

**THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF REMOTE WORKING
ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AT AN ODeL
INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING**

By

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DECLARATION

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Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila, at this moment, declares that this thesis is titled:

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25/07/2025

.....
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DATE

DEDICATION

My roots run deep as I pave the way for my generation to blossom. I am anchored to the spirit of Black excellence, my late Grandmother, Mother, and Daughter.

May their beautiful souls rest in eternal peace!

Jeremiah 29:11

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ABSTRACT – ENGLISH

The global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic restrictions affected traditional face-to-face, physical office presence service provision, necessitating a shift to online remote work supported by technology. A shift that significantly transformed operations, and service delivery. The primary aim of this article is to investigate the effectiveness of remote working as a sustainable model for executing service delivery in a post-COVID-19 world. Exploring both scholarly and literature on to enhance and support continuous service delivery, upholding financial sustainability and the resilience of institutions in the aftermath of the pandemic. The secondary aim is to assess how institutions have adapted to remote working, its impact on productivity, employee well-being, stakeholder satisfaction, the development of technological infrastructure and conducive remote working environments. Using a mixed-methods research design, qualitative interviews were conducted with the human resources departmental heads as well as online quantitative questionnaires were distributed amongst the academic staff, administrative staff and students at the institution of higher learning. The study revealed the gaps that exist in the educational environment at open institutions of higher learning, where service provision and service delivery were altered from traditional physical presence, face-to-face, in a physical office environment, to working remotely supported by technology. The study also revealed the challenges brought by the pandemic in the working environment, employee engagements, communication, productivity, performance management, evaluation methods, and institutional effectiveness. Analysing both benefits and challenges of remote working, this study aims to provide insights into optimising performance strategies. To develop a remote working framework policy and advocate for student support in online environments highlight the importance of effective communication, the role of technology in facilitating performance assessments and the need for adaptive management strategies to support remote employees. The study concludes with recommendations for the development of a remote working framework to manage and evaluate remote working performance. Enhancing the evaluation and assessment of operations output in remote working settings, ensuring that ODeL institutions can maintain high standards of online education, service delivery, and operational efficiency.

Keywords: *Remote working, COVID-19 pandemic, Virtual workforce, ODeL. Work from home, and performance management*

TSHOBOKANYO – SETSWANA

Dithibelo tsa leroborobo la lefatshe lotlhe la coronavirus (COVID-19) di amile tlamelo ya tirelo ya sefatlhego le sefatlhego, ya go nna teng mo ofising, mme seno sa dira gore go tlhokege gore go fetogelwe kwa tirong e e dirwang kwa kgakala ya inthanete e e tshegediwang ke thekenoloji. Phetogo e e fetotseng thata ditiro, le thebolo ya ditirelo. Maikaelelo a konokono a athikele eno ke go batlisisa ka katlego ya go dira o le kgakala jaaka sekao se se tsweleng pele sa go diragatsa thebolo ya ditirelo mo lefatsheng la morago ga COVID-19. Go sekaseka bobedi barutegi le dikwalo ka ga go tokafatsa le go tshegetsisa thebolo ya ditirelo e e tsweleng, go tshegetsisa tswelisopele ya matlole le go itsetsepela ga ditheo morago ga leroborobo. Maikaelelo a bobedi ke go sekaseka ka fao ditheo di tlwaetseng go dira kwa kgakala, khuetso ya yona mo ntshodikunong, itekanelo ya badiri, kgotsafalo ya bannaleseabe, tlhabololo ya mafaratlhatlha a thekenoloji le mafelo a a siametseng go dira kwa kgakala. Ka go dirisa thulaganyo ya patlisiso ya mekgwa e e tlhakaneng, go ne ga dirwa dipotsolotso tsa boleng le ditlhogo tsa mafapha a tsa badiri mmogo le go anamisiwa ga dipampiri tsa dipotso tsa dipalopalo tsa mo inthaneteng mo gare ga badiri ba thuto, badiri ba botsamaisi le baithuti kwa setheong sa thutogodimo. Thutopatlisiso e senotse diphatlha tse di leng teng mo tikologong ya thuto kwa ditheong tse di bulegileng tsa thutogodimo, koo tlamelo ya ditirelo le thebolo ya ditirelo di neng tsa fetolwa go tswa mo go nneng teng ga tlwaelo ka namana, sefatlhego le sefatlhego, mo tikologong ya ofisi ya mmatota, go ya go go bereka o le kgakala o tshegediwa ke thekenoloji. Thutopatlisiso e senotse gape dikgwetlho tse di tlisitsweng ke leroborobo mo tikologong ya tiro, go nna le seabe ga badiri, tlhaeletsano, ntshodikuno, taolo ya tiragatso, mekgwa ya tshekatsheko, le go dira sentle ga setheo. Go sekaseka melemo le dikgwetlho tsa go dira o le kgakala, thutopatlisiso eno e ikaeletse go tlamela ka dintlha tsa go tokafatsa maano a go dira. Go tlhama pholisi ya letlhomeso la go dira kwa kgakala le go buelela tshegetso ya baithuti mo ditikologong tsa mo inthaneteng go tlhagisa botlhokwa jwa tlhaeletsano e e nang le matswela, seabe sa thekenoloji mo go tlhofofatseng ditshekatsheko tsa tiragatso le tlhokego ya maano a botsamaisi a fetofetogang go tshegetsisa badiri ba ba kwa kgakala. Thutopatlisiso e konela ka dikgakololo tsa go tlhama letlhomeso la go dira kwa kgakala go laola le go sekaseka tiragatso ya go dira kwa kgakala. Go tokafatsa tshekatsheko le tlhatlhobo ya dipholo tsa ditiro mo mafelong a go dira a a kgakala, go netefatsa gore ditheo tsa ODeL di ka

tshegetsa maemo a a kwa godimo a thuto ya inthanete, thebolo ya ditirelo, le bokgoni jwa go dira.

Mafoko a botlhokwa: *Go bereka o le kgakala, leroborobo la COVID-19, Badiri ba mo inthaneteng, ODeL. Tiro o le kwa gae, le taolo ya tiragatso*

SIFINYEZO– NDEBELE

Imikhawulo yomkhuhlane we-corona (COVID-19) ephasini loke ithinte ukuhlinzekwa kweenkonzo zokuqalana ubuso nobuso, ukuba khona ehhovisini, okwenza bona kutlhogeke ukutjhugulukela emsebenzini we-inthanethi osekelwa yithekhnoloji. Itjhuguluko elitjhugulule khulu imisebenzi, nokulethwa kweenkonzo. Umnqopho omkhulu wale-atikili kuphenya ukusebenza kuhle kokusebenza kude njengendlela esimemeko yokufeza ukulethwa kweenkonzo ephasini ngemva kwe-COVID-19. Ukuhlolisisa zombili izazi nemitlolo ukuthuthukisa nokusekela ukulethwa kweenkonzo okuragela phambili, ukusekela ukusimama kwezezimali nokuqina kwamaziko ngemva kobhubhane. Umnqopho wesibili kukuhlola bona iinkhungo zitjhuguluke njani ekusebenzeni ukude, umthelela wakho ekukhiqizeni, ukuphila kuhle kwabasebenzi, ukwaneliseka kwabathintekako, ukuthuthukiswa kwesakhiwo sethekhnoloji kanye neendawo ezifaneleko zokusebenza ukude. Ngokusebenzisa umklamo weendlela ezihlangeneko zokwenza irhubhululo, kwenziwa iintjumayelo zekhwalthi neenhloko zomnyango wezabasebenzi begodu namaphepha wemibuzo we-inthanethi asabalaliswe hlangana nabasebenzi bezefundo, abasebenzi bokuphatha nabafundi esikhungweni semfundo ephakemeko. Irhubhululo liveze iinkhala ezikhona endaweni yefundo eenkhungweni ezivulekileko zefundo ephakemeko, lapho ukunikelwa kweenkonzo nokulethwa kweenkonzo kwatjhugululwa ukusuka ekubeni khona ngokwesiko, ubuso nobuso, endaweni ye-ofisi ebonakalako, ukuya ekusebenzeni ukude kusekelwe yithekhnoloji. Irhubhululo libuye laveza iintjhijilo ezilethwe bulwelwe lobu endaweni yokusebenza, ukuzibandakanya kwabasebenzi, ukukhulumisana, ukukhiqiza, ukulawulwa kokusebenza, iindlela zokuhlola, nokusebenza kuhle kwesikhungo. Ukuhlaziya zombili iinzuzo neentjhijilo zokusebenza ukude, irhubhululo leli lihlose ukunikela ilwazi lokuthuthukisa amaqhinga wokusebenza. Ukuthuthukisa umthethomgomo wohlaka lokusebenza ukude nokukhuthaza ukusekelwa kwabafundi eendaweni ze-inthanethi kuveza ukuqakatheka kokukhulumisana okuphumelelako, indima yethekhnoloji ekusizeni ukuhlolwa kokusebenza kanye nesidingo samaqhinga wokulawula atjhugulukako ukusekela abasebenzi abakude. Irhubhululo liphetha ngeencomo zokuthuthukisa ihlelo lokusebenza ukude ukulawula nokuhlola ukusebenza kokusebenza ukude. Ukuthuthukisa ukuhlolwa nokuhlolwa kwemiphumela yokusebenza eendaweni zokusebenza ezikude, ukuqinisekisa bona

iinkhongo ze-ODeL zingagcina amazinga aphezulu wefundo ye-inthanethi, ukulethwa kweenkonzo, nokusebenza kuhle.

Amagama aqakathekileko: *Ukusebenza kude, ubhubhane lwe-COVID-19, abasebenzi be-Virtual, i-ODeL. Ukusebenza ekhaya, nokuphathwa kokusebenza*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

4IR:	Fourth Industrial Revolution
CDC:	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
COVID-19:	Coronavirus disease
DEASA:	Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (RSA)
DEI:	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
DSAR:	Department of Student Administration and Registration
FWAs:	Flexible work arrangements
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
HR:	Human Resources
HRIS:	Human resources information system
HRM:	Human resource management
ICT:	Information and Communications Technology
IPMS:	Integrated Performance Management Systems
KMS:	Knowledge Management System
M&D:	Masters & Doctoral
NCIRD:	National Centre for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases
NHS:	National Health Service
ODeL:	Open distance and e-learning
ODL:	Open distance learning
PG:	Postgraduate
PGAD:	Post Graduate Administration Department
RSA:	Republic of South Africa
SADC:	Southern African Development Community
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goal
SRC:	Student Representative Council
UG:	Undergraduate
UNISA:	University of South Africa
VUCA:	Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous/ Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility
WFH:	Work from home
WHO:	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) reshaped the global working world, necessitating a new way of conducting operations, delivering services, overseeing daily business, and restructuring business functionalities within institutions of higher learning. The World Health Organisation (hereafter referred to as WHO) declared a lockdown and implemented various restrictions to prevent the spread of the pandemic (Shah & Farrow, 2020). During the lockdown, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a swift shift in business operations from conventional methods to remote online working. The pandemic caught the world unprepared and brought the realisation that no situation lasts forever. The pandemic challenged everything that was known, and existing skills became obsolete.

Moralo and Graupner (2022) state that although the pandemic seems to be under control and restrictions continue to be relaxed, uncertainties persist across industries and among the workforces. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (hereafter referred to as Smart) technology has been introduced and applied as enterprise solutions that changed the way we work and manage the workforce (Breux, Melissa, Dvorsky, Marsh, Green, Cash, Delshad, Buchen, Langberg & Becker, 2021). There was a shift necessitated by the pandemic lockdown, changing service delivery from the traditional office-bound workforce to working remotely anywhere, supported by technology.

Carmela, Brunetta, Capo, and Heideveld (2020) studied the management of performance in a simulated domain, with results showing the need for industries to embrace the challenges brought by the pandemic by adapting to appropriate performance management mechanisms. This adaptation necessitated the move from the traditional employee contract, adjusting to the new way of conducting business, and aligning business needs and priorities. Institutions of higher learning at various levels across the globe were not spared from the effects and consequences brought by the pandemic. Institutions had to relook at ways of providing education and developing new work plans. The occurrence of COVID-19 caused significant changes

to the workplace worldwide, resulting from pandemic lockdowns, restrictions, and all other mechanisms implemented to contain the spread of the pandemic. These restrictive regulations meant the organisation had to change from physical office presence to working remotely (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). This was regarded as a rapid move to a predominantly virtual world and workforce. Service delivery such as student administration, online education, and online evaluation in institutions of higher education, was impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions globally, including the new reality of finding new ways of managing performance for remote working (Dison, 2022).

1.2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Wheatley (2021) asserts that COVID-19 has transformed the way work is performed. The new focus is on the organisation's purpose and strategy, sharing creative ideas and productive tools to help optimise output and make business more rewarding. The dawn of the pandemic imposed and accelerated the implementation of technology in institutions of higher learning. Wheatley (2021) confirms that COVID-19 has necessitated the rapid move to a predominantly virtual workforce. The need to develop new policies and undertake policy evaluations in a variety of contexts to determine their feasibility and the possibility of adopting internal policies relating to procedural structures is emphasised (Bonometti, Sacchi, Stobbiones, Lauritano, Tamiazzo et al., 2020). Workflows within institutions, management strategies, as well as new communication platforms and strategies to manage performance, were essential to adapt to the change. The study offers an understanding of the new phenomenon introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, known as the "new normal", a concept that entails working remotely or working from home.

Studies have revealed the need for educational institutions to embrace the new changes and build capacity to improve the worker's relationship with technology. In so doing, it would ensure the continuity of services and achievement of expected performance and institutional goals (Tang, Yu, Veeraraghavan, Kaldor, Michelson, Kooburat, Anbudurai, Clark, Gogia, Cheng, and Christensen, 2020). The phenomenon of change is gaining importance in daily work and personal life, highlighting the reality that change is constant, and organisations need to change as operations within

organisations adapt to the new normal. Employers and employees must work more closely together to address and manage uncertainty and performance expectations.

Institutions of higher learning are protecting their reputation by avoiding risks, embracing remote working, and fostering a culture of virtual work amid unprecedented life events. It is critical to understand how organisations that aim to address social and environmental problems contribute to fostering sustainability transformations through the economic market structures. García-Peñalvo (2020) purports that managers are confronted with the need to plan and embrace new strategies for managing operations and performance in the new reality of remote working.

There is a significant shift in how institutions work to create a more responsive workforce from an office-bound environment to a remote workforce. Carpenter (2021) indicates that as organisations continue to make decisions to adapt to the changes brought by COVID-19, businesses should also consider the fact that employees are dealing with acclimatising to the new way of conducting operations. Additionally, employees are dealing with new prospects, namely remoteness, working away from their extended support networks, and importantly, balancing their daily work and family life as well as building new relationships and collaborations online.

Baumgartner, Kunkes, Clark, Brady, Monte, Singh, Wahler Jr. and Chen (2020) reports that over the past several years, employers have been in constant consultation with employees, guiding employees to work in such a way that they become an agile workforce, shifting the entire team from office presence to working from anywhere outside a traditional office setting. Carpenter, Wyman & Marsh (2021) argue that online working is not a new concept within organisations, and therefore it needs to be viewed as a new normal and the future of work. The new normal is characterised by flexibility in work operations, self-management, working hours, and virtual connectivity to keep employees connected, engaged, and aligned with the mandate of the institutions (Young-McCaughan, 2023). The restrictions brought about by the pandemic therefore demand a professional workforce that has good work ethics, and can collaborate virtually to foster good relationships, thereby contributing to improved institutional performance.

Regulations that were implemented for surveillance and control of notifiable medical conditions stipulated that the COVID-19 lockdown included interprovincial restrictions on movement between provinces, and a total shutdown of businesses, schools, and institutions of higher learning (Wagenaar & Burris, 2013). During a global crisis where all industries are affected, it is the education sector that is the most affected as students and faculty frantically try to maintain their educational programme through these uncertain times (Sebayang & Sebayang, 2020). Besides the shifting of educational courses to the online platform or hybrid approaches, there is a need to be mindful of the impact that such changes have on students. With newfound ways of learning, new online environments, and new teaching methods, students are greatly impacted by the changing face of education.

The restrictions stated in the amended National Health Act adversely affected the service delivery of organisations, businesses, and institutions. Subsequently, some of the restrictions were eased in 2021 and 2022 (Ramakumar & Priyadarshini, 2021). The WHO reports that the COVID-19 virus continues to manifest itself, constantly changing through mutation, and sometimes these mutations result in new variants of the virus. Some variants emerge and disappear, while others persist (Wang et al., 2021). New variants will continue to emerge due to ongoing viral threats, and global and national restrictions will persist to control the spread of the virus. As a result, organisations must rethink traditional operations, adopt best practices, follow emerging trends, and effectively manage remote workers.

The world has experienced an incredible transformation to remote working, resulting from lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic. Feedback from the National Health Service (hereafter referred to as NHS) Staff Survey revealed that employees across the globe were significantly more productive after transitioning to remote work (Van der Westhuizen et al., 2020). Moving forward, there is a need to develop an effective remote work-from-home strategy that adapts organisations to move from an office-based workforce to working remotely (Wheatley, 2021). The open-distance e-learning institution (hereafter referred to as ODeL) is characterised by physical walk-ins where students depend on administrative support staff to guide them through the processes of the institution, and academic staff. Additionally, students rely on face-to-face contact to manage and pursue their teaching and learning experiences.

Institutions use corporate communications strategies to convey their messages coherently. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) represents an era of innovation in technology, enhancing human-machine relationships, unlocking new market opportunities, digitalising, and accelerating growth globally. In the 21st Century, technology manages and controls huge volumes of knowledge, data acquisition, and obtains information, and encourages relationship building between humans and machines. This empowers institutions to cooperate with the necessary stakeholders (Burton et al., 2002).

Cascio (2006) states that there is an additional challenge brought by remote working known as hybrid teams, where organisations have some employees working from offices while some employees work remotely. Misclassification can result in severe consequences for institutions. Not only can it lead to hefty penalties and potential litigation, but it may also cause deregistration or even force the institutions to shut down. Mitchell et al. (2021) suggest that beyond the pandemic, the use of virtual environments to communicate, the digitalisation of processes, online service provision, and the implementation of 4IR and AI are now a regular feature of remote working environments. Smart working has compelled employees to integrate and balance their personal lives with their professional day-to-day work lives. Employees successfully transformed their homes into workspaces to embrace the co-existence of home, social, and work life, deal with unexpected challenges, tackle connectivity challenges, and address the presence of other family members (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021).

Accommodating a hybrid model is achieved by dividing the total number of working weeks into office-bound days and home-bound days to ensure that this arrangement is beneficial to both the employee and employer. The hybrid model means an overhaul of processes and procedures in organisations and a review of recruitment processes. Organisations should attract and recruit appropriately skilled personnel as well as develop processes that will adapt to required changes (McHenry et al., 2021). Employee training and development are essential to develop an understanding of how remote working teams should perform. The entire world is confronted with new encounters that require a new understanding to manage the effects of the pandemic, currently and in the future (Reizer, Brender-Ilan & Sheaffer, 2019). To keep up with

information technology developments, the implementation and utilisation of technology-driven processes, and digitalisation of service delivery, especially in the education environment, plans should be developed to ensure service delivery to citizens within public universities.

Despite the aforesaid, the current situation at work highlights that remote working encourages trained and skilled workers, capacity building, and the existence of a global talent pool is essential for employers to tap into. The hybrid system offers flexibility for employees to work from anywhere and at any time (Dyer & Shepherd, 2021). Adapting to this hybrid mode and its requirements necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of organisational processes, a thorough review of documentation to meet appointment criteria, and a re-evaluation of team workflows. Institutions should attract and recruit the right kind of people, bearing in mind that these processes take time (McHenry et al., 2021). The new global challenge is to understand and manage this pandemic. Similarly, South Africa is striving to keep up with advancements in information technology. These efforts include implementing and utilising technology-driven processes and digitalising service delivery, particularly within the education sector and institutions focused on Internationalisation in Higher Education.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The global shift toward remote working has significantly impacted operations and structures in ODeL institutions. This review explores existing literature on the perceived effects of remote work on performance management, with a focus on ODeL institutions. Remote working in higher education has seen accelerated adoption due to technological advancements and global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Wheatley (2021:19) confirms that COVID-19 has necessitated the rapid move to a predominantly virtual workforce. In reaction to the pandemic, ODeL institutions pushed to develop and implement innovative strategies, teaching and learning methods, and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to enhance operations because staff at ODeL institutions had to perform their work remotely (Kopnina, 2020). SDGs presented the challenge of how to evaluate the performance of those teams who are working remotely rather than those working in the workplace.

One of the central themes in the literature is the perception of productivity among remote workers. Studies such as Bloom et al. (2021) have shown that remote work can increase productivity due to fewer office distractions and more flexible schedules. However, in the academic context, especially within ODeL, productivity may be hindered by unclear boundaries between home and work life, digital fatigue, and inconsistent access to reliable internet services (Mulenga & Marbán, 2022). Although the ODeL institution delivered teaching using online platforms to students, the staff worked from the main campus and regional offices. Much of the research and the design of performance management systems is based on employees who work physically at an ODeL institution. According to Barbour and Hodges (2024), institutions were compelled to shift rapidly to remote work and online delivery, highlighting both opportunities and challenges in maintaining administration, academic standards, and staff performance.

For ODeL institutions, which are already structured around distance learning principles, this shift often reinforces their existing models but can also stress the boundaries of digital capacity and staff adaptability. There are existing gaps identified in the educational environment at open institutions of higher learning, where service provision and service delivery were altered from traditional physical face-to-face presence, in a physical office environment, to working remotely supported by technology (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021). Additionally, there exists a gap in the performance management of the remote workforce at contact universities.

There has been some research conducted on the COVID-19 pandemic, inclusive of elements on job satisfaction of remote working, working from home during the COVID-19 outbreak, remote work productivity, and engagement. These studies examined performance management during the outbreak and how to make remote working meaningful (Hiwa, 2021). However, there is limited knowledge pertaining to remote work in the education environment, specifically in ODeL institutions. Studies have shown mixed results regarding remote work and employee performance. Some literature suggests increased productivity and job satisfaction due to flexibility and autonomy (Bloom et al., 2015), while other studies highlight issues such as isolation, lack of supervision, and unclear expectations (Wang et al., 2021). In ODeL contexts,

these issues are further compounded by the need for self-regulation and effective digital communication.

Participants in the study are employees in an ODeL institution, responsible for service provision to all prospective and registered students during the period before the COVID-19 outbreak, through the pandemic periods, and post-pandemic, as well as students who experienced and received online services during the pandemic (Dyer & Sheperd, 2021). The data were collected by distributing online questionnaires, which produced findings that during 2020/2021, procedures for working remotely were not clear. There are no stipulated targets or work expectations for employees, and no performance tools to measure remote working.

