work-life balance enjoyed higher retention, employee morale, and productivity down the line (Aleem et al., 2022; George et al., 2021). Furthermore, management needed to assess whether over-blurring boundaries, added isolation, and general online engagement cognitive load caused burnout and stress for employees. Therefore, a prominent objective would be to ensure that remote workers had the resources, access, and time to destress.

These results imply that from a distance, those companies that focus on employee well-being and the ability to distinguish work from home and home—from remote settings will have a more engaged, effective, and longitudinally stable workforce with more consequences for organizational success.

### **iii. Equity and Fairness**

The primary concern that managers faced relative to equity and fairness came within the virtual work setting. For instance, employees who generally work with a great deal of task interdependence might be

more challenged than others relative to productivity and communication in a virtual setting, which breeds feelings of inequity and unfairness (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Therefore, over the course of the pandemic, organizations had to reconfigure how they did business and establish new business structures to avoid or increase compliance with employee needs. This meant greater attention and capital investment in knowledge management, human resource management, and change management to mitigate areas of disrupted or changed communication, trust, organizational training and development, and interpersonal relationship cultivation (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

In addition, organizations started to evaluate performance in a new light based on output rather than input; that is, whether employees meet goals and productivity benchmarks versus how many hours they sit behind a desk or logged into a corporate network (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

These results suggest that relative equity and fairness in an online work setting are essential to keeping employees happy, trusted, and engaged. Therefore, the companies that previously engaged in inequity but have been able to change practices and policies to equity are more likely to have a satisfied and engaged workforce—even during a pandemic.

#### **iv. Performance Management**

One of the other challenges that managers experienced was performance management in the sense of evaluating and managing employee productivity. Essentially, with work from home, many managers were not going to be able to see their employees at the office anymore, and different methods of evaluation and management of productivity were going to be needed. Where the trend differs from previous years is the change in corporate culture to welcome the developments. For example, new performance management systems exist and are more stringent. However, they focus more on outcomes/KPIs than they do on time worked or time spent online virtually (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Furthermore, the setting of expectations, feedback, and managerial support is more nuanced. These results bode well for future performance management during such disruptions. If the firms can successfully assess and measure performance now, comfortably and with an eye toward employee wellness, in a virtual space to which they've acclimated, they'll be positioned to have engaged and productive employees in the event of any future disruptions.

#### **v. The onboarding and integration**

Organizations with new hires experienced difficulties in a remote reality as well. New hires do not have the urgency of in-person meetings and quick access to understanding the culture of the company, meaning they may be less connected to their direct teams or the organization as a whole (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Therefore, onboarding had to be transformed and revamped in a remote reality to ensure new hires could do their jobs and feel like part of the team and the culture. Yet, this was challenging, as there was no physical presence, cultural misunderstandings, and minimal to no social engagement. Therefore, in a company culture now more dependent upon virtual connectivity, efforts for onboarding and assimilation became increasingly prudent. Technological and virtual opportunities helped facilitate connection, cultural cementation, and position learning, including virtual icebreakers, digital mentorships, and managerial check-in assessments of comfort and integration into this new remote world. (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Thus, any organization that takes the time and effort for purposeful, engaging virtual onboarding and assimilation will be on a firm trajectory to not only hire but also retain the best talent in a remote working environment. Resources allocated to the undertaking to make sure new employees are trained and assimilated effectively foster loyalty and appreciation in return via productivity, engagement, and of course, retention.

#### **vi. Organizational Culture**

Managers had difficulty in fostering an active, positive company culture when working virtually. For example, without informal meet and greets blended within the fabric of regular daily operations, it was challenging to do so, especially with no cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions of appropriate behavior (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Therefore, where this was more of an added bonus pre-pandemic, now, such things had to be put into place. New virtual social interactions and online platforms for collaboration and communication and new ways to incentivize success from a distance became the norm (Newman & Ford, 2020). In addition, where this was not as much a concern at one time—especially when people were in the office—being remote presented an easier distraction for companies to have to urgently focus on, so employees became engaged. Therefore, virtual happy hours or games, increased access by managers for check-ins, assessments of appropriate work-life balance, and wellness attention became critical (Caiazza et al., 2021).

Ultimately, the findings of the project suggest that those companies who adapt to creating a sustainable virtual culture will be on top in keeping employees engaged, energized, and retained through remote efforts. Therefore, the emphasis on a strong culture and, especially, the inclusion of all employees during the remote culture creation process goes a long way in ensuring that all team members value what they do and stay engaged—connected—and, from a company perspective, effective. Ultimately, the lessons learned from the pandemic show failings from management's side of authority and readiness to successfully engage with remote teams that indicate a need for improved training, resources, and company actions to engage and motivate a remote team.

#### 4.9.4. Discussion of Objective 4:

*To assess how organizations adapted communication, collaboration, and team dynamics to suit a virtual workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic.*

Organizations experienced "**universal demand for collaborative technologies**" to maintain productivity (Jacks, 2021). The transition to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated significant changes in organizational practices around communication, collaboration, and team dynamics. (Aleem et al., 2022)

##### **i. Collaboration and communication:**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations had to shift communication patterns for a remote workforce almost overnight. This means the implementation of telecommuting opportunities (Kessler et al., 2020; Aleem et al., 2022; Cai et al., 2021). When organizations were forced to shutter physical workspaces, an effort was made to transition as many employees as possible to remote operations as feasible and without announcement (Cai et al., 2021). No one asked to work from home, and it was an inconvenience for everyone; however, those employees transitioning to remote work status had to play catch up to the newly established standard operating procedures while attempting to learn new systems with subpar home office setups (Cai et al., 2021). This is especially true for those with differentiated, high-dependency tasks, as most likely, they had a tough time maintaining productivity and communication while simultaneously dealing with unavoidable distractions from the realities of everyday life (Aleem et al., 2022). Companies ultimately came together through collaboration tools and video conferencing software, digitally expanding their infrastructure to facilitate effortless virtual endeavors (Newman & Ford, 2020). Employees connected from their home offices yet still learned resources and project goals as a team from far and wide. However, researchers found it increasingly difficult to collaborate virtually; brainstorming was challenging, no accidental water cooler conversations happened, and meetings and discussions took extra scheduling and structure (Mancl & Fraser, 2020). Furthermore, virtual call fatigue set in as too many hours staring at one's colleagues and speaking became too much.

