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**Navigating the new normal: Small, medium, and micro enterprise managers' lived experiences with telework during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa**

**BY**

**Akhonamandla Gumede**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a degree of Masters in Social Sciences (Industrial and Organisational Psychology) in the School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

**Supervisor: Doctor Zandile Madlabana-Luthuli**

**2023**

## DECLARATION

I, Akhonamandla Gumede, declare that:

1. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs, or information unless expressly acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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Date: 11 July 2023



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Date:11 July 2023

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my favourite sunflower and rainbow, Emihle Gumede.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express gratitude to God, who has strengthened me throughout my trajectory. My family who has been very supportive and motivated me to complete this dissertation. *Thonga lami, ngiyanibonga boPhakathwayo ngokungikhanyisela zikhathi zonke. Ngcwele eMakhosini (praises).*

To my research supervisor, Doctor Zandile Madlabana-Luthuli, I truly appreciate your continuous guidance and patience. With you, this study was such a success.

Thank you!

## ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has placed organisational managers at the forefront with their ability to lead organisations successfully during the crisis. Telework being a rare approach in South Africa and the pandemic a never-experienced phenomenon, managers faced several challenges. Most literature on the impact on organisations of the Covid-19 pandemic focuses on employees' experiences and limited attention to managers. Specifically, research on small, medium, and micro enterprise (SMME) managers is scarce. Thus, this study explores SMME managers' experiences with teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic in the South African context.

The study used in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect data, following a case study approach. It is revealed that SMME managers experienced a balance in challenges and opportunities in the effect of the pandemic. As a result, there is a great need for training and development for SMME managers to better cope during and post the Covid-19 pandemic. SMME managers recognised the criticality of obtaining training in resilience, emotional intelligence, change management, and leadership development in adverse times.

The findings have contributed to a South African conceptualisation of teleworking. Hence, the study recommends the exploration of gender differences in managers' experiences of teleworking in this context and the impact of the availability of energy resources to facilitate telework in developing economies.

*Keywords: Covid-19, SMME, Managers, Teleworking, Resilience, South Africa.*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with the background of the study and proceeds to the rationale, the aim, objectives, and research questions. Finally, an overview of the structure of the dissertation is provided.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

Information and communication technology (ICT) has become a prominent aspect in most organisations around the globe. ICT has introduced new possibilities that further give meaning to the already developing fourth industrial revolution; for instance, with further technological advancements, ICT has allowed office work to take place from any location external to the office space (Boell et al., 2013). This is mainly referred to as remote work, virtual work, telecommuting, or teleworking; for this study, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, these terms will be used interchangeably. Telework introduces a new perspective on how work is understood. It does not merely refer to where work takes place; it redefines employees' roles, how organisations manoeuvre their operations, and the management of work (Boell et al., 2013).

The concept of telework has become a dominantly used term in studies based on the effects of the pandemic on organisations; however, this concept (and practice) has existed since the 1970s (Athansiadou & Theriou, 2021; van der Merwe & Smith, 2014). During the 1970s, there was an introduction of technical mechanisms in the professional arena (i.e., computers, digital connections), which led “researchers, policymakers and practitioners” (Athansiadou & Theriou, 2021, p.1) to be intrigued and engaged in research that focused on telework.

Before the pandemic, telework was not practised in most organisations; however, it was seen as a potential way to advance organisations, for them to be at an advantage over their competitors in terms of being innovative. Telework was also selective in terms of the type of employees who could embark on this style of working. Occupations first need to be assessed to see whether they are suitable to be performed remotely before an organisation wholly or partly implements virtual working. In the inclusion list of employees who can participate in telework are people living with disabilities, as it may be a challenge for them to commute to

work daily and people who have been involved in accidents and are in a recovery stage (Athansiadou & Theriou, 2021). However, virtual work has been perceived to exclude employees with low technical skills and those who reside in rural areas, who may not have access to required virtual technological resources.

As the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic has sown turbulence in organisations' standard ways of working, telework is now a strategic response to maintaining business operations. Knoesen and Seymour (2020) assert that virtual work is no longer just an option; it is now a requirement to meet the promulgated regulations to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Managers act as gatekeepers in the transition to new business strategies and decision-making (Knoesen & Seymour, 2020). With telework, managers must have a positive stance towards it for the adaptation process to occur with less hesitation. This form of work practice requires managers to have skill sets and management processes suitable to maintaining their roles with remote management. Therefore, how managers experience teleworking during this time is significant. Previous literature has acknowledged the challenges which managers experience with telework, resulting in many of them being resistant to allowing all their staff to work from home (Beham et al., 2015; Knoesen & Seymour, 2020).

Telework has indeed evoked the shift that has to occur in terms of management; for instance, Beham et al. (2015) maintain that this work arrangement creates a change in the balance of power between the manager and their staff. Employees get the autonomy to decide how they schedule their work; however, this risks the development of a lack of trust between the employee and manager. The challenges and the highlighted benefits of remote working will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Previously, literature that has explored managers' experiences has been limited to managers in large organisations, while there are limited studies on small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs), even though they are substantial contributors to economic growth, especially in developing countries (Naicker et al., 2017). It is therefore from this perspective that the researcher is interested in exploring SMME managers' experiences with the conditions created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **1.3 Rationale of the Study**

SMMEs range from medium to micro enterprises that are often owned by just one or two people. These businesses often experience slow growth that, in most cases, results in early mortality. The high failure rate of SMMEs is an outcome of the challenges in establishing SMMEs, especially in developing contexts. From a more positive stance, the SMME sector is essential due to its contribution to substantial economic growth in both developed and developing countries, by promoting employment. It is considered a solution to addressing socio-economic concerns. In a developing economy such as South Africa, the development of SMMEs has contributed to resolving some of the economic woes that were inherent to the apartheid era. The nature of SMMEs in developing countries is characterised by Cronje et al. (2001, p. 492) as:

- More labour intensive than larger operations.
- Generate more direct job opportunities.
- Award entrepreneurial opportunities to people who cannot easily use their talent in a large business.
- Become successful by rendering services to small markets that are not targeted by larger businesses.
- Influence competition in the economy.
- Promote social stability, are less harmful to the environment due to their small factories and encourage growth and development in rural areas.

Despite the SMME sector's crucial contribution to the economy, unfortunately, there are challenges that they encounter. Muriithi (2017), and Mutyeniyoka, and Madzivhandila (2014), account for the challenges often endured by SMMEs in South Africa. These issues include lack of training and education; this challenge results in an insufficiency of management skills in both the entrepreneurs of SMMEs and their managers. Providing training and education to SMMEs encourages the development of management competencies, which are a set of observable attitudes, behaviours, skills, and knowledge that managers may possess to perform well in their roles (Brits & Veldsman, 2014). Developing managerial competencies is considered one of the critical strategies in decreasing the failure rate of SMMEs.

Insufficient financial resources are one of the significant concerns of SMMEs, as having a secure financial resource ensures collateral security. Many SMMEs are denied bank loans

due to not being secure in their source of capital and not having the required deposit for a loan. Additionally, insufficient financial resources contribute to SMMEs' inability to access appropriate technology. Technology is a critical component in the organisation's development, more importantly in the current century where technology is crucial in the industrial arena, and with the pandemic leading organisations to fully embrace the fourth industrial revolution.

The inability to access markets is also an acknowledged challenge for SMMEs. It is pivotal for SMME owners and managers to be literate in the market dynamics, paying careful attention to environmental changes. In other words, they need to be kept informed about their competitors and the popular trends that award their type of enterprise a competitive edge in the market. It is maintained that SMMEs are not supported enough by the government. SMMEs are often unaware of the support facilities that the government develops to assist in their growth of these enterprises. Some organisations are established to assist SMMEs, in terms of financial support and the provision of training for current and future entrepreneurs in developing skills to run an SMME successfully.

Due to the distinct challenges experienced by SMMEs, strong leadership is thus required. Managers of SMMEs have a unique experience in leading SMMEs to success, compared to managers in large businesses. In light of this, managerial competencies are pivotal to the survival and performance of organisations. According to Ncube and Chimucheka (2019), managerial competency is essential in SMMEs, as a lack of such competency results in the mortality of SMMEs; hence, this is a significant resource required by these enterprises.

Therefore, this study has chosen to focus on managers of a South African SMME in respect of exploring their experiences with leading an organisation under the pressure of the pandemic and adapting to telework. This is a crucial aspect to focus on because existing literature focuses on how organisations have been affected by the pandemic, in terms of the changes that were needed to be made, and the challenges and opportunities bestowed by this world crisis (Kirchner et al., 2021; Parker et al., 2020). Additionally, most studies have focused on large organisations, and than small businesses, and the literature produced is limited in the South African context. Hence, this study will explore SMME managers' perceptions of telework and how they have experienced the implications of the pandemic. The chosen SMME of this study is a Resilience Institute. This SMME is one of seven

international branches. The SMME offers resilience workshops in South African organisations, intending to endow the organisation and its employees with resilience skills to adapt to change and gain a competitive edge. An SMME was chosen as the focal point as they are a critical factor in the country's economy, contributing to about "91% of the country's enterprise and 80% of employment opportunities" (Ncube & Chimucheka, 2019, p. 2). More importantly, SMMEs are also a key focus of the National Development Plan, Vision 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012).

This study envisages:

- a) Providing an in-depth understanding of SMME managers' experiences with the transition to telework during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- b) Understanding the leadership requirements that will equip managers with the skills to manage remotely.
- c) Encouraging further research focusing on telework or digitalisation in SMMEs, especially in a developing context.

#### **1.4 Aim**

This study aims to explore managers' experiences with teleworking at a South African SMME during the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the experiences of SMME managers teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. To explore the challenges and opportunities of working remotely for SMME managers.
3. To establish managers' opinions on their training and development requirements during this period.

#### **1.6 Research Questions**

##### **Key Research Question**

What are the experiences of SMME managers with teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic?

## **Critical Questions**

The following are significant questions that guide this research study:

1. What are the management-based challenges and opportunities of working remotely?
2. What are managers' opinions on their training and development requirements during times of adversity like the Covid-19 pandemic?

## **1.7 Overview of the Dissertation**

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

This is an introductory chapter. It presents the essential foundations of the study, such as the background of the study, the rationale behind it, its aim, its objectives, and critical questions that this research study seeks to answer. This chapter closes with the layout of the entire dissertation.

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

The literature review chapter explores the literature related to significant aspects of this study. This chapter discusses the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on society and the economy. It proceeds to discuss SMMEs, in terms of what they are, their importance, and how they too have been affected by the pandemic. The role of managers is explored, along with the challenges and opportunities they have endured during the global crisis. The concept of teleworking, another focus of this study, is explored. Lastly, the significance of the trait of resilience in leaders in times of adversity is considered.

### **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

This chapter presents the means by which the research study was conducted. The methodological approach used in this study is discussed, including the research design in terms of sampling, data collection method, and the analysis of the acquired data. This chapter also considers ethical considerations and issues with reliability and validity.

### **Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion**

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter, and these findings are then interpreted and discussed.

### **Chapter Five: Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations**

This final chapter presents an overview of the study. A summary of the key findings, and also a discussion of the limitations and contribution of the study, are provided. This chapter ends with the presentation of recommendations for future research.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the study. The study's motivation, aim, objectives, and research questions were discussed. This chapter was concluded by the outline of the subsequent chapters of this treatise.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected both large and small organisations globally. Organisation managers were expected to respond by assuming leadership roles to ensure little interruption to their businesses due to the pandemic (McMullin & Raggo, 2020). This necessitated exploring the difficulties, including the managers adjusting appropriately to the pandemic circumstances. Thus, this chapter explores the existing literature that relates to the challenges and opportunities created by the pandemic, and to pertinent concepts.

The literature review commences with exploring the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on society and the economy. Thereafter, literature on SMMEs is included, assessing their importance, the challenges often encountered when developing these enterprises in a developing context, and how they have been affected by the pandemic. The role of leaders, including the challenges and opportunities they experience due to the pandemic and the concept of telework, is also reviewed. The final section of this chapter focuses on the conceptualisation of resilience and its significance for leaders during adversity. This is followed by a section addressing the theoretical foundation for the study.

#### **2.2 The Impact of Covid-19 on Society and the Economy**

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed unanticipated changes in everyday operations in industrial and social interactions. This has often resulted in people feeling isolated, whereas it is human nature to be interactive for people to feel connected to the world throughout their existence (Singh & Singh, 2020). The introduction of Covid-19 protection measures contributed substantially to people feeling isolated. The absence of social connection and interaction created a feeling of being overwhelmed (Singh & Singh, 2020), especially with adapting to working from home. Some businesses were unable to effectively cope with the impact and the strain of the pandemic and were closed, hence creating unemployment across the globe (Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020). Consequently, local, and global economic markets experienced instability (Pak et al., 2020; Singh & Singh, 2020). Those organisations that were able to continue with daily functioning were also affected, as there were resource constraints in providing workers with equipment for them to work from home (Pak et al., 2020). This

situation caused an upsurge in poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and inequality (Gittings et al., 2021).

### **2.3 Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises**

Defining small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMME) depends on the ranges of the enterprise from informal to formal, varying in size, and classified according to their annual turnover. Contrary to broadly defining SMMEs, a small enterprise in one country might be considered a large enterprise in another, especially considering the contrast between developed and developing regions (Cant, 2016). However, for this study, the definition of an SMME is guided by the one stipulated in the South African National Small Business Act No. 102 of 1996: “separate and distinct business entity, together with its branches or subsidiaries, if any including cooperative enterprises, managed by one or more owner(s) predominantly carried in any sector of the economy that is classified as a micro, small or a medium enterprise” . In South Africa, the SMME sector dominates the following industries: retail, financial, transport, manufacturing, construction, community, and social services industries (Bhorat et al., 2018). According to labour markets dynamics in South Africa (cited in Bhorat et al., 2018), a large number of SMMEs are found in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, and a few are located in Free State, Limpopo, Northern Cape, and North-West provinces. This is dependent on the percentage of economic growth activities available in these provinces.

#### **2.3.1 The Role and Importance of SMMEs**

From a global perspective, the SMME sector plays a significant role in developing a country’s economic state, creating more employment opportunities, encouraging growth in young entrepreneurship, and further creating more international connections due to increased exports (Keskin et al., 2010). Thus, SMMEs are regarded as vital contributors to economic innovation, and to healthy competition in all economies (Jamali et al., 2017), and also to a country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Cant, 2016). This is much more important in developing countries, as SMMEs help meet the countries’ socio-economic objectives (Abor & Quartey, 2010). It is suggested that SMMEs in developing countries are believed to be the antidote to poverty and the foundation of growth and innovation in the economy sector, with accelerating job creation granting people the chance to be employed, and most importantly, to ensure a stable economy (Jamali et al., 2017; Keskin et al. 2010; Masutha & Rogerson, 2014; Naicker et al., 2017). However, to have a sustainable, stable economy in developing countries through the development of SMMEs, support should be provided. This includes amongst

others, financial assistance, as this is one of the most significant challenges faced by SMMEs, where inadequate start-up capital to continue to sustain their business is a challenge (Abor & Quartey, 2010; Cant & Wild, 2013; Keskin et al., 2010).