Employees reported that they were not provided with devices to perform their duties for the first eight months of 2020, nor did they have internet connectivity. Staff also needed training and development because WFH and working remotely were new phenomena (Smith & White, 2022). This study examined employees' experiences and observations in providing online services, the act of administration of remote working employees, and the students' knowledge of receiving online services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study illuminates the problems caused by a shift in service delivery from traditional physical presence in an office environment to working remotely anywhere at any time, supported by technology in ODeL institutions in higher education (Priyadarshini et al., 2021). Secondly, it identifies tools and processes that have to be developed to monitor and review performance, as well as enable the evaluation of remote workers. The above can also be applicable to contact universities that have also experienced the perceived effects of remote working on performance management.

COVID-19 declarations led to restrictions, amongst others, signalling a wave of change worldwide impacting society, the economy, and service delivery in institutions of higher learning (Nkate, 2020). The research contributes positively to the field of education, particularly the mode of offering student support to guarantee the success of online education as they pursue their studies online. This is achieved by improving electronic platforms and the deployment of new technology-supported ways of accessing institutions. Brown et al. (2020) encourage ODeL institutions of higher

learning to embrace remote work as a fundamental aspect of their operations and work arrangements for long-term viability, sustainability, and employee job satisfaction. Nkate (2020) indicates that the pandemic propelled organisations to realise that change is not coming, but is already here, and that it is time for organisations to deliberate on “the future workforce” and implement smart working.

Marino and Capone (2021) reported that by the year 2020, the pandemic caused a considerable overall decrease in working hours and economic activities. Professional public services and tertiary education facilities became involved in smart working, characterised by absenteeism, space restrictions, and unachieved organisational objectives. Countries worldwide managed the first wave of the pandemic by ensuring that employees' conduct does not contribute to the spread of the virus. The pandemic opened a platform for negotiations between employers and employees (Majhy et al., 2021) on future operations and business continuity. The pandemic caught institutions off guard worldwide, imposing the implementation of the 4IR and the use of expertise in organisations to deliver services and continue operations, and to consider the benefits of some forms of remote schedules against company-wide efficiency.

The lifting of pandemic regulations and the reality of returning to the office are uppermost in the minds of employers. Safieh et al. (2022) and Brown et al. (2020) contend that after two years of remote work, many companies are considering returning to the office under a new dispensation of an organised hybrid model that recognises the benefits of overall well-being of employees, flexibility, and output. Safieh et al. (2022) suggest that the future of the workplace is determined by the power balance between employers and employees, and this question will be answered in Chapter 3 of this study. The competitive job market, on the other hand, allows employees to determine the future of the work environment, while workers who experienced more work flexibility during the pandemic by working remotely want employers to prioritise work-life balance moving forward. So, the question becomes, do the benefits of the WFH model outweigh the consequences of working remotely?

Majhy et al. (2021) agree that the proposed move to go back to the office, and the engagement platforms having altered from physical contact to virtual operations, create new innovative encounters. This further creates a challenge for managers to

effectively engage with remote employees compared to before the pandemic, as well as managing the remote workforce and ensuring that they remain productive. Working from home has its benefits, such as flexibility, freedom, and self-management, which provide a better quality of living for employees. Willers et. al. (2025) highlight that the prevailing status quo calls for a comprehensive change to remote working or the return to the workplace. Strategic management is critical in planning for the future and ensuring the continuity of service provision. These strategies include effective tools for positive outcomes in institutional performance, implementing suitable change, adapting strategies to keep the employees engaged, observing and identifying what will be needed, and cultivating the culture of institutional trust.

Management must guide, educate, and train employees in skills that equip them to manage crises, be adaptable, and develop resilience. Buonincontri et al. (2017) allude to the fact that even though employees are important role players, the introduction of technology is the focal point for organisations post-pandemic (Chung, Chung & Lin, 2024). The researchers further stipulate that the introduction of 4IR is at the core of vibrant academic debates, with an increasingly larger number of studies investigating the effects of the latest generation of new technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (hereafter referred to as AI), flexible automation, additive manufacturing, big data, and intelligent technologies (Majhy et al., 2021). In planning for operations, institutions should be considerate of the risks that come with instituting change.

Performance management in higher education, particularly in ODeL settings, involves continuous assessment of teaching effectiveness, research output, administrative efficiency, and learner support. O'Leary et al. (2017) note that performance metrics in academic institutions often blend qualitative assessments with quantitative indicators, such as student satisfaction and completion rates. However, remote work environments require rethinking these frameworks to accommodate asynchronous collaboration, virtual supervision, and online reporting tools.

The extensive integration of digital technologies into institutions tends to entail different expectations in terms of excellence in people, partnerships, processes, and products. Various options can be considered given the effects associated with the development of related technological knowledge, but it has remained almost unexplored, as

employee well-being in an unfamiliar environment usually has the highest priority (Conforti et al., 2020). In addition, when planning for operations, institutions should be considerate of the risks that come with instituting change such as relationships among employees, required skill sets, trust element that forms the base of operations, retention of the workforce, institutional memory, and compliance with COVID-19 regulations, that need to be catered for.

1.4 MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

This study contemplates dealing with the effects of remote working on performance management at an ODeL institution of higher learning, providing insight into improving electronic student administration systems, influencing the advancement of enhanced online education and technology systems (Smith & White, 2022). The study promotes the development of a performance management tool to manage and evaluate the performance of operations and service delivery in institutions. It is anticipated that ODeL institutions of higher learning will be encouraged to embrace remote work as a fundamental aspect of delivering services and execute viable and sustainable operations and work arrangements in the long term. The negative impact of the pandemic on day-to-day operations signals a change in service delivery (Nkate, 2020), hence this study.

The pandemic propelled institutions of higher learning to realise that change is here (Priyadarshini, 2021). The shift to remote working has significantly transformed institutional operations worldwide, particularly in the education sector. ODeL institutions of higher learning have been at the forefront of this transformation, relying heavily on digital platforms to sustain academic and administrative functions. This study will address the adaptation to remote work to bring an understanding of how this change in service delivery impacts performance management in institutions of higher learning and encourage digitalisation and technology support of remote work. The study intends to contribute to the development of an ODeL remote working framework that will accommodate administrative and academic staff at an ODeL institution of higher learning.

1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

While this study examines the effects of remote working on performance management at an Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) institution of higher learning, several limitations might arise. The research is limited to a single ODeL institution in the Republic of South Africa. This might pose a challenge to the generalisation of the findings to other ODeL institutions, ODL institutions of higher learning, or contact universities. Challenges were experienced with data collection as the study used purposive sampling to select the population or participants, thus narrowing the selection of participants.

Questionnaires were developed to examine the understanding and need for working from home (hereafter referred to as WFH) and to explore the reliability and sustainability of technology to support remote working. These questionnaires further collected data on the ability of performance management systems to monitor work performance and service delivery, or output, because remote workers operated in varied environments, which can influence productivity, output, and performance differently. The line of questioning for the administrative staff was on obtaining their experiences on service delivery, while the academic staff were questioned on the online teaching and learning.

The different workload fluctuations, other remote setups, and home environments, which can also influence performance, were not deeply explored in this study. Cultural differences may also pose a limitation on how remote working and performance management are perceived and implemented. The dynamic nature of remote work, shaped by factors such as technology adoption, managerial practices, and personal circumstances. To this end, recommendations on considerations for further research, outlined in chapter 7, will cover outstanding gaps and strategies to mitigate these limitations. The study acknowledges potential limitations related to the sample size and its representativeness, addressing possible response bias in self-reported data.

1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a rapid shift in service provision at institutions of higher learning to rapidly transition to remote working, significantly

impacting traditional performance management systems. This shift created challenges in monitoring, evaluating, and ensuring staff productivity, engagement, and overall institutional effectiveness. The lack of well-defined remote performance metrics, technological constraints, and varying levels of digital adaptability among employees have an influence on performance outcomes. The difficulty lies in identifying and implementing strategies that can effectively address these challenges, ensuring that remote working does not compromise the performance and operational efficiency of higher education institutions. An overview of these challenges led to the formulation of the following problem statement for this study:

The effects of COVID-19 restrictions on the change from face-to-face service provision to remote working on performance management in institutions of higher learning.

1.7 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Delimitation of the Study refers to the boundaries that a researcher sets for a study, essentially, the choices one makes to narrow the scope of the research. These are intentional limitations that define what the study will cover. This study is delimited to line remote working and performance, focusing specifically on the employees at an ODeL institution of higher learning. The study will examine remote working and performance management. This study is delimited to the registered students and SRC members in office during the academic year 2020–2024. It focuses on the relationship between employees and line managers. Furthermore, it will rely on survey questionnaires and online interviews as methods of data collection and survey.

1.8 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The World Health Organization (hereafter referred to as WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The main purpose of this research is to understand what constitutes online remote working (hereafter referred to as WFH) and online service delivery supported by technology. Through the pandemic, both public and private organisations demanded that their workers work from home to comply with restrictions aimed at reducing the spread of the virus. This is a scenario that will presumably continue to be practiced, resulting in employees having to balance work and family life. To this end, organisations need to develop work designs that address challenges

they face, both at the strategic and structural levels. The study also generates information on processes about change management, emphasising the position that organisational performance and culture change influence the new work plan, policies, and planning procedures (Capone et al., 2021). The following are formulated research objectives:

1. To investigate working from home as a viable solution to execute service delivery at an ODeL institution.
2. To contribute to the development of a remote working framework for an ODeL policy
3. To examine the role of performance management as a tool to measure remote working.
4. To explore the perceptions and experiences of academic and administrative staff on remote working.
5. To determine the experiences of students in obtaining remote service delivery at an ODeL institution.
6. To explore the insights of the human resources staff on compiling a remote working policy for an ODeL institution.
7. To develop a remote working performance management system.

Therefore, the study was conducted in two stages of interest to respond to the research study objectives as mentioned above.

Stage 1: Institutions globally are compelled to revise institutional strategies and procedures to combat the outcomes of the pandemic and its restrictions. Organisations requested their workforce to work remotely, from home. A strategy to assist organisations and institutions of higher learning to manage online remote working was therefore necessary. The respective universities have in-house, tailor-made performance management tools to measure performance. It is therefore important to examine how these tools are going to assist these institutions in measuring online remote working, maintaining operations, and executing the business of the day, sustaining productivity and performance output. The study seeks to explore how this change is affecting how the performance of remote working is managed within the ODeL environment, addressed by the following objectives:

- Objective 1: To investigate working from home as a viable solution to execute service delivery at an institution of higher learning (Chapter 2).
- Objective 2: To contribute to the development of a remote working framework for an ODeL policy (Chapter 5).
- Objective 4 To explore the perceptions and experiences of academic staff and administrative staff on remote working (Chapter 2).

Stage 2: The crisis led to organisations facing changes both at the structural and strategic levels. The researcher explores the narrative on change management and organisational cultural change as well as experiences of service providers and service recipients at the university (Capone et al., 2021), addressed by the following objectives:

- Objective 5 To determine the experiences of the students in obtaining remote service delivery at an ODeL institution (Chapter 5).
- Objective 6: To explore the insights of human resources heads of staff on compiling a remote working policy for an institution of higher learning (Chapter 5).
- Objective 7: To develop a performance management system to manage remote working (Chapter 5).
- Objective 2: To examine the role of performance management as a tool to measure remote working (Chapter 3).

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceived effects of remote working on performance management at an ODeL institution. The rationale for using a mixed-methods approach lies in its ability to capture both measurable trends and the deeper experiences of staff and management. The study critically analyses remote working arrangements, working conditions, environment, and specific work resources in the context of digital transformation and development of remote working (Van der Westhuizen, 2016:125). A grounded theory approach was selected as the most suitable research methodology to be used to formulate open-ended questions that

were distributed to a population sample of respondents (Vannabouathong, Devji, Ekhtiari, Chang, Phillips, Zhu, Charla, Main, & Bhandari, 2020).

In this study, a qualitative approach is employed to be flexible and focus on retaining the relevance, evaluating a study's overall validity and reliability when interpreting data. The research approach and design provide a framework to collect and analyse data collected from the target population, sampling method, and ethical considerations. Frederick Taylor (1856-1959) developed scientific management theory at the beginning of the 20th century, referred to as 'Taylorism'. Taylor's theory had four principles: (i) Find the best way to do something, to conduct each task; (ii) Match each employee to each task carefully. (iii) Supervise the workers closely, meaning the use of punishment and reward as motivators, and (iv) Management's task is planning and control (Wheatley 2021:123).

To fully achieve the purpose of the study, a quantitative questionnaire was distributed to sample groups to explore the perceived impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by institutions of higher learning (HEI) whose business is to offer open distance learning (ODL) education. The outbreak of COVID-19 threatened operations, financial sustainability, and the existence of the ODeL institutions, employees, businesses, and customers continue to be under real strain and remain in a "fight or flight" mode, as they continue to face an environment of increased uncertainty and lack of stability. To obtain an understanding, gain insight, and explore how people experienced a given phenomenon, handled challenges, and or problems brought by such.

The researcher employs the institutional theory as a lens to explore the subjective experiences of support staff and academics' understanding of remote working supported by technology, performance management of remote working, as well as the students' encounter with online service provision. Quantitative data was collected through structured surveys distributed to participants to measure their perceptions of remote working and its impact on performance management.

According to Faria, Mellan, Whittaker, Claro, Candido, Mishra, Crispim, Sales, Hawryluk, McCrone, and Hulswit (2021), the choice of research design depends on the researcher's decisions about the importance of various dimensions of the research

process. How to specify causal connections between variables, and how, the results can be generalised to a larger group of people or institutions than those that are included in the investigation. To understand and explain behaviour, and what it means to people, in a specific social context, explain social phenomena interconnected and changed over time.

1.10 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Concepts are abstract ideas or phenomena used in this study, clarified for ease of understanding within the context of the study. The following are the variables and concepts explained:

1.10.1 Remote working and working from home

Leonardi, Parker, and Shen (2024: 193) explain that remote work is a concept used for telecommuting, teleworking, virtual teaming, and distributed teaming which are some of the many structures that organisations have devised to enable people to work together from locations other than the office when coordinating tasks. Working remotely is defined by Marino and Capone (2021) as working away from the allocated conventional workplace, as well as any work that is performed outside of the company's own dedicated office space, in a location of the workers' choosing. Alan (2022) agrees that remote working refers to employees performing their job duties from a location outside of the traditional office environment. This could be from home, a co-working space, a café, or any other place with internet access. The key aspect is that the work is done remotely, without needing in-person presence at the institution's office.

In this study, remote work or working from home is defined as any work that is performed outside of the institution's own dedicated office space, in a location of the worker's choice. It is a practice conducted by employees who execute expected duties prescribed by an employment contract from a different location or any supplementary dwelling separate from the traditional business offices, operated and managed by the employer, associated with the employer, or any other shared space. These sites could either include an employee's home, hence the term WFH. Since the pandemic, our

understanding of the positive impacts of remote work for tech professionals, institutions, and organisations has evolved massively.

The concept of working from home is not really about the location. Instead, the term refers to performing your duties from any place that is not a traditional office setting, the ability to control your work environment more than the location where you complete your tasks, on condition that your work can be performed without the need for in-person collaboration (Davies, 2009). Institutions are describing themselves as remote-first, which means there is an office that employees can work in, but they're not obligated to go. Some companies are also 'fully remote', which usually means there's no institution-owned office space or headquarters at all. Every employee, including the leadership and people teams, is working remotely (Chrysikou, Savvopoulou, & Hernandez, 2021). With the rise of remote work comes the rise of flexible working variations like WFH, or the hybrid work model.

1.10.2 Performance Management

Performance management is the overarching system in the assessment of performance. Depending on the organisation, a performance appraisal cycle can consist of multiple phases within a performance management cycle. Performance appraisal is an important managerial instrument that helps managers to monitor and evaluate operations, as well as manage human resources (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). The performance management process needs personnel to be knowledgeable about job expectations, targets set, and expected outputs. Performance management is challenging because it is a complex, multifaceted, and multilevel process that draws on theory and research from many different areas, including measurement theory and motivation theory, cognitive, clinical, social, and behavioural psychology, neuroscience and change management (Slaney, Graham, Dhillon, & Hohn, 2024).

In this study, performance management refers to practices that should be designed to drive performance in support of the organisation's overall strategy and goals. These include various strategies such as structured and comprehensive performance management processes that typically involve cascading goals, goal setting, competency modelling, evaluation of behaviour, results, and implementation

innovations in real-time feedback, coaching, and behaviour change, while planning to handle operations in the working environment (Schrøder-Hansen & Hansen, 2022).

Underlying performance rating research identifies three assumptions that are worthy of further exploration (Murphy, Cleveland, Skattebo & Kinney, 2004), employees' true performance that reflects their effectiveness on the job, manager's ability to rate employees accurately with proper rating instruments, must negotiate and balance when they evaluate employees: align ratings information-processing capabilities and training.

1.10.3 The ODeL institutions of higher learning

Open Distance e-Learning institutions are tertiary universities dedicated to offering both contact and distance higher education programmes. ODeL institutions are established to provide tertiary education dedicated to offering reputable, comprehensive, flexible, and accessible qualifications. In addition, these institutions embrace the fact that there is a need to adapt rapidly to the fast-paced higher education environment of the 21st century with appropriate management styles and leadership practices.

1.10.4 Administrative support staff

The case study institution is an ODeL higher education institution consisting of administrative staff. The ODeL institution is made up of administrative support staff responsible for providing administrative support to undergraduate and postgraduate level students in their endeavour to pursue their studies and achieve academic success. The support staff is also responsible for providing and promoting an integrated effort in administrative support, to serve, establish, and ensure an organisational climate that encourages organisational growth, service provision, and an elevated level of morale among personnel in service of the client, recommending and marketing organisational functions and areas of responsibility.

1.10.5 Academic staff

The ODeL institution has academic staff, also known as professional staff. The academic staff is responsible for teaching and learning, verification assessment, and

postgraduate supervision. The academic staff of an ODeL institution delivers well-designed and interactive study material to contribute to the academic discourse and tuition, with the focus on authoring scholarly articles to be published in accredited journals to contribute to the knowledge repository of the country and the world. Academic staff should remain contactable, attend to student correspondence at any time of day, and be accessible to the diverse student population.

1.10.6 Student Representative Council

In this study, the Student Representative Council (SRC) is an elected student forum at an ODeL institution established in terms of Act 101 of 1997, to be a forum through which students are represented, have a mouthpiece, exercise their rights, and are visible despite the distance. The SRC is fully representative of the university student population.

1.10.7 Human Resources Management

Opatha (2021) explains that Human Resources Management (hereafter referred to as HRM) denotes the strategic approach to managing people within an institution. It includes a collection of functions aimed at maximising employee performance and ensuring that the institution can achieve its goals. Schneider and Bowen (1993) support Opatha in explaining that the management section responsible for human resource processes such as recruitment, retention of staff, training, development, and policy development. HRM supports employees and protects the institution to ensure fairness and continuity within the institution. Including recruitment and selection, training, and development, performance management, compensation, benefits, employee relations, and workforce planning. Aspects that play a crucial role in creating a productive and positive work environment, fostering employee engagement, and aligning the workforce with the organisation's strategic objectives are examined in this study.

1.11 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The study comprises seven Chapters outlined as follows:

Chapter 1: The introduction and orientation of the study. This Chapter provides the motivation and context for the study. It further outlines the research problem statement, objectives to be attained by the research, data collection methods used, the data study mode, delimitations of the research, a preliminary literature review, and an outline of chapters.

Chapter 2: A conceptual analysis of remote working. The theoretical focus of the chapter is a literature review on remote working arrangements, strategies that promote transformational change from an office-bound environment, face-to-face contact, to online technology-driven systems, which support remote working, management of performance output, and enhanced service delivery.

Chapter 3: Performance management supported by employing technology. The COVID-19 pandemic imposed a need to function remotely. Working remotely was due to the lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions. ODeL institutions were no exception because of the type of services they deliver. As a result, institutions were forced to embrace the 4IR. Institutions of higher learning introduced and implemented online technology-driven systems to optimise business processes for effective service delivery and performance management. Additionally, the chapter outlines strategies such as offering online tuition and online assessment, exploring good practices, and interrogating flexible work arrangements needed for the survival of organisations.

Chapter 4: The Case Study: The focal point is an ODeL institution. The chapter provides information about the ODeL, such as the organisational productivity, performance strategy, organisational culture change, applicable remote work and the return-to-work strategy.

Chapter 5: Research methodology. This chapter outlines the research design, strategy, and data collection techniques used in the study. These include the population, sample size, data analysis, ethical considerations, and research trustworthiness.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Data Interpretation of an Empirical Study. This chapter presents research results and findings from the qualitative survey and

interviews, respectively. The data is further analysed and interpreted based on existing literature to respond to the questions posed in the study.

Chapter 7: Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion. This last chapter outlines the research done and the research outcomes, proposals, and conclusions that inform managing the present situation with the effects of the crisis and beyond into the future.

1.12 SUMMARY

The world of work is engulfed by uncertainty emanating from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Operations have altered, for now, and perhaps forever. Remote working is no longer a temporary solution to the crisis but has become the norm within organisations. Organisations were forced to develop technology-enabled processes to accommodate this new normal. Not only has the shift towards remote working changed the employment landscape, but it has also provided the benefit of flexibility, proven to enhance work-life stability in most cases, and a comprehensive talent group unrestricted by geographic boundaries. WFH requires high performance, productivity, self-management, the ability to apply limits to working hours, and the need to balance work-life, family, and social life. On the other hand, there still exists physical labour, trade skills, and shift work that require structure and work routine, which challenge the flexibility brought by online remote working. The first chapter laid the foundation and provided an understanding of what the study is about. Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual analysis of working remotely, ensuring the phenomenon of remote working is analysed as well as comprehended to enable a smooth transition and implementation.

CHAPTER 2: A CONCEPTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK OF REMOTE WORKING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A conceptual and contextual analysis of remote framework is a structured system of theories and concepts that guide research and analysis. The conceptual framework captures the key variables, their relationships, and how they contribute to understanding remote working. Conceptual frameworks are often used in the development of business strategy and project planning to provide a clear foundation for investigation and decision-making during research. One of the many concepts of the conceptual framework is the theoretical background that is existing theories and models that inform the development framework to be designed by the findings of this study. The contextual framework is a structured approach used to analyse and interpret a subject, event, or problem within its relevant context.

This chapter focuses on the conceptual exploration of remote working. On 9 April 2020, the RSA President broadcast a two-week lockdown extension (Lone & Ahmad, 2020). This extension was subsequently followed by another extension until the end of April 2020. This was but one of the many lockdown allowances followed in the years 2020 and 2021. Dirani et al. (2020) state that the sole purpose of the lockdowns and the regulations set was to contain and manage the blow-out of the virus and level the curve of infections in the RSA. In this study this disease forced boundaries that demanded a huge number of the population to be quarantined, and to close facilities (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021).