They experienced productivity difficulties and communication breakdowns in figuring out how to manage unplanned daily distractions like what remote work unexpectedly added to their day (Cai et al., 2021). Prior to the pandemic, remote work was a bonus for employees, providing higher levels of engagement and retention with a lower cost in operational expenditures for the organization. However, after COVID-19 and remote work becoming a trend easier to manage than in-person operations, companies were forced to conduct the majority of value-added processes in an online realm. This implies a transformation in the nature/design of work activities, the work activities themselves, and the management thereof. Thus, to

accommodate their transformed employee/associate needs and opportunities, companies relied upon knowledge management, human resources management, and change management. Ultimately, in this cybersecurity world/dependence, factors like communication, trust, pre-established standards, and intentions of networking emerged (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

The onset of the pandemic marked a shift in organizational communication, as the quick transition to remote work forced organizations to develop new strategies for maintaining effective operations within a digital environment.

## **ii. Collaboration Tools**

Another form of innovation that infiltrated companies was the need for collaborative technologies meant for remote work. From teleconferencing to cloud computing, demand for collaborative technologies was universal to keep productivity on track. For instance, access to cloud computing resources was scaled up as companies continued seeking resources that made communication easier and access to information more efficient for employees who were not in the same space (Jacks, 2021).

Yet such demand for, and subsequent integration of, technology is not a good sign, though, because with a forced integration of collaborative technology, many companies were in no position to best utilize such collaborative technology (Jacks, 2021). Whether due to issues of digital literacy or access to adequate internet, the changes came with problems. For some, unfamiliarity with collaborative technology made them less productive than their digitally present peers who were more quickly up to speed with new systems. Employees with less access from rural homes struggled to connect and engage in Zoom meetings while some who got booted out of teleconferencing found themselves mute. Instead of fostering inclusion and collaboration, tools became barriers for some.

Therefore, even though they helped and complicated concerns of productivity at the same time, these required additional efforts from companies and employees to make them hailed as productive achievements. Thus, collaboration technologies ensured that productivity numbers were met and many operations were underway as if a physical team existed. For example, Zoom provides employees and managers the opportunity to have company meetings and training sessions directly from their homes and host group workshops in real-time; cloud-based software allows for documents to be shared in virtual settings with editing rights provided so groups can work on the same document at the same time without needing to occupy the same location (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Thus, not only did such collaboration tools keep many companies operating during uncertain times with companies and individuals previously unaware of such possibilities, but they also paved the way for international expansion and access to talent in the future. By

the time the pandemic came about, collaboration tools were in the ether. Companies not only needed to maintain business as usual, but they also had new access to global talent at their fingertips.

However, such technologies do not improve automatically without proper training and introduction to a virtual work culture that properly integrates with already established company policy. Team dynamics and culture: Maintaining a cohesive company culture and community became even more difficult with remote work. New programs developed across firms to facilitate social engagement and team integration virtually social Zooms, coffee breaks, games fostering peer recognition, new managers reordering onboarding schedules without integrative in-person meetings to foster trust and comprehension and new programs for integrative onboarding (George et al., 2020). For instance, "virtual happy hours" and "buddy systems" were instituted at LinkedIn and Salesforce, respectively. Ultimately, these organizations had to relearn how to communicate, collaborate, and manage teams under pressure during the pandemic while transitioning to a virtual workforce.

**Figure 4.2. Communication and Integrity During COVID-19**



Source: (Sull and Sull, 2020) (MIT Sloan Management Review)

Figure 4.2 provides an overview of sentiment scores (how positively employees discussed cultural topics) in Culture 500 companies during March-August 2020 and compared them with those for the preceding 12 months. Employees were nearly twice as likely to speak positively about how well their top team communicated during the first six months of COVID-19 compared with the preceding year (Sull & Sull, 2020).

Overall, the literature review highlights the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communication and collaboration. The forced transition to remote work at an unprecedented scale has challenged longstanding assumptions and prompted organizations to rapidly adapt their work practices, policies, and technologies to support virtual collaboration and productivity.

### **iii. Team management and dynamics**

Where the team was once viewed as a certain tier within the corporate hierarchy, it no longer exists as such now that teams operate remotely and from across the globe with less in-person meet-ups and more of a personalized, independent style of collaboration. Therefore, team cohesion, communication effectiveness, and overall effectiveness have adjusted (Ünal, 2023).

In addition, where team management was looking for new ways to supplement in-person team brainstorming and pop-up meetings, the companies relied upon software and applications that tried to bridge the gap—virtual team-building exercises, digital social happy hours, and added one-on-one check-ins between management, employees, and their groups. In addition, where the casual water cooler or pop-up meeting was, company culture and employee health and wellness suffered. More mandatory, intentional time was required by management to encourage socialization, peer-to-peer training, and wellness initiatives in order to ensure that employees did not feel alone, overwhelmed, and on the verge of burnout.