SMMEs are pivotal to the South African context. Since the early development stages of SMMEs, they have accounted for 60% of employment in the national workforce and for 42% in the GDP (Mudzamba et al., 2022). The National Development Plan sets out to eradicate the high poverty percentage and inequality, and to create approximately 11 million new jobs by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012). Concerning the South African vision for 2030, most jobs are sourced from SMMEs (Bhorat et al., 2018; Masutha & Rogerson, 2014); this further emphasises the importance of such enterprises in the country. However, there is a recognisable gap between what the goal is and the current state of the economy (Bhorat et al., 2018). Thus, the government's support will ensure that these SMMEs are sustained in achieving the goals of the anticipated plan for 2030.

### **2.3.2 The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on SMMEs**

The impact of the pandemic on SMMEs is much more severe than on large organisations, as SMMEs tend to be less buoyant. Even SMMEs in developed regions such as Europe have experienced constraints in their finances (Juergensen et al., 2020). For example, manufacturing SMMEs have encountered challenges in logistics, with the transportation of goods affected due to travel restrictions and a decrease in demand. This mainly depends on the type of goods manufactured, as the pandemic leads consumers to opt for essential goods (Juergensen et al., 2020). Some SMMEs have closed due to low financial security, which is unexpected in advanced settings. However, many SMMEs were operating under a low budget and relied on external support (Juergensen et al., 2020).

SMMEs in developing countries experienced a more severe impact of the pandemic, with the immense pressure from the issues that already existed before the pandemic. The existing issues included a lack of investments improving in the market, human resources, planning, limited skills in terms of management and technical aspects, lack of knowledge management, and economic constraints (Caballero-Morales, 2021; Klein & Todesco, 2021).

The threat brought by the coronavirus to humankind was terrifying, as a large number of people lost their lives. This meant that governments had to implement lockdown measures to

limit the spread of the virus. In the initial stages of the lockdown, there was a menace to all SMMEs and large firms, and some were forced to terminate operations due to a lack of resources, or because they did not produce essential goods and services (Bruwer et al., 2020; Fubah & Moos, 2022; Kumar & Ayedee, 2021; Rajagopaul et al., 2020). Many travels and transport SMMEs had to close business, as travelling was restricted (Fubah & Moos, 2022). Moreover, there was also a reduction in customers for those who could operate (Caballero-Morales, 2021; Fubah & Moos, 2022).

The South African government developed relief funding schemes to assist businesses in the crisis, as capital was a significant factor in enabling businesses to remain running (Bruwer et al., 2020; Fubah & Moos, 2022; Khumalo, 2020). However, not all SMMEs were eligible to receive this relief scheme because they were informal businesses and not registered. Moreover, in South Africa, most SMMEs are owned by migrants, and non-citizens were not eligible for the relief funding scheme (Merten, 2020). In addition, a few SMMEs applied to receive funding; however, their applications were not responded to (Fubah & Moos, 2022). Other SMMEs requested funding from the private sector; however, only SMMEs that had been in operation for five or more years were eligible (Rajagopaul et al., 2020). Banks were also hesitant to give loans to new SMMEs (Fubah & Moos, 2022).

According to Rajagopaul et al. (2020), some SMMEs were not aware of the other opportunities that would grant them funding, such as the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and Pay as You Earn (PAYE). Consequently, the lack of financial support resulted in SMMEs being unable to pay their employees or reducing their employees' salaries to make up for other fixed expenses, such as rent (Fubah & Moos, 2022). Essentially, not all SMMEs were affected similarly, as it depended on the different types of sectors and the strength of their resources. Under these circumstances, some owners of SMMEs failed to lead efficiently and to empower their employees (Rajagopaul et al., 2020), in their attempt to navigate the crisis. Organisational leaders were experiencing difficulties in taking up strategic roles in searching for innovative mechanisms to empower employees in adverse situations while continuing to prosper in running the business. This stems from the lack of "sufficient performance management systems and structures with well-defined roles and responsibilities" (Rajagopaul et al., 2020, p. 6) in SMMEs.

Most literature recognises the need for SMMEs to adapt to digital operations to deal with the crisis successfully (Bruwer et al., 2020; Caballero-Morales, 2021; Fubah & Moos, 2022; Juergensen et al., 2020; Kamble et al., 2020; Klein & Todesco, 2021; Rajagopaul et al., 2020). Before the pandemic, most SMMEs were not exploring the benefits of technology, as the fourth industrial revolution slowly made its way to the scene. However, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of SMMEs adapting to digital technologies. The fourth industrial revolution entails new “trends in manufacturing technology that transforms existing manufacturing systems to Smart Manufacturing Systems (SMS) through Smart Automation, data exchanges, Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS), Cloud Computing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Internet of Things (IoT)” (Kamble et al., 2020, p. 1). Hence, transforming to digital technologies will enable SMMEs to be more innovative, as innovation is a vital strategy for small businesses in dealing with the pandemic’s effects on businesses and developing the organisation’s resilience (Caballero-Morales, 2021). Some SMMEs have taken the initiative to form partnerships with other businesses to adapt to digital operations rapidly. Additionally, these partnerships can assist in the supply and demand of SMMEs’ products or services (Klein & Todesco, 2021).

Adapting to new technology requires several changes for a successful implementation. Therefore, this alters existing “business models, organisational culture, work habits and activities of employees” (Kutnjak, 2021, p. 79373), causing potential barriers to a successful transition. Furthermore, some SMMEs lack efficient digital infrastructure and skills, and this has resulted in difficulties adapting to telework (Klein & Todesco, 2021).

### **2.3.3 The Context of SMME Development in Developing Countries**

There are several reasons why challenges are encountered with developing the SMME form of business sector in developing countries. For example, there is a high mortality rate of SMMEs in developing regions, as they are known to be at risk of deteriorating without passing three years in operation (Cant, 2016; Keskin et al., 2010; Naicker et al., 2017). This ensues from issues related to sustaining the business. Moreover, the government and institutions fail to provide much-needed support services.

The challenges endured by SMMEs are identified to be caused by both macro and micro environmental factors (Ramukumba, 2014). In terms of the macro environmental factors, the focus is on the external environment of the SMME. Challenges experienced are financial, as

not enough funds are raised for SMMEs in developing countries. Moreover, inadequate financial literacy is often a barrier (Ye & Kulathunga, 2019). Without sufficient funds, the business will not be able to support its operational needs and invest further. As South Africa is a developing country, this means that there are inconsistencies experienced in the economic climate. This has a direct impact on SMMEs in terms of how they continue to gain access to capital, while it also determines the consumption made by customers of that small business (Cant, 2016; Cant & Wild, 2013).

Crime is the “third highest obstacle” (Ramukumba, 2014, p. 25); South Africa has one of the world’s highest crime rates. Small businesses spend a high percentage of their budget on security, keeping a safeguard not solely of the business and its products, but also of their clients (Cant & Wild, 2013). Such an environment also leads to challenges for small businesses in terms of poor infrastructure (Jamali et al., 2017; Ramukumba, 2014). In South Africa, there are infrastructural inadequacies, namely, to transportation, with substandard roads, electricity, and telecommunication due to insufficient public services (Bushe, 2019). Consequently, without reliable electricity in SMMEs, performing tasks effectively is hampered.

Ramukumba (2014) further acknowledges that SMMEs, at most times, have limited knowledge and the connections needed in the market. Therefore, this brings about great global competition for SMMEs, as they then fail to expand their market successfully, produce quality products, meet the needs of their consumers, and have efficient strategies in terms of pricing (Abor & Quartey, 2010; Cant & Wild, 2013). The lack of support received by SMMEs is also a predominant issue. According to Abor and Quartey (2010), some institutions provide support to these businesses in terms of advising and training. However, there still exists a ‘skills gap’ in the SMME sector due to many of them not being able to afford such support. There are also regulatory constraints, with it being a very taxing trajectory for SMMEs to gain their registration and licensing. In South Africa, it takes approximately 176 days and 18 procedures to manage licensing (Ocloo et al., 2014). Furthermore, existing labour regulations are often inflexible (Cant, 2016; Ramukumba, 2014).

In terms of micro challenges, there are internal constraints that the business endures. Firstly, this relates to management: SMMEs usually attract determined and motivated managers;

however, their skills run short in competing with larger businesses (Abor & Quartey, 2010). Managers are a crucial asset to organisations; they require the ability to lead the business to success during adversity. In the case of SMMEs having limited resources, a manager is expected to explore alternatives through which they can handle these scarce resources for the business to continue running (Cant, 2016; Ramukumba, 2014). Also, managers in SMMEs ought to know about marketing, as reaching external markets is a prevalent issue for SMMEs, particularly in developing regions; this includes knowledge in dealing with human capital (Cant & Wild, 2013).

Secondly, strategic market planning challenges result from having managers who lack innovative and strategic capabilities in developing robust business plans as to how they will attract clients, produce quality products and services, and possibly save the business from a crisis that may arise (Cant & Wild, 2013; Cant, 2016). Thirdly, due to the lack of adequate finances, many SMMEs experience difficulty in having sustainable access to technology (Abor & Quartey, 2010); this means that, if it is a manufacturing SMME, it will struggle with having efficient machinery for the manufacturing processes. Fourthly, where the business is located can impact the number of consumers it can attract, and more importantly, growth opportunities (Cant, 2016). This is acknowledged by Olawale and Garwe (2010, p. 731), who say that “geographical proximity to either critical buyers or suppliers produces a form of enhanced environmental scanning that enables new firms to more easily identify and exploit growth opportunities in the market”.

In light of the South African context, the government has mechanisms to assist SMMEs with funding and training. Establishments such as the Department of Small Business Development, established in 2014 to assist in the economic growth of small businesses, and Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA), facilitate financial assistance to SMMEs. Regarding skills development, some institutions, such as the Ekurhuleni Artisan and Skills Training Centre, equip people with skills to build their own SMMEs, including how to manage them (Fubah & Moos, 2022). However, these schemes are insufficient as SMMEs still endure difficulties in finances and skills development, and this was exacerbated by the pressures of the pandemic. Therefore, the government still has a great deal of work to do to efficiently support SMMEs with resources, beginning from the initial stages of development, to decrease the mortality rate of SMMEs in their early years. There can be more programmes implemented whose mission is to equip SMME owners with skills to help them grow their

businesses and to teach them strategies for building resilience which is vital in adversity (Rajagopaul et al., 2020).

## **2.4 Managers' Roles During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Concerning the guidelines by the World Health Organization (WHO), state presidents across the globe set lockdown regulations on how citizens had to stay safe during the pandemic (Dirani et al., 2020). For example, people were required to adhere to social distancing. The restrictions set changed work systems in most organisations, driving the demand for remote working. As a result, managers were tasked with managing their employees remotely. However, this presented numerous challenges, as managers did not have training to equip them with essential skills to manage remotely, as this differs from the traditional approach to management (Parker et al., 2020). Hence, managers experienced challenges in their roles.

It was paramount for managers to trust their employees to deliver on work and provide support, as this was an emotionally turbulent time. Furthermore, adequate communication was compulsory for managers to keep track of employees' needs and provide adequate feedback (Kirchner et al., 2021).

## **2.5 Challenges and Opportunities Experienced by Organisational Managers During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

### **2.5.1 Challenges**

The Covid-19 effect on organisations left managers in turmoil. Managers had to immediately engage in new strategies to enable the organisation to adapt to the new approaches to working (Collings et al., 2021). Hence, managers faced numerous challenges, such as ensuring employees' well-being and mental health. In addition, the unprecedented disruption brought anxiety to employees regarding how they would cope with remote working (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garces, 2020; Parker et al., 2020). This anxiety is exacerbated by the additional responsibilities which require attention while they must work. For example, Parker et al. (2020) maintains that being a parent and working from home creates a problem with multiple responsibilities. These employees are faced with what is referred to as "work-family conflict" (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020, p. 184). This can affect employee performance (Parker et al., 2020). As a result, managers need to be cognisant of these factors and provide the necessary support (Collings et al., 2021).

Additionally, managers must create techniques to reduce the stress of employees who are parents. This can be achieved by having childcare services that adhere to the conditions of the pandemic within the organisations; however, some organisations will encounter difficulties due to insufficient funds (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Collings et al., 2021). In light of this, it is difficult for the manager to keep a structured workflow with their members, as, with the shift in work context, changes have occurred in employees' work routines. As managers have not experienced such a phenomenon before and have not had training provided to aid their responses and adaptation to manage remotely, it is difficult for them to deal with some of the challenges (Kirchner et al., 2021; Parker et al., 2020). Budhwar and Cumming (2020) suggest that post-pandemic research should be conducted to assist managers in understanding how they can approach a similar situation in the future.

It is acknowledged that how organisational stakeholders lead managers impacts how managers lead their employees (Parker et al., 2020). In other words, if stakeholders place pressure on managers, managers will convey the same to employees. Lagowska et al. (2020) assert that managers are confronted with stakeholders' resistant to the required changes, which employees will most likely reciprocate. Thus, it is paramount for stakeholders to work alongside managers for effective control over the negative impact caused by the pandemic (McMullin & Raggo, 2020).

The most critical challenge has been communication, as virtual communication requires new digital platforms that managers are not yet accustomed to. In addition, managers experience difficulties creating proximity and a sense of belonging among their employees (Kirchner et al., 2021), and they need consistency in checking on the employees. This can lead to employees feeling isolated; thus, managers must find mechanisms to eliminate isolation to ensure productivity (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Hence, Lagowska et al. (2020) state that the impact of the pandemic is a great challenge that requires unique physical, technical, social, and emotional skills.

### **2.5.2 Opportunities**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, managers have encountered unexpected opportunities that will direct future actions (Hamouche, 2021). Managers have had the opportunity to learn and develop new skills, as the pandemic has enabled them to transform their traditional approaches into developmental strategies (Hamouche, 2021). However, previously developed

strategies have also assisted managers in overcoming some of the difficulties experienced (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Working remotely has given both employees and managers autonomy in their working hours and a chance to embrace new working conditions, which has groomed them into becoming technologically savvy individuals (Hamouche, 2021). Even though these opportunities have come at a cost, this has allowed managers to be creative in their plans to empower employees to meet the organisation's goals and keep its vision alive (Lagowska et al., 2020).

## **2.6 Conceptualisation of Telework**

The concept of teleworking was introduced during the 1970s, with the purpose that information systems would lead to a new possibility of people working outside the traditional office setting (Bezunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garces, 2020). Telework gained the authors' attention, as it was seen as the solution for decreasing the high levels of air pollution, due to the large number of workers commuting daily to industrial cities (Kord et al., 2017). With the energy crisis that occurred during the mid-1970s, telework further gained popularity, as companies adapting to telework to combat the crisis had proven to be a success (Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Kord et al., 2017). In this decade, researchers were curious and explored this newly possible alternative to working in the traditional office.