COVID-19 threatened and made the working environment vulnerable and brought uncertainty to the working environment globally, adversely impacting the well-being of employees to the detriment of institutional performance and productivity (Fild, 2022). According to Johnston et al. (2019), the lockdown restrictions had an immediate effect on the economies of the respective countries and globally. The pandemic has congested all phases of the communal and personal systems. The interests and business safety of relations were severely impacted by the financial properties of the disease (Walsh et al., 2020). This chapter debates the various descriptions of working

remotely and the basis of the perception of remote working. A discussion of the possible impacts of remote working follows to provide an understanding of challenges facing organisations, necessitating a vital increased employee engagement and commitment to keep institutions operating (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019), and foster work cultures that validate equality, vibrant opportunities, guidance, and provision for employees. The chapter further discusses measures to establish self-governance and flexibility in the work environment as well as the production of substantial operational adjustments to resolve the influence of COVID-19 on operations and decrease the impact on personnel and managers.

The next section, section 2.2 deals with definitions of remote working and working from home used interchangeably throughout the study.

2.2 DEFINITION OF REMOTE WORKING

WHO declared a global pandemic, COVID-19, resulting in a succession of bodily limitations such as lockdowns, community isolation, and restrictions across the world, necessitating the rapid change from the physical presence of conducting business, to working remotely, and virtual support by technology (Chaffey & Smith, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant rise in the use of remote work for jobs where this method is realistic (Brynjolfsson, Ozimek, Rock, Sharma & TuYe, 2020). Working remotely is defined by Marino and Capone (2021) as working away from the allocated conventional workplace. Alan (2022) states that remote work is working away from the allocated space, working at home, working from home, mobile working, and remote working. Wheatley (2021) agrees and expresses that remote working means working separate from the traditional office environment. Bahn, Cohen, and Van der Meulen (2020) agree with Marino and Capone's (2021) view that remote work is an exercise of employees performing work from a place additional to the traditional office managed by the employer.

Remote working is further defined as a practice that occurs when personnel are permitted to work either from the employee's own home or any other habitation outside the use of the traditional office building (Leonardi, Parker & Shen, 2024, Ozimek, 2020). Ashforth (2020) agrees with Rogers, Ha, and Ockey (2021) that working from home supported by technology can also be referred to as e-working, smart working,

working away from the traditional office, working from another employee's home, with no need to commute to the workplace, see other workers face-to-face or communicate with others, work independently off-site and using technology. Nilles et al. (2010) outline that remote working also means successfully implementing mobile working or e-working, which requires effective online systems, procedures, and processes to ensure organisational and theoretical performance that improve operations within an institution and work-life balance.

Managers need to set individual goals that are easy to understand, achievable, and measurable (Rogers et al., 2021). Line managers also have to contextualise technology-driven systems transformation and develop remote working strategies. Managers have to understand what employees who report to them need to execute their respective work and ensure that working remotely becomes simple and comfortable (Visser, 2018). The operational strategy implemented should highlight the risks and challenges associated with non-compliance. Service provision and service delivery necessitated a shift from the traditional face-to-face, physical presence in an office environment service provision to an online, remote working environment from anywhere, supported by technology.

The shift in remote working arrangements enables the well-being of employees, manages performance output, and supports organisational productivity now and into the future. The definitions of remote working include either e-working or smart working (Wheatley, 2021). For this study, working remotely is explained as flexible work planning whereby the process of working in isolation away from a designated space is supported by technology (Zhang, Yu & Marin, 2021). Remote working entails the ability of workers to function as individuals from a distant location, being dependent on reliable, effective online technology and Wi-Fi connectivity. This includes working productively online, managing the work allocated responsibly, and remaining accountable. The experiences of working remotely throughout the pandemic-specific designated that the remote work will rise in the upcoming years. To ensure service recovery and sustainability for institutions, (Thompson, 2019). Kowalski and Ślebarska (2022) state that there are three objects from which one can be distanced when working remotely, namely social resources, symbolic resources, and substantial possessions.

The novel coronavirus outbreak drastically changed the global economic landscape, workplaces, patterns of work, families, and our overall health and well-being. The next section discusses the origin of working from home, remote working.

2.3 THE ORIGIN OF REMOTE WORKING

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a need to facilitate a change of service delivery to working remotely online, supported by technology (Craig & Churchill, 2021). COVID-19 forced a change in the techniques, belongings and services that were distributed and established. A transformation in service provision migrated to online engagements and the information handover process, which encouraged the change of new distribution systems, merging work and home life, and incorporating the greatest applications for remote workers (Fraken et al., 2021).

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the status of working from home at the beginning of 2020. However, not all work is suitable for remote working (Visser, 2018). To implement remote working, there should be communication systems in place, and the creation of an electronic environment that familiarises team members to shift to flexible remote work environments that add value and increase productivity, which improves when people are given more flexibility to work from home or a third space (Visser, 2018). Rogers et al. (2021) assert that before the year 2020, COVID-19 was not acknowledged and social distancing, working in isolation, and wearing a face mask to shop for groceries seemed absurd, and being able to work from home was mostly a privilege reserved for successful freelancers and wealthy chief executives with their own companies. Change comes much faster than people anticipate, and change is sometimes for the better (Van Rooyen, 2020). Institutional change, amongst others, means embracing digitalised working, growing the use of new technologies, and transforming spaces other than offices to workspaces suitable to promote remote working (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021). Remote working is enabled and becomes a possibility when it is a space equipped and connected to reliable high-speed internet, a computer, laptop, or a phone, a conducive and sustainable environment that promotes and assists employees to focus and produce a better existence

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the entire world. The world spent two years, 2020-2021, working in isolation from home because the pandemic necessitated a change in the known traditional institutional cultures and service delivery (Fraken et al., 2021). Many businesses and institutions needed to transform to meet the market demands and forces. Institutions are conducting surveys to determine what the future of the workplace should look like which model fits into the future, the work perspective, technological infrastructure, and what conforms to the competitive job market.

The model of choice should ensure that all work performed enriches the execution of the institutional strategy, due to the tasks caused by the pandemic (Carpenter & Wyman, 2021). An opportunity arose to revisit institutional cultures because the traditional method of physically working from the office and in service delivery posed challenges (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021). Institutional communities functioned effectively in building a remote working strategy during those volatile times. Working remotely requires employees to be more proactive about what they need and when they need it, be committed, dedicated, able to self-manage, and be trustworthy.

Remote working requires an agile team, with agile leadership that is positive and replies reasonably rather than reactively to sustain and authorise employees (Clark et al., 2020). The study analyses the literature on change management and institutional cultural change, institutional development, and maintenance of communication channels, networks, and collaborations beneficial to the employees (Priyadarshini et al., 2021). To encourage the development of technology infrastructure to facilitate and support service delivery and performance, leaders should forge and maintain communication channels, networks, and collaborations beneficial to the institutions and employees (Hoefling, 2021). It is important to remodel the current office spaces to blend in with the needs of the flexible working environment, Visser (2018) refers to remote working as institutions creating and allowing people to work from home or a third space and visit the office from time to time or not at all.

This study envisages guiding organisations and institutions in moving forward past the pandemic (Leta et al., 2018). Post the pandemic organisations and institutions around the globe need to continue developing good WFH strategies, develop policies to monitor remote working employees, advance plans on how to assign and distribute

remote work, keep employees motivated to improve and maintain high productivity levels, and manage performance (Chychun, Chaplynska, Shpatakova, Pankova & Saienko, 2023). Therefore, this research explored the perceptions introduced by the pandemic on services provided by organisations and employees who delivered services during the pandemic. At institutions of higher learning, service providers were both administrators responsible for generic student administration processes and academic employees who ensured that the national and international students received virtual learning, teaching, and learning services and online assessments.

With lockdown and shutdown of businesses, places of worship, institutions, organisations, and schools, people were forced into isolation, disrupted social integration and support systems of our collective co-existence, and enforced remote working. There were potential effects of remote working as discussed in the next section 2.4.

2.4 CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF REMOTE WORKING

Working remotely or WFH provides increased flexible working hours within or outside the traditionally known working hours. Flexibility also supports the technology that promotes remote flexible work arrangements, viable for organisations to consider (Capone et al., 2021). Remote working locations could be anywhere, including an employee's home, other shared space, a coffee shop, or an internet café, from where work can be done at any time, supported by technology. Remote working has benefits and challenges, and large-scale movements to remote working are affecting working lives and the respective economies. (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). Remote working provides employees with greater flexible work environment and independence, which fosters the drive and dedication of remote work compared to office work. Holgersen and Svenkerud (2021) assert that managers must be responsive to requests for assistance or guidance and provide quick responses and feedback.

Remote working leads to increased autonomy, allowing individual employees to take possession and self-manage and potentially improve performance as they can choose the most productive times and environments for their tasks (Abrams, 2019). As a result of the coronavirus outbreak, operations at institutions were disrupted, worldwide.

Remote working characteristics entail self-governance and flexibility, as discussed in the next section.

2.4.1 Self-governance and flexibility

The pandemic did not allow the traditional way of service delivery, physical contact, or office presence at institutions of higher education, open distance learning, as well as contact universities. Students and instructors were migrated to online platforms and engagements. Ngcobo (2022) states that there will always be operational challenges in the work environment, as discussed below, while Murphy (2020) concurs that remote working was predicted and encouraged as an interim solution, hence the following discussion on operational challenges that affected performance and management processes that were implemented to embrace change in institutional strategies and culture.

2.4.2 Operational challenges

Institutions were prompted to develop new delivery systems and knowledge transfer processes, which created unforeseen challenges to instructions, work allocation, and work to be done (Abrams, 2019). All the aforementioned elements are necessary to manage remote working successfully (Visser, 2018). Smart working brings with it flexible forms, new ways of working and events that require reconsideration of the organisational strategy toward rethinking the smart working model. These include decreased office space for economic return for the organisation, increased conservation, sustainability, and better employees' satisfaction, well-being, and excellence of life. These further facilitate knowledge management activities, increased levels of both employee engagement and performance (Mercer, Agarwal, Dayananda, Yasin & Trickett, 2020). This change merged business and academic life with home life.

Bowles and Carlin (2020) state that the evaluation needed for an institutional culture, progressively oriented towards agile working culture in conjunction with institutional support and training, simplifying the relationship between the employee and the manager. Once an employee's current performance is measured, personal developmental areas are identified, strengths are evaluated, and overall response and

accounts are given to the employee, the process of performance management will be completed (Dinmohamed, Visser, Verhoeven, Louwman, Van Nederveen, Willems, Merckx, Lemmens, Nagtegaal & Sieslin, 2020). Employee performance improves when performance agreements stipulate clear targets, performance standards, and appropriate performance appraisal criteria are set for evaluating employee performance (Bowles & Carlin, 2020). Performance management and performance evaluations are processes that proceed one after the other when determining performance output in an institution as explained in the next section.

2.4.3 Performance management and evaluation

Performance management and evaluation is part of the performance process. (Bonacini et al., 2021). HR also contributes to the development and introduction of performance management to employees who actively want more freedom of choice to achieve work goals and seek out the opportunity to work more flexibly in terms of time and location. This provides an experience of choice that includes physical, psychological, social, and institutional aspects. Monitoring remote working arrangements can be challenging for managers, therefore, to monitor performance successfully, managers may effectively and efficiently rely more heavily on outcomes-based performance measures rather than direct observation of performance (Pullokaran & Paulachan, 2023). Employee training and development are essential drivers of productivity enhancement in organisations, as they contribute towards the continuous skill development of their workforce, produce a competitive advantage, and achieve sustainable growth. Training and reskilling are needed, hence the following discussion on staff training and development. According to Sandhya and Kumar (2011), performance can be enhanced by close collaboration between managers and their subordinates, better communication, transparency, and honesty, through increased employee engagement, improved incentive rewards, and a better understanding of the effects of work-linked stress.

2.4.4 Staff training and development

Hanscom and Cleveland (2018) state that managers within an institution always have expectations and norms of how to maintain acceptable levels of performance. To have a sustainable capacity of human resources, HR describes the training and

development of the workforce as recognised growth, and career advancement to improve individual or team performance for enhance organisational output. To improve employee productivity and keep employees motivated, HR creates positive communication networks, collaborations, and develops problem-solving activities for individuals and groups within the organisation (Pullan, 2016). Training and development improve employee performance and enhance the institution's effectiveness (Nel, Botha & Marais, 2021). Employees who experience job satisfaction are employees who know and understand their job requirements, work towards career growth, tend to be committed, motivated, productive, and fulfilled with the work they do.

Ngcobo (2022) supports development and training as fundamentally important to all levels, as training reintroduces reskilling, and keeps employees abreast with the latest knowledge and information, for employees to not become obsolete. Training is considered a valuable tool for building employee competencies, enhancing skills, enabling employees to gain a competitive advantage, and sustainable organisational culture. Movement of employees out of the institution or any permanent departure beyond institutional boundaries should be discouraged through a display of the institution's ability to retain its employees, employee training and development play an important role in staff retention as well as attract new talent (Otte, Streb, Rasche, Franke, Segmiller, Nigal, Vasic, and Dudeck, 78: 2019). Research shows that if employees are not actively engaged, the organisation no longer has support (Patanjali, 2022). WFH requires soft skills such as adapting to the use of technology, and leadership, just like all other aspects of transformation (Chaffey & Smith, 2022).

Leta, Beyene, De Clercq, Amenu, Kraemer, and Revie (2018) highlight that training and development include remote working tools, time management techniques, and strategies for maintaining motivation and focus while working remotely. Remote employees may opt to alleviate and decrease isolation and emotional exhaustion by being innovative and seeking ways to increase support from the employer. Conradie and De Klerk (2019) discuss the type of workers named the next generation of workers known as Today's workforce, made up of employees who are computer literate and have the required work ethics with enhanced commitment, discipline, are trustworthy,

with the right mind-set focused on productivity because these are elements that make up remote working.

Kenny and Priyadarshini (2021) explain that the future of the workforce known as Tomorrow's employees, are inspired, have a specific idea of how the working environment should be, have the passion to work, and are flexible to ensure a balanced lifestyle. These employees are resourced to deal with isolation and stress, are motivated, able to be innovative and creative, adding value to their workplace, are critical thinkers, and problem-solvers (Liedtka & Ogilvie, 2011). Flexible working arrangements and remote working are on the rise, collaboration and a sense of trustworthiness, brainstorming, innovation, creativity, and collaboration are non-negotiable between co-workers and remain crucial elements of a happy workplace (Patanjali, 2022). Employees remain accountable and responsible when working privately from home.

Develop performance management strategies that engage the employees, improve, and sustain organisational productivity and performance output, done to manage the pandemic, now in the present, the future, and post-pandemic. Dirani et al. (2020), supported by Pamidimukkala and Kermanshach (2021), describe Today's workforce and Tomorrow's employees as an employee cohort made up of different generations with different perspectives in performing services remotely, transforming from office-based to technology-driven remote working. This means that organisations should develop different training and development strategies relevant to each generation.

Workforce generations have unique characteristics, values, and attitudes towards work. The importance of these types of generations is relevant to putting forward a work-from-home strategy that leads to improved performance or a more effective workforce. Zhang and Acs (2018:775) define workforce generation as:

2.4.4.1 Baby Boomers (Born 1946-1964): An economically influential generation, dominating the working class, contributing to the economy and wealth of respective countries, has values, and attains a positive mindset in the workplace. Political views and entrepreneurs who provide financial help and support to the silent generation, that was their parents.

- 2.4.4.2 Generation X (Born 1965-1980): Generation X is the early boomers, born at a time of shifting societal values, a cohort that increased participation in the workforce. The cohort has been credited with entrepreneurial tendencies. A generation whose education contributes broadly to the respective countries' economies.
- 2.4.4.3 Millennials (Born 1981-1996): The Millennials, who are well-educated, technology-driven, the generation with a purpose, focused and dedicated, those who boost economic growth, a generation highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused economic recession, but work towards ensuring that remote working does not hurt productivity.
- 2.4.4.4 Generation Z (Born 1997-2012) The cohort dubbed, the digital natives. Subjects who share a defining characteristic that gives this generation an advantage. The first community to grow up exposed to technology as well as have access from an early age. A generation that advocates and understands working anywhere, supported by technology (Zhang & Acs, 2018:775).

Understanding these generational differences is of value for HR in areas such as recruitment, retention, and employee engagement strategies. Infrastructure and technology are interdependent, enabling connectivity, automation, and efficiency improvements (Wang et al., 2021). Investment in infrastructure and technology is crucial for economic development, competitiveness, and sustainable growth in the digital age.

2.4.5 Infrastructure and Technology development

Infrastructure and technology are essential components of modern society, business operations, and everyday life. Physical and organisational buildings and facilities are needed for the operation of a culture, enterprise, and system. Information infrastructure includes communication networks that enable and facilitate connectivity and collaboration across geographical distances. Hamamatsu et al. (2021) analysed underlying variables, including employee engagement, organisational motivation, leadership accessibility, leadership control effectiveness, commitment, productivity,

and job retention as the attributes to support technology-driven systems to be supportive technology (Murphy, 2021).

Institutions developed work environments and adopted flexible working arrangements (hereafter referred to as FWA). The developers use flexible working arrangements and receive support from staff, who perceive the arrangements to be beneficial for themselves and their institution (Wiatr, 2021). This arrangement enables individuals to manage and cope with home and office demands (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). WFH arrangements with the present status in the work environment, technological innovations have become ingrained in daily life (Visser, Schaap & Wijnhoven, 2020).

There is a constant need to analyse how technological developments will transform job functions while keeping in mind that the implementation of these changes is significant in effecting change (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021). Business owners must first shape the right approach and change their behaviours. Institutions of higher learning need to advance and rationalise the expected outcomes and use of technology for considering digitalisation (Visser et al., 2020). Technology development brings about new working possibilities that have become a popular option. An institution's transformation strategy affects the acceleration of conversion, hence it is important to safeguard a successful transformation of leadership and inclusion of leadership, fulfilling all the indicators of appropriate leadership style that add to digital transformation to promote remote working (Fraken, Bentley, Shafaei, Farr-Wharton, Onnis & Oma, 2021).

Remote working often necessitates a cultural change within an organisation, including changes in management styles, trust-building practices, communication, and collaborations. Institutions need to advance principles of transparency, accountability to support effective performance management in a remote setting and trust. Digital business opportunities bring forth new organisational capabilities (Whitby, Cardelli, Kwiatkowska, Laurenti, Tribastone & Tschaikowski, 2022). With the challenges in the current climate, employees are exploring flexible modes of work such as working at home, including technology to enable remote working, to enhance organisational benefits and work performance, now and post the pandemic. Agile leaders, a culture of trust, in the organisation, and technology-driven systems, direct continuous remote

working and employee involvement (Franken et al., 2021). Effective leadership, clear communication, employee involvement, and a systematic approach are necessary for the effective implementation of organisational cultural transformation discussed next section in section 2.4.6.

2.4.6 Institutional Cultural Change

Restrictions were periodically lifted, and the respective economies reopened globally during the COVID-19 pandemic. Organisations and businesses across the country were hard at work planning remote work strategies and enhancing the ability to work remotely. Franken et al. (2021) allude to the fact that at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic came the stay-at-home orders and working remotely from home. For businesses, the takeaway was simply out of reach as not all work performed remotely can be continued as WFH, or automatically directed back to the office. To successfully implement organisational cultural change, there needs to be an assessment of the current culture to establish the areas that need improvement or alignment with strategic goals and cultivate a new culture, bringing forth change.

Institutions need to advance a clear vision of the desired culture, communicate, and integrate the new strategies, and allocate responsibilities to leadership and accountabilities to individual employees or teams. As organisations and institutions adapt to the new way of doing and providing a service, they need to engage employees, take note of feedback, and embed cultural norms that foster continuous improvement and version to ensure long-term sustainability within the organisation or institution (Ramakumar & Priyadarshini, 2021). Even though the call back to the office due to the relaxed lockdown restrictions was affected, organisations should assess the individual roles and work to be done to determine which functions can be executed remotely or demand employees to report to the office occasionally to do on-ground service. This gave rise to a hybrid model for institutions and organisations which offers an open approach that amalgamates part working in an office and part working from home (Daley, 2023).

Each institution must assess and identify the variety of factors as hybrid work varies in flexibility and supports a variety of different work schedules. It permits employees to decide how and where they work and offers autonomy to employees to design their

working week in a way that works both for them and within institution policies. Institutions that use a hybrid work model can offer a better work-life balance to their employees (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021).

For change to be successfully implemented, it should be done in such a way that it stabilises the psychological needs of all affected and promotes self-fulfilment to be actualised with the new normal (Pradana, Silvianita, Syarifuddin & Renaldi, 2022). Local conditions, including colleague sentiment, market needs, regulatory requirements, and cultural practices in geography, are continuously evolving. With all the operational changes within an organisation, employees should continue to uphold the organisation's norms and values. Ehi (2020) analyses cultural change as a challenge, noting that the pandemic is a catalyst for change and affords employees a voice. Organisations should ensure that they constantly listen to employees' needs.

Institutional theory is used in this study, which addresses the sociological study of the structures and processes of social groups, including institutions (Nickbakhsh et al., 2020). These include the examination of the output and performance of groups, the actions of the personnel, and their relationships between organisations and their environment. Frederick Taylor (1856-1859) developed a scientific management theory at the beginning of the 20th century, referred to as Taylorism. Taylor's theory had four principles, namely, find the best way to do something, carry out each task, match each employee to each task carefully, and supervise the workers closely. This means that punishment and reward are used as motivators, and management's task is planning and control (Ramakumar & Priyadarshini, 2021). The already heavy performance load on institutions of higher learning (hereafter referred to as IHES) was exacerbated by the need to manage and contain the spread of this virus.

It is important in all agendas of private and public institutions as well as businesses, to promote change for operational needs, and service regulations as amended from time to time (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). Change facilitates and contributes to institutional governance, impacts on and paves the path going forward to bring about an understanding of transformation in tackling practical expectations and challenges to the traditional way of operations (Visser et al., 2020). A solution is needed for the current work-based dilemma created by the pandemic on individuals, organisations,

institutions, and society. Therefore, the research focused on the well-being of workers and organisational performance, along with reflections on how these developments may influence and alter the nature of service provision now and in the post-COVID-19 era. Kenny and Priyadarshini (2021) contend that employees' engagement is a challenging task for institution because they are home-based, therefore, the remoteness prevents the traditional physical office environment monitoring and supervision of work. Viljevac et al, (2012) provided a vital connection concerning worker's appointments process, recruitment processes to facilitate the change that addresses the present challenges in traditional jobs now and beyond the pandemic.