But to solve these problems, teams have changed. Team structures, responsibilities, and anticipated deliverables in a remote setting have shifted. For example, new collaborative efforts have emerged, like more meetings, more required use of cloud-based collaborative software, and more accountability (Caiazza et al., 2021). In addition, more training and development efforts have been required to help transient teams with remote work challenges like trust issues, knowledge transfer, and time zone variances for global teams (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

A lot of what organizations have done in the post-pandemic world is re-evaluate—evaluate team composition and how people work remotely and institute new plans to foster remote engagement, productivity, and employee wellbeing through online efforts. Ultimately, the pandemic forced companies to shift their modes of communication, collaboration, and team management overnight to facilitate a remote work environment. While digital means of communication and collaboration facilitated the maintenance of productivity at rapid rates, companies struggled without in-person, face-to-face interaction to promote company culture and socialization, which existed regardless and needed focus in addition to employee engagement and well-being. In addition, findings confirmed that virtual teams need even more communication to ensure clarity of roles, responsibilities, and expectations to keep teams on task.

#### 4.9.5. Discussion of Objective 5:

*To investigate changes brought by Covid-19 pandemic on management practices and organizational policies.*

The literature reveals that COVID-19 created "**a significant paradigm shift in the world of management and organizational policies**" (Mathende & Karim, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic created a shift in management practices and organizational policies across industries. It not only disrupted the traditional ways of working but also accelerated the transformation of organizational cultures, management styles, and business processes. A key shift was the adoption of transformational leadership, which emphasizes motivation, support, and adaptability in leading teams through challenging times.

##### **iii. Policies and Management Practices**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on management practices and organizational policies as organizations attempted to adapt to the realities of a remote workforce. Additionally, it has undoubtedly brought about a significant paradigm shift in the world of management and organizational policies (Mathende & Karim, 2022; Claus, 2021; Howe et al., 2020). Amidst the disruption caused by the crisis, researchers have argued that a new leadership paradigm is necessary to navigate the changing context effectively (Claus, 2021). The pandemic has led to profound changes in employees' routines, activities, and the managerial leadership styles required to address the implications of COVID-19 (Mathende & Karim, 2022).

Transformational leadership, in particular, has been identified as a suitable approach to manage and lead resources in challenging environments. This is because transformational leaders are able to inspire and motivate employees, while also providing the necessary support to navigate the complexities introduced by the pandemic (Mathende & Karim, 2022). Organizations have had to adapt to new work schedules, build effective team relationships, and demonstrate a positive attitude of protection and care towards their employees. (Stefan & Nazarov, 2020). These shifts in management practices have been critical in maintaining organizational performance and employee well-being during the crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on organizational policies, particularly in the areas of remote work, performance management, and employee well-being. (Claus, 2021). Many organizations have had to rapidly transition to remote work arrangements, which has necessitated the development of new policies and procedures to ensure productivity and collaboration. (Howe et al., 2020).

Performance management practices have also had to evolve, with a greater emphasis on employee well-being, work-life balance, and outcomes-based evaluations (Howe et al., 2020).

The shift towards remote work has been accompanied by the need for organizations to invest in robust technology and infrastructure to support this new way of working. These policy changes have had broader implications for organizational culture, with increased emphasis on trust, autonomy, and employee empowerment.

The data gathered from various sources highlight the significant changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic on management practices and organizational policies. These changes have far-reaching implications for the way organizations operate, manage their workforce, and adapt to the evolving business landscape.

The shift towards transformational leadership, remote work, and a focus on employee well-being suggests that organizations are recognizing the need for a more holistic and adaptable approach to management. These changes have the potential to improve employee engagement, productivity, and organizational resilience in the face of future crises.

Furthermore, the emphasis on technology and infrastructure to support remote work has accelerated the digital transformation of many organizations, potentially leading to long-term improvements in efficiency, collaboration, and access to global talent.

However, the transition to these new management practices and policies has not been without its challenges. The stress and isolation associated with remote work, as well as the potential for burnout, have emerged as critical concerns that organizations must address.

**Table 4.11: Summary of Identified Themes**

*Author's Compilation*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Supporting Objective(s)</b>
Digital Transformation Acceleration	Rapid adoption of technology infrastructure for remote work	1, 2, 4
Leadership Model Evolution	Shift from directive to transformational leadership approaches	1, 3, 5
Performance Management Restructuring	Transition from time-based to outcome-based evaluation	1, 2, 3
Employee Well-being Prioritization	Integration of mental health and wellness into organizational policy	2, 3

Theme	Description	Supporting Objective(s)
Organizational Culture Reconstruction	Deliberate redesign of culture transmission in virtual environments	1, 4, 5
Communication Framework Transformation	Formalization of previously informal communication processes	3, 4

#### 4.10. Summary

Chapter 4 of the dissertation focuses on the presentation and analysis of research findings derived from secondary data. This critical chapter is structured into four main sections: Results, Analysis, Presentation of Results, and Discussion, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the study's significance and implications. The chapter begins by highlighting key themes and patterns identified during the analysis, organized according to specific research questions. A rigorous methodology was applied in selecting relevant articles from various academic databases, ensuring the quality and relevance of the data. The selection process included initial searches, screening abstracts and titles, critical evaluations, and full-text reviews, eventually culminating in a curated set of articles for analysis.

In the Analysis section, the chapter delves into the findings, interpreting underlying trends and relationships within the data. It contextualizes the results by linking them to existing literature and theoretical frameworks, offering insights into their significance and relevance to the research objectives. The theoretical analysis builds on, challenges, and extends established management theories through systematic synthesis of COVID-19's impact on remote work management. The cross-source analytical approach reveals patterns invisible in individual studies while generating new theoretical insights that advance understanding of virtual work management as a distinct organizational capability requiring integrated theoretical frameworks rather than simple adaptations of existing approaches.