Several terms were coined to refer to remote working, such as electronic homeworking, e-work, telecommuting, telework, and virtual teams; these implied that people who work from home are using information and communications technologies (Kord et al., 2017). Over time, the term 'telework' posed confusion concerning its meaning, as it was commonly known in certain professions, such as advanced white-collar jobs (Bolbol & Zalat, 2021; Tavares, 2017). However, existing definitions include central elements of teleworking that inform the concept's meaning. For example, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines *telework* as "the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets for work to be performed outside the employer's premises" (cited in Bezunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garces, 2020, p. 2). According to Mielck (2021), the notion of teleworking is "an umbrella term for working at home, and other similar alternative working arrangements, such as distance working" (p. 8). Therefore, telework merely refers to one working in the comfort of their home or any other place, rather than the office. Dubey and Tripathi (2020) state that for teleworking to be carried out, there must be technical platforms that are used to ensure that employees remain efficient in accomplishing their tasks.

## **2.6.1 Advantages of Telework**

Teleworking has advantages that are appealing to organisations that consider transforming their traditional work mechanisms. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations were eager to transition into teleworking because it provided a flexible workforce which was an advantage relative to their competitors. The advantages are categorised into personal (individual), organisational, social, and technological advantages (Kord et al., 2017).

### ***2.6.1.1 Personal (individual) advantages***

#### ***- Work-family balance***

The most prominent factor leading employees to favour teleworking is the autonomy it allows them with their work schedule and how it improves their social life (Ivasciuc et al., 2022; Tavares, 2017). Teleworking also enables employees to save on commuting time and costs and, thus, to have more time to be with their children; they can also be available for necessary house tasks (Tavares, 2017). Workers are also awarded an opportunity to improve their social contact with their friends, as socialisation is a fundamental aspect of human beings (psychological well-being) (Vasic, 2020). An improved work-family balance is regarded as an automatic benefit of telework. On the other hand, it can also be a challenge, with boundaries being blurred between personal and work aspects (Bjursell et al., 2021; Bolbol & Zalat, 2021).

#### ***- Improved productivity***

Telework enables workers to be more productive, with fewer distractions and enhanced job satisfaction (Tavares, 2017). However, working from home does not guarantee that workers are not being interrupted; nevertheless, this can be mitigated with the hybrid approach, where employees who experience disturbances can work in the office most days of the week to increase productivity further.

### ***2.6.1.2 Organisational advantages***

#### ***- Productivity***

The literature emphasises that teleworking increases organisational productivity (Ma, 2021). This is attributed to teleworkers adequately managing their tasks and being satisfied and motivated with their occupation while working from home (Bolbol & Zalat, 2021). When teleworkers control their work activities, there is a reduced level of stress, which further enhances their productivity (Bjursell et al., 2021). However, employees' productivity and job satisfaction are individual to each employee, considering the diversity in the type of work environment their home permits, which can pose challenges to organisations. Moreover, during teleworking, productivity is not only dependent on employees' capabilities, but also on organisational aspects such as "communication, work management, and technology upgrade[s]" (Ivasciuc et al., 2022, p. 4).

- ***Worker retention and recruitment***

Teleworking benefits senior workers in organisations as it enables them to continue working from home, reducing travel in their old age. The telework approach also attracts young and disabled potential employees (Bjursell et al., 2021). This emanates from the reality that young individuals are technically savvy, while technology makes it easier for disabled individuals to work efficiently. Moreover, it reduces the stress of employees searching for accommodation close to work (Ma, 2021).

- ***Responsive customer support***

Customers who appreciate being exposed to new situations tend to be very receptive to telework. Online shopping is an example of how retail organisations embrace the benefits emanating from the fourth industrial revolution. Hence, the support they gain from their clients allows them to maintain the demand for their services and survive the crisis.

- ***Reduced operational costs***

Operational costs are reduced, with office spaces not being used often (Bolbol & Zalat, 2021). Companies save on rent, water, and electricity payments.

### ***2.6.1.3 Social advantages***

- ***Environmentally friendly***

With a majority of employees working from home this results in a reduction in carbon emissions and traffic congestion, and further decreases global warming. Moreover, the

decrease in land use and in the purchase of petrol associated with high traffic volumes help to create a healthy environment (Van der Merwe & Smith, 2014). In turn, a healthy environment limits health risks in human beings that can result from air and land pollution.

#### ***2.6.1.4 Technological advances***

Technological advances occur as more people are attracted to cyberspace, as it is convenient for completing their work faster (Kord et al., 2017). This increases the desire in organisations to remain up to date with trendy, innovative ideas. Furthermore, it inspires organisations in developing economies, as improving their use of technology creates skilled workers and enables the business to remain competitive, thereby creating a digitally advanced economy and permitting the development of rural areas.

These advantages of teleworking are still relevant in the Covid-19 pandemic. However, some advantages have been compromised due to the negative effects of the pandemic.

### **2.6.2 Challenges of Telework**

Literature had identified the challenges of telework before the pandemic, and these were brought to the forefront during the current global crisis.

#### ***2.6.2.1 Work and family life balance***

Working from home is advantageous because it allows employees a flexible work schedule. However, working from home can disrupt the work-life balance due to employees overworking (Abdullah et al., 2020). This occurs because employees get comfortable working, thinking they will be more productive and so leave enough time to complete other family duties (Abdullah et al., 2020). Additionally, overworking leads to exhaustion and stress which in turn can result in physical health issues due to long hours spent sitting in front of a digital screen (Arlinghaus & Nachreiner, 2014).

#### ***2.6.2.2 Change in the organisation's work policies***

New drafts of work policies that address telework are essential when workers undertake remote work. There tends to be an issue with the legal arrangements for teleworking in terms of insurance and employment contracts suited for remote working. Some countries have not established these legalities because telework was not prominent in their context (Baard & Thomas, 2010). From the onset of the pandemic, organisations were required to rapidly

develop new employment contracts (Turkeş et al., 2021); this was essential because workers' rights still had to be prioritised.

### ***2.6.2.3 Managerial control***

Organisational managers can experience a challenge in effectively managing teleworking employees, as they cannot physically monitor them. This factor caused managers to resist telework before the epidemic (Morrison et al., 2019; Van der Merwe & Smith, 2014). In managing performance with telework, traditional performance appraisal approaches require a change to a management method that relies on objectives and outcomes (Van der Merwe & Smith, 2014), as physical observation is impossible. Thus, trust is fundamental in the manager-employee relationship, to limit the uncertainty and fear of managers not having close control over their teams.

### ***2.6.2.4 Physical and psychological well-being of employees***

Moving from the regular office space to working remotely can leave people feeling isolated. Consequently, this can result in psychological effects such as depression and lack of motivation (Bolbol & Zalat, 2021). The latter plays a significant role during change, as employees should be able to feel satisfied and secure in their jobs (Vasic, 2020).

The physical health of remote workers is also not ensured as employers are unable to assess if employees' workspaces are a risk to employees' health (Bouziri et al., 2020). If teleworking is a temporary solution, it will help limit health risks such as musculoskeletal disorders resulting from unergonomic workspaces (Bouziri et al., 2020). However, since teleworking will most likely be a permanent solution for some organisations, organisations need to consider these risks and develop strategies to eliminate the health risks associated with telework.

### ***2.6.2.5 Work environment***

Telework can be challenging to adapt to due to the environment the employee will be working in. Workers have different living conditions; thus, they might not have a space at home that will allow them to be undisturbed and work efficiently. This also speaks to employees not having access to the infrastructure required to work remotely, such as a stable internet connection. There might be differences in different communities (Matli, 2020),

including in terms of owning intelligent devices and the technical skills required for telecommuting (Ma, 2021; Vasic, 2020).

#### ***2.6.2.6 Communication***

Telework offers a new dynamic in employment relations and how individuals communicate. Leaders may experience difficulty delegating tasks and ensuing feedback to employees by using online platforms; the way they communicate (i.e., the tone of the language used in emails) may be misunderstood by employees (Bolbol & Zalat, 2021; Ma, 2021). Therefore, it is beneficial for leaders to make it a priority to learn how to communicate appropriately, as this influences the quality of work produced and employee job satisfaction.

#### ***2.6.2.7 Cost for preparation and implementation of telework***

Telework is considerably costly to implement as appropriate infrastructure is required. Most organisations have not implemented telework due to a lack of capital for this work style. In addition, they could not afford to provide the required training to employees; this mainly applies to developing economies. Even though the pandemic imposed this change, not all organisations were able to survive, as the cost to transition their staff to remote working rapidly was still high.

### **2.6.3 Teleworking During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

From the early 1970s to before the pandemic, organisations globally have had the choice to advance their corporation to technical innovations and create new traditions in their working styles (López Peláez et al., 2021). However, the pandemic has made telework mandatory for all businesses, thereby ensuring continuity. Telework was predominantly regarded as an innovative strategy for organisations to gain a competitive advantage in the global market. Hence, it was a benefit for employees to have flexible work arrangements to balance work and family life. In effect, the tools, conditions, and implementation plan of telework were not pre-existing for organisations that are in countries where telework was not popular in (Carillo et al., 2020). However, the Covid-19 pandemic environment presented idiosyncratic characteristics, unlike other difficult situations organisations have faced (Mihalca et al., 2021). The stress that employers and employees have been experiencing has been a significant concern. Therefore, organisations had to promptly create an environment that could accommodate telework using the existing resources and find ways to address the challenges.

#### **2.6.4 Teleworking in South Africa**

A limited number of studies in the South African context have engaged with this concept and the most critical implications of telework. Studies that have explored this concept focus on ICT workers, as their work and job structure are seen as fit for teleworking (Baard & Thomas, 2010). Although ICT is an integral aspect of all organisations, South Africa, like other developing economies, experiences a scarcity of skilled individuals who can work with the latest technological advancements. A contributing factor is that South Africa produces relatively few ICT graduates entering the professional space (Morrison et al., 2019). Therefore, this creates a challenge in implementing teleworking, as employees may experience difficulty using digital platforms. Of equal importance, there are concerns in terms of efficiently managing employees without being able to physically observe their performance (Van der Merwe & Smith, 2014). Hence, only a limited number of South African organisations adopted telework (Baard & Thomas, 2010) before the upsurge of the pandemic. Moreover, many African countries have ignored adapting to telework, due to the constraints in accessing the necessary infrastructure and ‘the African traditional way of working’ (Atiku et al., 2020). ‘African traditional way of working in this context speaks to how a majority of African people usually work: many are manual labourers, who are not exposed to using technical equipment in their duties (i.e., farmers, construction workers).

Furthermore, the circumstances in these developing economies have made it difficult for flexible work arrangements. South Africa continues to endure inequality in service delivery; most communities are disadvantaged by receiving inadequate services and lacking the proper infrastructure to enable telework (Lebopo et al., 2020; Malti, 2020). For example, loadshedding is a disturbance when working from home, as not all workers can afford electricity generators for backup. Loadshedding can be elucidated as the deliberate discontinuation of the electricity supply at set timeframes with the intention to reduce the demand experienced by ESCOM (Electricity Supply Commission) which is the South African electricity supplier (Steenkamp et al., 2016). In addition, due to the pandemic, schools were closed, and home-schooling was imposed on parents (Matli, 2020), while day-care facilities were also closed, placing immense pressure on workers to conduct work without distractions.

Lebopo et al. (2020) have identified a number of factors that influence telework adaptation in South African organisations; these are described below:

#### ***2.6.4.1 Job characteristics***

Not all jobs are suited for teleworking due to the activities of that particular occupation. For instance, the difference in job characteristics between essential and non-essential workers make it almost impossible for healthcare workers to work remotely. Thus, when organisations consider telecommuting, managers must assess which of their staff can telework, depending on the activities involved in their job. It is mandatory to create an environment that supports teleworking and train employees accordingly.

#### ***2.6.4.2 Communication***

Communication is fundamental to all organisations; operations cannot proceed without executives efficiently communicating what is expected of their staff members. Thus, with teleworking, organisational members must be trained to communicate using technology. Traditionally, management prefers face-to-face communication; however, this can cause resistance when transitioning to telework. Management is trying new ways to communicate with teleworkers, such as having Zoom meetings, so workers can socialise as they usually would in the office space. This has increased employee engagement and made employees feel less isolated.

#### ***2.6.4.3 Senior management support***

Senior management support is vital, as it will guarantee adaptation to remote working. Senior management has the power to make the final decision about changes in organisations. If organisational executives are committed, employees feel less hesitant about this transformation and feel secure about their jobs.

#### ***2.6.4.4 Management control***

Management control moves away from traditional management approaches and toward objective employee assessments and outcome orientation. However, teleworking does not allow the physical observations that managers are comfortable with; instead, employee performance was monitored online, using various online tasks trackers.

#### ***2.6.4.5 Trust***

Trust is essential in the employee-manager relationship; both sides must have integrity. Managers need to feel that they can trust the employees to work, meet the deadlines scheduled, and be productive as they would in the office. On the other hand, employees also need to trust that their managers will continue to communicate adequately and that their performance will continue to be assessed fairly.

#### ***2.6.4.6 Organisational culture***

Telework must align with the organisation's values, norms, culture, and existing infrastructure. Telework is accommodated and compatible when the organisation is open to an innovative culture.

#### ***2.6.4.7 Compatibility fit***

This aspect assesses whether the existing organisation's human resources policies support teleworking. This involves stipulations on providing training to employees on teleworking and how coherently the organisation is implementing telework.

### **2.7 Resilience**

Resilience is a term that was derived from *resilire*, a Latin word that means 'to leap back' (Förster & Ducheck, 2017, p. 283). Van Breda (2018) assessed the multiple definitions noted in previous studies, intending to find a South African meaning of resilience in social work. An *action definition* of resilience is provided by Bonanno (cited in Van Breda, 2018, p. 4) as "a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event." Resilience can also be perceived as a process, where one does not succumb to the negativity of hardships and has "the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful" (Walsh cited in Van Breda, 2018, p. 4). Hence, Van Breda (2018) preferred seeing resilience as a mediating process, where after experiencing adversity, the individual can easily transition back to their normal state of functioning and proposed that resilience entails "the multilevel processes that systems engage in to obtain better-than-expected outcomes in the face of adversity" (Van Breda, 2018, p. 4).

Ledesma (2014), in their study, highlights the diversity of resilience and says that how one defines it depends on the context and field they are in or how one chooses to explore resilience. In other words, in nursing, resilience has been elucidated as "the ability to regenerate power to respond to the internal or external environment for survival" (p. 2). In the

social sciences, it is “the ability to recover from negative life experiences and become stronger while overcoming them” (Henderson & Milstein cited in Ledesma, 2014, p. 2).

In organisational-based studies, resilience is best viewed as a developmental process whereby an organisation learns how to adjust positively to the current crisis and, most importantly, learns how it can overcome challenges in the future (Teo et al., 2017). Therefore, this process-based perspective of resilience in organisations is ideal when proposing theories on how organisations adapt to adversity (Lombardi et al., 2021; Sarkar & Clegg, 2021). This approach is also fitting because it includes circumstantial factors and the awareness that, for resilience to be activated, it depends on a crucial interplay of components across the individual, social, and organisational levels (Teo et al., 2017).