Ozimek (2020:2138) states that digital literacy, entrepreneurship, problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, and the capability to blend a variety of skills from different jobs to become a specialist in a new field are required to build a digital-friendly workplace. These skills sustain a high level of productivity, and come down to more than technology. Business needs staff with the correct skills and expertise to manage and maintain all the information, which is where the next generation of workers become applicable. A cohort of true digital natives is needed as they adapt easily to using technology, can improve business performance, and are aware of the benefits they bring to a business environment (Fettucciari et al., 2021), compare to other types of generations that exists in the working environment. Institutional cultural change provides interventions that institution implements to boost employee engagement and subsequently improve overall performance, the effectiveness of how these processes are tailored to fit different cultural contexts and outlines the key factors that contribute to a performance-oriented culture. Structural culture impacts the usefulness of performance management measures, and how can these developments to fit different cultural contexts and frameworks, the key factors that contribute to a performance-oriented culture within an institution, hence the discussion on the contextual framework of remote working.

2.5 CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK OF REMOTE WORKING

Employee experience encompasses everything an employee encounters during their journey in an institution, from recruitment and on boarding to day-to-day work, and development opportunities. Institutional context refers to the working environment shaped by the rules, norms, values, structures, and practices within an institution

(Mercer, Agarwal, Dayananda, Yasin & Trickett, 2020). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working has become a significant aspect of modern work environments. Even though remote work was initially adopted to curb the spread of COVID-19, it has now become a permanent fixture in the post-pandemic work landscape (Davis, Granić, & Marangunić, 2023:1-50). The contextual framework analysis of remote working involves examining remote work practices through various interrelated aspects to understand how context influences its adoption, success, and challenges. This framework examines how remote work offers greater temporal and locational flexibility but also raises concerns about the commodification of work to enhance the institution's position (Khateeb, 2021). This framework explores the impact of remote working on productivity, work-life balance, and collaborative dynamics among employees.

2.5.1 Institutional context

Institutional culture entails trust, communication norms, flexibility, and attitudes of employees where agile, adaptive cultures and supportive leadership are more successful in remote work adoption. The quality of technological infrastructure often determines the feasibility and efficiency of remote work (Alotaiby, 2024). This is consistent with the adaptive systems theory which suggests that remote work can positively and negatively influence employee productivity and outcomes, depending on how well remote working is supervised and managed. Remote work can both enhance and hinder inclusion depending on implementation (Murphy, 2021).

2.5.2 Employee experience

The institutional context shapes the boundaries and possibilities of employee experience, a journey an employee takes with the institutions covering every interaction from recruitment to exit (Demerouti, 2023). It encompasses the physical, emotional, and digital interactions they have in the workplace and has become a major focus for institution that seeks to improve retention, engagement, and productivity. Therefore, it is important that institutions put in place remote working policies and procedures. HR has the responsibility to ensure that HR practices are in place to ensure job security, a retention strategy, as well as a recruitment strategy that best

serve the employee and employer (Buyens & De Vos, 2001). In the next section, the development of a capable strategic business model will be dealt with.

2.6 A REMOTE WORKING STRATEGY INCORPORATING TECHNOLOGY

The COVID-19 outbreak resulted in institutional changes such as the development of capable business models, work strategy, design, design thinking, and employee turnover (Wong, Tay, Hap & Chia, 2020). There are essential factors to consider when creating an effective remote working strategy that incorporates technology. Greene and Murphy (2021) provide several challenges that face universities in developing countries, amongst others, the implementation of e-learning systems, connectivity stability. Wi-Fi connections, technology and systems literacy and digitisation readiness. Working remotely has made working hours increasingly flexible, while embracing 4IR has brought major innovations in remote working (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). The elements that are worth considering include bringing major innovations in communication tools and platforms, and the implementation of 4IR as a fusion of advances in artificial intelligence. These allow the application of ICTs to facilitate online technology-driven service provision to process administrative needs, manage learning experiences, support and train employees to enable flexible work arrangements.

During the development stage, when engaging with employees across the institution, employers had urgent burning challenges with remote worker agreements. The traditional job descriptions were not accommodating of remote working scenarios, management of logistics of WFH, performance, and productivity. It became imperative to develop services that can cope with this new remote environment, with the emphasis of knowing what the homemaker needs, and finding the right balance between the office and working from home. This further requires internal and external stakeholders to come together to create workable home office environments and address technological and legal issues together (Smith-Bingham & Hariharan, 2020). HR management must weigh the ethical effects of prospective interventions and ensure that the solutions to reduce waiting times do not compromise the values of equitable access to all in the development of new processes in institutions of higher learning and educational offerings (Pokhrel & Chetri, 2021).

The change to remote work requires institutions to create new strategies and an institutional climate. Institutional climate refers to collective insights, feelings, and attitudes that employees and organisational members have about the organisational culture, established norms, values, and attitudes that influence individual behaviour, and specifically work-related wellness and well-being of staff (Giovanis, 2018). According to Priyadarshini et al. (2021), employee engagement should be the highest item on the manager's plan, because every contact a manager has with employees contributes to the organisational performance. Working remotely is one of the flexible working practices that has become the survival of businesses in many sectors. The evolving landscape of remote work comes with benefits, challenges, and organisational implications, as well as managerial dilemmas. This landscape cultivates the elements of shared knowledge, trust, commitment, dedication, and communication, elements that bring a sense of comfort, despite the general discomfort that exists presently between the employer and employee (Blanchard, 2021). Remote work practice varies widely across occupations, institutions, and industries in the respective countries.

The key principle of worker commitment is the element of trust and loyalty. Agustriyana and Setyadi's (2021) concept of digital transformation is especially relevant today because, with the pandemic, companies and organisations had to change their business strategies to be digitally based. The agile leadership style is one of the principal aspects of digital transformation. Conradie et al. (2019) state that working remotely or WFH provides increased flexible working hours, in and outside normal working hours, and advancement in technology that supports remote, flexible work arrangements viable for corporations to consider (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). The development of a capable strategic business model is facilitated by various tools and technologies, including knowledge bases, content management systems, collaboration platforms, expertise locators, and analytics tools to measure the effectiveness of knowledge-sharing initiatives, to ensure compliance and readiness.

Section 2.6.1 is a discussion on how work strategy and design are integrated into various human resource processes such as selection, staffing, training, career planning, and operational coordination.

2.6.1 Integration of institutional model and technology

Liedtka and Ogilvie (2011) studied design thinking as an enabler that allows organisations to reach a reasonable reward through innovation and strategy. The present status in the work environment and technological innovations have become established in daily life with the need to work remotely, collaboratively, from home, or from anywhere (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). There is a constant need to analyse how technological developments will transform job functions while keeping in mind that the implementation of these changes is significant in effecting change.

Integrating an institutional model with technology is a critical aspect of modern institutional strategy, especially in the context of improving operational efficiency, enhancing stakeholder experience, and staying competitive. Remote working has brought competition amongst institutions of higher learning. According to Nanthambwe (2023), of importance is the approach by ICT, the observation of business capabilities in what is available and vice versa, and the capabilities needed going forward. Remote working requires trust as well as digital infrastructure, and trust in people's reliability, capability, and motivation to have productive teams and institutions (Janczewski et al., 2023). The implementation of digitalisation has a ripple effect; therefore, whatever plan is proposed should be thought through by the strategists within the institution.

Institutional capabilities must influence the skill sets required, while the existing training and development must inform the capabilities required, such as the integration of systems by ICT to address the business of the day and get the job done (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). Additionally, consultation with staff is required on the business knowledge, present skills, driving processes, and those needed to either upskill or reskill staff. Management should also decide on what skills are needed to attract and build on, and how to adapt or bridge existing gaps in performance abilities between employees, with the emphasis on the need to work remotely supported by technology. Smith-Bingham (2018) expresses that in the fourth industrial revolution, adopting innovative technologies is intense, even where near-term performance benefits are uncertain and longer-term ecosystem effects are unclear.

In today's rapidly evolving environment, businesses must continuously adapt their models to leverage emerging technologies like AI and 4IR. An ability to work remotely

and agile transformation are among the top two skills required in institutions. The two are the pillars of preparedness to dominate discussions in companies that take steps to simultaneously rebound and drive reinvention (Blanchard, 2021). Reskilling and an adaptable mind set are often the practical lenses through which institutions are observed. Collaborations, strategic partnerships, and trust are required in operations within institutions and among employees to allow flexibility in the current climate. Institutions worry about virtual working on productivity.

Brynjolfsson et al. (2020) further state that a business strategy enables behavioural change in employees to have useful input beneficial to the business. In implementing any plan, an institution should endeavour to rate outcomes such as productivity, reduced turnaround times in service provision, lower absenteeism, increased loyalty, and more positive work attitudes (Henze, 2018). Institutions need to retain skilled and knowledgeable workers with a desire to reduce the time wasted in commuting, can resolve family or work conflicts, as well as be able to perform tasks from anywhere at any given time (Marchegiani et al., 2020).

Change in organisational cultures and service delivery was necessitated and enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic, whose effect is global. Change is crucial and requires an understanding of the existing organisational culture (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). According to Chiaroni et al. (2010), a proper organisational change is an effective change management process consisting of four main active dimensions, namely, evaluation processes, organisational structures, inter-organisational networks, and knowledge management systems. The implemented change should involve identifying the values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours that currently define the culture, and bringing a critical understanding of the organisation's resilience in initiating change.

2.6.2 Work strategy and design

Studies show that due to the workplace that continues to evolve, constant work environment and operational style changes that address the pandemic, global trends, changing work attitudes, leadership, and performance adaptations are needed (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). These will address the emotional and physical job possessions, including many changed employed arrangements, teamwork, and

dissemination of information, living in communities, compassion, rising to the occasion, being resilient, being concerned about their relatives, and manifesting true leadership by accommodating them to be financially sustainable. According to Ashforth (2020), the developers use flexible working arrangements and receive support from staff, who perceive the arrangements to be beneficial for themselves and their organisations.

The employee experience within an institutional context includes looking at how employees feel or perform, but how the structure, culture, and policies of the institution shape that experience. According to Visser et al. (2020), during the encounters created by the pandemic, all institutions took initiatives to make brand changes, including virtual transformations to their institutions. The flexibility of current digital pieces of knowledge can foster knowledge inventiveness, interest in data transformations, and automated systems that enhance traditional jobs, hence the need for the application of ICT to facilitate digitalisation and online service provision.

There is a need to develop a good WFH strategy, develop policies to monitor remote working employees, as well as manage performance. Working remotely can either be beneficial or hurt productivity. There is value in working in an office environment, but not all work has to happen on-site. Breaux et al. (2021) stipulate that design thinking, digital services, and innovation are all crucial skills post-pandemic. Communication still plays an important role, allowing a platform for employees and managers to share useful insights to help enhance the performance of employees to have creative ideas with a positive impact on business goals.

To ensure that all work performed enriches the execution of the institutional strategy, situations arose to revisit the institutional cultures as the traditional method of physically working face-to-face posed challenges. In addition to the internet, communication and collaboration can happen around the world, so workers want freedom and flexibility, and companies want access to the best talent, performance output, and results (Marino & Capone, 2022). Institutions must be more advanced in the development of new processes. Institutions have realised the rapid changes in institutions of higher learning and educational offerings. All institutions are exploring

digital technology and management concepts to enable performance, as well as coordinate processes (Agustriyana & Setyadi, 2021).

Remote working cultivates the elements of shared knowledge, trust, commitment, dedication, and communication. The elements bring a sense of comfort, despite the general discomfort that exists presently between the employer and employee. They create or change operational processes and customer experiences to create new value across occupations, industries, and countries (Agustriyana & Setyadi, 2021). As the world adapts to a post-COVID era, management within institutions needs to listen to their customers and rethink what their customers need, embrace a digital transformation strategy that includes certain elements that derive four important dimensions, namely, the use of knowledge, changes in worth, structural changes, and financial characteristics.

2.6.3 Rational proposal and employee turnover

The Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 promotes a culture of honest, gentle, kind, and practical conversations based on fair principles evident within the institution, to develop a survival strategy that is fair to all within the institution, management, academics, administrators, and students alike. To achieve their strategic objectives with the new, employers face the challenge of employee turnover. Nyamubarwa, Mupani and Chiduuro (2013) define employee turnover as the rate of movement of employees in and out of an institution, the rotation of workers around jobs and institutions, a movement that ushers in retention of corporate memory, information, customers, and intellectual property to competitors. It is therefore important for institutions to denote the ability to retain employees who are productive and of value to the institution. Ongori (2007) and Sandhya and Kumar (2011) concur, further stating that employee turnover is the replacement of workers from one workplace to another in a working environment. Managerial decisions are pivotal in advancing institutional competitiveness and sustainability in the coming decades.

Staff morale and well-being of staff are important at a time like this, for service delivery and performance output (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021). Capabilities and strategic workforce planning are, therefore, important concepts to usher in changes in employment approaches critical for institutions. These concepts help to enhance

employee fulfilment as well as achieve business goals. Institutions also play an important role in tracking active employee appointments, policies used within the institution to improve employee attraction, and applying employee retention strategies to retain the best talent. In the working environment, compensation and profits are important in implementing change. However, Breaux et al. (2021), drawing on the metaphor of the body and a variety of theories and disciplines, such as corporate communications, convention, complexity, critique, and challenge the idealised notion that institutions can and should communicate as integrated entities. In working remotely, trust is a very important key element in the working environment to harmonise operations. Every institution has a way of handling operations, supervision of work done, output measurement, and accountability enforced. Performance management is encouraged as a process that offers much potential for enhancing institutional effectiveness and helps to improve and satisfy the needs of employees for performance and feedback on performance. Administrative management describes an approach to management to increase productivity by emphasising institutional structure and human behaviour (Khanlarl, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in institutional cultural change, the development of capable business models, work strategy, design thinking, and employee turnover, as well as competency modelling to guide institutional operations into the future. Strategy intelligence is a system used by institutions to address employee turnover through providing a structured approach for managers to understand employee needs, identify areas of need, and develop innovative solutions to enhance the employee experience in the working environment (Modau, Dhanpat, Lugisani, MaboJane & Phiri, 2018). Working from home or any other remote location has become the norm (Smith-Rodden & Wiley, 2022), therefore line managers and supervisors fulfil the role of being change agents who conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis to facilitate the change from the traditional physical contact service delivery to flexible, remote online working.

Technology was viewed as a constant, highlighting the need for increased focus on technological development in socio-technical studies, while underscoring the importance of aligning social and technical systems to enhance performance and worker satisfaction, leading to further discussions on relevant theories.

2.7 THEORIES UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

The study deals with the adoption of new system technologies and the acceptance of technology. Systems theory emphasizes input, process, output, and feedback loops, a perspective useful for analysing how technologies interact with users, processes, and environments. A successful implementation of systems requires a balance between social and technical components (McMahon, 2017), based on established theories that provide a framework for understanding the development, implementation, and impact of system technology within institutional and user contexts.

2.7.1 Theoretical framework: The Technology Acceptance Model

According to Wheatley (2021:123), a theoretical framework is a predicted perspective with set assumptions about reality that informs the questions asked and the answers provided. It is the foundation of a research study that provides a structured way to understand and analyse a problem. The key steps involved in research methodology typically include data collection, data coding, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and theory development, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections. Capone et al. (2021) express that this exceptional period has changed the models of work and engagement with stakeholders and employees, and these times brought new approaches, as the future work model is accommodated. The theoretical frameworks provide a particular perspective, or lens, through which to examine the title. The lenses encompass psychological, social, institutional, and economic theories, which are discussed later in the study.

The researcher employed the Technology Acceptance Model (hereafter referred to as TAM). TAM is a theoretical framework developed by Fred Davis in 1989, an abstract outline that explains how users come to accept and use technology. It advocates for acknowledgment of the intention to use technology, and use of individual employees and promotes the change to remote work technologies and platforms (O'Dea, 2025). This study will employ the technology acceptance model as a theoretical framework for working remotely in ODeL institutions and influencing change in institutional policies. Reinforced remote working highlights the strategies, practices, and tools that enhance and strengthen the effectiveness of remote work. TAM explains how users accept and use information technology, focusing on perceived usefulness and ease of

use as key factors when conducting operations (Davis, 1989). In this study, the theoretical framework chosen, TAM, provides a structured foundation to connect the existing knowledge, direct the data collection and analysis, to bring an understanding and offer an interpretation of the findings, explain the study, and predict the outcomes of the study.

To maintain service provision during times of crisis and beyond, institutions of higher learning should strike a balance on what capabilities are needed to digitalise systems and processes within institutions. It can be particularly useful in examining the perceived effects of remote working on performance management at an ODeL institution of higher learning (Davis, Granić, & Marangunić, 2023). Institutions of higher learning should reflect, collaborate, and exchange institutional strategies to bridge the gap in the changing world, align the workforce, alter operations, adopt flexible work arrangements and employment, to make a valuable contribution to performance management tools.

TAM is used in research to bring an understanding of the acceptance and adoption of various technologies, websites, information systems, and software applications needed for online service delivery by the user (Davis, Granić, & Marangunić, 2023). TAM presents valued perceptions for designers, developers, and institutions seeking to improve user acceptance and usage of technology by focusing on identified effectiveness and efficient usage. Using technology is perceived to make the execution of tasks easier to accomplish. TAM is commonly applied in software adoption, e-learning, mobile apps, and various IT systems to assess user acceptance and adoption. TAM has also been extended and adapted in various ways to address specific contexts and factors influencing technology acceptance. TAM will be applied in this study as it is grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action. A perceived usefulness, which is the belief that using a specific technology will improve job performance, and performance management. In the context of this study, it will enhance remote working, influence the needed technological support, with the belief that utilising certain technologies will enhance job performance.

2.7.2 Socio-Technical Systems Theory

Socio-technical systems (herewith referred to as STS) theory is an institutional approach that emphasises the interrelatedness of social and technical aspects within a workplace. STS emphasises the need to consider both human (social) and technological (technical) factors when designing work systems or implementing change. The theory proposes that optimal performance is achieved when both the social and technical subsystems are designed to work together in harmony without integrating them.

STS upholds human factors such as motivation, job satisfaction, people relationships, roles, values, work culture, communication, and team dynamics as being central. STS deals with system design, automation, and infrastructure needed to accommodate change and comprises tools, processes, technologies, workflows, and equipment used to complete tasks remotely. It ultimately encourages the design of jobs and workflows that provide autonomy, task variety, and meaningful engagement for workers.

2.7.3 The relation of theories to the key concepts

The TAM theory highlights the interrelationship between social and technical aspects of an institution. It posits that the successful implementation of system technologies depends not only on the technical efficiency but also on how well these systems integrate with human and institutional factors (Omelyanenko, 2018). This approach ensures that both people and technology are considered during the system design and deployment process. STS and TAM, when applied within institutions, recognise that the interaction between people and technology significantly impacts institutional success. These theories optimise the balance between social and technical elements to enhance overall system performance, a key aspect in remote working. They further enable collaboration and innovations, encouraging a participative and innovative work environment, an element necessary to support a remote working environment (Adomako & Tran, 2022).

STS in ODeL institutions acknowledges that a system's success is affected by the way it interacts with its environment, and its evolution and responsiveness to any changing

conditions. This implies that environmental factors brought by the pandemic influence the way the system behaves, and therefore, to resolve complex issues, the dynamics between psychological, economic, technical, cultural, and institutional aspects need to be understood. An institutional setting is made up of people who produce products or deliver services using technology, relationships, values, structure, work-related elements, and associations that are delivered by institutional members who interact with the systems (Serafini, De Moura, De Almeida & de Retender, 2022). The technical subsystem, which refers to the physical and material flows within a transformation process, in addition to the tasks, control and maintenance functions, and when applied to the organisational setting, denotes the tools, techniques, skills, and devices that are required by workers to fulfil institutional objectives and tasks (Glynn, 2025).

2.8 SUMMARY

In the effective integration of remote working during the pandemic, managers within institutions must endeavour to enhance employees' affective and regular commitment to their jobs to achieve the integration of remote working during this period. Remote working has evolved from a flexible option to a mainstream mode of work, transforming the way individuals and organisations operate. The study aims to introduce remote working as a model for implementation by defining its characteristics, benefits, challenges, and broader implications. Remote work fosters increased autonomy, improved work-life balance, and access to a global talent pool, making it a highly attractive model for better performance outcomes, improved productivity, improved ability to manage remote employees, successful communication flow inside organisations, management of individual personalities, and conduct of employees as a successful model going forward. Organisations should employ more effort to provide employees with more flexible working arrangements, with the aim of improving employee morale and productivity in the workplace. Remote working was a short-term choice for certain workers under the unusual conditions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Presently, remote working is seen as a long-term alternative for most of the workforce.

CHAPTER 3: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SUPPORTED BY TECHNOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Ever since the pandemic took its full might in 2020, working remotely has become the norm in many work environments. Due to the isolation necessitated by the pandemic lockdown, the reality at hand is that remote working has become the order of the day, hence the development of performance management in remote working environments (Albukhitan, 2020). This involves adjusting traditional practices to fit the unique challenges and opportunities of remote setups. In remote working, employees have to be enabled to perform remotely through clear communication of expectations and goals, setting up platforms for feedback sessions, as well as providing technology tools and reliable connectivity (Jones, 2024). Flexibility allows employees to work at times that suit them best, and trust that they manage time and meet deadlines.

In the remote working environment, institutions must introduce performance-based rewards, encourage employee wellness, and foster cultural integration. The implementation of these strategies assists in effectively managing performance in a remote working environment thereby ensuring the acquisition of organisational goals and employee well-being is maintained. Many employers also began offering a combination of working from the office and home interchangeably, giving rise to a hybrid model. The process of digital transformation relies on employee capabilities and digital technology knowledge to create or change business (Sokhi et al., 2021). Institutional change in performance is influenced by the digital transformation of the processes that occur in business processes, utilisation of technology, and human resources. Businesses referred to the COVID-19 pandemic as a brief inconvenience and a temporary solution to a permanent crisis because the workforce cannot ignore the ongoing tasks and impacts of the pandemic on operations.

The properties of the pandemic are economic challenges, health, social, organisational performance management, employee efficiency, institutional leadership skills and abilities, employee trust, and digitalisation (Marino & Capone, 2021). HR professionals have an essential role in engaging with personnel in deciding on operations within the respective organisations or institutions to familiarise themselves

with the contemporary way of working and providing a service. Carpenter, Wyman and Marsh (2021) highlight that working virtually is not a new concept in organisations but instead, an opportunity to revisit the organisational culture, because the traditional method of working from the office and face-to-face service delivery posed challenges during the pandemic.

The lockdown and the restrictions put in place necessitated businesses to adjust to a new mode of operating, conducting business, and service delivery (Makanyeza, Kwandayi & Ikobe, 2013). This change in conducting business is referred to as the new normal. The new normal model is the transition path from the known traditional way of service delivery and conducting operations to the digitalised new model of conducting operations, implementing technology, and artificial intelligence. Marino and Capone (2021) state that the new normal should be seen as a way or means to shape organisations and institutions to continue their existence and be sustainable, not only to resolve the present situation but to be able to withstand and face possible future catastrophic events (Zengin & Naktiyok, 2022). Essential businesses were instructed to send staff home, and many businesses were faced with the challenge of having to set up their teams rapidly to effectively carry out operations remotely. Remote working is discussed in conjunction with innovative digital technologies.