The Presentation of Results section systematically organizes the data, utilizing tables, figures, and visual representations to enhance clarity and comprehension. This structured approach ensures that the reader can easily grasp the key findings and their implications. The chapter ultimately underscores the validity and impact of the study, contributing valuable insights to the field and addressing the outlined research questions effectively.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### 5.1. Introduction

The concluding chapter of a dissertation is, for the most part, a summary of results, suggestions, and future implications. Therefore, the last chapter is a summary of what was learned and applied for this dissertation's contribution to the evolving realm of managing remote work in a post-COVID-19 world. The chapter contains four elements. First, a concise, pertinent recap of the research intent and findings of the project in an ending fashion. Second, an exploration of the incremental contribution to the literature through the type of theoretical contention and consideration to intraorganizational activities. Third, the incremental contribution is the limitation of the findings, which situate the findings' validity and comparative position to a more generalizable situation. Ultimately, this chapter makes an additional contribution to the expected efforts of the feasibility and successful developments for the Managing Remote Workers study. These are split between the contribution to practice and future research. The contribution to practice represents what managerial personnel can adopt to assess their current level of comprehension and feasibility, and the practicality of remote worker management. Future research represents what other potential researchers might be able to do to replicate this study or build upon it, given the parenthetical citations by the authors. The final chapter serves as a launching pad for the additional research in the body of the literature and then the steadily growing inclination to explore and subsequently for career opportunities in managing remote work.

The final chapter offers not only the findings, practical relevance, limitations, and subsequent future research, but it renders an all too familiar experienced appreciation of what the research found and why it was such a valuable undertaking.

### 5.2. Study Implications

This systematic review of global literature informs implementation strategies for sustainable management for long-term remote and hybrid work scenarios. Assessing managerial worries about maintaining employee productivity and engagement levels and how organizations adjusted their communicative and cooperative efforts to keep employees working from home creates an understanding of what's been done and what's necessary. Furthermore, this study assesses whether these adjustments are sustainable or just a stopgap for actual implementation down the line. The chapter integrates Organizational Agility Theory, Media Richness Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory applications to articulate both theoretical contributions and practical implications for organizational development in post-pandemic work environments.

### **5.3. Discussion**

Ultimately, by revisiting these questions and objectives throughout the conclusion, the reader learns in hindsight the bigger picture of this dissertation undertaking: to find the nuance of how managers' behaviors and attitudes changed toward their at-home workers during the pandemic. With the dissertation's questions answered from a retrospective point of view, the final adjustment before easing into the dissertation's implications/findings relative to the dissertation's research questions for a more educated understanding and awareness of one's perspective about remote work, further broadened by experience.

#### **5.3.1. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on management practices in organizations with virtual employees prior and after the pandemic**

The analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on management practices in organizations with virtual employees revealed the following key findings:

In evaluating how Covid-19 shifted management of organizations with virtual employees pre-and-post, it was determined that remote work policies were instituted. Prior to the pandemic, remote working as a supplemental endeavor was not employed frequently. Yet with the onset of COVID-19, the entire world transitioned to remote work at unprecedented speed—and for many, unfortunately, endeavors. Where employers had been previously reluctant to embrace such formats, remote work became the new standard.

This environment suggested advancements in managerial approaches occurred almost instantly for every expected communicative, technological, and reconfiguration of teams and needs dimension to ensure productivity and interpersonal relationships, albeit digitally. Learning about how businesses transitioned to remote work emphasizes the difficulties it posed.

Emotional and social concerns—from lonely feelings to merged home and work environments—emerged from a generalized necessity of understanding people management, health, and wellness. New managerial strategies were required for clear communication, championing needs, and establishing trust, especially with remote teams. New tools and approaches emerged almost overnight for knowledge management, human capital, and change management operations as companies attempted to address problems of communication, trust, and relationships. This was also true for managerial staff who needed new tools and approaches to keep people productive, engaged, and well. Increased focus on digital collaboration and cybersecurity.

The remote working economies meant more people partaking in virtual communications than ever before, and the companies that could manage technology best were the most agile and sustainable for productivity and virtual engagement.

### **i. Performance Management Problems Lack of Performance Management**

Where performance went unnoticed almost in the past due to digital transformation, people had to be brought in and retransformed. But now, with digital reality cemented, performance went by the wayside as unavoidable new standards and new systems to evaluate became unavoidable.

Wellness of the employee was a focus. According to Kahn's engagement theory, working in a hybrid model, people needed to make themselves vulnerable, sharing their home lives with coworkers. Thus, many remained engaged so that they would not be judged for how or where they lived. However, this was a temporary solution for something more permanent. With consistent employment and social distancing opportunities, however, employee morale was low, and many employees felt socially isolated. Therefore, within this quickly adjusted working environment, companies took steps to ensure that employees had access to mental health resources, wellness opportunities, and personalized work-life balance. The importance of wellness programs allows for better employee engagement and retention. These discoveries relate to more than what's required relative to a few years of necessary working conditions and the present—improved virtual leadership, equity in performance systems and performance ratings, and increased focus on employee well-being will always be needed moving forward since remote work is permanent and organizations didn't just diversify managerial skill sets and technology capabilities for nothing.

Ultimately, these findings assess the new complexities and possibilities of post-pandemic times and the shifting effectiveness of management for companies with virtually engaged employees.

### **5.3.2. Organizational policies adapted to manage virtual employees during the Covid-19 pandemic**

In light of achieving objective two, the results indicated that in order to successfully oversee virtual employees as a result of COVID-19, many companies had to attempt to adopt a myriad of policies and practices almost all at once. For example, one policy was the creation or revision of a remote work policy that provided at-home work advice and assistance. Yet this is not to say that companies were not already in a state of reaction—technologically and organizationally unprepared—yet once the dust settled, companies could concentrate on more prioritized efforts of knowledge transfer, trust development, and managerial practices in a virtual setting.