Thus, the common factors in the definitions of resilience are that it is either evoked by an adverse event or is a result of adversity. Resilience is viewed as a positive development and a trait whereby a person can return to equilibrium after a crisis (Förster & Ducheck, 2017; Teo et al., 2017).

### **2.7.1 The Importance of Resilience in Organisational Leaders**

In leadership, resilience is considered a valuable feature a leader should have, which ensures continuity in the organisation during disturbance to the state of equilibrium and transmits positive energy to the rest of the team (Župerkienė et al., 2021). When the organisation is confronted with a crisis, the leader’s priority is to understand the adversity and evaluate how best to deal with it. Hence, resilient leaders play a fundamental role in developing resilience in others (Lombardi et al., 2021).

During a crisis, leaders have significant roles that they have to fulfil, and these are acknowledged by Boin et al., (2013), who have introduced a framework that evaluates the leaders’ tasks. This framework consists of five components:

1. Sensemaking involves assessing the external factors that cause turbulence to understand the crisis at hand. This is considered the most crucial role of the leader, as their understanding of the event allows others not to be conflicted by the situation (Combe & Carrington, 2015).
2. In a crisis, leaders are required to make essential decisions to solve problems and expedite collaboration amongst the teams in the organisation.

3. Leaders also have to engage in meaning-making, whereby they provide a comprehensive overview of the situation.
4. Leaders must ensure that trust is restored in the organisation, to enable organisational members to have a sense of relief, and to feel that matters will be resolved successfully, such that they will not resist the changes made.
5. Lastly, after enduring the effect of the adversity and managing to combat it strategically, it is necessary to participate in a reflection process on the situation and facilitate learning for future unpredictable events.

It is also noted that along with leaders' tasks during the crisis, their attitude and behaviour are vital, as these influence the organisation's performance and the team's attitude (Teo et al., 2017). Additionally, four broad characteristics are required for resilience to be present, as identified by Cooper et al. (cited in Förster & Ducheck, 2017, p. 285): "1. confidence (i.e., optimism), 2. Purposefulness (i.e., self-control, conscientiousness), 3. Adaptability (i.e., intelligence, problem-solving, ability to improvise), and 4. Social support (i.e., self-awareness, sociability)."

Therefore, with the presence of the pandemic, there is no significant difference in the task of resilient leadership compared to any other crisis. Leaders must still assess the situation, develop strategies to recover, and respond to the crisis (Župerkienė et al., 2021). Further, resilience is not a once-off state but rather a process of learning and quickly adapting to chaotic situations. An organisation secured with resilience as part of its foundation provides itself the opportunity to remain strategic and survive uncertain conditions, hence the significance of resilience in the presence of uncertainty.

## **2.8 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.8.1 Contingency Theory of Management**

Fred Edward Fiedler developed Contingency Theory in 1964. This theory is situation specific; in other words, it states that how a person leads is affected by various internal and external environmental factors that influence the leader to adapt to a particular condition (Khan et al., 2016). Fiedler's Contingency Model emphasises assessing the success of the leaders' performance in an organisation; it is essential not to isolate a leader from their situation, as it affects how they lead (Khan et al., 2017). Thus, there is an emphasis on the leader's personality and the context in which they lead. Therefore, this theory gave rise to a

more adapted theory, the Contingency Theory of Management, which applies to this study. As derived from Flinsch-Rodriguez (2010), the Contingency Theory of Management is based on the following concepts: firstly, there is no single set process for managing an organisation. Secondly, managers must adopt a leadership style best suited to deal with a particular crisis and simultaneously meet the organisation's objectives. Lastly, to measure the orientation of a manager's leadership, it uses the Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) scale. This scale measures whether managers are more orientated toward issuing tasks to their employees or forming good professional relationships with their employees to increase their motivation and performance. However, this scale will not be applied in this study, as it seeks to understand the managers' experiences with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Contingent Theory of Management (2010) uses an open system approach to assess multiple influences on how the organisation operates and managers lead. Given the impact caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in the industrial arena, there are shifts in the environment and situations experienced by organisations, as a new norm has come to reality (telework). Managers' roles and performance levels in organisations have thus been affected. The application of this theory in this study enables the exploration of the influences these changes have had on management and how they have developed new leadership techniques, specifically through technology and managing from home.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the literature on SMMEs, the context in which this study is based, as well as teleworking as the imposed approach to working during the pandemic; it also reviewed resilience literature, as this which is a fundamental trait in organisational leaders. Literature shows how SMMEs have been affected by the pandemic and the challenges SMMEs face in ensuring development and sustainability in developing economies. Moreover, the challenges this pandemic has presented to organisations, and how managers are affected, are explored. The opportunities are also identified; however, there is a gap in the literature regarding managers' experiences in SMMEs.

Organisational managers fulfil vital roles in the face of adversity, as employees rely on their leaders to provide information and solutions to the crisis experienced. Hence, the theoretical framework is based on the Contingency Theory of Management, which provides a scope of what influences a manager's leadership style. The theory acknowledges that managers lead

depending on internal and external factors, such as the leader's environment and the situation they are facing. Therefore, the pandemic has transformed managers' leadership techniques as they adapt to managing remotely. With managers receiving no training during the pandemic, attention is required to developing organisational leaders in times of adversity. Furthermore, this study explored leaders' experiences in an SMME in the South African context, to address this research gap. Thus, the findings of this study can initiate further research in SMMEs, especially in terms of their digitalisation and essential interventions needed for SMME managers in times of uncertainty.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodological approach utilised in this study is discussed. Brief background information on the study location is presented. Thereafter, the chapter outlines the study's design, paradigm, sampling, research instrument, data collection, and data analysis processes. The chapter concludes by presenting the ethical considerations.

#### 3.2 Study Location

The study was conducted in an SMME, located in Mount Edgecombe, a Durban suburb in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Mount Edgecombe forms part of the greater Durban Metropolitan Area, previously recognised as a sugar-growing vicinity (Illovo Sugar Park). This area is popular due to its gated communities, resorts, and golf estates.

#### 3.3 Research Paradigm

Research is based on scientific paradigms that shape the research in terms of the nature of the study, what is being studied, and how it will be studied (Slawecki, 2018). A paradigm can be understood as a framework or set of beliefs that describes the researcher's perspective of reality and the study of this reality (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, p. 26) elaborate that a paradigm "is the conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research to determine the research method and how the data will be analysed".

Paradigms consist of four elements (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Slawecki, 2018). Firstly, **ontology** is a philosophical field concerned with the nature of reality, the assumptions made to believe that something exists, and that it makes sense. In research, ontology assists the researcher in formulating a frame of reference for the phenomenon they aim to study, considering all aspects that relate to this phenomenon and how it will be studied. Secondly, **epistemology** focuses on acquiring knowledge and how people come to know and understand their reality. In other words, it concerns the "source of human cognition, [and] the role of experience in the creation of knowledge" (Slawecki, 2018, p. 12).

Ontology and epistemology are the significant foundation for all research, as they inform the researcher's choice of methodological strategy and procedures for conducting the research (Dammak, 2015). Following this, **methodology** focuses on the variety of ways in which a phenomenon can be studied. In the light of research, it refers to the study's design, approach, and procedures for conducting the research project. Lastly, the **methods** consist of the way/s in which the required data for the research will be collected (i.e., interviews, observation, documents, questionnaires, audio-visual materials).

This study seeks to document the gap in the literature on the experiences of SMME managers and thus will follow an interpretive paradigm. The central focus of an interpretive paradigm is to gain an understanding of the subjective world through the encounters of humans. This subjective world refers to reality, which researchers embarking on the interpretive route perceive to be “multi-layered and complex” (Dammak, 2015, p. 5). This means that interpretivist researchers deduce that humans, through their various interactions, are active agents in constructing their reality. In an interpretive paradigm, the emphasis is placed on the interpretive researcher seeking to understand reality through the lens of their research participants, without any interference from their encounters (Dammak, 2015). Furthermore, it is critical for an interpretivist researcher to study a phenomenon in its natural context and to understand this context (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This enables an appropriate analysis of the collected data. Hence, an interpretive paradigm is subjective.

The *ontological* basis of an interpretive paradigm is that it is ‘anti-foundationalist’ (Dammak, 2015; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This means that reality does not naturally exist; rather, it is socially constructed. There is also a relativist perspective that reality is subjective to the individual, and that each person holds a different perspective of reality from any other person (Dammak, 2015; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In light of this, the multiple viewpoints of reality stem from Willis's (cited in Thanh & Thanh, 2015) belief that “external reality is variable” (p. 25). This, in turn, leads to a more thoroughly understood phenomenon.

On the other hand, interpretive *epistemology* holds a subjective perspective. It claims that people interact with one another, and during these interactions, meanings are ascribed to different social phenomena (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This refers to the social construction

of reality, as both the natural and social worlds co-exist, with the researcher not being detached from this reality (Dammak. 2015).

An interpretive approach follows an inductive *methodology*. This entails that the researcher begins with collecting data from participants and then analyses this data to develop themes that will, thus, generate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon or lead to the development of a theory. Thus, the objective of an interpretive methodology is to understand a phenomenon through the lens of participants in their context rather than the lens of the researcher (Dammak, 2015; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). There are various methodologies in an interpretive paradigm, such as phenomenology, ethnography, ground theory, and case study. In terms of this research, the latter, as discussed above, is the chosen methodological strategy. The interpretive research *methods* utilised in this study were selected to obtain rich data appropriate for the chosen research approach and will be discussed in detail below.

### **3.4 Research Design**

The research design used in this study is a qualitative approach. This is because the researcher's primary purpose was to understand the experiences of managers working under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Astalin (2013), qualitative research entails an approach that aims to achieve an in-depth narrative description that forms an understanding of the specific social or cultural occurrences for the researcher. Thus, a qualitative approach is popular in the social sciences, as it seeks to obtain a detailed understanding and elucidation of issues or aspects of concern to the social context. Moreover, the methods embedded in this research design are appropriate in exploring peoples' perceptions of concerns specific to their context (Creswell & Poth, 2016); precisely, for this research project, it is the managers' experiences, along with the organisational changes in their work environment, that are to be studied. Therefore, a qualitative study enabled the researcher to collect comprehensive data (Grossoehme, 2014), hence, its suitability for the research.

#### **3.4.1 Case Study Approach**

A case study approach informs the methodological strategy for this study. This approach proved suitable since it focused on a single SMME, to explore the managers' experiences with teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic. Houghton et al. (2015) maintain that case studies are an appropriate approach for exploring situations or experiences in the context in

which they occur. Additionally, Gustafsson (2017) confirms that focusing on a single case study permits the researcher to make a more careful exploration of the phenomenon and thoroughly understand the subject being researched.

In qualitative research, the pivot is the acquisition of a detailed description of the meaning buried in reality and how this reality is acknowledged and deciphered by individuals. In this instance, case studies are one of the suitable approaches to attaining this objective, as they extensively analyse various phenomena or behaviours, their source, and how they relate to their environment (Njie & Asimiran, 2014).

A case study approach involves an examination of a specific event or phenomenon that occurs in a particular context, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexity of a case (Creswell, 2014; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). In other words, a case study can be regarded as a complete study of people, an entire community, organisations, or real-life events, which are analysed using various methods to establish a holistic description of the phenomenon. In light of the description of a case study, Priya (2021) maintains that the key attributes of this methodology are:

- A case study should be acknowledged as a methodology strategy rather than a data collection method.
- It consists of an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon within its indigenous context.
- Within this approach, various methods can be used to collect data, provided that the method used fulfils, and is appropriate for, the purpose.
- Lastly, a phenomenon that can be regarded as a case can include individuals, families, communities, businesses, situations, and decisions.

Furthermore, Yin (2014) enunciates that a case study can take any of the following three forms; firstly, it can be a descriptive case study, which solely describes an entity in its natural setting. Secondly, it can be an explanatory case study that seeks to explain an aspect in great detail. For example, this type mainly focuses on answering the questions of ‘how’ something has occurred and ‘why’ it is happening. Thirdly, there are exploratory case studies that explore a phenomenon in order to identify the possible gaps that exist or contribute to new research to be conducted on the unknown factors of the case. The latter best describes the applicability of the present study, as the researcher was interested in exploring SMME

(context) managers' experiences and situations (phenomenon) with working under the conditions presented by the pandemic.

### **3.5 Sampling**

#### **3.5.1 Sampling Strategy**

*Sampling* is a “technique employed by a researcher to systematically select a relatively small number of representatives from a predefined population, to serve as subjects for their study” (Sharma, 2017, p. 749). Tyrer and Heyman (2016) maintain that it is essential for sampling techniques to be very meticulous to ensure that biases and errors are minimalised. Sampling methods are classified into two categories: probability and non-probability sampling methods. Specifically, this study used non-probability sampling methods, as this study is built on a qualitative research framework. Non-probability sampling methods are based on the researcher's subjective judgement because participants are selected based on the specific group the researcher intends to study, unlike in random selection (Berndt, 2020; Sharma, 2017).

Non-probability sampling consists of the following methods: Quota sampling, snowball sampling, self-selection sampling, and purposive sampling. In this study, purposive sampling was used. The researcher selected SMME managers as participants, as they held particular expertise and experience in what was being researched. Hence, purposive sampling relies upon the researcher's judgment to select individuals that meet the study's criteria (Berndt, 2020; Etikan & Bala, 2017; Sharma, 2017).

The advantages of using purposive sampling are that it provides the researcher with various sampling techniques to choose from (i.e., expert sampling, maximum variation sampling, or typical case sampling). Secondly, these techniques enable the researcher to generalise from the selected sample (Sharma, 2017). The disadvantage of this sampling method is that it could be based on the researcher's bias. However, this can have a negative impact only if the researcher does not base their selections on a clear objective (Sharma, 2017). Thus, the researcher ensured that participants were managers based in an SMME, in order to obtain information that meets the objectives of the study.

#### **3.5.2 Sample Description**

This study aimed to recruit participants who were in managerial positions in SMMEs. They were purposively chosen because they possess insight into the constraints and opportunities presented by Covid-19. SMMEs are relatively small and consist of a small number of managers; hence, the study comprised four participants. Moreover, the intention was for the researcher to obtain data that speaks to the aim of the study and does not result in superficial data, as this is most likely the case from having a large sample (Gaskell, 2000). Additionally, conducting a single case study was beneficial for the researcher, as it was not time-consuming and was less expensive (Mohajan, 2018), thus permitting the researcher to acquire rich data related to the explored phenomenon.

### **3.6 The Role of the Researcher**

In interpretive research, the researcher is a primary instrument in the study (Zhang & Liu, 2018). In this study, the researcher conducted interviews. In the data collection stage, the researcher needs to build rapport with their participants, as this aids in creating a comfortable environment during the interviews. Hence, the researcher formed a relationship with the participants by communicating with them prior to the interview date through emails. As a result, trust was built between the researcher and their participants (Zhang & Liu, 2018). The researcher also conducted the transcribing, analysing, and developing themes from the research findings (Collins & Stockton, 2022).