The next section addresses the need for organisations to revisit and adapt business plans, culture analysis, define performance management approaches, and review policies, processes, procedures, and design practices.

3.2 REINFORCED REMOTE WORKING

The diffusion of innovation (hereafter referred to as DOI) model is a theory developed to explain how new ideas, products, or technologies spread within a society or social system. A system that serves as a best practice for current performance administration in remote working is to address challenges caused by management and enhance performance by developing the intention and direct determining factor for actual technology usage. The remote working performance tool should be developed with consideration of other external factors, such as the remote working organisational policy that supports employees as remote teams or individual remote workers (Lawler III & McDermott, 2003). It is essential to develop a clear communication strategy and

a remote working performance tool to monitor, track, and manage the performance of the remote team.

Performance management in remote working is discussed in section 3.3, which outlines the importance of effectively managing the performance of remote workers, ensuring productivity, engagement, and alignment with the institutional mandate.

3.3 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN REMOTE WORKING

Performance management transformation is a major organisational change effort, and established change management models provide insights about how to orchestrate change effectively. Managing performance in an outside office environment presents unique challenges and opportunities. Performance management is defined by Armstrong and Taylor (2014:31-332) as well as Davila et al. (2014:349) as ongoing functioning and job responsibilities, employer communication to clarify and align organisational strategic goals, and performance expectations that accomplish outcomes. There are three cautionary notes about successful behaviour change to bear in mind. The first is that many companies have unrealistic expectations about how long and what it takes for meaningful change to occur, which includes intentionality from learners, a learning orientation, and repeated practice (Pulakos et al. 2015). The second caution is that performance management behaviour change (e.g., real-time feedback, agile goal setting, coaching, etc.) is unlikely to be successfully embedded without context. This is because concepts such as agile goal setting, real-time feedback, and effective coaching are elusive ideas that cannot be well understood and do not gain sufficient meaning to be learned until they are practiced in the actual work context.

The third caution, which is related to the first two, is that new performance management behaviours will be most successfully embedded by intentionally applying them in support of achieving an important performance goal. The perception of routine management includes providing the information needed to improve performance, influencing the employee's behaviour concerning the achievement of the expected results, and influencing workers' performance to achieve rewards (Osiobe, 2021). Reward management is a reward system intended to acknowledge and appreciate excellent performance by rewarding and providing incentives to enhance

performance. A controlling approach is used in organisations to advance employee performance as well as that of teams within the workplace (Sife, Lwoga & Sanga, 2007). This approach requires the setting of clear objectives, evaluating progress, providing regular feedback, and aligning employee performance with organisational goals.

During the flow of COVID-19 and multiple return-to-work false starts, uncertainty among employees prevailed. The question institutions need to ask as they navigate strategies and plan the future is whether or not there exists a need to recall workers back to the office. Whatever answer institutions offer should prepare their people for that return to the office (Frawley, 2022). The priority of institutions was how often employees would need to report to the office and from where employees execute their duties, and whether there will be any flexibility for those who cannot report to the office, or an obligation to comply with the return to office instruction. All these are questions for which most employers still do not have the answers, aggravating the volatile work environment.

Johansen et al. (2020) state that the working environment prevailing after the pandemic is uncontrolled and complex, described as a VUCA environment that is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. However, the determination in the working industry is to change the circumstances around and create a positive VUCA work environment with distinctive attributes of Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility. Institutional leadership should regularly assess the effectiveness of remote performance management systems and adjust policies. The new normal remodels the working environments to a positive VUCA environment, hence the intention to implement and embrace technological innovations and artificial intelligence in the VUCA world, as follows:

- a) Vision, advocate digitalisation, embrace 4IR, and transformation of existing complex, ambiguous work environments. Facilitate the rapid move to a predominantly virtual world and workforce to accommodate the new normal.
- b) Understanding of the model presently applicable, known as the new model that promotes working online, remotely, anywhere, supported by technology. The new normal prompts systems to support and monitor performance working remotely, and influences the advancement of the policy to work remotely. The

new normal also contributes positively to the field of education, improving electronic teaching and learning platforms and improving access to education and knowledge. Most of all, to demonstrate to ODeL institutions how to embrace and apply technology to operations because the ODeL institution is a leader in providing distance electronic education.

- c) Clarity about online remote working, remote performance, and performance management systems to monitor remote working inside institutions in Africa and across the globe. Develop new technology-supported ways of access to institutions and support the remote working model.
- d) Agility, by encouraging agile leadership to enhance managing a remote workforce performance, support business productivity and output while engaging remote working, resilience, as well as the financial sustainability of organisations. Develop a performance management framework tool to manage remote work performance and bring into being a remote workforce profile.

The WHO announced that the COVID-19 virus outbreak brought amongst other feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and an absolute state of confusion. COVID-19 was acknowledged as a worldwide health crisis (WHO, 2020). The pandemic brought a new normal model that remodels the negative working environments to a positive VUCA, which includes advocating for the employment of the fourth industrial revolution (hereafter referred to as 4IR), and artificial intelligence (hereafter referred to as AI) to enhance operations, capabilities, and improve effectiveness. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) stipulate that allowing the transformation of the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous work environments bring an understanding of the new normal, a model that promotes WFH, also referred to as remote working, smart working, or working online, anywhere, supported by technology.

3.3.1 Remote performance management tools

Institutional change requires substantial resources and time investments to achieve. In essence, a new mindset and climate need to be created about how PM is enacted regularly through key managers' and employees' behaviours (Pulakos et al., 2015). Remote work demands a reimagined approach to achieve performance; therefore, HR department leaders have the responsibility to shape, train, and develop employees and teams to thrive in performance regardless of location (Marino & Capone, 2021).

Managers need to master remote performance management, crucial to driving better business outcomes and output, creating clear systems to monitor remote working performance, developing a remote working policy, and supporting the business's productivity. It further promotes the well-being of employees as well as the financial sustainability of the institution (Ammons & Roenigk, 2020). There is now a need to develop remote working performance management processes that guide and reskill employees to work and perform remotely to deliver consistent experiences and achievable outcomes for all employees.

Performance management ensures continuity of services, achievable targets, as well as expected performance as outlined by the institutional goals and the respective institution's mandate, because the remote workforce needs assurance from time to time from managers, even though there is no physical contact (Dekker et al., 2012). Institutions and organisations prioritise protecting their status by avoiding risks, embracing remote working, and fostering a culture of virtual amid operations. According to Enz and Sigauaw (2020), the best practices to shift service delivery and operations to working remotely have emerged. Knight et al. (2018) agree that the change to remote working indicates that digital transformation within the workplace is implemented, and the incorporation of new technologies in the workplace has become clear as the future of business.

The implementation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is already changing the institution's operations and service delivery model. HR professionals and managers have a fundamental role to play in deciding on the new normal within their respective institutions and organisations. Birken et al. (2022) state that change facilitates and contributes to institutional governance, impacts on, and paves the path going forward to bring about an understanding of transformation in undertaking practical expectations and challenges to the traditional way of delivering services. There is a need to shift the mind sets of institutional behaviours, adaptability, decision-making, and the approach to service delivery, as well as to embrace remote working to accomplish the organisational or institutional mandate (Wright & Wright, 2002).

The study proposes to positively underwrite the field of education, improving electronic teaching and learning platforms, fostering access to education, knowledge, and

developing technology-supported effective implementation of technology-driven systems, procedures, and processes. Lawler and McDermott (2003) and Osam (2020) explain and describe performance management assessment as an effort to value employees and maintain and improve employees' performance in line with an organisation's objectives and mandate. The management process is not a single activity, but rather a group of practices that should be approached holistically. The performance measurement allows the involvement of employees in the enhancement of the overall performance of an institution. Osam (2020) continues to propose that organisational culture is shared attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviours that illustrate the institution as an entity. Institutional culture is often reflected in the organisation's image and operational statement, the approach and treatment of employees, the approach to decision-making, and its overall work environment. Employee involvement is actively engaging workers in the operational processes, objective background, problem-solving, and decision-making.

Section 3.3.2 is a discussion on organisational culture and employee involvement, which are interconnected aspects that significantly influence the overall functioning and success of an organisation or institution.

3.3.2 Institutional culture and employee involvement

It may be useful to consider new models that focus on playing to employee strengths and accepting that everyone has limitations within bounds rather than imposing requirements to provide developmental feedback and improve performance areas that may not be easily addressed (Budworth & Chummar, 2022). These ideas are not to suggest that individual performance be forgotten, or poor performance be tolerated, but there may be room to shift our thinking to models that would better support the human and practical realities of the imperfect performers in the workplace that collectively need to get a job done. Meaningful change requires viewing the concept differently, engaging differently, and reacting differently over time and across contexts until new behavioral patterns are formed and embedded (Worley & Good, 2021). Successful change is more likely to occur when individuals adopt a learning versus performance orientation to arouse positive belief in their capability to change and maintain focus on what they want to become.

Effective behaviour may also be facilitated by mindfulness practices that are gaining increasing attention in institutions to enable higher performance, satisfaction, and resilience, among other positive work outcomes. The idea is that individuals must become intrinsically motivated to change, driven by the emotional part of their brains, versus feeling obligated to change because others told them to change (Wang et al., 2021). Also important are trusting and supportive relationships to enable the change process. An important aspect of implementation, however, is ensuring that the PM approach fits the organisation's strategy and culture, and that it can be successfully implemented within the given context.

Experiential learning on the job provides a platform for behaviour change (Ericsson et al., 1993) because work inherently contains several important elements. Organisational values and employee participation are meticulously connected aspects to move the daily operations within an organisation. Institutional refers to the ethics, principles, attitudes, and behaviours that characterise an institution. It is the way the organisation works in its planning and strategising that influences the level of participation and encouragement of employees (Venturato, Horner & Etherton-Beer, 2020). Post-pandemic organisations had to be creative, plan, and revise processes and policies to integrate all employees and embrace the diversity and change brought by the pandemic. Employees are actively involved in the performance output, including target setting, response discussions, and development planning (Harapan et al., 2020, 668). Encouraging the implementation and use of technology to foster a culture of change within institutions, encouraging continuous communication and employee participation in the performance management process, fosters ownership of performance goals and increases engagement in the process.

In remote work settings, workforce profiles must be planned and be suitable for remote working (Ingusci et al., 2023). During the pandemic, organisations and institutions struggled to fulfil their mandate to serve clients, and the global challenge was to develop applicable plans and strategies to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. It is therefore critical to develop a systematic process for managing performance output and service delivery that incorporates a combination of the past and present context, culture, and the correct positioning of valuable input (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019) to reshape the future of the organisation.

Schwartz (2012) asserts that managers within an organisation have an important function in the operation of adaptable and outside working policies, and in developing an alteration framework (Osiobe, 2021). Organisations are now perpetuating the knowledge and strategy to manage remote workforces, forcing everyone to learn, understand, and implement the use of technology to do work, deliver a service, and manage operations. Institutions find themselves operating in a situation where there is a mixed-mode, distinct workforce, and managers are challenged in managing the performance of the online remote workforce simultaneously with the seasonal office-working workforce.

Bless, Higson-Smith, and Kagee (2006) highlight that with all the changes on board, there are three streams of research important for this study. A combination of the past and present context, culture, and the correct positioning of the results of what is valuable input will bring the needed change to shift the minds and behaviours of staff at institutions of higher learning and organisations. This will assist in embracing remote working, fulfilling the institutional mandate in terms of adaptability, management, and an old-style method of delivering a service during this period of the pandemic and beyond.

3.3.3 Institutional Development

Employees expect increased support from the organisation, line managers, and individual capital development. Experts to guide operations. (Ramlachan & Beharry-Ramraj, 2021). Organisations use technology-based tools and platforms to streamline and automate performance management processes, such as feedback collection, goal tracking, and performance analytics. To comprehend how HRM can sustain leaders and promote guidance competencies, Mitsakis (2019) states that it is important to note that the organisational leaders are now being called upon to direct their institutions and employees through the crisis because organisations are pursuing direction from their leaders. Leadership capabilities, especially ethical leadership characteristics, contribute to the viewpoint that evaluates conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an appropriate time for reliable leaders to contribute to the institution (Schmidt, Van Dierendonck & Weber, 2023).

Employees overcome fears and limitations, enhance, and improve their performance, and achieve flexibility in their human strategy, capital, and other salient resources. Authentic leadership seeks to recognise management experiences required to manage the challenges brought on by the pandemic in the working world (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). The existence of ethical leadership in the workplace is replicated by a firm belief and support of employee rights and dignity. It is therefore imperative for ethical leaders to cultivate work cultures that demonstrate fairness, clear expectations, and sound judgment in the leadership of institutions and organisations to display timing and emotional maturity when addressing matters of employment, service provision, and performance. Islam (2019) describes the situation during the pandemic as needing workforce appreciation and positive reinforcement. Coping with change, concentrating on the skills required by the workforce for now and post-pandemic to continue service delivery is essential (Osiobe, 2021). Leaders must be able to be accountable and possess the ability to delegate and manage stress during a crisis. Seidenbecher et al. (2023) state that leaders must develop competencies, require continuous learning ability, possess decisive adaptability, and plan to tackle challenging situations.

3.3.4 Integration of institutional development

Birken et al. (2022:41) stipulate that planners in organisations and institutions must be mindful that there is a need for ongoing understanding, training as well as learning more about this virus and the management thereof, to avoid any future catastrophe because what may be good for today may not necessarily be good enough in future (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021). Technology allows organisations to automate repetitive tasks, reducing the likelihood of increasing productivity. Integration of organisational development is when organisational goals are aligned. Organisational alignment promotes collaboration and teamwork across all areas of work to establish employee empowerment and employee involvement (Murphy et al., 2021). Technology and digitalisation have become a cornerstone of organisational development, enabling companies to streamline processes, enhance communication, and improve overall efficiency (Murphy et. al., 2021). Quality employee performance is achieved when an employee carries out the tasks assigned to them based on experience, sincerity, time, and skills. Supervisory facilitation assists leaders within an organisation to increase employee retention, a benefit positively affecting organisational performance

throughout the crisis. As the institution continues to plan now and beyond the pandemic. Workforces continue to seek flexible arrangements suitable to work remotely (O'Connor et al., 2020).

Flexible work arrangements enable people to cope capably with the challenging pressures between work and home demands, enhancing workers' experience of the dealings between their personal and work life (Murphy et al., 2021). Organisations that want to succeed in implementing remote working have to provide employees more options to consider by improving the workplace, employing flexible working arrangements (hereafter referred to as FWA), to retain talented employees and boost their competitiveness, and ensure continuity in service delivery. Zemke, Raines and Filipczak (2013) describe the different generations found in the respective workplaces. Those born between 1981 and 1996 to be the Born-Free, also known as Millennials are a well-educated generation, technology-driven who contribute and boost economic growth. a generation highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, that caused the economic recession.

Millennials raise an argument that one does not need to be at work to do work, but argue that work can be done anywhere, supported by technology (O'Connor et al., 2020). They contend that staff can deliver, perform, and be managed remotely. The Baby Boomers are the economically influential generation, dominating the working class, and contributing to the economy and wealth of their respective countries. They have values and political views and are entrepreneurs who provide financial help and support to the silent generation that was their parents (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011). Generation X, born between 1965 and 1981, is the generation that is increasingly aware that overall lifestyle can be a bargaining tool for employment. Generational work performance is aligned with organisational goals, and the required support and feedback sessions provide the necessary platform for the performance management approach that aims to produce a culture of unceasing enhancement, accountability, and performance excellence within the organisation and institutes (Shankar & Bhatnagar, 2010).

The discussion on the reconfiguration processes and performance management beyond the pandemic ensures organisations' development driven by technology for the achievement of strategic objectives.

3.4 RECONFIGURATION OF PROCESSES AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

The workforce is prepared to do anything to assist the institution to succeed, declare a high level of efficiency output, build a digital-friendly workplace, and sustain an extraordinary level of productivity. Korhonen, Sillanpaa, and Jääskeläinen (2023) state that new technology is key in ensuring efficiency and that the institution remains competitive within a challenging marketplace. Knowledge Management Systems (hereafter referred to as KMS) leverage effective ICT knowledge management to boost the possibility of effectively implementing proper KMSs, a process that ensures activities produce the desired results (Marchegani et al., 2020). Digital-enabled business opportunities bring forth new organisational capabilities. The Fourth Industrial Revolution brought major innovation to the working environment that configures developments and measures to align with the new normal. Annosi et al. (2020) highlight that managers must build a flexible and remote constant connection with the world through technology, which helps organisations to remain more proactive in this new dispensation (Marchegiani, 2020) because of the configuration of interacting with actual and potential customers to deliver services and take direct responsibility in their operational domains.

Economic and social life is judgmentally reliant on distributed and available information and telecommunications pieces of knowledge, with all the accurate skills and expertise to manage and maintain, support staff with technical expertise, and multitaskers who can process information rapidly, to complete their daily tasks and meet their overall potential performance successfully (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). As remote work rises through institutions, the analysis of factors that effectively influence institutional growth is crucial to advance the well-being of the workers, as discussed in section 3.4.1.

3.4.1 Encounters with organisational development

A strong organisational culture that values and promotes employee involvement and associations can establish a positive and dynamic work environment that drives

success and growth (Ingusci et al., 2023). This study contributes positively to the field of education, improving electronic education platforms, admission to education and knowledge, the development of new technology-supported ways of access to institutions, and a model to offer student support that ensures online teaching and learning for students to pursue their studies. Institutional development is a critical process that assists institutions in building their capability to change and achieve greater effectiveness (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). Employers must point out and reflect on the challenges of a continued remote workforce and the safety measures required. Institutions should develop, improve, and reinforce strategies, structures, and processes to build capacity to change and achieve greater effectiveness of remote working (Murphy, 2021).

3.4.2 Employee engagement and technology platforms

As with any change effort, success requires developing a business case, engaging stakeholders, gaining buy-in and support, communicating effectively, enabling and empowering the workforce to embed the change, and managing expectations. Employee engagement is the responsiveness of connection, and the dedication people have toward their work, their colleagues, the institution, and the organisation as a whole. Higher engagement leads to happier, better-performing employees or teams. In working remotely, trust and employee-manager interaction play a very important role in the remote working environment (Kanakalaxmi & Senthil, 2024). The office environment has its pros and cons.

The consequences of the office environment are costly and affect the well-being of the institution's workforce (Bagga et al., 2023:123). There are benefits to building loyalty, selflessness, collectivism, cooperativeness, and trust among the employees and teams. The development and implementation of technology-driven strategic plans enhance work engagements and assumed performance levels, flexibility to circumstances, and reduced performance associated with workplace space constraints (Kraft & Flubacher, 2023). Employees need to be actively engaged in creating a vision for their change, which is essential for building the motivation to practice new behaviours. Repetition, reinforcement, and patience are important in attitude, behaviour, and culture change. It is important to be realistic about what outcomes can be achieved in a given context, as well as context factors that shape what should be

attempted and can be accomplished. This means realistically assessing political, social, and motivational factors that will enable or undermine change, as these are often given insufficient attention.

Vulnerable and truthful conversations with workers about how they are pursuing their performance and attainment of objectives are essential, as well as how they are coping directly, including team engagement in organisational strategy and virtual employee engagement platforms embracing the implementation of organisational strategy. Employees want to work and be led by managers who engage subordinates on an individual level to influence and support their work-life balance and assist them in navigating their professional development journeys (Kenny & Priyadarshini, 2021).

Dennerlein et al. (2020) describe leadership skills as the seven Cs, highlighting how to lead and manage during a crisis: Calm, remote working should be tackled with understanding, and level up virtual employee engagement. Confidence to see virtual employee engagement platforms bring strategy to life successfully. Communicate, employers focus on strengthening the communication between employees with employers, relentlessly within and outside the organisation, to avoid rumours and uncertainty. Create an atmosphere where workers feel recognised and rewarded. Collaborations, effective collaboration builds connections between team members and creates a sense of closeness and mutual support. Encourage employees to contribute as individuals and apply teamwork to the dissemination of information.

Dennerlein et al. (2020) continues to explain leadership skills, where the fifth C is Community, since employees live in communities, it allows them to easily pick up conversations and work where they left off, which fosters effective, rewarding collaborations. Compassion brings forth an independent opportunity as well as an in-depth understanding of the staff's skills and capacity. Employees need to be recognised, listened to, understood, and accommodated. Cash, encourage new ideas, develop, and train employees to plan for the recovery and revival of global economic relations. Employees need to be rewarded for good work, and work should ensure financial sustainability (Dennerlein et al., 2020). Leadership skills are essential because when employees feel they are understood, they are more receptive to being

managed and accommodating to the employer's expectations (Ramlachan & Beharry-Ramraj, 2021).

The African perspective and the European perspective of remote working post-pandemic and socioeconomic factors affecting the economic status are dealt with in section 3.5.

3.5 HARMONISING THE GLOBAL, AFRICAN, LOCAL, AND THE ODeL INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

During the pandemic, the use of technology significantly supported and enhanced performance management in organisations, institutions, and businesses globally. Harmonising the global, African, local, and ODeL institutional perspectives on performance management through technology requires a nuanced understanding of diverse contexts, infrastructure levels, and strategic goals. The global north groups were on a different wavelength because, with the adoption of 4IR technologies, there were quick and affordable ways to ensure adjustments and business continuity. Employers are hard at work to retain businesses and institutions and to gradually re-employ employees into new work outlines. Ramlachan and Beharry-Ramraj (2021) contend that apart from the opposing effects on organisational culture, the virus led to high-pitched surprises in global economies, harming the business sustainability of different organisations.

3.5.1 Insight into the global perspective

Birken et al. (2022:41) state that work challenges and organisational work-life balance increased post-pandemic. Socio-demographic characteristics and job influences are critical in shaping tomorrow's workforce. With the pandemic, restrictions came working online remotely. Working remotely is not a new work arrangement, hence, the ability to adapt to smart working when there was a call to do so. Multi-tasking or holding down more than one job is rife in Europe; therefore, flexible work arrangements provide employees with a collection of jobs.

It is clear that while remote working is on the increase, traditional in-office present work is far from obsolete, with both workforces' growing affinity towards autonomy,

flexibility, of work-life balance that remote work offers. The hybrid model combines both home and in-office working, offering flexibility and maintaining a level of physical presence at the workplace, requiring human resources departments to pivot so as to change faster than ever before (Poalses & Bezuidenhout, 2018). Simultaneously, remote working employees have adapted to a hybrid work model, and both models satisfy the working world and bring a balance in social, family, and work-life (Halfmann et al., 2022). This suggests that the younger workforce values the flexibility and autonomy offered by remote work, which could have implications for businesses looking to attract and retain this talent group.