Where communication breakdowns were evident, companies successfully utilized virtual applications. Messaging and video applications provided information to do virtually and expediently, through negotiated needs for liquidation. Policy updates about in-meeting behavior, status updates on projects, and intra-team communication were the virtual equivalent of what would have been in-person information dissemination, indicating that successful communication and team interdependence via collaborative digital applications

were as effective for communication and collaboration as in-person applications. Whether it was from increased mental health resources, virtual happy hours, flexible/hybrid arrangements, or shifting in performance management and work/life mental health stressors due to the pandemic, championing attested to company changes.

For those companies overcoming these challenges, feelings of loneliness and burnout were eased. This was a good thing. It meant management was transformed from the old school style to something that was more compassionate and inclusive, resulting in better engagement and retention. Where organizational culture was in-office, it shifted to a more blended approach to performance management that focused on time in the office and hourly metrics. Organizations offered more set expectations, more check-ins, and evaluations. Those that evaluated productivity and results—rather than micromanaging how many hours employees sat staring at a computer—built trust and adapted to the nuances of the new remote world. In addition, businesses rethought the means by which to develop an organizational culture. For instance, absent physical co-location, virtual team-building initiatives, online affinity groups, and greater leader communication fostered engagement and feelings of inclusion. The mere fact that such efforts were made demonstrated that a remote culture could be just as fulfilling as one done in person. What this means is that the official inking of how people and companies will be doing this for the foreseeable future has already been determined. The ability to do so has been established in a new hybrid, remote working world and it was clear with policies about increased digitization and transformed workspaces.

The pandemic opened up a proverbial can of worms that should be policy assessed moving forward to be more flexible, more manageable, and more sensitive to employees. For those who had remote access to work prior to the pandemic, adjusting policies post-pandemic was much easier than for those who never attempted remote access work before. These results highlight the critical changes in operations and culture required to support a successful dispersed workforce while creating a standardized policy for a fair and flexible hybrid approach moving into a post-COVID era.

### **5.3.3. Challenges faced by managers in ensuring organizational and employee productivity and employee engagement in a virtual environment during the pandemic**

With regard to the third objective, the challenges included:

#### **i. Challenges - Communication & Collaboration Challenges**

Pre-established lines of communication were fractured with an immediate work from home transition, making it harder than ever to remain on the same page and complete group efforts among geographically dispersed teams. Without hallway and break room chit chat, management found it difficult to maintain

transparency and inclusiveness as a team. · An organizational reassessment of when, how often and which facets people would touch upon to assess goals and deadlines needed to be made to fit the remote reality.

## **ii. Organizational Solutions to Resolve Communication Issues ·**

Video conferencing, chatting, and online collaborative spaces made it all possible. · Management hosted virtual happy hours, daily stand-ups, and casual meet and greets to foster team cohesion and excitement. Where some employees were able to work remotely, the lines between work and home environments became more blurred, and additional stressors arose alongside burnout and isolation. Organizations that maintained better morale acknowledged employee wellbeing—mental health intervention, optional hours, consistent breaks—lower turnover rates and greater productivity. Equity and Fairness in Remote Work. Managers found it difficult to remain equitable with communications, projects, and tools. Those companies with collaborative efforts found it harder to remain productive. ·

## **iii. Remote Onboarding**

Employees had trouble being onboarded remotely and integrating into company culture and with teams. · Where successful, virtual mentorship opportunities, team bonding, and consistent check-ins encouraged inclusion and productivity. Sustaining Company Culture · Without having anyone in the same room, it was challenging to have a fully inclusive company culture. · Managers purposely curated social opportunities, check-ins, and acknowledgment efforts to champion company values and its members.

## **iv. Most Successful Management Lessons Learned ·**

The company was not in the best place to manage a remote workforce, which is more resource-, training-, and support-intensive across the company. · Where communication, collaboration, culture, and wellbeing were stressed, empowered employees made companies more nimble and innovative as advances in engagement and productivity were realized. The complication of remote, geographically dispersed teams compounds the necessity of intentional changes that minimize communication complications but maximize wellbeing and cultural experiences in a virtual world.

### **5.3.4. Assessing how organizations adapted communication, collaboration, and team dynamics to suit a virtual workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic**

Adaptations assessed in objective four are listed as follows:

## **i. Issues with Communication and Collaboration ·**

Moving to a virtual world came with all kinds of communication issues—from misalignment to poor digital literacy to connection and safety issues. · In an interdependent environment, the need to communicate to

facilitate getting the job done and ensuring everyone was on the same page was exacerbated by the need to creatively troubleshoot solutions without the informal avenues that usually engage creativity; instead, it relied upon more formal channels less frequent than an in-person meeting but more than an email. Communication channels became fluid.

New collaboration technologies for digital teamwork—video conferencing, cloud sharing and collaborative applications, and asynchronous messaging—were invented to support working remotely and reduce the need for too many meetings. Cost management related to knowledge management, human resource management, and change management solved for trust, communication, and procedural development in the virtual domain. Collaboration Technology · Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Docs were the staples to keep companies operating and a more extensive workforce.

Successfully executing such programs required new adjustments to employees' technological abilities as well as new training and troubleshooting. Organizational Culture and Team Dynamics Where team dynamics and hierarchies existed, they had to shift for remote work, which required new understandings of roles, responsibilities, and communication for geographical dispersion and employee independence. Daily team huddles, virtual happy hours, and relearning roles and responsibilities were welcomed to encourage the necessities of cohesion and productivity regardless of distance. · Building an internal culture and a community was challenging without in-person connection. ·

Opportunities for employee engagement and employee feedback existed through virtual happy hours, buddy systems, and chances for colleagues to recognize each other. · Employees needed to trust each other based on formal introductions from leaders and had to ensure getting to know each other on a personal level to sustain a collaborative atmosphere virtually.