#### **3.6.1 Entry into the Field**

For this study, the recruitment and data collection occurred over an online platform. On the day of the interview and before its commencement, the researcher informed the participants about their study, that their participation was voluntary, and that they had the right to anonymity. However, the participants were informed that the interviews would be shared with the researcher's supervisor.

#### **3.6.2 Selection of Study Participants**

Study participants were selected based on their position in the SMME; as mentioned above, the study focused on SMME managers. Therefore, the researcher's study sample can be described as follows: a human resources executive manager, talent and development manager, contracts manager, and financial manager. All study participants are females and range between the ages of 35-40.

## **3.7 Data Collection**

### **3.7.1 Data Collection Method**

The primary data collection methods in qualitative research are focus groups, interviews, and observations (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The objective of these qualitative research methods is to thoroughly understand the experiences of people, and beliefs, exploring how certain decisions are made and the occurrence of significant social events (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The most common method, out of the three mentioned above, is interviews. This is because interviews are considered the most appropriate choice for obtaining rich data from participants about the phenomenon the researcher is interested in (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Interviews can be either structured or semi-structured; the latter was used in this study. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to structure their interviews and simultaneously allowed the researcher autonomy to explore other ideas that arose during the interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Hence, the researcher was able to probe participants to understand managers' experiences better and created a comfortable atmosphere for the participant to build rapport and not feel interrogated (Gaskell, 2000). The interviews were conducted on Zoom because the country was still experiencing an increase in Covid-19 cases, and the risk of physical exposure was high.

Semi-structured interviews must be well-designed to capture data that speaks to the critical areas of the study (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). An interview guide (Appendix 4) used for the semi-structured interviews mainly consisted of open-ended questions. This was done to allow the participants to express themselves fully; thus, the researcher could receive comprehensive data. This guide was framed by the study's objectives, literature, theoretical framework, and critical topics. Notably, this interview guide served as a guide and not an instrument to control how the interview was led.

### **3.7.2 Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process began once ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: **HSSREC/00003730/2021**). An initial email was sent to all research participants to inform them of ethical approval. They were invited to suggest a date and time convenient for the interview. Attached to the email was the ethics approval letter (Appendix 1), information sheet (Appendix 2) and consent form (Appendix 3) for the participant to read and sign. The

participants had enough time to carefully read the study details, review their rights as participants, take note of any questions, and sign the consent form when satisfied.

**Table 3.1: Interview schedule**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>
Manager #1	26/09/2022	10:00 am
Manager #2	26/09/2022	12:00 am
Manager #3	28/09/2022	10:00 am
Manager #4	25/10/2022	16:00 pm

The date and time of the online interviews were scheduled depending on the availability of the participant (illustrated in Table 3.1 above). The researcher guided the processes for the online interviews. Three days before the interview date, the researcher sent an email to remind the participant of their interview session and to ensure that the consent form was submitted before the interview.

On the day of the interviews, standard procedure was adhered to. The researcher briefly introduced the study to the participants and clarified the consent required. The researcher made sure to emphasise that participation in the study was voluntary, that confidentiality would be respected, and that the session would be audio recorded as a future reference. Most importantly, to ensure that participants did not feel pressured to speak well of their organisation and role, they were informed that their participation was independent of the organisation, as this could have hindered them from freely expressing their opinions. Once this was concluded, the interview session began. The interviews were conducted for approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Transcription of the interviews occurred immediately after the interview, for the researcher to accurately capture the participant's responses and non-verbal expressions.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Qualitative research design obtains words as a form of data collected and analysed using various techniques of this paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, the analysis approach employed in this study was thematic analysis, as it is specifically suited for

qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is explained by Braun and Clarke (2014), the founders of this approach, as “a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data” (p. 1). This method can be time-consuming; however, the researcher chose it as the technique explores the context and meaning of the research problem (Ulin, 2002). Thematic analysis can be applied in deductive or inductive analysis; the former is more theoretical, and the latter is ‘data driven.’ In this study, the researcher adopted an inductive analysis as it best captured the experiences of the participants, and Braun et al. (2015) mention that “inductive approaches are instrumental when exploring new terrain” (p. 3). Moreover, this approach is flexible, making it unique compared to other data analysis approaches (Braun et al., 2015). Flexibility means that it does not rely on any “epistemological and ontological bases” (Braun & Clarke, 2014, p. 4).

The thematic analysis consists of six phases completed in a non-linear format. The researcher could work interchangeably through the phases (Braun et al., 2015), and be able to move back and forth between them. The phases are described below.

#### ❖ **Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data**

The phase of the researcher familiarising themselves with the data occurs when data collection is in progress (Braun et al., 2015). Thus, it was important for the researcher to understand the type of data they wanted to achieve and once achieved, notice some similarities or differences in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase allowed the researcher to accurately analyse large amounts of data, as this might be daunting for the researcher to analyse numerous interview transcripts (Braun et al., 2015). In this phase, the researcher transcribed the recorded interview into the laptop and actively read the transcripts to ‘immerse themselves’ (p. 12) with the transcripts. After reading the transcripts more than once, the researcher began noticing patterns that allowed the next phase to commence (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2015).

#### ❖ **Phase 2: Generating initial codes**

Once the researcher had fully immersed themselves in the transcripts, the researcher began to note codes that were consistent and, most importantly, set ‘meaningful labels’ in their data (Braun et al., 2015). Coding is explained as “the systematic and thorough creation of meaningful labels attached to specific segments of the data” (Braun et al., 2015, p. 15). This means that the researcher reread all the data; however, this time, the intention was to find

relevant codes related to the research question. While reading segments of the interview transcripts, the researcher captured each code using a single phrase (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, taking notes of what stood out was related to what the study intended to find (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was beneficial to the researcher, as it reduced the data into specific categories for easy reading for the researcher, without needing to return to the large amounts of data; it also identified patterns that would be further refined as the process continued (Braun et al., 2015). This phase sets the foundation for data analysis, where the researcher generates meaning (Braun et al., 2015).

### ❖ **Phase 3: Theme development**

This phase involved assessing the codes regarding how they differed or were similar, and grouping them into themes (Braun et al., 2015). The researcher can use visual aids such as a table to cluster the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This helped the researcher decipher the theme's meaning (Braun et al., 2015). The researcher was then able to identify the crucial codes and group themes into a specific category that informed the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Thus, the researcher could not simply use all the codes as themes, since they appear frequently (Braun & Clarke 2013); however, this process did not yet determine the final themes.

### ❖ **Phase 4: Reviewing themes**

The researcher then reviewed the developed themes and selected the most coherent ones (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2015). According to Braun et al. (2015), this is done because some of the themes generated need to be evaluated for their relevance as they might be inconsistent or redundant. The researcher remained cognisant that the themes must be validly related to the codes and should inform the questions of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### ❖ **Phase 5: Defining and naming themes**

In this phase, the researcher interpreted the themes rather than viewing them as a list. This was to enable the themes to form a logical narrative when read (Braun et al., 2015). This phase is where the analysis emerges, and the researcher needs to ensure “clarity, cohesion, precision and quality” (Braun et al., 2015, p. 23). Defining the themes assisted the researcher to develop a clear sense of what the theme means and if it has been captured adequately (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### ❖ Phase 6: Producing the report

After having identified the themes, they were evaluated to check if they made sense, they were defined, and named, and the next phase was refining the themes and reporting on them (Braun et al., 2015). When doing a write-up, the themes must be written to give a holistic perspective of the entire study. In this analytic phase, the researcher included direct quotes from the transcripts to demonstrate accurate perceptions of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

It is imperative that researchers ensure that their study is conducted in an ethical manner for the rights and values of the participants to be respected. Prior the commencement of the study *ethical clearance* was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Human and Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu Natal (Appendix 1).

The researcher further obtained *informed consent* (Appendix 3) from the study participants, so that they are aware of what the study entails and their rights during their participation. Therefore, the consent form clearly explained to the participants that their participation was voluntary, and that they have the autonomy to withdraw should they feel that they are in any harm.

The *confidentiality* of participants was assured and protected using pseudonyms, and under no circumstances was the identity of participants revealed in the study.

Furthermore, the researcher ensured that throughout the study participants are not placed at risk of any *harm*.

### 3.10 Reliability And Validity In Qualitative Research

#### 3.10.1 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the issues of reliability and validity are addressed through the assessment of trustworthiness in the study by ensuring that the study is credible in producing a good quality report. Thus, trustworthiness refers to the confidence that the data, methods used in the study, and the interpretation of the data guarantee the quality of the study (Connelly, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) address rigour in trustworthiness through the

criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016; Kyngäs et al., 2020).

- ***Credibility***

According to Stahl and King (2020), credibility refers to the extent to which the study findings are congruent with the reality of the participants. Thus, for the reader to trust the findings, the data should be conceptually interpreted to encapsulate the authentic expression of the participants' experiences (Kyngäs et al., 2020). The researcher probed during the interviews to fully capture the participant's expressions. The data were also recorded and presented in a way that portrayed the participants' actual experiences and interests during the research. This was done using direct quotations from the participants to enhance credibility in the discussion of the research findings.

- ***Transferability***

Transferability refers to the degree to which the study findings may apply to another context similar to the one in the study (Connelly, 2016; Kyngäs et al., 2020; Stahl & King, 2020). Qualitative research findings are context specific and may be challenging to transfer to other contexts. Therefore, qualitative researchers must be cautious in claiming that their research findings are transferable. To assist the reader in making judgments of transferability, the researcher provided a comprehensive description of the context of the study, its location, and the participants (Connelly, 2016). Hence, for the findings of this study to be transferred, context will have to be carefully considered. Therefore, the findings on managers' experiences due to the pandemic can be transferred to managers' experiences from other SMMEs organisations in South Africa.

- ***Dependability***

Dependability is concerned with the data's consistency over time and the different conditions of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014; Stahl & King, 2020). In other words, it refers to the stability of the research processes involved in this study, namely data collection and data analysis (Kyngäs et al., 2020). Therefore, the researcher has provided a comprehensive description of the processes followed and justifications for the methods used to maintain the study's dependability (Connelly, 2016).

- ***Confirmability***

Lastly, confirmability refers to objectivity in terms of the neutrality of the research findings (Nguyen et al., 2021). To limit bias, the researcher was aware of their perceptions of the possible outcome of the study, having engaged in the literature that relates to the study, and they mainly focused on the perceptions expressed by the participants. This then attests to Kyngäs et al.'s (2020) suggestion that when a researcher considers the confirmability of their research findings, they should verify that their findings are based solely on the participants' responses and do not reflect the ideas of the researcher. Hence, reflexivity played a significant role in the researcher being aware of their position in the study and not influencing the responses received from the participants. According to Darawshel (2014), "reflexivity refers to the continuous process of self-reflection that researchers engage in to generate awareness about their actions, feelings, and perceptions" (p. 561). Therefore, the researcher can confirm that the interpretation of the research findings discussed in Chapter Four is as free as possible from contamination by the researcher's biases, as the discussion is solely led by the responses of the participants (i.e., extracts from the transcripts are included). Moreover, the transparency and authenticity of the results produced from the study are increased (Darawshel, 2014).

### **3.11. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a detailed description of a qualitative research paradigm, design, and the case study approach employed in this study. Purposive sampling methods were used to select research participants. The participants were interviewed on Zoom. A description of the data analysis was presented. This chapter concluded with ethical considerations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings and interpretation of these findings. The data emanated from the four in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore SMME managers' experiences with working under the conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The discussions of the themes include direct quotes from the participants' transcripts. Each participant has been allocated a pseudonym. The associated themes are shaped by the study's objectives presented in Chapter One and Fiedler's Contingency Theory of Management (2010), which is the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Two.

#### 4.2 Emerging Themes from Data

**Table 4.1: Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the experiences of SMME managers with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic**

Broad theme	Sub-theme
1. Experiences with the conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic	1.1 The impact of the pandemic on the role of SMME managers
	1.2 Management-based challenges with the impact of Covid-19 and teleworking
	1.3 Strategies employed by managers to deal with the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic
	1.4 Management-based opportunities with Covid-19 and teleworking
2. SMME managers' adaptation to teleworking	2.1 SMME managers conceptualisation of 'telework'
	2.2 SMME manager's orientation towards teleworking
	2.3 The implementation of a hybrid work environment in SMMEs and managers' preferred working approach

3. The training and development required by SMME managers during the Covid-19 pandemic	3.1 Managers' conceptualisation of 'resilience' and the importance of resilience amongst SMME leaders
	3.2 The training and support given to managers during the pandemic
	3.3 Training required by managers during a crisis

### 4.3 Experiences with Conditions Imposed by the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic was indeed an unanticipated challenge for organisational leaders. They had to respond appropriately to restore harmony in the organisation amidst the panic. The findings attested that these challenges had never been experienced before, and there was no existing code of conduct to assist them. Therefore, confronting these challenges was a matter of trial and error, based on the incremental skills acquisition they had gained from all their years of experience. They nonetheless also noted opportunities they gained in their trajectory to engage extensively with this new phenomenon.