3.5.2 Insight into the African Perceptive

Within the African context, businesses have had to evaluate their business practices to accommodate remote working and transform infrastructure to improve access to electricity for all and improve the quality of service. This meant bridging the digital divide, contextual relevance, and capacity building to achieve remote working. These changes further promote sustainable energy investment through neutral platforms, leveraging mobile technology and tailor-made systems for multilingual and offline capabilities. However, with these benefits come challenges hence, organisations are hard at work to mitigate these challenges through strategies such as digital transformation, access to technology, development of communication platforms, training, and providing support for employees to navigate this innovative way of working, and align with African Union's Agenda 2063 goals, which include skills development and innovation. Poalses and Bezuidenhout (2018) proclaim that African universities should be participants in implementing transformational Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) systems (Marino & Capone, 2021). African insights also emphasise the enduring cultural suppression, exploitation of resources, impacts of colonialism, including the imposition of arbitrary borders due to persistent challenges of deficiency, inequality, and underdevelopment on the continent.

3.5.3 The local perspective

The global south was challenged by a lack of contemporary progressive affordable technologies. Institutions on different continents were ill-prepared for the unplanned vagueness instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The unexpected shift in service

provision, digitalisation technology implementation associated with 4IR in the global south meant enhanced remote working strategies that include public-private partnerships for funding digital tools, building local performance frameworks that are culturally responsive, digitalisation policies, national quality assurance, and performance frameworks. Organisations had to also develop a harmonisation strategy, integrate global tools with local HRIS systems and government reporting standards, and offer training and support for local HR, administrative, and academic staff to effectively use performance tools.

3.5.4 ODeL institutions of higher learning perspective

The implementation of 4IR and AI in South African ODeL institutions of higher learning increases efficiency, transparency, and alignment between employees, institutional goals, and objectives. Digitalisation within institutions further promotes technology knowledge sharing, policy alignment, standardisation, and compliance with labour and education regulations to observe the institutions' mandate. The use of technology in ODeL institutions is important as it enables systems to track learner engagement and tutor performance online. The use of technology is also crucial in ensuring and monitoring the productivity of remote working performance, ensuring fairness and consistency in evaluation.

3.6 SUMMARY

Technology has significantly transformed performance management, making it more self-motivated, data-driven, and aligned with strategic business goals. Digital tools, technology-driven platforms enhance goal setting, feedback, and employee development, enabling institutions to continuously monitor, assess, and improve employee performance in real time. These technologies facilitate clearer goal setting, more frequent and meaningful feedback, and a shift from annual reviews to continuous development. Invest in digital literacy and capacity-building initiatives, reconfiguration of processes in performance management enables data-driven decision making and development plans, real-time feedback, and a continuous review process. Technology improves accuracy and engagement; however, successful implementation requires a balance between automation and human touch, as well as employee engagement to foster motivation and workplace culture. In developing technology platforms,

organisations and institutions should ensure transparency, fairness, and adaptability for long-term success and sustainability. Technology-driven platforms have transformed remote performance management, making it more efficient to help identify high performers, address skill gaps, foster a culture of accountability, growth, and enhance accessibility and engagement, ensuring that performance management becomes an ongoing, collaborative process between managers and employees, and the success of operations in ODeL institutions depends on aligning tools with strategic objectives, providing adequate training, and maintaining a human-centered approach to performance development.

CHAPTER 4: AN ODEL INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic that hit the world in March 2020 has directly transformed the private and public businesses, and this change was felt globally. As a result, working from home was introduced as an alternative and a resolution to deliver services during the period of the pandemic lockdown. Many employees did not understand the functioning from home. Therefore, working remotely from home began with certain assumptions about what it would be like and what to comply with within that environment. COVID-19 also caused a fairly high level of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty among employees at the university and students alike (Sahu et al., 2020), as well as disruption in the education systems, affecting learners and educators alike (Marino & Capone, 2021).

Corey et al. (2022) state that research is a thorough probe and evaluation of a cluster of various perspectives on the extent and uniqueness of a precise policy, system, institution, and project in physical-life circumstances. Raikar (2024) describes a case study as a specified narrative and reflection of an exact position in the actual world created to acquire insights and suggestions on operations at the institution for operational plans going forward. Flyvbjerg (2006) agrees with Corey et al. (2022) on the understanding that the study is an investigation based on a certain research strategy and a research approach to conduct research. This study focuses on an ODeL that has since transitioned into a comprehensive open-distance electronic learning, offering a comprehensive, flexible, and accessible education whose transformation changed its service delivery mode from the office presence provision to online service provision supported by technology. The change in service provision affected the experiences of the employees and students alike.

Section 4.2 discusses the locus of the study, an institution of higher learning (ODeL).

4.2 THE INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING

An institution of higher learning aims at shaping generations through education. Educational institutions at large are expected to develop and achieve an acceptable model for implementation for facility workers, the employees, the recipients of services, the students, and other internal and external stakeholders. The institution should engage with the employees, encourage employee participation, and probe for input to improve operations (Marino & Capone, 2021). The institution's management should listen to and consider the inputs made by employees because the employees' inputs are informed by their experiences and lessons learned while working at home during the lockdown (Naylo & Nyanjom, 2021). The model developed should ensure that working from home becomes a reality, remains productive, and benefits both the employer and employee. Effective implementation of a fully-fledged online performance management strategy to support and unleash a clear understanding among employees at the institution about working online, remotely, supported by technology is therefore essential.

Institutions of higher learning continue to experience ongoing transformation, aimed at shaping generations through education. The institution subscribes to service excellence, which inspires employees to serve students, their colleagues and internal and external stakeholders with integrity and dedication. Service excellence also enables an environment conducive to implementing the necessary enablers and resources to support employee responsibilities (Darmawan & Grenier, 2021). For institutions to be most effective, it is imperative to develop an understanding of where the institution is headed and set clear, measurable goals linked with the institutional objectives (Raikar, 2024).

Section 4.3 addresses institutional productivity and performance strategies that are essential for improving efficiency, achieving goals, and maintaining productivity while ensuring employee well-being.

4.3 INSTITUTIONAL PRODUCTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE STRATEGY

Institutional productivity and performance strategies are essential for improving efficiency, achieving goals, and maintaining a competitive advantage. Performance

strategies stipulate clear, achievable goals and measurable outputs for the institution to remain resilient and have a competitive advantage. In matters of performance, it is critical to involve and engage workers in the conclusion and the decision-making process to grow their commitment, buy-in, support, and reduce resistance. This is an important element for the smooth implementation of systems, methods, and procedures (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). Institutional productivity and performance strategies are essential for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution (Hagiu & Wright, 2020).

To be the most effective leader possible, it is imperative to develop an understanding of where the institution is headed and set clear, measurable goals in line with the institutional objectives (Raikar, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the world to imagine differently on many issues, amongst others, the provision of higher education, creating an agenda offering a distinctive prospect to ask fundamental questions about how the institutions are structured, delegate duties, and define responsibilities and accountability. Institutions were therefore required to conceptualise operations going forward with the hope of managing these challenges (to foster an agile culture, collaboration, and teamwork (Murphy et al., 2021). There have been many encounters in responding to the properties of the pandemic. Employee involvement and engagements necessitate regular feedback mechanisms that require training and development for the effectiveness and efficiency of the institution (Armstrong, 2018).

The massive use of digital technologies enables analysing, regaining, and merging of facts to harvest unceasing data and information for future use. Efficient resource allocation ensures optimal utilisation of institutional assets, including human, economic, and physical resources. The process of optimisation entails digitalisation in institutions, enabling business opportunities and bringing forth new institutional capabilities (Marchegiani, 2020) such as digitalised innovation in service provision for seamless interaction with actual and potential customers (Bonometti et al., 2020). The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) brought major online innovations, communication platforms, and design thinking in service offerings, operations, and problem-solving frameworks that allow institutions and individuals alike to influence viable benefits over originality and strategy.

Students at the university and other internal and external stakeholders are customers at the centre of every institution, therefore, customer involvement and feedback contribute to shaping the customer-business relationship (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). There are critical components for the integration and development of an institutional productivity and performance strategy to enhance performance and yield good productivity (Scudellari, 2020). These include institutional cultural change and employee involvement that have an important effect on an institution's output. The institution needs to embrace change to adapt and remain competitive because with change comes innovation, adaptability, rewarding innovative ideas, and creative thinking to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, as well as overall performance of the institution; hence the discussion about institutional cultural change.

4.4 INSTITUTIONAL CULTURAL CHANGE

Institutional culture is how work is done within an institution, namely the institutional productivity and performance strategy. Institutions can enhance their efficiency, effectiveness, and overall performance by appealing to employee's engagement in decision making processes. To increase their commitment and dedication to executing their duties. Committed and agile leaders who are exemplary, with a vision to drive cultural change, are required. Such leadership must understand the characteristics of each generation and adapt the leadership style that makes use of the individual employees' talent. Managers need to change and adapt their managerial skills to address the needs of employees. Identifying employees' talent encourages them to make the most of their talents while developments in information and communication technologies increase compliance. System improvements and the integration of ICT are critical to the successful digitalised education and evaluation processes.

The study examines and explores the change from the out-of-date way of operating in a physical environment to remote online working supported by technology-driven systems. Consistent with some studies, some universities face the critical challenge of a workforce not being ready to provide online support acceptable to the learners (Orlando & Bank, 2016). Technology-driven systems supporting remote working are effective in ODeL institutions, in facilitating the scholarship of teaching and learning, and providing technical administration support (Murphy et al., 2021). In addressing the effects of COVID-19, institutions were expected to embrace employees' needs for a

balanced quality work-life by rationalising work and family demands, being capable of resolving family and work conflict, providing flexible work environments with minimal workload stress, and being able to perform tasks from anywhere.

Traditionally, at the university, services were provided face-to-face in a physical office. Häger and Pfister (2018) argued that working remotely is well-received and exciting in today's working environment because it is flexible and allows self-motivation and self-management, resulting in employees being responsible and accountable. Recognising the adverse impact of the crisis, Unisa is therefore concentrating on developing a reactive strategy, and leadership competencies in leaders who manage, supervise, coordinate, and evaluate employee performance (Sahu et al., 2020). Providing a service, the scales strongly tip to remote working, supported by technology. The continuous change to remote personnel is likely to modify and moderate selected roles and pose a challenge for managers who are used to managing physical workforces (Marchegiani, 2020).

An institution may allow remote working, which influences employees to learn new techniques for conducting particular tasks. As employees become more independent, assessment and evaluation of performance are likely to change, which is challenging in remote working (Murphy, 2021). Employee involvement refers to the level to which workforces are allowed to have a voice and provide input and suggestions on contributing to decision-making processes, problem-solving, and innovation within the institution. It encompasses participative management, employee suggestion programmes, team-based decision-making, training, and open communication platforms (Zhang & Ramse, 2021).

4.4.1 Personnel management in the institution management systems

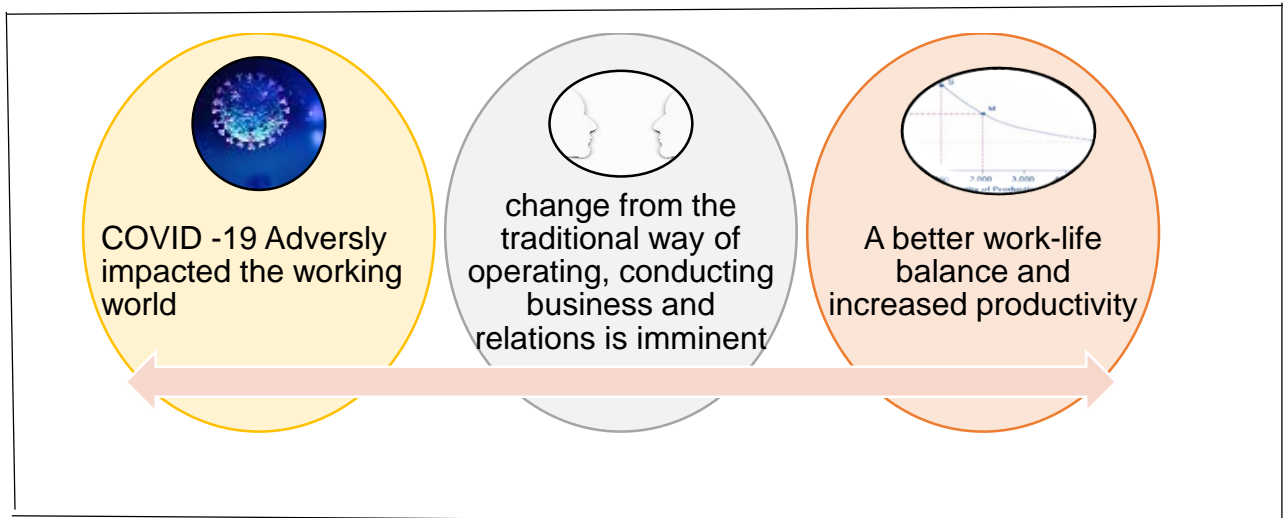
The implementation of a performance management system of an institution is a strategy to maintain managerial and developmental capabilities as well as adherence to the values and ethics of the institution. The institutional performance management system is required to foster an effective institutional environment for employees to comprehend the stipulated expectations (Shankar, 2021), as this study aims to influence and guide HR practitioners to manage the doubts triggered by the pandemic in the human resources of the education segment. Employers are asking employees

to familiarise themselves with a whole innovative way of working, and leaders are tasked to develop new capabilities, analyse processes, monitor threats, explore opportunities, and identify strengths and weaknesses of the institution, to continue its existence and survive the pandemic (Daft & Marcic, 2013).

Performance evaluation system assessment is mainly to measure evidence-based output that reflects the actual performance of employees against pre-determined targets (Van der Westhuizen 2016). The performance management system is also available to manage staff efficiently and to determine how managers interrelate with employees. The lockdown restrictions, such as social distancing and restrictive movements, significantly disturbed traditional educational practices. New mindsets were needed to address issues. According to Marchegiani (2020), design thinking drives thinkers into the following mental states needed by the institution for survival:

- a) Divergent thinking: where the employees create different alternatives to the current situation, with ideas that move the institution from a face-to-face interaction, physical presence in an office, to a remote working online technology-supported model, to work anywhere, any time.
- b) Convergent thinking: strategic planners select the best choice created and related to the examination amalgamation, to ensure that the managers drive the process in the best way to enhance performance and facilitate service delivery. Den Hond and Painter (2022) state that digital professional invention stages are activities of a system of establishments with capabilities to revolutionise new business models. These phases of change are depicted in

FIGURE 4.1: PHASES OF CHANGE



Source: Author's own: Developed based on Den Hond and Painter (2022:357) and Zhang and Ramse (2021:100).

4.4.2 The Sustainability of the Administration System

The presentation of the institutional system is a systematic process of managing operations associated with ensuring that performance outcomes are achieved in an integrated way to support performance achievements. The sustainability of a performance system is the ability of the system to remain effective, relevant, and beneficial as a tool for use over the long term. Traditional systems are designed around office work and office presence; hence, the need to develop a sustainable performance management system for managers to manage remote working and create feedback. This creates opportunities for employees to know what the employer's expectations are and to be informed if their performance meets the set targets or not. Tessema, Tesfom, Faircloth, Tesfagiorgis, and Tackles (2022) state that the attractiveness and preservation of talented workers remain critical to the accomplishment of employment strategies.

Employees have diverse expectations of their institutions and various interpretations of what they contemplate their employers have a right to assume of them concerning performance, as well as keeping the institution resilient and financially sustainable (Worley & Good, 2021). Institutional development, administrative purpose, and employee development enhance all the attributes needed to advance employee

authority, thus enabling institutions to keep polite and loyal employees who are responsible and accountable (Verma et al., 2020). The performance management tool to be implemented should ensure credible appraisal, productivity, and continuous improvement to maintain service delivery and sustainability of the institution (Marino & Capone, 2021).

Performance review is a tool used by line managers to monitor, evaluate, and assess employee performance and establish whether performance contributes to the productivity and growth of the institution (Armstrong, 2018). Therefore, when performance does not meet the set standards, improvement plans should be developed as interventions to correct performance and train employees to enhance performance, to remain sustainable, and contribute to the institution's vision and mission (Harris & Jones, 2020). Line managers must facilitate employee engagement and buy-in on the development of the remote management tool for successful implementation. Institutions of higher education should rethink the institution's strategy and develop performance management systems with the inclusion of employees for implementation and selection criteria for training and development of the employees (Murphy, 2021).

The growing use of new technologies improves the efficiency and effectiveness of operations. The ongoing digitalisation of work favours the development of innovative institutional concepts to ease output (Marino & Capone, 2021). Implementation of developmental plans for employee performance is ongoing, with feedback from managers to plan and shape future performance within the institution (Van Niekerk, 2014). Performance management informs performance reviews and appraisals conducted to improve the success of the performance and encourages productivity and effective performance within the institutions of higher learning.

Open communication is critical for continuous flow of information among the line managers or supervisors and the employees, ensuring that the employees are informed and receive timely feedback, are provided with solutions on how to correct the detected flaws, and are granted reasonable opportunities for recovery (Soria & Horgos, 2021). Encouraging personnel is essential as employees join the institutions

with a variety of personalities, aptitudes, interests, skills, and abilities, and these need to align with the institutional operational plans.

4.4.3 Consistently working remotely post-COVID-19

Alsoud and Harasis (2021) reveal that the effects of the pandemic remain to be experienced globally. However, restoration to either the former practices or adoption of the innovative standard is a guarantee for the post-pandemic work setting. With the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic in the working world, working remotely consistently means regularly performing duties away from the office setting, including doing work from home, an internet cafe, or a co-working space supported by technology, during the lockdown, and has become the norm (Worley & Good, 2021). Institutions around the globe introduced SMART working, the use of technology to help employees work more efficiently, automating service delivery tasks, managing the working environment, and connecting systems and software to create a seamless workplace experience on an ongoing basis within institutions, and is perfected for the future (Harris & Jones, 2020).

Consistent remote work requires discipline and effective time management, but with the right approach, it can be highly rewarding (Marino & Capone, 2021). In all operations, employers were supposed to demonstrate how much they value employees' health and well-being and how far they are prepared to go in support of remote working (Verma, 2020). Amid such concentrated and continuous pressure, employers are expected to advance the excellence of work and minimise stress triggers on workers expected to work online and remotely.

Section 4.5 discusses the remote working approach and the hybrid work method as models applicable to the future workforce.

4.5 APPLICABLE REMOTE WORK MODEL FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Institutions should choose the most applicable work model dependent on the characteristics of the work, institutional culture, employee preferences, and operational requirements (Newton et al., 2020). The chosen model should provide flexibility, increased productivity, and the use of technology. There already exist

approaches applicable to office operations; hence, adapting those to remote working is necessary. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there existed the following modes of service delivery.

4.5.1 Traditional face-to-face work model

The traditional face-to-face work model means providing services physically in an office environment. Service provision or work is performed from a central office location during set office hours. Office presence means operating under rigid, specific given times, requiring commuting to work, dealing with traffic challenges, having a work dress code, and dealing with challenges created by the presence of other employees in the office (Conradie & De Klerk, 2019). Workplace safety becomes a challenge in working from the office. Employee wellness becomes a priority for the employer in all institutions (Murphy, 2021). Therefore, advocating for workplace safety encompasses all features that influence the health, safety, and well-being of employees, for now, and into the future.

The truth is that COVID-19 may not be the last catastrophe we face; there might be other national catastrophes in the future, implicating or affecting any other area of life, operations, or the economy. It could be either demographic aspects, social unrest, economic reconstruction, capital destruction, longer-term structural consequences, societal collapse, land loss, mortality, or calling for an emergency (Harris & Jones, 2020:244). It is therefore critical to take note of the lessons that the experiences of the pandemic have taught us, to base our future preparations on being better prepared for any future impact of any type of disaster.

4.5.2 Remote Work Model

Remote working is a practice by workforces undertaking to perform their duties from a place away from a central administrative focus not controlled by the institution they work for, be it from their own private home, mobile working, or smart working. Remote working requires reliable technology and clear communication protocols between the employee and the employer to safeguard employee successful achievement of institutional goals. It is therefore essential to, establish if the success is measurable throughput, output, and productivity that meet the set performance standards

(Dinmohamed et al., 2020). In allowing the implementation of any model, ODeL institutions should cautiously deal with observing the day-to-day business practices, service delivery, stakeholder needs, managerial practices, knowledge management, employee performance, working environment management, and competitive advantage (Kasowe, 2022).

In preparation for remote working, ODeL environments need to facilitate knowledge management activities, as higher education institutions should know and perform the responsibilities that are necessary for system modification, adapt processes, relook at procedures, and develop a more effective, environmentally appropriate, aligned model to drive operations (Scudellari, 2020). To embrace transformation, institutions should adopt Flexible Working Arrangements (henceforth referred to as FWAs) that relate to amplified levels of both employee engagement and employee performance (Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma & Nwokorie, 2020).

Employees are increasingly looking for flexibility in operations, and therefore, there is a need to balance business requirements with employees' needs. FWA practices present employees with fewer fixed structures to execute their daily work anywhere. The implementation of FWAs provides a platform for increased engagement, flexible work arrangements, flexitime, enhanced performance, and producing important positive work outcomes. According to Ngubane (2024), the stipulated performance standards and objectives should be spelled out within the institution, and effectively cascade down with aims, missions, and visions as well as objectives that inform the prescribed performance outputs to the knowledge of all.

4.5.3 Hybrid Work Model

A mixed mode is a model that offers workers and supports two models, either working in the office or working remotely, interchangeably in some instances. When employees are allowed to work partly in the physical office environment and partly remotely or from the employee's own home or from another workspace not linked to the employer is known as hybrid working (Gilson, Coenen, Hallman, Holtermann, Holtermann & Straker, 2022). For many institutions, a hybrid model offers a balanced approach, providing both flexibility and suitability to both the employer and employee, and benefits both. The success of a hybrid mode is to tailor-make the model to fit specific

institutional contexts and continuously adapt the model's characteristics based on feedback and changing circumstances. The hybrid model entails employees working from locations outside the office, often from home. Specific institutional, strong distinctive human resources management, and human resources policies should be developed to communicate and state practices that advocate to employees the kind of behaviours expected to bring value to the institution (Bednall et al., 2014).

Workforces are motivated to work for an institution with an effective knowledge management system and spelled-out targets supported by their managers and transformational leadership, promoting a culture of participative decision-making. However, for employees to meet their objectives, there should be performance feedback delivered by line managers to the employees who report to them. Such feedback will likely enhance performance or provide corrective information about the expected as well as desired levels of performance.

Post-COVID-19 pandemic, there was a call for certain institutions to return to the office, while other organisations continue to work from home, and other institutions have a combination of the two scenarios aforementioned, hence, the discussion on the return-to-work strategy.