## **ii. Employee Wellbeing ·**

Where there is no physical office and no casual water cooler talk with colleagues, the issue of isolation and resultant burnout was a real concern. These problems were attempted to be resolved by management with the aid of wellness programs such as virtual wellness activities, check-in one-on-one more frequently, and mental health resources.

## **iii. Significance and Implications**

Digital resources were praised in use during the pandemic, and means of managing one's teams in their newly virtual spaces changed. For those companies that were able to successfully execute this new strategic opportunity, it was because they understood the capacity to pivot to sustain productivity, harnessed talent on a global scale, and zeroed in on employee wellness. The gratitude for a new environment revealed that

more than anticipated, teams communicated formally, and more than expected, existing policies and cultural diversity initiatives had to be extended and executed from afar.

Ultimately, the pandemic necessitated such a quick transition in how companies interacted, communicated, and did work that instant innovation was made. Where traditional teams accomplished their work and existed in online avenues, a team atmosphere, virtually, demonstrated that where in-person engagement and in-person styles existed, those accomplishments required a concerted effort to establish culture, engagement, and productivity in a remote workforce.

### **5.3.5. Investigating changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic on management practices and organizational policies**

In terms of the fifth and final study objective, the following changes were made for proper understanding:

#### **i. Change in Leadership**

The pandemic required a completely different leadership style to assess a chaotic, changing world, and more often than not, post-pandemic, transformational leadership was one of the most effective leadership styles through which leaders both empower and motivate workers and rely on human capital as a necessary resource to overcome obstacles created by the pandemic. Thus, in comparison to mere management, the very obvious need for compassion and effort put forth to save employees, the need for strong personal relationships within teams and with team leaders, and compassionate, empathetic, and flexible treatment was essential.

#### **ii. Changes in Organizational Policies**

The most changes occurred in organizational policies related to remote work and the necessity to develop new policies overnight to foster efficiency, collaboration, and engagement. However, aspects of traditional performance management shifted as companies focused on assessing productivity from home and gauging employee satisfaction with new work/life boundaries. The culture of monitoring transformed into trusting employees, empowering them, and granting autonomy over their work as companies recognized the need to engage and motivate their employees in this new hybrid remote setting quickly.

#### **iii. Digital Investment and Infrastructure**

Companies were forced to make drastic digital investments and infrastructure changes to accommodate a remote baseline for so many employees. These changes also expedited digital transformation trends as companies became more operationally accessible with a globalized workforce.

#### **iv. Employee Well-Being Became an Emphasis**

As remote working began to take a toll on employee mental and physical health, from stress and isolation to burnout, employers shifted focus to prioritize well-being. New policies and initiatives emerged to compensate for the added pressure, from flexible work arrangements and mental health resources, to virtual wellness and networking opportunities. They'll make companies more nimble and flexible in the future.

The requirement for differently trained management styles and company policies due to pandemic conditions will not exist only for the present. It implies the necessity for all-inclusive, flexible micro-management. That breeds productivity and engagement during business as usual and increases organizational agility and preparedness for the next crisis. But the alteration also highlighted issues that would remain a concern down the line—equitable access to technology, digital burnout, and future considerations for workplace health and wellness.

Ultimately, the adjustments to management and company policy during the Covid-19 pandemic were revolutionary. The dependence on transformational leadership by upper management, hybrid schedules, and emphasis on workplace health and wellness demonstrate what companies value going forward to sustain flexibility and adaptability; however, these adjustments present new obstacles that need to be worked out in this new world of work. This research demonstrates that COVID-19's impact on remote work management represents fundamental advancement in management theory rather than temporary organizational adaptation. Through systematic application and extension of Organizational Agility Theory, Media Richness Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Social Exchange Theory, the analysis reveals how crisis conditions accelerated beneficial organizational transformations while extending theoretical understanding of virtual work management as a distinct organizational capability.

#### **5.4. Recommendations to solve the research problem**

i. The best type of leadership to work with remote-based teams is a transformational type of leadership focused on empowerment, trust, and flexibility (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). *Actionable Steps:*

- Develop competency frameworks specifically for remote transformational leadership,
- Implement 360-degree feedback systems focused on empowerment, trust-building, and flexibility,
- Create mentorship programs pairing experienced remote leaders with developing managers,
- Establish quarterly leadership effectiveness assessments using remote-specific metrics.
- Human Resources departments should lead this leadership transformation initiative, coordinating with senior management for strategic alignment, Learning and Development teams for programme design and delivery, and line managers for day-to-day implementation and assessment.

ii. Enhanced virtual interaction and communication: The best methods of communication and collaboration emerge and need to be established along with a code of conduct for communication and interaction (Aleem et al., 2022; Makowski, 2023). *Actionable Steps:*

- Develop organization-specific communication matrices specifying appropriate channels for different interaction types,
- Implement mandatory communication skills training focused on virtual environment effectiveness,
- Create structured informal interaction opportunities (virtual coffee breaks, team huddles),
- Establish response time expectations for different communication channels.
- Internal Communications teams should lead this initiative in partnership with Training and Development departments for skills delivery, team leaders for facilitating informal interactions, and senior management for policy approval and compliance monitoring.

iii. The demand for employee assistance and engagement: Establish strong wellness programs, from mental health support to work-life balance support to virtual team bonding opportunities, to address the specific challenges posed by working remotely (Caiazza et al., 2021). *Actionable Steps:*