#### 4.3.1 The Impact of the Pandemic on the Role of SMME Managers

The role of leadership in an organisation is the most pivotal to its smooth running and success. Organisational leaders are responsible for leading employees effectively to ensure that company objectives are met; thus, they design strategies and policies for this to occur and ensure employees are also motivated (Al Khajeh, 2018; Fiaz et al., 2017). Each of the managers described the leadership style they perceived they possessed. What was most prominent was that most identified a democratic or participative leadership style. A democratic leadership style is described as one where the leader is part of the team; hence, there is increased interaction between the leader and the group, and decision-making is shared (Fiaz et al., 2017):

*“I would say it is democratic because it is especially important to get everybody’s viewpoint as well. If you are working in a team, it is always good to know what other people feel about a certain proposal that you are making.”* [Manager 2]

*“My style is incredibly open in that I engage a lot with the people I lead. It is not an authoritative and autocratic style. I allow them to be, to come and raise issues with me. I mean, I sort of embrace ideas that they come with, so it is a very collaborative effort, if I can put it like that.”* [Manager 3]

*“I would say my leadership style is participative leadership. I work with my team to get their thoughts and suggestions, and I am very inclusive in how I lead. I do not just decide and then say, this is what will happen.”* [Manager 4]

Al Khajeh (2018) also acknowledges that the positive aspect of this leadership style is that it is people focused, which encourages employees to be more engaged with the leader and increases employee motivation. This is especially because the employees feel that their opinions are valued which makes them less resistant to changes effected. The managers also realise that they have a common goal to reach and should collaborate:

*“I now also feel that if more ideas were to be put on the table, it gives us a variety and a chance for us to make good decisions ... if you are a leader that is open to people’s suggestions ... it becomes easier for you to get everybody’s buy-in as well.”* [Manager 2]

The negative aspect of this leadership style is that, in some instances, there might be a misunderstanding, or employees can take advantage of being included in the sharing of ideas. However, the managers realise that employees do not need to be included with every decision; some situations dictate managerial decision-making, as per their portfolio. Moreover, in some circumstances, employees await the manager’s direction, whereupon managers have to provide such organisational steps. Furthermore, leaders must be independent at times, to ensure the organisations’ continuous growth, as they are responsible for the functioning, and reaching the goals, of the organisation. Managers shared the following to explain their circumstances:

*“You delegate where possible, but in the end, if you are in charge of a project, which is your responsibility to see it from beginning to end, and that is how I tend to operate.”* [Manager 1]

*“It has to adapt to whatever situations because there are situations that require you to stand your authority. Moreover, sometimes you will not be able to bring everyone*

*along and ensure that everyone takes time to process and agree. Sometimes you just must make decisions and go with that, regardless of how other people feel at times ... for the better man [sic] and the good of the organisation.” [Manager 3]*

*“There are situations where you have to make the call as a leader.” [Manager 4]*

The Contingency Theory of Management (2010) suggests that a person’s leadership is influenced by internal and external factors. The internal factors include the manager’s personality; hence, managers were questioned on their thoughts on what influences their leadership style. Managers maintained that the way they lead emanates from their character, validating the Contingency Theory of Management:

*“I think it is because I am a people’s person and I strongly believe in people’s opinions.” [Manager 2]*

*“It is who I am. It does not only come across at work but even at home. Some of the things that other parents would normally say, like this is what will happen with the kids. I want to get their thoughts. I do not remember being taught about leadership before I became a leader.” [Manager 4]*

External factors that are likely to shape managers’ leadership style may be within their internal environment (i.e., people within their workspace or the group of individuals they lead) and the organisation’s external environment. One of the managers revealed that their leadership style is primarily influenced by what she experienced in leadership from those she previously led:

*“It is more the character that I am and the type of leaders and managers that I have personally had in my working experience. It is people that have allowed me to grow, perform, exercise my thoughts, put them forward, and that sat very well with me. Hence, I also thought the style could bring out the best in people. Whereas when I have had managers that were authoritative, I did not like [this].” [Manager 3]*

The environmental factor of the Covid-19 pandemic did not necessarily change the managers’ leadership style or how they were used to leading prior to the pandemic; however, it altered their usual manner of engagement:

*“There were things that had to be done differently ... because we were dealing with an unprecedented pandemic.” [Manager 3]*

Covid-19 imposed communication changes to communicating using digital platforms:

*“How we communicate has changed ... how I lead has remained the same. At the height of Covid, we are having meetings virtually.” [Manager 4]*

This study also established that managers’ had to be more patient towards their staff and considerate of their emotions than prior to the pandemic. They were grappling with abrupt changes and other events that followed, which affected them emotionally:

*“Covid-19 taught us that people are valuable, and we have to appreciate the team that we work in, and not everybody works at the same pace ... it has taught us to be much more patient, understanding, and empathetic.” [Manager 1]*

Covid-19, being a never-experienced crisis, meant that there was no existing code of conduct or policies that guided what was expected from all components of the organisation. Hence, managers had to develop new policies that accommodated the adaptable working conditions:

*“It required that we also create policies because it was something new and nobody had information about it. You needed to have policies in place regarding what happens if you are in quarantine. What is required of you if you test positive?” [Manager 2]*

Therefore, the study findings related to the Contingency Theory of Management (2010) in that a leader’s internal and external factors influenced how they lead. Moreover, it determined the best method of engagement.

#### **4.3.2 Management-Based Challenges with the Impact of Covid-19 and Teleworking**

The data revealed that SMME managers experienced the following constraints in managing their staff while teleworking and finding a solution to assist the organisation in not succumbing to any adversity: i) emotionally affected employees; ii) unavailability of staff; iii) contracts and policies not catering for a Covid-19 induced work environment; iv) misuse of organisation’s resources by staff; v) connectivity issues; vi) working with leaders with a different leadership style; and vii) work-life balance.

#### ***4.3.2.1 Emotionally affected employees***

The Covid-19 pandemic affected employees emotionally as they had to deal with ill family members and friends who had been hospitalised due to the coronavirus. Moreover, others were confronted with the loss of significant individuals, which negatively impacted their work:

*“Other people would lose family members, or they would have family members that are hospitalised at one time.”* [Manager 4]

Employees, who had been in contact with an infected person, had to isolate, which required remaining at home. Also, employees were unable to report to work due to being ill, which invariably led to objectives not being met at the intended time. Often, the managers assumed those duties and had to supervise most tasks. This, in turn, resulted in overworked managers, especially the case of one of the managers who said she had to be on duty for 24 hours, along with just two out of the fifteen supervisors she works with on-site. As they were highly short-staffed, double shifts became the norm:

*“Five of our team members, and their families were sick, and with the fact that we will have to isolate when you have been in contact with a positive person, so we were short-staffed like we have never been before.”* [Manager 3]

Thus, managers had to be more patient towards employees, being aware that they themselves endured colleagues falling ill. One of the managers maintained that they needed to be very understanding towards employees, as the pandemic was traumatic. Moreover, everyone deals with trauma or loss differently:

*“Emotionally COVID-19 affected a lot of people. As leaders we must understand that people are different.”* [Manager 1]

Although managers had to be supportive of employees, they themselves were affected emotionally as they had also endured the loss of colleagues, family, or friends. Therefore, another challenge was that managers also required emotional support. However, being in a leadership position meant that employees expected solutions from them. One manager expressed the difference:

*“We were all experiencing the same thing but on different levels.”* [Manager 4]

#### **4.3.2.2 Unavailability of staff**

Managers expressed that, since Covid-19 necessitated working from home, there were challenges in supervising employees to ensure completion of work. Moreover, when they needed to communicate with their staff, they were sometimes unavailable, resulting in a delay in task completion:

*“It is difficult because, when you want to get feedback, it is delayed in coming.”*

[Manager 1]

*“You do not have much control of employees’ whereabouts ... that is the main challenge because you will look for an employee and not get a hold of the employee.”*

[Manager 2]

Another manager shared how her staff would refuse to report to work for fear of possible infection, as some people would not present with symptoms of the coronavirus:

*“I had people in my team that had to be stationed in Covid wards and they were not happy, and at times we had people that would flatly refuse to call in.”* [Manager 3]

Hence, this illustrates a third challenge: a lack of policies suited for Covid-19-imposed conditions.

#### **4.3.2.3 Contracts and policies not catering for a Covid-19-induced work environment**

The situation induced by Covid-19 was difficult, as there were no existing policies guiding managers on how best to deal with employees’ refusal to work:

*“We did not [have] policies... if a person disagrees, as most people feared for their lives.”* [Manager 3]

Moreover, managers were aware of these fears; however, work required completion as per contract:

*“In our contract, there is nothing that catered for such a situation.”* [Manager 3]

Therefore, managers developed workplace policies that satisfied the demands imposed by the pandemic. These policies met the requirements of teleworking and/or the hybrid working environment. One manager who developed a policy maintains the following:

*“In less than a day or two, I remember putting together a policy that would guide employees around what time they must be available online to work.” [Manager 4]*

The policies laid out how organisational leaders were required to manage challenges that further arose during the pandemic. As in the above example, the manager drafted a policy concerning what procedure had to be followed when employees were in quarantine or tested positive for coronavirus.

#### ***4.3.2.4 Misuse of organisation’s resources by staff***

Employees were given equipment such as laptops and Wi-Fi routers to work from home. One of the managers noted that employees tended to misuse these resources for personal reasons:

*“It was a challenge that some people would misuse the opportunity and use it for personal reasons and not adhere to company rules as to be available on their phone or laptop.” [Manager 2]*

Consequently, managers could not control and supervise that these resources were utilised per company rules.

#### ***4.3.2.5 Connectivity issues***

Virtual working is convenient for most employees; however, South Africa experiences high levels of loadshedding, which affects network connections. In turn, work and virtual meetings were disrupted. Some of the employees resided in rural areas, which meant that, in some instances, they encountered challenges in joining online meetings due to network connection difficulties. Managers share their experiences below:

*“If a person cannot get a hold of you or you have a Zoom meeting and saying, “I cannot hear you”, it became a challenge. Since we are having extreme loadshedding, it is becoming a major problem with most of the employers.” [Manager 2]*

*“There were challenges, the biggest one being the internet connection. When I would use a laptop to connect to meetings, submit reports, attend to emails, you will find that maybe at home, there is no internet connection at the time because the Wi-Fi is down when the network is playing up. Loadshedding is a factor; it contributes to not being able to connect as expected.” [Manager 3]*

#### **4.3.2.6 Working with leaders with a different leadership style**

One of the managers expressed that she endured a challenge with working with leaders who are authoritative. As authoritative leaders preferred being in control, the decision to implement teleworking was a difficult one for them. This revealed the lack of trust they had in their employees, preferring to supervise them in the office rather than remotely:

*“We do not trust that employees are where they say they are. We found that a lot of CEOs and CFOs, people who like to have things under control, they could not handle the fact that they were not able to see employees.”* [Manager 4]

Hence, it was difficult for her, as she believes that when she has given employees tasks, she trusts they know what work they must do and produce results on time:

*“For me, it was not an issue because I had a meeting with you on Monday and I know exactly that you know what to do... but other managers wanted to have a meeting every day.”* [Manager 4]

This manager initially resisted other leaders' manner of engagement. She maintained that these leaders were males, and this revealed the possibility of gender differences in leadership styles. In due time, she accepted the leadership diversity in the organisation; hence, the development of a work-from-home policy that accommodates all leaders.

#### **4.3.2.7 Work-life conflict**

Managers were confronted with balancing their personal and professional lives. They expressed experiencing several distractions when working from home, such as housekeeping, parenting, and working simultaneously. They felt overwhelmed with the multiple duties and that they were unable to occupy their professional role effectively when at home:

*“The main challenge was that I needed to be a mom, a housewife, a maid. Working on top of everything was a very unfair balance ... sometimes you do not even hear your phone ring and you are outside; you are drying clothes. You are cooking and you missed those important calls and then it looks like a black mark against your name.”*  
[Manager 1]

### **4.3.3 Strategies Employed by Managers to Deal with the Challenges Presented by the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The premise of the Contingency Theory of Management (2010) is that there is no single or best way to lead, as it is determined by internal and external factors unique in every environment (Brooks, 2022). Therefore, managers were questioned about what they perceive is the best way to lead during a crisis, as this governs their choice of strategies to manage the challenges. Below are the managers' thoughts:

*“As a leader, you must try to remove yourself from the situation; you cannot allow yourself to be at a level where everybody is. Employees are looking up to you for assurance, guidance, and answers, sometimes answers that you may not have. But you must present an image of being in control of the situation.”* [Manager 3]

*“The Covid-19 [pandemic] required a very resilient leader, as well as a leader that is not shy to be firm and a leader who can be a change agent, because that person will be able to adapt, as they are currently dealing with Covid-19 which came as a surprise ... Also making sure that you are willing to explore and research how you are going to make this happen, which is the best way to try and make this situation be the best.”* [Manager 2]

This pandemic requires a transformational leader, as it has forced numerous changes in organisations. Thus, leaders were required to find ways to combat the challenges and quickly introduce changes that best suited the novel environment or the situation:

*“The best way to lead is to be more empathetic to others' needs, to be more understanding.”* [Manager 1]

*“The best way to lead during a crisis is to understand where your people are concerned. How they view it, and how are they experiencing it ... And then the second thing is to stick to the most critical things ... Moreover, the third thing is to just appreciate the work that they are doing, appreciate the small wins in an environment that was so challenging.”* [Manager 4]

Managers 1 and 4's perspective focuses on taking care and being mindful of the human aspect in organisations. This involves being conscious of the difficulty employees were facing with adjusting to the 'new normal' in their work and personal lives. Additionally, this involves understanding that these experiences, in terms of being confronted with an unknown global crisis, will affect their work; thus, leaders must be more patient.

According to the findings, managers adopted the strategy of being more empathetic towards their team, because of the emotional trauma they are experiencing. Thus, they began to understand that people dealt differently with the massive changes they endured, and work was most likely to be affected:

*“I have learned to be more compassionate. I have also realised that not everybody operates on the same clock ... you cannot be so demanding that you cannot understand that people are also challenged.”* [Manager 1]

Managers scheduled weekly meetings to check on the well-being of their employees, prior the commencement of discussions relating to work. This was encouraged to ensure that employees feel supported:

*“If you have the meetings daily, do a check-in and then embark on the work, not just go straight to work and provide employees with work.”* [Manager 4]

The daily meetings were also done to ensure that employees were working, as managers feared that employees were behind in their work:

*“There was constant monitoring. You had to constantly try and communicate: if you are not phoning, you are setting up meetings, just to get a sense of whether the people are actually doing the work.”* [Manager 2]

To further support their employees, managers organised counselling sessions with psychologists for those who experienced severe trauma during this period:

*“We also organised some sessions with a hospital psychologist. They really appreciated that, because to them, it shows that we are aware and acknowledge their concerns as well.”* [Manager 3]

Managers reduced employees’ work hours, altered the shift rotation, and introduced a hybrid approach as to limit the risk of employees being infected:

*“To minimise the risk of having everybody here and thereby increasing the risk of getting infected, we had two rotating shifts. We had to have some other people working from home, and some only coming in for a limited number of hours, and try and make everyone not meet at the same time, so that when somebody from this team is infected, the team must isolate.”* [Manager 3]

#### **4.3.4 Management-Based Opportunities with Covid-19 and Teleworking**

A number of opportunities related to Covid-19 and teleworking were identified by managers: i) growth in team unity; ii) less commuting time/cost; iii) balancing work/personal life; iv) hybrid environment; and v) developing new policies.

##### ***4.3.4.1 Growth in team unity***

Team unity grew and was enhanced by increased support and improved communication. Managers acknowledged that working in a team assisted in problem-solving and created harmony amongst the employees:

*“It helped us bond more as a team and identify some other strengths that maybe some people did not even know they have ... in how we responded to it as a team, it actually helped us to understand each other more.”* [Manager 3]

##### ***4.3.4.2 Less commuting time/cost***

Teleworking awarded managers the advantage of reducing commuting time/costs. With working from home and outside movement restricted by the lockdown regulations, managers spent less time on the road. This meant that there was more time to work and balance their daily schedule between work and personal duties (see next section). As a result, the virtual work experience was convenient for managers:

*“The cost of travelling to the office is minimised which is a benefit.”* [Manager 3]

*“Being able to reach centres in places you would need to drive hours for ... virtual meetings to meet them virtually made it so quick for me.”* [Manager 4]

##### ***4.3.4.3 Balancing work and personal life***

As parents, managers enjoyed spending more time with their children; they felt it allowed them to do things with their children that they would not be able to if they worked at the office. These included simple activities such as making breakfast for their family without being rushed, helping with homework, and bonding more as a family. This reveals how female employees (all the participating managers are mothers) found it convenient to work from home and fully express their nurturing side to their children. As a result, this enabled a balance between their work and personal life, as they could appropriately schedule their day to allow the completion of all urgent tasks. This also allowed managers to focus on their well-

being; for example, they could rest and extend their sleep hours for a productive day ahead, and if they were ill, they could recover fully in the comfort of their homes:

*“I was there for my kids and family. It felt good now and again, just being able to give your kids breakfast, because when you are working, you leave home quite early.”*

[Manager 1]

*“I think we do get more time to do other things that you cannot do with the work that you do. You can time yourself and plan yourself accordingly to say: at this time, this is what I need to be doing.”* [Manager 3]

#### **4.3.4.4 Developing new policies**

Managers received an opportunity to display their creativity in developing first-time policies, which confronted the conditions imposed by the pandemic and any new challenges that arose:

*“Having to be creative in a way that I needed, to ensure that there were policies in place that will now focus on the fact that this is the current situation, and this is what needs to happen, and these are the changes.”* [Manager 2]

### **4.4 Managers’ Adaptation to Teleworking**

This study focused on exploring how SMME managers experienced telework, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the findings give insight into what these managers understand telework to be, their attitude towards teleworking, and whether they perceive it as a convenient way of working or struggle to adapt to it. Furthermore, this study demonstrated the functional approach preferred by managers.