4.6 THE RETURN-TO-WORK STRATEGY OF AN ODeL INSTITUTION

During COVID-19, ODeL institutions around the globe were obligated to discontinue physical face-to-face service delivery and produce innovative plans to continue service provision amid the crisis. The return-to-work strategy is a process that involves careful planning around the current work situation to develop a plan that will recruit staff to report to the office and physically work from the office. The institution has to plan carefully and communicate the plan in such a way that it ensures a smooth transition for employees and the institution. ODeL institutions are those institutions mandated to offer distance education, online remotely, and therefore returning to the office for these institutions should be developed in a way that does not fail its mandate and intended purpose, and make the staff understand why they should return to the office while services are conducted online. Not all institutions are in favour of the return to the office strategy, and equally, not all institutions subscribe to total remote working; hence, the application of a hybrid mode. The ultimate aim of institutional culture is to

ensure employees achieve their maximum potential, maximise opportunities to achieve strategic goals, and reach job satisfaction (Camilleri, 2021).

Diversity is about observing and respecting the differences among employees and stakeholders and benefiting from the diverse skills of different individuals. It is also about identifying potential in employees, capacity building, strategic, administrative, and developmental needs, as well as developing tools to manage the potential for the benefit of the institution (Camilleri, 2021). The development of integrated processes, recognised systems for the ideal accomplishment of institutional objectives, and purposes, occupational development of employees, and assisting with added resource requirements is needed for staff expansion.

Erikson and Verge (2022) mention that when the world instituted working from home, not many employees were exposed to working away from the physical office controlled by the employer. This sparked a lot of uncertainty, and assumptions about what it would be like, what is expected, what would be needed, and whether remote working supported by technology will add value to service delivery in the educational environment, online teaching, and learning when it became a reality.

4.6.1 Management Perspective on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Henry Fayol's principles of managing institutions are applicable, including the 14 management principles, namely subordination of individual interests, unity of command, unity of direction, management authority, management discipline, team spirit, a chain of command, clean, safe, and tidy working environment, general interest in the work to be done, centralisation of functions, reasonable compensation order in the workplace, accommodating stability of tenure, employee equity, and initiative taking. Fayol resolved that management principles should work together with personnel to command and prepare production and enable workers to perform the anticipated duties. Management must lead and direct staff performance with stated facts and certainty. In coordination, management must ensure that processes merge to acquire the core of actions and evaluate, assess, and manage given tasks (Godwin et al., 2017). Globally, the flexible corporate setting, new-age, and performance strategies are embraced in the working world (Murphy, 2020).

Working online, remotely from home, is a new phenomenon referred to as the new normal, providing freedom to work online from anywhere (Newton et al., 2020). The status of the ODeL in the regional offices before the pandemic was a physical presence in an office environment, offering a face-to-face service while observing office hours and workdays (Murphy et al., 2021). With the uncertainty that has plagued the working world and managing the effects of the pandemic, it is still a distant call to see a full-blown return to the office being a reality.

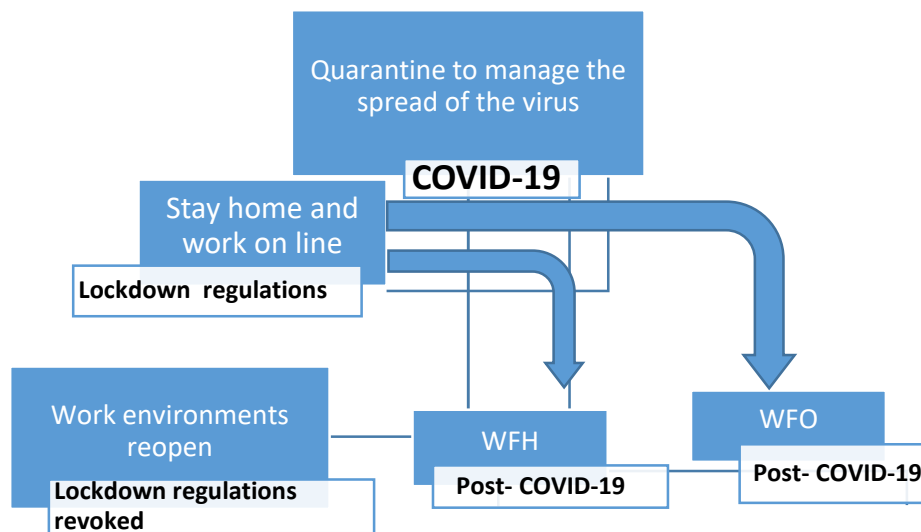
4.6.2 Institutional Work Plan Readiness

The ODeL institution has a blended workforce of academic and administrative staff coming from diverse backgrounds, races, genders, ages, and ethnicities, working together for the same institution under different working conditions and environments. The cohort of learners is a blend of national and international students, spread across different age groups and different social standings. Mawonde and Togo (2021) describe that an ODeL institution should enable amalgamations of declarations among learners and academics, separated from one another for part or all of their educational experience, and are adversely affected by the challenges brought by the pandemic, to open distance education. There is a need that the institution must adapt and embrace the 21st-century digitalised way of conducting higher education. The conduct of academics and administrators contributes to and influences the overall excellence of remote learning as a product for students at the institution.

During the pandemic lockdown, there were migrations of staff from the head offices of the university to their respective hometowns, affecting all levels of employment across the university. ODeL institution (2021) also outlined that staff who initially relocated to the big cities due to work opportunities moved back to their respective hometowns as the pandemic unfolded. The staff made means and invested in working from home (Murphy, 2020). The students, on the other hand, also adapted and made means to access and learn online. Globally COVID-19 pandemic afforded schools, other learning facilities, and institutions of higher learning an opportunity to offer and introduce digital teaching and learning, online assessments, develop models to manage service provision, and manage offerings. Adaptation of systems to ensure online administration, online teaching, and learning, and online formal and non-formal assessment at the institution were necessary (Verma et al., 2020).

Dinmohamed (2020) contends that, going forward, online working supported by technology is the future of universities and other educational entities. The world recognises that the future of our working environment is going to be more online, supported by technology, because we envisage future challenges addressing global threats and/or crises threatening the work environment. The lesson taken from the pandemic is that it is necessary to set out a corporate protocol and ensure that institutional policies speak to such, rethink key performance areas, performance management processes, and design adaptable institutions procedures and different measurable goals. This move will address the challenges and prospects of online and continuing administration, learning, and service provision during the pandemic and beyond (Makonde & Togo, 2021). Online infrastructure, exposure to online education, online assessment, bridging the information gap, adapting homes to balance work and family time, creating conducive study environments for students, access to engage academics and learn, as well as obtain academic excellence in terms of higher education, will be addressed and the day-to-day business will be managed effectively.

FIGURE 4.2: A NEW DISPENSATION OF THE CURRENT WORKING ENVIRONMENT



Source: Author’s own: Displaying the probable influence of the COVID-19 outbreak (Nyabadza et al., 2020:1-12).

4.6.3 Performance Management Tool at Institution of Higher Learning

There is an expectation that line managers and employees should keep appropriate records and evidence, both documentary evidence and incidents, in line with the inherent nature and requirements of the employees’ job, during the performance cycle (Da Silva & Berry, 2020). For the management of remote working, evaluation outlines the institutional performance plan to ensure the assessment of the employee’s performance, employees’ attitudes, expectations, and personal development. In an ODeL institution, the approach implemented ought to promote operations through sub-processes of goal setting.

Employees have job descriptions that dictate individual tasks, responsibilities, and performance areas. Employees must sign performance agreements annually (Zhang & Ramse, 2021). Employee and line manager conversations are critical and form the basis of crafting the performance management criteria. Feedback sessions enhance excellence by employing the value of constant learning and important identity models (Armstrong, 2018). Managers within an institution are supposed to report quarterly or annually, depending on the institution, about the condition and success of employee performance and management of operations.

4.6.4 Employee Support Strategies

Institutions of higher learning vary in the commitment levels of all personnel to serve successfully and engage with each other. Students are sustained and supported by both administrative staff and academic staff to have a successful learning experience. A credible and real-time response online system is planned with great consideration to verify the business goals, enhance performance, and increase institutional effectiveness (Armstrong, 2018). HR practices contribute to institutional performance, while human resource management influences employee's performance. Buonincontri et al. (2017) define performance assessment as a process by line managers to evaluate how well an employee performs and justify the requirement for employees to operate remotely in line with the institutional business continuity plan (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). Institutions may expect employees to make their knowledge and expertise more widely available to communities and other institutions, in contrast to what is stipulated in their employment agreement. An institution as an employer may, at times, call upon employees, either with or without remuneration, to assist other departments with tasks not directly related to their current key performance areas for which they have been appointed.

Remote online working supported by technology can deliver a service to external and internal stakeholders, facilitate the research of teaching and learning, and online assessments (Mawonde & Togo, 2021). The activities performed contribute to the development of employees and equip them to work in a smart environment. An extension of the pervasive computing environment adds value and contributes to the good reputation and image of the universities or institutions. To ensure a successful business model, it is essential to identify all that is necessary to aid the institution to improve its performance and develop new innovative chances, relevant to the era, as well as to allow technology functionality, communications, and appropriate action that is in line with institutions' standards. Any institution can benefit from diversity, as this means transforming from the physical office environment to remote online, technology-driven systems, a radical change in the institution's culture (Lupia et al., 2020). Remote working and its needs are responsible for the change from physical presence in an office environment to online service offering administration and support, venue-based assessments, and physical contact teaching and learning. This indicates an improved agreement of all institutional conduct and improves employment relationships,

ensuring staff and student readiness is gauged and supported accordingly, imparting quality education for all now and in the future.

Digital technologies have brought to businesses entirely new possibilities, redefining some basic principles. The ODeL institution is working towards having employees with the ability and discipline to work in solitude, with institutional skills allowing change, institutional decision making, multi-tasking abilities, adaptation to technology, and remote leadership, as well as being responsible, committed, and trustworthy. With the introduction of technology, staff should be able to work remotely and still perform as efficiently and collaboratively as if work were done in the office. There should be a work-life balance, and flexibility towards creating a positive, productive, and happy workforce, implementing suitable knowledge management with two key traits, namely preparedness and resilience (Bonometti et al., 2020). To address operations, institutions endorsed the call to work online from home, an effective option for all, given the circumstances. Simultaneously with physical presence in the office at a given agreed-upon time, the procedures were temporarily implemented.

In institutions, most of the operations have moved online, and most colleagues are working from home, some full-time, and some part-time. Responsibilities conventionally required for the improvement of the type of in-person collaboration may have to be improved (Bonometti et al., 2020). Policy is a tool that enables the employer to offer a conducive environment to enhance performance, no matter the conditions, ensuring the personnel accept the required capital and provision to convey their responsibilities and to address performance shortfalls proactively. This chapter concludes that institutional culture and employee involvement are interdependent factors that shape the work environment, employee behaviours, and leadership, leading to the success in service delivery and productivity of the ODeL institutions of higher learning.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter provided valuable insights for ODeL universities to embark on business transformation to enforce accountability on operations, commitment to meet employer expectations, availability, and trust in line managers and management of the institution. The ODeL institution should offer reputable, international, national,

accredited qualifications, flexible, accessible, and comprehensive, open-distance education globally, to provide hope, offer access and education to the disadvantaged students, and support, equip, and motivate future generations. The workforce engagement on issues such as workspace environment safety is in line with embracing change. The present situation calls for continual research to examine the university employees' well-being and ability to provide a fully-fledged online service.

Essential recommendations for ODeL institutions include additional comparisons of online education and assessment, and the implementation of technology to facilitate consultation with students and other stakeholders within and outside the institution. A clear need is expressed, revealing the significance of restructuring, within which a rational outlook with strong and visible job descriptions and performance targets is identified. Competent employees deliver a service, enabled by consultative decision-making within the institution. Employee efficiency is frequently described as good support for those who contribute to high-performance levels and productivity. Recent developments suggest that smart or remote working employment is increasingly popular for institutional sustainability. The task at hand is to sustain the pace of technological improvements and guarantee that these improvement plans result in improved working practices to guarantee employee well-being, productivity, and output, as well as the financial sustainability of businesses.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology is a way of rationalising how a study plans to carry out its research, outlining the specific techniques and procedures used to collect, analyse, and interpret data to answer research questions (Strijker et al., 2020). This chapter describes the procedures followed to enlighten, investigate, define, and formulate the research problem. It further articulates the rationale for the particular processes and methods employed to identify, collect, and analyse data. This study used a mixed methods approach to bring a considered view of the perceived effects of remote working on performance management at an ODeL institution.

The selected research approach in this study was appropriate for gathering and inquiring about observable and measurable data to respond to specific research questions. The study used a combination of qualitative interview schedules and quantitative questionnaires distributed to randomly sampled groups to obtain information on the perceived effects experienced by institutions of higher learning (HEI) whose day-to-day business is to offer open distance learning (ODL) education. Data was analysed thematically to reflect on the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the vulnerability and the uncertainty that exist in a remote working environment globally. The outbreak of COVID-19 threatened operations, financial sustainability, and the existence of businesses, putting a real burden on employers, employees, businesses, and customers alike.

Institutions worldwide have been forced to plan and respond to the effects of COVID-19 on their operations. Leaders were further compelled to engage in roles that enable changes in employees as well as offer guidance during this crisis. Similarly, employees were encouraged to recognise the experience of service recipients during the pandemic. The empirical approach used in the study also entails mapping out, planning, interpreting, and gaining knowledge from direct and indirect observations and experiences of employees in an institution. The research entails a case study of an ODeL institution mandated to provide distant, open, flexible, comprehensive, and accessible education across South Africa, the rest of Africa, and globally.

5.2 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHOD

A research approach chosen by a researcher to investigate the stated problem. This study adopts a qualitative and quantitative approach (Faria et al. 2021). This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of delivering online remote services and obtaining online remote service delivery. The goal is to gain in-depth understanding of online remote service delivery during the lockdown periods of the pandemic. The research method refers to the specific techniques and procedures used to collect and analyse data. Semi-structured interviews with key participants to gather detailed perspectives of their duties at the institution. Questionnaires were structured and used for collecting standardised data from the named samples (Taherdoost, 2022).

5.2.1 Qualitative Research

A qualitative approach is employed in the form of interviews to source knowledge from the policy developer and guardians of institutional policies. This study explores the perceived effects of performance management at an ODeL institution of higher learning. Interprets and describes information gathered during the lockdown periods to inform policy development that governs remote working processes at a specific point in time and a particular framework. The study further determines the lived experiences of participants in their day-to-day lives and work environments. The study focuses on bringing an understanding of how to address the perceived effects of the pandemic, drawing from the experiences and perceptions about online working supported by technology, remote working, and performance management at an ODeL institution of higher learning. In this study, qualitative online interview schedules with open-ended questions were distributed to participants for in-depth insight, opinions, and experiences from academics, administrators, and students alike. Online qualitative interviews were conducted with HR managers at the ODeL institution of higher learning.

5.2.2 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research approach is used to test, measure variables, and analyse statistical relationships using numerical data. Mohajan (2020) highlights that quantitative research is a research strategy that focuses on quantifying the collection

and analysis of data. A method of inquiry that focuses, detects, and seeks to measure and analyse variables numerically and outline attributes of an event systematically, look for patterns, and make predictions to obtain results that can be applied to larger populations. This research strategy promotes the objective empirical investigation of observable phenomena to test and understand relationships because this study has to produce a plan on how to bridge the gap between students and academics and the gap between the institution and the student, as well as adopt and establish a communication strategy for remote working. The online questionnaires were distributed to the academics who provided online teaching and learning, conducted online formal and non-formal assessments, as well as to students who received remote online service delivery and support services during the pandemic. The online questionnaires were also distributed to the administration staff who provided online student administration (applications, admissions, registrations, and follow-up administration functions) services during the pandemic. The administrative staff provided online administrative processes such as applications, admissions, and registrations during the pandemic at an ODeL institution. The distribution was also to students who received remote online service and student support.

5.2.3 Rationale for mixed-methods design

This study adopted a mixed-method methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative procedures (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) to model data and extract insights to bring an understanding and solutions to tackle the consequences brought by the pandemic. Mixed methods research is an approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative research in a single study, to get a fuller, deeper understanding of a research problem. Mixed mode is a process of steering qualitative and quantitative research to review literature and reports. The qualitative approach is a driven epistemology and methodology that forms the core of the study and further clarifies and explains the research questions.

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches involve a systematic interaction between theory and data. These theories describe logical relationships between variables. Quantitative research is often used to standardise data collection and generalise findings. This study is descriptive research that simply seeks an overall summary of the study variables, provides a summary of data, and includes measures of averages

and variability. The study uses mixed methods research that combines elements of quantitative research and qualitative research in order to answer the research questions, put findings in context, and add detail to the conclusions, for the results to be more credible and meaningful, integrating questions in this research study.

The mixed-method sequential exploratory approach was used, where data was collected using questionnaires, and then the data collected informed the interview schedule. Verganti et al. (2020) contend that being a leading ODeL institution in Africa means that the teaching and learning strategy of the institution must allow its students to use technology, taking into consideration the diversity of the student profile as well as challenges of distance, cost, and time. There is a need to propose effective methods for creating a merged learning environment that can enhance access to learning and educational experiences as well as support students with their studies (Marino & Capone, 2021).

The study explores the subjective lived experiences and observations of support staff and academics on operations and delivering a service throughout the pandemic. In addition, the study examines participants' understanding of remote work, supported by technology, and its effect on online service delivery and performance management at an ODeL institution of higher learning during the pandemic. The theory also addresses vulnerability and sustainability, as well as the global uncertainty in the working class. The study also analysed how students experienced online service provision at an ODeL institution of higher learning during the pandemic.

Using a mixed-methods approach, data were analysed from questionnaire responses received from the academic and administrative employees of an ODeL institution in South Africa, as well as from interviews conducted with human resources (HRM) managers at the institution. The findings equip and enlighten ODeL institutions of higher learning HRMs, productive professionals, academics, and administrators to continue to embrace new technology advancements to ensure accessible learner-focused content and enable administrative, teaching, and learning strategies to support operations as well as interaction between administrators, academics, and students.

5.3 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Data collection methods included interviews with the heads of human resources on their role in advising the employer, influencing policy, and addressing employee well-being. It examined the institution's HR management, use of human resources, the effects of employee working relationships, and the institution's role. Additionally, data were collected through various questionnaires. The lessons learned during the pandemic have far-reaching implications for how we approach work in the future (Smith & White, 2022). An empirical method of study involves collecting data through questionnaires and interviews, designed to gather evidence, facts, or information about a specific phenomenon and to provide objective, verifiable, and replicable findings to contribute to our understanding of the study. The qualitative interviews were used to examine the perception of HR managers to source specific insight on policy making, policy implementation, and human resources knowledge, as well as obtain information on the ability to update policies, suggest policy changes, manage, supervise, and evaluate remote working at ODeL institutions of higher learning. The further sought to obtain the perspective, knowledge, and lived experiences of working online and working remotely from both the academic and administrative staff at the institution. In this study, questionnaires were used to source the experiences of students in receiving online services during the pandemic.

The research involved gathering awareness and information from questionnaires to offer answers to the investigation questions distributed to obtain descriptive information from employees at the university on their experiences and perceptions of online remote working (Milne et al., 2016). Additionally, the study gathered data with insights from students receiving online services at the institution. as well as responses obtained from Qualitative virtual interviews were conducted with the managers who are accountable for crafting policy, processes, and procedures, and overseeing and coordinating human resources, during the pandemic and post-pandemic. The research is characterised by openness, flexibility, and responsiveness to context.

5.3.1 Quantitative Questionnaire

Online questionnaires were prepared to source in-depth insights and opinions from academics, administrative staff, and students regarding online remote working and performance management of remote working.

Moran (2022) stipulates that there has been exponential growth in research and literature about the digital world and its enormous potential benefits and threats. The information was obtained using an online questionnaire, which informed interviews conducted via MS Teams. The questionnaires were open-ended questions to be completed at the participant's preferred time and convenience (Kovach, 2017). This study brings together an expertly curated and authoritative overview of the impact and emerging horizons of digital consumption.

The questionnaire for academics and administrative staff consists of five sections. Section A: Includes descriptive questions containing demographic data to obtain information such as age, gender, academic title, type of employment, and responsibilities at the institution of higher learning. Section B: Explores individuals' perceptions and experiences of remote working in 2020/2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Section C: Focuses on determining how Unisa systems supported service delivery during 202/2021. Section D: Focuses on performance management within the remote working environment. Section E: Focuses on change management in the remote working environment.

The questionnaire focusing on students at the university was designed to consist of two Sections. Section A: Biographical information. Section B: explores Unisa students' undergraduate and postgraduate Students. Experience and perceptions on the online service provision during 2020/2021.

The questionnaires, which entail graphic visual communication to explain figures, were applied to summarise and describe the basic qualities of the dataset. These include procedures of central learning and measures of distribution. Descriptive statistics will provide insights into the distribution and variability of key variables such as teaching and learning strategies, performance management, and employee productivity, and assist in understanding the data.

A psychometric scale named the Likert scale was applied to the questionnaires to interrogate perceptions, attitudes, opinions, and other particular phenomena. The Likert scale consists of several themes and statements under the themes to which participants are requested to specify their level of agreement or disagreement, ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, and Strongly Disagree (Nemoto & Beglar, 2013). The response is assigned a numerical value, ranging from 1 to 4. The Likert scale provides valuable insights into people's opinions and attitudes. Online questionnaires were distributed to the student representative council members active in office, undergraduate (UG) registered students, and postgraduate (PG) registered students, selected from the 9 provinces in South Africa (hereafter SA). A combination of 18 students (undergraduate and postgraduate registered students) or Student Representative Council members, in the office for the current academic year (year 2024), was targeted. 9 Students or Student Representative Council members, 2 students for each of the academic levels at the university, 1 Undergraduate and 1 Postgraduate student, from each Regional Office of the 9 provinces in South Africa. 30 questionnaires were distributed online. 18 required students' responses were obtained.

5.3.2 Qualitative Interviews

Human resource management (hereafter referred to as HRM) departmental heads were interviewed virtually using qualitative semi-structured interviews. Qualitative information collected and analysed seeks to understand human behaviour and obtain perspectives and experiences of those who lived through the phenomena. Moralo and Graupner (2022) state that the two procedures of data collection, which are compiling information and facts to investigate and the information to recognise themes, happen sequentially to promote the emergence of substantive data. Interviews conducted with managers were used to establish the reliability and sustainability of technology to support online remote working and the ability to monitor work performance, management of remote working, and service output using technology, working anywhere suitable for the institution (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Qualitative interview schedules/guides for students were designed, comprising two Sections. Section A is to source biographical information, and Section B is to investigate the student's undergraduate and postgraduate experiences and perceptions of the online service provision during 2020/2021. The qualitative

interviews for the HRM department were conducted to establish the reliability and sustainability of technology to support online remote working and the ability to manage performance of remote working, and service output supported by technology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

An interview guide outlines the main topics and themes to be explored during the interviews and it includes open questions that prompt respondents to elaborate on their responses and provide detailed in-depth insights, knowledge, and an understanding of the specific HRM manager's perspectives, experiences, and role in caring for the human capital (employees) and promoting their well-being during the pandemic and beyond. The interviews also probed into the manager's knowledge to influence policymaking, to investigate the readiness to conduct transformation (Aguinis, Jensen & Kraus, 2022), provide insight and an understanding of the new way of service delivery, and employee buy-in to institutional changes to ensure continuity of service delivery, attaining the institutional goal, and help institutions to successfully emerge from the pandemic (Wang et al., 2021).