- Implement proactive mental health screening and support programs,
- Provide ergonomic and technology support for home office environments,
- Establish flexible work arrangement policies accommodating individual circumstances,
- Create virtual peer support networks and employee resource groups.
- Employee Assistance Programme coordinators and HR Wellness teams should lead this comprehensive employee support initiative, collaborating with IT departments for technology provision, Health and Safety teams for ergonomic support, and line managers for implementing flexible arrangements with their teams.

iv. The demand for continuous learning and flexibility: Establish a culture of testing and assessment so that when the next period of uncertainty happens, companies can seamlessly shift (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). *Actionable Steps:*

- Establish regular organizational capability assessments and gap analysis,
- Create cross-functional teams dedicated to emerging work practice evaluation,
- Implement scenario planning exercises for future workplace disruptions,

- Develop rapid pilot program capabilities for testing new management approaches,
- Strategic Planning and Change Management teams should lead this organisational agility initiative, working closely with Risk Management for scenario planning, department heads for capability assessments, and senior executives for sponsoring cross-functional evaluation teams.

v. Using data and analytics to justify decision-making. For instance, data-driven evaluations of employee productivity, engagement, and wellness through tracking such metrics and being positioned to make supported decisions and suggestions. *Actionable Steps:*

- Deploy comprehensive employee engagement and productivity analytics platforms,
- Establish baseline metrics for remote work effectiveness measurement,
- Create predictive models for identifying at-risk employees or teams,
- Implement regular data-driven management practice evaluation and adjustment,
- HR Analytics and Business Intelligence teams should lead this data-driven approach initiative, coordinating with IT departments for platform deployment, Data Analytics teams for predictive model development, and senior management for championing the use of analytical insights in decision-making processes.

## **5.5. Study Limitations**

Limitations of the research are factors which minimize, confine, limit, and forecast the research design in such a way that compromises the outcome and applicability/generalizability of the entire study (Sowbel, 2012).

Thus, the limitations that exist for such a study are the following, as it is desktop research from secondary sources:

### **i. Secondary Data Analysis**

This is a secondary data analysis; therefore, without any primary data collection that would have been conducted by this author, the study may be remiss of the contemporaneous, in-depth experiences and perceptions of such organizations and their related managers as of this writing relative to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reliance on secondary data sources prevents access to real-time organizational experiences and managerial perspectives during the research period. This methodological choice limits the study's ability to capture

context-specific implementations of remote work strategies. Future research should incorporate primary data collection through manager interviews and organizational case studies to complement these findings.

Regionally Limited Sources: The sources of this study may come from a regionally limited population or the bias of one region or country over another, regardless of the findings of this study.

Potential Limitations From Collected Data/Analyzed Results:

**ii. Specific Industries**

The survey of literature was based on specific industries and does not account for all potential findings across all industries. Covid-19 Is an Ever-Evolving Situation. Many findings assessed will not be relevant weeks/months/years from now as the factors assessed during the pandemic were evaluated over time. Some innovations and lessons learned may not be reflected in the available literature, potentially underrepresenting successful practices developed during the study period.

**iii. Secondary Data Collection**

The findings were based on articles of secondary research and did not take into account any primary research, such as interviews or surveys, with any company executives and management who have a more personalized view and unique industry insight.

Therefore, relative to the limitations of the data collection and findings assessed, the following are important to note:

**iv. No Longitudinal Study**

The study is cross-sectional in that it is a snapshot of how Covid-19 affected crisis management for strategic planning and policy development. There is no longitudinal study.

**v. Limitations to Qualitative Data**

Qualitative secondary data means that translating results to other researchers might not be as persuasive to them as they prefer empirical and quantitative data.

**vi. Third Party Data with Potential Bias**

The qualitative secondary elements from other studies come with potential inherent biases whether they be publication or selection biases which could otherwise bias this study's findings.

## **5.6. Study Contribution**

This research makes important contributions across theoretical, managerial, and practical domains, addressing critical gaps in remote work management understanding.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

This study proposes four theoretical advancements that extend existing management theory. Crisis Acceleration Theory challenges orthodox change management by showing that crisis conditions can accelerate organisational transformation whilst maintaining quality through focused decision-making and rapid resource alignment. Media Ecosystem Design Theory builds upon Media Richness Theory by demonstrating that organisations can achieve rich communication through strategically combining multiple digital channels rather than relying on single communication methods. Virtual Transformational Leadership Theory identifies distinct leadership competencies required for virtual environments, including digital presence cultivation and asynchronous influence, which differ from traditional leadership approaches adapted for technology. Enhanced Social Exchange Theory reveals how virtual work environments alter power dynamics between employers and employees, creating more balanced relationships through geographic independence and temporal flexibility that benefit both parties.

### **Managerial Contributions**

The research provides evidence-based frameworks for effective remote work supervision, identifying successful management practices including transformational leadership approaches, multi-channel communication strategies, and outcome-focused performance management systems. Managers gain concrete guidance on developing virtual leadership competencies, implementing trust-based supervision models, and creating protocols that maintain team cohesion and productivity. The study offers practical frameworks for policy development, employee well-being programmes, and data-driven management approaches that enable informed remote work implementation whilst avoiding common failure modes.

### **Practical Contributions**

The research delivers immediate value for organisations through validated approaches for maintaining culture in virtual environments, preventing communication breakdowns, and supporting employee engagement in distributed contexts. Practitioners receive actionable recommendations for technology integration, performance measurement design, and change management processes facilitating successful remote work transitions. Human resource professionals gain frameworks for developing remote work policies, virtual onboarding processes, and support systems addressing distributed workforce challenges, ultimately supporting improved workplace outcomes for remote employees whilst helping organisations maintain competitive advantage.