#### **4.4.1 SMME Managers’ Conceptualisation of Telework**

The literature-based definition of telework is discussed in Chapter Two. The managers were asked to define telework for two reasons: i) to identify whether managers in the South African context are familiar with the term, and ii) to gain a South African understanding of teleworking. This study found that most of the managers were more familiar with the term remote working than teleworking. This indicates that ‘telework’ is not a popular term in the South African context; however, the Covid-19 pandemic brought teleworking to the forefront in most South African organisations, as teleworking was predominantly known in the European context and the United States of America, as stated previously. Hence, managers defined remote working in the following manner:

*“Remote working is having the technology to work from home, which is your router or Wi-Fi, whatever it is.” [Manager 1]*

*“Remote working will be working out of the office ... you are virtually connected to the office; that is remote working to me ... because you still need to deliver your daily tasks, and the targets still need to be met.” [Manager 2]*

*“Remote working is where you are working away from your normal office space, be it home or elsewhere, and you use whatever tools that you may use to connect to the office or to do your work, be it your laptop, your router, or any other tool that will make you be able to you know to connect and deliver the work.” [Manager 3]*

The following extract is from a manager who was familiar with the term ‘telework’:

*“I would define it as working virtually through ... being able to connect with your colleagues and have meetings virtually and connecting not just for work.” [Manager 4]*

It is crucial to note that, although ‘telework’ and ‘remote work’ are different terms, they denote one aspect: working outside the office space, using technology to connect with colleagues, and performing work tasks. This is shown by the similarities in the abovementioned definitions. Therefore, from these definitions, it can be seen that South African organisational managers define and understand the concept of teleworking or remote working as: working outside the office environment in a comfortable space, such as at home, using technology such as laptops or computers, and Wi-Fi routers to allow virtual connection to meetings, colleagues, and to complete work activities.

#### **4.4.2 SMME Managers’ Orientation towards Teleworking**

Managers perceive telework as a practice that South African organisations will implement and further elevate in the future. They believe that, apart from the negative aspects, the Covid-19 pandemic taught and introduced a new approach to working that they never imagined possible in this context:

*“It is the future. It is something that organisations are realising that it does work. I also think it is something that works, because people are more productive when they are in that environment.” [Manager 3]*

*“It is a very progressive way of doing work. Because what it allows for [is] a work-life balance. ... Work becomes very flexible, allowing people to spend more time with their families.” [Manager 4]*

Even though telework is considered a convenient way of working, it is emphasised that caution has to be taken when implementing telework, as it:

*“requires maturity. If you know that you have staff that is not mature enough, then it might be a problem. But if you have staff that is mature, it is easy.” [Manager 2]*

This is because employees need to be disciplined in ensuring they are working during the stipulated work hours and not misuse company resources for personal reasons.

#### **4.4.3 The Implementation of a Hybrid Work Environment in SMMEs and Managers’ Preferred Approach to Working**

As the lockdown levels decreased and eventually lifted, some organisations remained operating remotely, others returned to the office full-time, while others implemented a hybrid approach. A hybrid approach is working a few days a week in the office and other days remotely. Managers indicated that implementing the hybrid approach in their SMME was successful. However, they have experienced a few challenges, as mentioned above, but the blended approach proved to be more convenient for them. Below are the managers’ thoughts on adapting to a blended approach:

*“It was implemented successfully. And just a few challenges where you cannot get hold of a certain individual.” [Manager 2]*

*“It was highly successful. I am still working from home; I go to the office when I need to.” [Manager 4]*

Manager 4 emphasised how they were pleased to have experienced the opportunity to work from home, and in turn, acknowledged that this is reciprocated by their employees.

*“We see they are much happier and much more excited about work.” [Manager 4]*

Moreover, managers consider this approach to have improved job satisfaction, as employees work in the environment they prefer, thus increasing employee productivity:

*“They can function better and be able to produce the quality of work that you are looking for in their own space. Also, there will be those that will not want to work when they are in their own space. You can see that diverse types of individuals can adapt to a new working environment and make the best use of it.”* [Manager 2]

Another manager shared that the hybrid approach was successful due to the maturity and unity of their team:

*“I would say it was successful because we have a solid team, in terms of their expertise. Even if I am not here, they will be able to deal with challenges.”* [Manager 3]

Hence, with the successful adaptation of the blended approach, the majority of the managers were in favour of this approach. This emanates from what it awarded them; for example, as parents, they were able to perform domestic duties:

*“I like the hybrid approach. It gives you flexibility as well. As a mom, I would like to be at home to assist the kids with homework or the drop-off that I cannot do when I need to be at work at eight o’clock.”* [Manager 2]

*“Before Covid, for some people, it was just tough to ask for time to do things that are family related.”* [Manager 4]

One of the managers, however, preferred working full-time in the office because they found balancing their work and house chores challenging:

*“There is a lot to do at home. I am just of the opinion that I would rather work in the office environment than work from home.”* [Manager 1]

Furthermore, for organisations it meant they could consider options to reduce the cost of having ample office space, as most employees prefer working away from the office during most days of the week. This will further enable organisations to strive to have reserve capital in case of any unprecedented event, especially if a lockdown had to be implemented again.

#### **4.5 Training and Development Required by SMME Managers During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

This study investigated the required training and development needed for SMME managers to assist them to cope and efficiently lead in the course of this unanticipated adversity. In this regard, resilience was explored, as it proved to be an indispensable trait to organisational leaders. Hence, this study gained insight into the managers' understanding of resilience, the support they received, and their opinion on the type of training they perceive as most essential in a crisis-induced environment.

#### **4.5.1 Managers' Conceptualisation of Resilience and the Importance of Resilience Amongst SMME Leaders**

It was important for the researcher to delve into the aspect of resilience to assess whether the managers know what resilience is and how important it is for leaders. Thus, the managers defined resilience in the following manner:

*"It is having the ability to withstand trauma and stress. It is to be flexible in your thinking, that when you do pull yourself back together again, you are now a brand-new person. I think of a ball: every time you bounce that ball [it] falls, but it rises."*

[Manager 1]

*"A resilient individual is able to bounce back and face whatever challenges they are experiencing, and sometimes they are even coming out stronger than before."*

[Manager 2]

In terms of Manager 2, several people tend to say that they are resilient when they are not. This is the reason for affirming that being resilient means one acts in those challenging moments and is thus able to withstand the pressure. In other words, a resilient individual adapts to the challenge by finding solutions to it and being able to cope efficiently with similar situations in the future:

*"Resilience is the ability to stay on top or to press on, and to be able to go above and beyond and to rise above situations ... and be able to remain focused despite everything that could be happening."* [Manager 3]

*"I would say resilience is the ability to bounce back after adverse situations ... and be able to live a progressive and productive life afterward."* [Manager 4]

Therefore, these SMME managers' definitions of resilience show that they have an in-depth understanding of the concept. Managers recognise that a resilient individual is one who is able to remain composed, surmount the adversity, and continue to perform at their best. Furthermore, these managers regard themselves as resilient individuals and leaders. Hence, they apprehend the importance of being resilient leaders in their organisations. In light of this, the managers shared the following opinions:

*“It will be regarded as a great direction for the business to have resilient leaders, because those leaders will be able to face any challenge that will come their direction. If companies can have resilient leaders after Covid, it will also mean that they are able to come out from that situation.”* [Manager 2]

*“It is imperative because, if you cannot show your staff that you lead by example, then it is not being a leader.”* [Manager 1]

*“You have got to encourage and demonstrate to your team that you are a person that is resilient and able to deal with situations and still hold on. They have got to see you being an example.”* [Manager 3]

In terms of Managers 1 and 3, being a resilient leader means setting a good example for the team to follow. In the time of Covid-19, even though it was a new phenomenon, the employees looked up to their leader to develop solutions and guidelines for them to follow. If leaders do not have control of the situation or cannot assist their team in finding solutions and maintaining their calmness, then the team will mirror this. Consequently, the organisation can lead to closing down operations:

*“Resilience is paramount. You must be able to find your way in situations where you do not have a point of reference, into making profits, and to pick your employees up, and their morale.”* [Manager 4]

The above manager further maintains that, with the outcome of the pandemic, employees have experienced immense trauma after falling ill and enduring the loss of significant people. As a result, it is critical for leaders to also focus on the human factor in paying careful attention to their mental health. Thus, it is understood that being a resilient leader does not constitute only focusing on the organisation's growth, but also on the wellness of the employees, who are the means to the production of the company.

#### **4.5.2 Training and Support Given to SMME Managers During the Pandemic**

To assist managers to better cope with the pandemic, they required a unique type of training and immense support to deal effectively with the adversity. However, it is found that managers did not receive support in terms of the emotional (and practical) considerations involved with the immediate transition to teleworking. As one of the managers explained, the pandemic caught organisations by surprise. In turn, organisations were unable to take the feelings of employees into consideration when adapting to remote working. Therefore, the managers did not receive any leadership training during the pandemic. However, one of the managers maintained she found training received in the previous years of her career helpful in managing the challenges. Below is her response to some of the training she has had:

*“Training that I have had with my previous employers has helped me to be able to deal with all the situations. I have gone for leadership programmes with the Business School - Leadership and Development programme, which was a one-year programme, and other business management courses.”* [Manager 3]

This shows that methods or approaches developed previously are able to assist organisational leaders in finding solutions to the challenges imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Bailey and Breslin (2021) account for already existing models, theories, and approaches that are ideal to be implemented in the Covid-19 pandemic environment for organisations.

#### **4.5.3 Training Required by SMME Managers During a Crisis**

The third study objective was to establish SMME managers' opinions on the training and development programmes required to equip them with the necessary skills to lead during a crisis such as the pandemic. In this regard, as the managers did not receive any training during this period, it made them conscious about the training they would like to have received as managers. According to the managers' experiences, they believed a number of training programmes to be essential during a time of uncertainty; these included: i) emotional intelligence programmes; ii) change management; iii) leadership development in disruptive times; and iv) resilience.

##### ***4.5.3.1 Emotional Intelligence Training***

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on employees' emotional well-being. Thus, leaders must embody a strong and emotionally stable persona in order to be good role models

to their team and also for their mental stability amidst the chaos. *Emotional intelligence* is defined as an individual's ability to comprehend their own emotions and the emotions of others, and to control their emotions so as not to lead to a negative outcome (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2020; Valenti et al., 2021). In line with the stress leaders and employees endured with the pressure of the pandemic, emotional intelligence acts as a means for an individual to resist succumbing easily to stressful external factors (Drigas & Chara, 2020). Hence, emotional intelligence is a fundamental requirement for preserving an individual's mental health. However, this is not to conclude that having a high emotional quotient (EQ) equates to an individual being immune to stress; it solely means that a person is better equipped in terms of their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (Valenti et al., 2021). Moreover, a leader with a high EQ will also be an asset to their employees, by assisting them when they feel overwhelmed to navigate their feelings positively and constructively at the workplace.

#### ***4.5.3.2 Change Management Programmes***

In a time that requires immediate decision-making, and constant changes in organisational models, frameworks, work approaches, and policies, change management plays a pivotal role in assisting managers to develop strategies to make appropriate changes, implement the desired changes, and finally maintain these changes. Additionally, this study finds that change management programmes will elicit innovative thinking amongst organisational leaders, to help them engage continuously in research and to keep informed about the contemporary trends in the global market, as one of the managers maintains below:

*“Innovative thinking training is significant for managers, because it is how you think that needs to change now.”* [Manager 2]

#### ***4.5.3.3 Leadership development in disruptive times***

The pandemic has had an impact on the leadership strategies managers have; thus, this type of training will equip managers with the essential skills to be able to lead in highly adverse circumstances. Managers suggest that this form of leadership development can include scenario planning. For example, in a scenario where there is loadshedding and the organisation's technical systems are destroyed, how can vital information be restored? Manager 4 states the following:

*“You need programmes that will teach you to navigate through uncertainty, for example, catastrophic floods, those types of things that we do not normally address ...*

*let alone the loadshedding or if we were to wake up and every backup you have in the business is gone.” [Manager 4]*

#### **4.5.3.3 Resilience training programmes**

In this study, resilience training is recognised as the most valuable training required:

*“Attending the Resilience Leadership course is an important one. Furthermore, I consider it being excellent training for managers to attend.” [Manager 2]*

*“I think resilience training programmes are very important for many managers in an organisation, because you have got to be equipped and empowered with the skills to do this.” [Manager 3]*

Importantly, resilience acts as a mechanism to reduce the development of mental illness in individuals and increase their well-being. Hence, in light of adversity, resilience is perceived to restore order (Kaye-Kauderer et al., 2021). Moreover, resilience must be understood as a communal condition; in other words, the resilience levels of an individual are highly influenced by the availability of resources and access to external support (Kaye-Kauderer et al., 2021). Therefore, in enhancing resilience amongst managers, the organisation should ensure that there are resources available for managers, and that support is provided. However, support is broad, and it also relates to support received from friends and families. Therefore, it is emphasised that an individual with high resilience levels is most likely to have an efficient support system and, thus, is better equipped to cope with occupational stress and challenging conditions.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

This study aimed to report on and explore SMME managers’ experiences with working under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings discussed in this chapter illustrate the impact that the pandemic has had on the role of managers, and the challenges and opportunities they have experienced. The study also assessed the managers’ understanding of the vital concepts related to dealing with the pandemic in an organisational context, such as teleworking and resilience, and thus, provided an indigenous understanding of these concepts. Moreover, this chapter presented the training and developmental needs of SMME managers: emotional intelligence programmes, change management training, the development of leaders

in disruptive times, and resilience training. The next chapter will summarise the study findings and limitations, and present recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This concluding chapter summarises the study's key findings in terms of SMME managers' experiences with teleworking during the pandemic. Additionally, the limitations are included; thereafter, the contributions are detailed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

#### **5.2 Summary of Findings**

The summary of the key findings as they relate to the study objectives is provided below.