## **5.7. Recommendations for future study**

### **5.7.1. Managerial Recommendations**

Management Decisions Implications for Managers and Decision Makers are as follows based upon the results and limitations of the current study.

#### **i. Emergency Disaster Mindset and Culture Developed**

Ensures that an unplanned disaster can be responded to with effective change in the future. The importance is that the pandemic is not over, and who knows what disaster awaits down the road? This will help organizations plan.

#### **ii. Financial Investment in Employee Wellness and Buy-In**

Organizational changes need to be made that provide resources for physical, mental, and emotional wellness for those working remotely. These considerations have been inequitable challenges throughout the pandemic.

#### **iii. Improve remote teamwork and communication**

Invest in updated digital resources and platforms for real-time teamwork, communication, and information sharing for remote workers. Ensure management has the resources needed to manage remote teams. Educate them in establishing trust, enabling autonomy, and fulfilling team objectives. Create a hybrid model of remote and in-office engagement. This means increased accessibility and work-life balance while still fostering company unity.

#### **iv. Strategic Implications**

Organizations that integrate these theoretical insights into management practices will demonstrate superior capability for thriving in post-pandemic work environments while contributing to continued advancement of management theory and practice.

#### **v. Future Theoretical Development**

The research establishes foundation for continued theoretical advancement in virtual work management, identifying specific areas where existing theories require extension and integration to address emerging organizational realities in an increasingly virtual work environment.

## **5.8. Future Research Recommendations**

Considering the findings and constraints of the research conducted above, future research on this topic should:

**i. Conduct a longitudinal study**

Assessing managerial choices and HR functions over time would better assess the pandemic's effects on the present and future.

**ii. Incorporate primary data**

While this study relied on secondary data, using secondary data combined with primary data through interviews, surveys, or case studies would paint a much clearer assessment of challenges, changes, and effective strategies.

**iii. Explore Industry Trends**

Researching which industries thrived or struggled based on different management approaches and company policies would render a more tailored approach.

**iv. Assess the significance of corporate culture**

A stronger sense of why corporate culture impacted the success of such managerial adjustments would justify why certain companies were so open to change.

**v. Survey remote work sustainability**

As we begin to assess what the current state of remote work means, there will be a need to survey how remote work is sustainable long term in terms of productivity, engagement, and employee satisfaction. Survey how the pandemic changed important skills of the new leaders of tomorrow, what they are learning or can learn now and what their future career trajectories will be.

## **5.9. Future Research Directions**

While literature review attempted to include much of the relevant information relative to the COVID-19 impact on management to date and unanswered questions or posed inquiries, it would be advantageous for future research to assess, over time, as developments occur:

a. The consequences of hybrid working on productivity and well-being in the long run. Since hybrid working is likely going to be a permanent option, it would be essential to see how such arrangements affect employees and organizations long-term.

b. The impact of technology on effective collaboration, communication, and knowledge transfer in hybrid and remote environments. It would be interesting for future research to investigate whether technology facilitates or hinders collaboration in virtual environments.

c. The impact of management on hybrid and remote groups. As group dynamics change, so should the basic underpinnings of what it means to manage a workgroup. Future research should pinpoint what managers need, in terms of skills, capabilities, and resources, to manage virtual groups effectively. The future of workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts after the pandemic. The inequality that existed before the pandemic became increasingly inequitable during it.

Future research should assess what companies can still embrace DEI efforts in a hybrid/remote world. The more we assess this and future research, the more we come to grasp an ever-changing working world, and the more we can fight against inequities for a better quality of life for everyone in the workforce.

By continuing to explore these and other research questions, we can gain a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of work and develop strategies to create a more equitable, productive, and fulfilling work experience for all.

## **5.10. Conclusion**

Chapter 5 is a comprehensive examination of the pandemic's impact on managerial approaches and components of business policy. The author explains the adjustments assessed from the findings, the associations between them, and the connection to how, due to findings that suggest future results, such adjustments were made.

The three most impactful changes are transformational leadership, work from home/respect for boundaries and personal space, and health and wellness. Next, the chapter notes the considerations for future research. They include dependence on secondary data, location and sector tendencies, and a fluctuating pandemic. Limitations specific to the research design include the use of comparative data to longitudinal studies where none was conducted, this being qualitative, and some tendencies found in the literature review. But the findings are useful to practitioners. The researcher suggests that managers should maintain daily flexibility, support employee mental health and wellness, improve integration within virtual teams, train managers who have experience with remote work, and provide a hybrid option.

Ultimately, the chapter sets a future research plan of longitudinal studies, first-party data, studies specific to the discipline in question, studies quantifying cultural impact, and whether or not companies can work remotely. Thus, from these proposed routes, an even broader and nuanced comprehension of the pandemic's impact on the discipline of management and industrial and organizational psychology will be provided

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Miss Thembile Thobile Baai (992219315)  
School Of Man Info Tech &Gov (Prior Restructuring)  
Pietermaritzburg

Dear Miss Thembile Thobile Baai,

Original application number: 00022748

Project title: Exploring the influence of coronavirus on management practices and policies for managing remote employees

Amended title: Managing remote employees during the coronavirus pandemic: A global review of management practices and policies

## Exemption from Ethics Review

In response to your amendment application received on \_\_\_\_\_, your school has indicated that the amendment has been granted **EXEMPTION FROM ETHICS REVIEW**.

Any alteration/s to the exempted research protocol, e.g., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. The original exemption number must be cited.

For any changes that could result in potential risk, an ethics application including the proposed amendments must be submitted to the relevant UKZN Research Ethics Committee. The original exemption number must be cited.

In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

### PLEASE NOTE:

Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours sincerely,

  
Prof Maria Isabel De Azevedo Martins  
Academic Leader Research

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