##### **5.2.1 SMME Managers' Experiences with the Covid-19 Pandemic and Teleworking**

The study revealed that the conditions imposed by the pandemic disrupted the role of SMME managers. The Contingency Theory of Management (2010) was supported by the findings, that how a person leads is influenced by the internal and external factors impacting on them. However, the managers' leadership style, in which they identified themselves as democratic leaders, was not affected. They continued to collaborate with employees during decision-making, primarily seeking solutions to challenges they were confronted with. In turn, managers acknowledged that employees were more engaging and less resistant to the changes required.

However, due to the changes brought about by the pandemic, managers had to adjust their manner of engagement. For example, communication had to be improved, as most communication moved to online platforms. In addition, they were required to be more patient and empathetic towards their employees, due to the traumatic experiences of losing close members to the coronavirus and those recovering from the severe symptoms of the virus. Moreover, managers also required the organisation to be more supportive towards them, as they were also experiencing similar emotional trauma. In addition, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic required managers to implement various changes within the organisation to deal with the challenges presented. Thus, their roles entailed being transformational leaders, in that managers had to create workplace policies which accommodated teleworking.

In addition, the managers struggled to manage remotely and cope with their family duties, due to the phenomenon of working remotely being reasonably new to South African employees, and adaptation did not occur immediately. Therefore, managers working remotely experienced an increase in their leadership responsibilities, making it difficult to focus on their professional responsibilities. Managers as leaders had to work alongside other SMME leaders to deal with the pandemic conditions, and with teleworking, the SMME manager participants noticed differences in leadership styles. The managers' perspectives revealed that some organisational Chief Executive Officers and Chief Financial Officers held an authoritative leadership style, meaning that they preferred being in control of things and initially resisted employees working from home. This came as a challenge when decisions had to be made. These leaders were also not trusting that employees would maintain their optimum performance. Hence, managers created teleworking policies that allowed organisational leaders to retain control. Moreover, it was revealed that the participants perceived that those with an authoritative leadership style were males. This suggested gender differences in leadership style.

Managers also experienced employees being unavailable when being contacted during work hours while working from home. This emanates from employees being occupied with personal matters during these hours, such as household chores or parenting duties, including fetching children from school. Occasionally, employees were unavailable because of their emotional well-being; they experienced grief from the loss of significant people and required psychological assistance because their emotional state affected their productivity in work tasks.

Furthermore, managers expressed concerns that the organisation's resources, such as laptops and Wi-Fi routers, were being misused, and employees were also using these resources for personal use. In turn, no guiding policy stipulated the procedures managers could adhere to with teleworking issues. Another factor was loadshedding; managers asserted that loadshedding disrupts production, work, and virtual meetings. Additionally, due to South Africa being a socially and economically unequal context, some areas (i.e., rural areas) do not have a strong network connection because they do not have network towers within their locality. In light of this, they occasionally experienced challenges connecting and completing their work.

The advantage gained by SMME managers amidst this time of uncertainty was spending less time travelling to work. This enabled managers to save petrol and time. Working from home taught managers how to balance their professional and personal life; being parents, they found it convenient to work in the comfort of their own homes, as it allowed them the luxury to spend more time with their children and attend their school events (i.e., sports matches, award days). Hence, they preferred the hybrid approach. However, one of the managers preferred being in the office full-time. In this regard, they could be more focused on their work and were subjected to fewer distractions to avoid being regarded as underperforming and unprofessional. Managers were provided with an opportunity to be creative in developing new policies suitable for remote working, which assisted in managing situations that may arise in this new environment. As managers became more empathetic towards their employees, they experienced growth amongst their team, as they continuously worked collaboratively in developing solutions. There was a sense of collegiality, and support was developed within the team.

### **5.2.2 SMME Managers' Understanding of Teleworking**

SMME managers were unfamiliar with the term 'teleworking', which indicated that telework as a work approach was not widely practised in South Africa before the Covid-19 pandemic. However, SMME managers' definition of remote working, a term they were more familiar with, revealed that they understood the fundamentals of the working-from-home construct. For example, they understood that remote working entails working outside the office in an environment the employee finds comfortable and is equipped with the necessary tools, such as laptops or computers and Wi-Fi routers, to complete their work. Moreover, managers comprehended that teleworking in the South African context requires improvement in ensuring that the required resources are made available for it to be implemented permanently. It also requires employees to be skilled in using the tools and be mature in remaining disciplined to adhere to policies.

### **5.2.3 Training and Development Requirements of SMME Managers During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

In order to have the capacity to cope with the changes imposed by the pandemic, in this study, resilience was a fundamental trait evident amongst SMME managers. They were not consumed by the pressure of the challenges experienced. They perceived resilience as a powerful tool for organisational leaders. It allowed them to adequately assess the challenge,

develop solutions, continue to improve the situation, and better cope with similar circumstances in the future. Resilience is a progressive process rather than a once-off mechanism, known as adaptive post-crisis resilience (Barasa et al., 2018). Hence, managers believed that resilience enabled them to readapt to their normal state and assist their team in remaining calm under overwhelming circumstances. Barton et al., (2020) acknowledge that resilient leaders can adequately control challenges encountered in adverse circumstances, thus resulting in continued productivity and performance within the organisation.

The managers did not receive training during the pandemic, as organisations primarily focused on the safety of their employees and the continuation of the work while employees worked from home. One of the managers asserted that training they had previously received in their career proved beneficial during the pandemic. For example, they had participated in training such as leadership and development programmes and management courses. These programmes equipped the manager with the necessary skills that assisted them in finding solutions to challenges presented by the pandemic. Additionally, these strategies were combined with new techniques they developed to better cope in a pandemic-infused environment. Moreover, this confirmed statements by Bailey and Breslin (2021) that models, theories, and approaches developed previously can be utilised in assisting organisational leaders in implementing solutions during and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Included in the training for organisational leaders which SMME managers regarded as essential during volatile and uncertain times was emotional intelligence programmes. The managers maintained that such programmes would equip them with competencies that would allow them not to submit readily to stress and assist their team in coping in stressful environments. In other words, a high emotional quotient is an attribute allowing managers to constructively navigate their emotions in the workplace, resulting in positive outcomes; for example, it can reduce occupational stress.

The Covid-19 pandemic required leaders who could effectively implement the necessary changes in their organisations to avoid business failure; this indicates the importance of change management training. The changes required in organisations during the pandemic were unique and different from changes implemented previously; hence, adjustments must be made in change management programmes to fit the magnitude of changes imposed in organisations in severely adverse circumstances. This further led managers to recommend

training programmes for leadership development in disruptive times. According to managers, this form of training is necessary for situation-specific scenarios that are most likely to occur during a crisis, such as severe loadshedding that has the potential to damage systems that store crucial data. They focused on what action would need to be taken if they were to lose big data due to the damage and how they would be able to retrieve it. Additionally, this form of training entails assisting managers with their current situations and future events that pose a massive threat to the organisation.

Lastly, resilience training is paramount to SMME managers during a crisis. Resilience training involves providing the necessary resources to leaders to enable them to cope with the challenges they are facing and feel supported in pressured times (Cooke et al., 2019). In light of this, a resilient leader is less likely to be prone to mental illnesses and can maintain a stable mental well-being (Zhang et al., 2022).

### **5.3 Study Limitations**

This study was qualitative research; thus, the findings cannot be generalised to managers' experiences at different SMMEs. This is because qualitative research is primarily rooted in understanding the participants' experiences, and human experiences are subjective to an individual. However, the findings of this study were able to provide an in-depth understanding of the SMME managers' experiences with teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic and also provide valuable insight that was lacking in the literature that focuses on the impact of the pandemic on SMMEs, especially in the South African context.

The sample of the study consisted of females. In this case, since the study was exploring managers' experiences, it is most likely that males in managerial roles would have different opinions and experiences from their female counterparts. The study found that female leaders reported a democratic leadership style and enjoyed the benefits of teleworking as they could spend more time with their children.

The study was conducted when the country was experiencing drastic loadshedding; hence, one of the scheduled interviews was interrupted by a network disruption, as the interviews were held online. In this instance, the researcher rescheduled the interview. Thus, the remaining interviews were scheduled in this manner to avoid disruptions.

#### **5.4 Contributions**

The study contributes significantly to the growth of research in SMME managers' experiences with the Covid-19 pandemic in the South African context. The approach of teleworking was commonly known in the European and American contexts. Thus, the findings of this study include the intriguing insight that teleworking was an unfamiliar term to SMME managers, although they understood the concept. As a result, the definition of teleworking provided by managers enabled a definition solely based on the understanding of South Africans. It further contributes to South African literature, as it predominantly adopted a European elucidation of the term.

The importance of training and developing SMME managers in times of adversity is emphasised in the study. Therefore, the study findings inform SMMEs on the type of interventions that are crucial to be implemented for managers during the Covid-19 pandemic or in other times of crisis or adversity.

#### **5.5 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, future research should consider increasing the sample by recruiting managers from different SMMEs (i.e., manufacturing, transport SMMEs, etc.). This will assist in assessing if there are differences in managers' experiences depending on the type of SMME they lead.

Further research is needed to establish the differences in the experiences with teleworking and managing from home in terms of different genders, as gender role stereotypes are salient in organisations (Wang et al., 2013). It is assumed that males possess a leadership style that prefers to have control and that they are against working from home. However, the female managers in this study favoured teleworking as it allowed them to be flexible with their work and spending more time with their family. In society it is expected for women to enjoy spending more time at home as they must take care of their children, given that they are perceived as nurturers (Vu et al., 2019). Consequently, this is a continuous challenge for professional women who are mothers. In turn, further research on this will give insight if different genders are associated with particular leadership styles, and which work approach is preferred by male managers. Moreover, if there are significant differences between women who are mothers and those who are not, and those who have caregivers to look after their children while they focus on work. Therefore, this exploration will further give evidence to

the foundations of the Contingency Theory of Management (2010), that leaders are influenced by the situation they are faced with.

There needs to be more literature focusing on digitalisation in SMMEs and the adaptation of telework in developing countries. More importantly, in the South African context, the impact of the availability of energy resources and disruptions caused by loadshedding during teleworking needs to be assessed. Therefore, findings from this research area will enable mechanisms to be developed. For example, research should explore how information communication and technology systems can be improved to combat the effect of these factors in teleworking.

Moreover, further exploration is required of SMME managers' training during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. This will equip managers with the necessary skills to cope with future adverse events.

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## APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



24 August 2022

**Akhonamandla Gumede (217052918)**  
School of Applied Human Sc  
Howard College

Dear A Gumede,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00003730/2021

**Project title:** Navigating the new normal: Small medium and micro enterprise managers lived experiences with telework during the coronavirus pandemic in South Africa

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 29 November 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. 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.**

This approval is valid until 24 August 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Newville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Research Participant

My name is Akhonamandla Gumede, an Industrial and Organisational Psychology Master's student from the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Howard College campus.

You are being invited to consider participating in a research study titled, *“Navigating the new normal: Small, medium, and micro enterprise managers’ experiences with teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa”*. The aim and purpose of this study is to explore SMME managers’ experiences with teleworking during the coronavirus pandemic. The duration of the interview, should you choose to enrol and remain in the study, is expected to be 45 minutes to an hour long, on a scheduled date convenient for you. This study is not funded by any organisation or individual; it is done to satisfy the requirements for my degree.

In addition to the above information, the following should be noted about this study:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. Hence, you have a choice to participate or not to participate, and to stop participating in the research, and you will not be penalised for taking such an action.
- The interview will take place over an online platform, in respect to reducing the risk of Covid-19 infection.
- Should there be any contingencies (i.e., loadshedding, internet, or network connection issues), the interview will continue using other methods such as telephonically or in extreme cases rescheduled to a suitable time and date.
- The interview will be recorded to assist the researcher in the transcribing stages.
- Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- The recording as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After five years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed of by shredding and burning.

- Please note that there will be no form of reward or compensation if you choose to participate in this research.
- If you agree to participate, please sign the consent form attached to this sheet.
- 

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: **HSSREC/00003730/2021**).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions, you may contact the researcher:

- email: [REDACTED]
- contact number: [REDACTED].

or research supervisor: Dr Zandile Madlabana-Luthuli

- email: [REDACTED]
- contact number: 031 260 8389.

or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

- email: [REDACTED]
- telephone contact- 031 260 3587/8350

### APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM

I ..... (Full names of participant) have been informed about the study titled, *“Navigating the new normal: Small, medium, and micro enterprise managers’ experiences with teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa”* by Akhonamandla Gumede.

1. I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.
2. I have been informed about who I can contact in case I encounter any problems or questions during my participation in the study.
3. I understand that I will be given an opportunity to obtain answers to questions about the study to my satisfaction.
4. I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without any consequences to me.
5. I have been informed that the interview will take place over an online platform. Additionally, in an event of any contingency, the interview can continue using other methods or be rescheduled to a convenient time and date for me.
6. I hereby consent to have this interview recorded.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

For questions related to the study	For your rights as a research participant
<p><b>Researcher:</b> Akhonamandla Gumede            Email: [REDACTED]            Cell: [REDACTED]  <b>Research Supervisor:</b>            Dr Zandile Madlabana-Luthuli            Email: [REDACTED]            Tel: 031 260 8389</p>	<p>UKZN Humanities &amp; Social Sciences            Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC)            Email: [REDACTED]            Tel: 031 260 3587/8350</p>

-----  
**Signature of Participant**

-----  
**Date**

-----

**Signature of Witness**

-----

**Date**

## **APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

- LEADERSHIP STYLE
  1. Can you please describe your personality to me?
  2. How would you describe your leadership style?
  3. Is your leadership style consistent throughout every situation or is there a difference? Kindly explain.
  
- IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC
  4. Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way you are used to leading?
  5. What are some of the management-based challenges or constraints you are experiencing during the pandemic?
  6. What steps have you taken to deal with these constraints?
  7. What would you say is the best way to lead during an event such as a crisis (pandemic)?
  8. What are some of the opportunities you have had during the pandemic as a manager?
  9. What support do you give to your staff during this time?
  
- TELEWORKING
  10. How would you describe 'teleworking' or 'remote working'?
  11. What is your attitude or thoughts towards teleworking?
  12. Were there any challenges for the organisation and you as a leader to adapt to teleworking?
  13. In your opinion, what opportunities has working from home presented for the organisation and you as a leader?
  14. How successful was the implementation of a blended approach (i.e., three days working from home, two days at the office or vice versa) in your organisation?
  15. What is your experience with managing staff remotely?
  
- RESILIENCE
  16. In your own words, how would you define resilience?
  17. Do you consider yourself to be resilient?
  18. In your opinion, how important is resilience to leaders or managers of your organisation? Explain.

19. Is there any management-based training you have received, to help you lead during a crisis (pandemic)?
20. What type of assistance (training and development) do you think is needed by managers in order to cope with the changes brought by the pandemic?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion?

Thank you for your time, enjoy the rest of your day.