During interviews, examination questions were posed to obtain more information, and clarity-seeking questions were asked after the response to the main questions had been provided. Interviews were scheduled to obtain information regarding how the institution envisages contributing to the development of a policy framework to effectively manage remote working, performance management, and remote service delivery. The four audio recordings of interviews and a question-and-answer session between the researcher and participants were transcribed verbatim.

5.4 PILOTING THE INSTRUMENTS

A pilot study is a test run conducted by the researcher to determine whether their data collection instruments will work in practice and produce the desired outcome. A pilot was conducted on 25 people with an emphasis on understanding the phenomena from the participant's viewpoint, spot all the challenges and issues that might hamper the study design, revisit and improve questionnaires and interview guides (Murphy, 2021:83). This allowed the researcher to adapt methods and questions based on ongoing findings. In general, pilot studies offer an in-depth perception of the context

and environment of the research subject and provide well-informed, valid, and reliable results.

5.5 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The content to be analysed is the answers to the online questionnaires distributed and the virtual interview recordings. Data analysis is the process where data is gathered methodically from various sources to achieve identified research objectives (Collis & Hussey, 2021). The coded data from the analysis that identifies patterns, trends, and correlations, and this may involve quantitative and qualitative analysis (Dyer & Shepherd, 2021). In this study, two techniques were used to analyse quantitative and qualitative data, namely statistical and thematic data analysis, discussed below. Individual analysis of responses to questions, and data collected from the responses to the distributed questionnaires, were analysed using the IPA process. Allowing flexibility, creativity, and applying critical thinking skills to the responses obtained and ensuring the quality of the data analysis process (Roelofs, 2019).

5.5.1 Statistical Data Analysis

In this study, the researchers examined the answers, responses obtained from the questionnaires up to the stage at which no new insights or facts were obtained from the collected responses. The questionnaires, which entail graphic visual communication to explain figures, were applied to summarise and describe the basic qualities of the dataset. These include procedures of central learning and measures of distribution (Hinton et al., 2014). Descriptive statistics provided insights into the distribution and variability of key variables such as teaching and learning strategies, performance management, and employee productivity, thereby ensuring better data interpretation. The technique used in this study to analyse data is the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) that comprehensively scrutinises the raw data collected to make broader conclusions. The composed data was analysed to either obtain responses to the study or address identified gaps existing in the field of study. To report the findings, the results were presented in a clear and structured format using diagrams, figures, and charts.

5.5.2 Thematic Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis provides an understanding of the answers in the context of the examined question as to what extent COVID-19 restrictions have brought a change from face-to-face, physical presence service provision in an ODeL institution of higher learning to remote working, supported by technology, and remote working performance management. A narrative analysis of data identified themes within the study that explored the challenges faced by administrative support staff and academics about remote working supported by technology and its effect on performance management throughout the pandemic. It further explored the students' experiences with receiving online service provision during the pandemic.

Data analysis emphasises the thoroughness, the coverage, and readability of the content. The data analysis process consists of data display and integration so that there can be a response to specific research questions and assess results (Alam, 2021). The study aims to develop an ODeL remote working framework that will accommodate support staff at an ODeL institution, like Unisa. The data was obtained and analysed until new responses stopped emerging, thus experiencing data saturation (Guest, Namey & Chen, 2020).

Data was analysed using the standardised 5-point Likert rating scale. The assessment was primarily criterion-referenced, evidence-based alongside pre-resolute targets, and set standards supported by documented indication and managerial judgment to validate the research (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). The rating descriptors document was developed to assist in ensuring that performance ratings reflected actual remote working output, technology-driven service provision, teaching and learning, supervision, and management of remote working, ensuring service provision befitting to the internal and external stakeholders of the ODeL institution and in line with the operational mandate of the university.

The stage at which no innovative insights, evidence, and themes are emerging from the data collection process is known as data saturation, where any additional data collection will not yield any additional worthy perceptions or awareness (Mwita, 2022). Data saturation is evident when there exists enough information to produce the study, there is no further coding feasible, and no additional information or insights are

identified (Hennink, Kaiser & Webber, 2019). This concept is vital to confirm that the study is comprehensive without being redundant.

5.6 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING METHOD

This study was conducted across four groups at an ODeL institution of higher learning: Group 1, the administrative staff, Group 2, the academic staff, Group 3, the registered students at the institution; and Group 4, the HRM managers. Group 1: a purposive sampling targeting 40 of 136 administrative staff at the university, who provided services online remotely during the pandemic.

Group 2: a random sampling of a threshold population of 70 from academics across the seven Colleges, also referred to as Faculties. The permanent academic employees sample size is 160. Therefore, 200 questionnaires were distributed, and a target of 160 was obtained. The academic staff are responsible for teaching and learning, postgraduate administration, postgraduate Master's, and Doctoral supervision, and preparing formative and summative assessments.

Group 3: A purposive sampling technique was used to select the 18 students registered for either an undergraduate (hereafter referred to as UG) qualification or a postgraduate (hereafter referred to as PG) qualification and/or registered representative council members active in office, from the 9 provinces in the Republic of South Africa. To source the experiences of students in receiving online services during the pandemic is adhered to and addressed.

Group 4, a purposive sampling technique, was employed to conduct interviews of the 4 human resource management (HRM) departmental heads to source specific insight on policy making, policy implementation, and human resources knowledge. To obtain information on the ability to update policies, suggest policy changes, and manage remote working at ODeL institutions of higher learning.

5.6.1 Sample size

Determining the appropriate sample size is a crucial element, while there's no fixed number, data saturation typically guides the end of data collection. Sampling is the

process of selection of a subset of individuals from the population to estimate the characteristics of the whole population (Boehm, Schröder & Bal, 2021). Therefore, the sample size is the number of individuals included in a model used to draw inferences about a larger population. Sample size plays a fundamental role in determining how accurate and reliable the results will be when generalising the obtained data to the whole population. The sample size should be supported by the nature of the research being directed, enabling researchers to identify the problem and reduce risks associated with identifying research issues. Considering that the common population characteristics depend upon the designing, planning, recruitment, and evaluation of data, and its accuracy subscribes to the expected degree of confidence.

To obtain an extensive perception, experiences, observations, thoughts, and opinions of the workforce, the study focused on permanent administrative staff members in the undergraduate and postgraduate departments. The words “support staff” and “administrative staff” are used interchangeably in this study to refer to employees responsible for student administration, such as applications, admissions, and registrations, together with all other follow-up administration functions until the student is handed over to graduation after all curriculum requirements are adhered to. The target for this group was 69 participants, and therefore 100 questionnaires were distributed, and 75 responses were received.

Four HRM staff were targeted as they are the managers of the departments responsible for managing and developing policies governing the institution, overseeing policy implementation, policies governing human resources, HR-related policies, drafting processes, and procedures to be applied in the ODeL institution (Robin et al., 2019).

5.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study is monitored and observes ethical principles set out by the Department of Public Administration and Management, Research Ethics Review Committee, at the University of South Africa. This was done to ensure that morals and beliefs are not compromised, safeguarding that humans are protected from abuse, harm, and manipulation in the research process.

This study obtained ethics clearance from the Department of Public Administration and Management, Research Ethics Review Committee, University of South Africa, to administer and distribute the questionnaire to the employees at the university and students, respectively, and conduct interviews with the human resources managers.

5.7.1 Permission to Conduct Study

The researcher wrote to the Registrar and Vice Principal Operations of Unisa, asking for a gate-keeper letter, providing permission to access staff information of specific age groups of the administrative support staff in different departments, academics in the respective colleges, and for the HRM officials to be interviewed. The researcher also approached the ICT department to obtain permission to access student data (Brittain, 2020).

5.7.2 Informed Consent

The researcher resolved to seek such consent as the respondents are employees at the university and registered students at the university. Both are the respondents of the online open-format questionnaire distributed and scheduled interviews, to obtain the personal experience of the employees and students alike on how they experienced service provision and received services during the pandemic as well as illustrate the benefit of understanding the new model of service delivery enforced globally to go digital, employing technology-driven processes and procedures, an important characteristic of an ODeL institution.

The participation letter clearly stated the research aims namely, to address the high rate of problems and challenges in remote working, service provision, performance management, and online education as well as the implication of digitalisation, the use, and benefit to the university in shifting to a remote working service provision model, developing strategies that promote online technology-supported systems, and implementing remote performance management.

5.7.3 Voluntary Participation

Respondents were informed that participation is voluntary without any benefits. The respondents of the surveys remained knowledgeable about the objective of the study,

clarified that partaking was voluntary, free, and at their discretion. Respondents were also informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the process without consequence (Wheatley et al., 2021).

The respondents were offered the chance to cease participation in the study if they felt uncomfortable continuing at any time during data collection. Participants were allowed to complete the questionnaire in their leisure time, pace, and in the safety of their environment. Therefore, there was no risk, harm, or injury expected of the participant.

5.7.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The participants were informed that they were protected, would remain anonymous, and confidentiality would be maintained. Anonymity and discretion were further maintained by making use of pseudonyms. All data collected in the study were saved on password-protected laptops, and physical copies were stored in locked storage facilities.

5.8 ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

The criterion for evaluating trustworthiness consists of four general principles for determining the reliability of research, namely, confirmability, transferability, dependability, and credibility (Adler, 2022). The paradigm approach, assumptions, beliefs, and practices guided the researcher in this study to design the theoretical framework for understanding and interpreting the phenomenon, to develop an ODeL remote working framework that will accommodate support staff at an ODeL institution.

5.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is the extent to which a study in a qualitative study trusts the accuracy of the research findings, and this can be achieved by ensuring proper interpretation of results (Stahl & King, 2020). In this study, the researcher used credible statistical analysis tools in the form of SPSS software. Data credibility of data collected from employees was further examined against the tools in place in the institution to ensure triangulation of data through multiple sources (Nguyen, Ahn, Belgrave, Lee, Cawelti, Kim, Prado, Santagata, & Villavicencio, 2021), conforming to and establishing a knowledge-sharing environment and supporting the development of an ODeL remote

working framework that will accommodate support staff at an ODeL institution and influence institutional policy so that there can be a change in policy structures. To accomplish the development of the policy framework, the researcher employed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which is a theoretical framework that explains how employers approach, implement, and utilise use of new technologies. TAM suggests the apparent effectiveness and improvement of personality's intention to embrace the use of technology. TAM helps understand how employees adopt and adapt to remote work technologies and platforms (Davis, Granić, & Marangunić, 2023).

5.8.2 Transferability

The process of ensuring transferability of research results involves similar results being achieved in similar settings or with the similar participants (Haq, Rasheed, Rashid & Akhter, 2023). In this study, the researcher provided a comprehensive description of the study setting and of the respondents.

5.8.3 Confirmability

Megheirkouni and Moir (2023:853) identify three elements that display confirmability of research, namely, “ethics approval process, interviewee debriefing and member checking”. In this study, the researcher received approval from the ethics committee. Other confirmability strategies used in this study are keeping a proper audit trail through effective record keeping (Adler, 2022).

5.8.4 Dependability

The reliability and trustworthiness of the study are tested based on the quality of doing what is expected, in time and to the best of your ability. This criterion entails a thorough explanation of the context and purpose of the study, as well as being certain about appropriate research questions and data that would enable the researcher to achieve the research objectives (Enworo, 2023).

5.9 SUMMARY

The research methodology needs to be ethical and trustworthy to generate credible research. Hence this study is meticulously sound, and the outcomes are reliable and valid, providing a solid foundation for further research or practical application. This

ensures that that the findings are comprehensive, credible, and a valid representation of the studied phenomenon. The study will provide credible results crucial for the research to measure the potential success of the study and establish if the study will influence, bring change, or assist in making informed strategic decisions to carry operations and service delivery at institutions of higher learning into the future. This study provides resolutions to the pandemic challenges and assist the future of the respective institutions, now and post the pandemic. The identified solutions were applied to resolve the effects of the pandemic.

CHAPTER 6: EMPIRICAL DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to collect objective and measurable evidence in response to the posed questions. Data was collected through the distribution of quantitative online questionnaires. A Likert scale question of 1-4 was used, where respondents rated their observations and shared their experiences. Busetto et al. (2020) explain that charts, graphs, and statistical tests are often used to illustrate the results therefore the collected data are processed and analysed to draw meaningful conclusions. Data was also collected by conducting virtual conversational qualitative interviews. Dirani et al. (2020) stipulate that the researcher has the responsibility to interpret the gathered data, being neutral so as not to be biased in interpretations, and presenting the data collected.

This study depended on perceived data to measure an understanding of different perspectives, the individuals' lived experiences, and experiences with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher deployed a mixed approach to inquire about the effects of remote working and performance management of a remote workforce. The mixed methods approach was further utilised to evaluate and explain the data collected to make informed decisions, to influence an understanding of remote working supported by technology, service delivery, and performance management of remote working employees, and to deliver an inclusive reply stated in the research problem (Marita et al., 2020). Institutional theory was employed to examine, predict, and explain how institutions are structured and are to function remotely. The restructuring exercise involved an inclusive variety of perspectives and ideas that sought to clarify the behaviour of institutions, managing uncertainties, challenges, and the dynamics within them. The study also addressed the vulnerability and sustainability of institutions going forward. It uncovered observations of administrative support staff and academics on operations and service delivery throughout the pandemic and the lived experiences of obtaining online services.

The following are objectives formulated and explored by the study:

1. To investigate working from home as a viable solution to execute service delivery at an ODeL institution.
2. To contribute to the development of a remote working framework for an ODeL policy.
3. To examine the role of performance management as a tool to measure remote working.
4. To explore the perceptions and experiences of academic staff and administrative staff on remote working.
5. To determine the experiences of obtaining remote service delivery at an ODeL institution.
6. To explore insights of human resources staff on the development of a remote working policy at the ODeL institution.
7. To develop a performance management system to manage remote working.

6.2 RESEARCH RESULTS: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE ODeL INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING

This section describes the questionnaire formulated for the administrative support employees at the institution of higher learning to obtain data. The data obtained was analysed using Microsoft Excel spreadsheet used for basic intermediate analyses and pivot table reports.

The ODeL consists of academic as well as administrative staff. The qualitative questionnaire was designed for the institution's employees, namely the academic staff and the administrative support staff. The questionnaire consisted of 40 questions, grouped into 4 themes as follows:

- Theme 1: Work Practices
- Theme 2: Systems
- Theme 3: Performance Management
- Theme 4: Change Management.

The second segment required biographic information, including gender, age, qualification obtained, employment years, position held at the institution, and responsibilities of the administrative support staff. Section B had 10 questions that

explored individual perceptions and experiences of remote working for the period 2020/2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Section C had six questions focused on determining how the systems supported service delivery during the years 2020/2021. Section D consisted of 14 questions focusing on performance management within the remote working environment, and Section E had 10 questions focusing on change management within the remote working environment.

6.2.1 Description of the administrative employee's questionnaire

This questionnaire was designed to probe information from the administration employees who delivered services online and remotely during the pandemic lockdown periods.

6.2.2 Biographical information: Permanent Administrative Staff

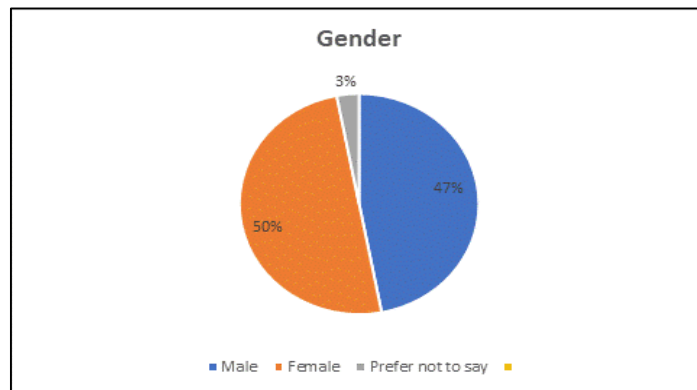
The biographical details section was included to collect data on the profile of the administrative staff. These questions asked the following information about the respondents:

- The gender of the respondent.
- The age.
- Highest qualification.
- Indicate whether you are part of the administrative staff.
- Number of years employed at Unisa.
- The position held.
- Indicate the responsibilities (select all applicable).

Question 1: Please indicate your gender.

The respondents had to indicate their gender. The gender data is important to determine the employment equity compliance of the institution and maintain a balance of the respective gender responses. The responses to question 1, where respondents had to indicate gender, are provided in Figure 6.1 below.

FIGURE 6.1: GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

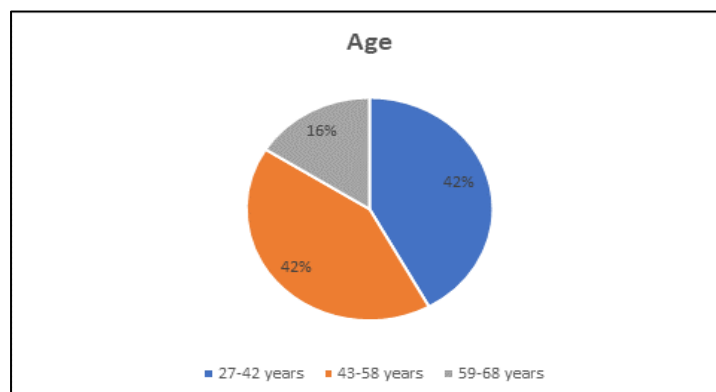


It was critical for the study to determine the gender of the personnel, so as not to discriminate but to balance out the scales of employment equity. Furthermore, it was important to establish a better work-life balance for employees (Göktepe, 2020). The response to the gender question projects female employees in the majority, which explains why, in this study, the scales of determining the work model to be employed are tipping more to WFH as compared to WFO. The remote working scenario is mostly preferred by female employees as it is a model that provides autonomy and brings forth characteristics like flexible working hours, accommodating family time and other social needs, addressing the multiple tasks female employees find themselves facing between home and work life. The flexible working arrangement offered by online remote working balances family, social, and work-life responsibilities.

Question 2: What is your age?

Question 2 asked for the age of the staff members, and responses are provided in Figure 6.2 below.

FIGURE 6.2: EMPLOYEES' AGE

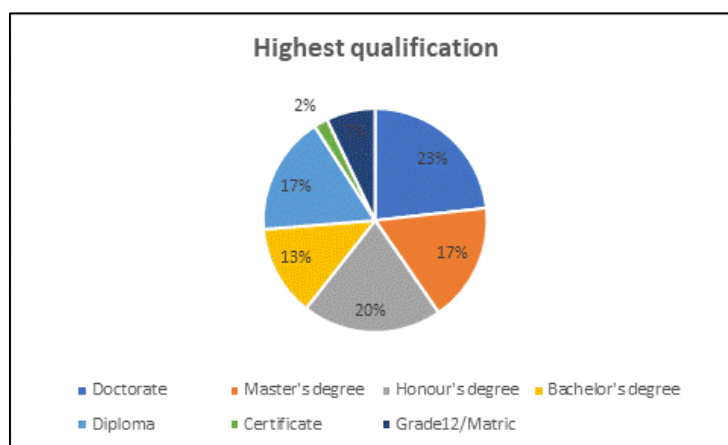


The answer to this question profiled that the university has the highest cohort named the Millennials and Generation X, both at 42%. The distinguishing characteristics of these generations are that Millennials and Generation X grew up exposed to portable digital technology, with access to the internet, a well-educated and technology-driven generation.

Question 3: What is your highest qualification?

The respondents were to state the highest qualifications obtained. The responses obtained are displayed in Figure 6.3.

FIGURE 6.3: HIGHEST QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

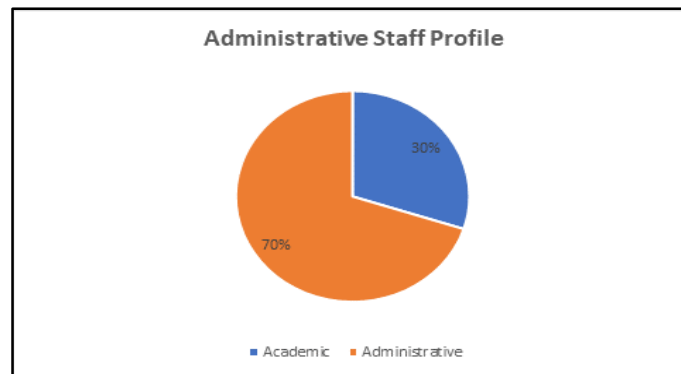


The responses indicated the highest qualification as the Doctoral qualification at 23%, followed by those who obtained an Honour's degree at 20%, Master's degree graduates at 17%, national diplomas at 17% and bachelor's degrees at 13%. Therefore, it means there are more administrative staff with Doctoral qualifications.

Question 4: Indicate if you are part of the administrative staff.

The institution is divided into two sections/categories, namely administrative support and the academic section. Question 4 required the applicants to specify whether they were part of the administrative support section or the academic section. The responses are displayed in Figure 6.4.

FIGURE 6.4: ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF PROFILE

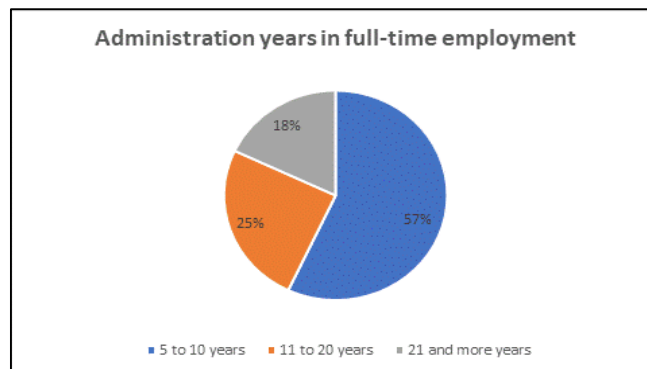


The responses indicate that 70% of respondents are administrative support staff, with 30% being academic staff. The administration departments are responsible for assisting undergraduate and postgraduate students with administration functionalities. The staff working within the administration departments at the ODeL institution are named administrators and student advisors (Durodolu, Enakrire & Chisita, 2023). According to the protocol of the institution structures, the student administrators and advisors report to administration supervisors who are responsible to oversee operations and sign off on operational tasks and projects. The administration supervisors report to managers.

Question 5: How long have you been employed at an ODeL institution of higher learning (Unisa)

The response to question 5 provided information on the number of years in full-time employment at as depicted in Figure 6.5 below.

FIGURE 6.5: DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT



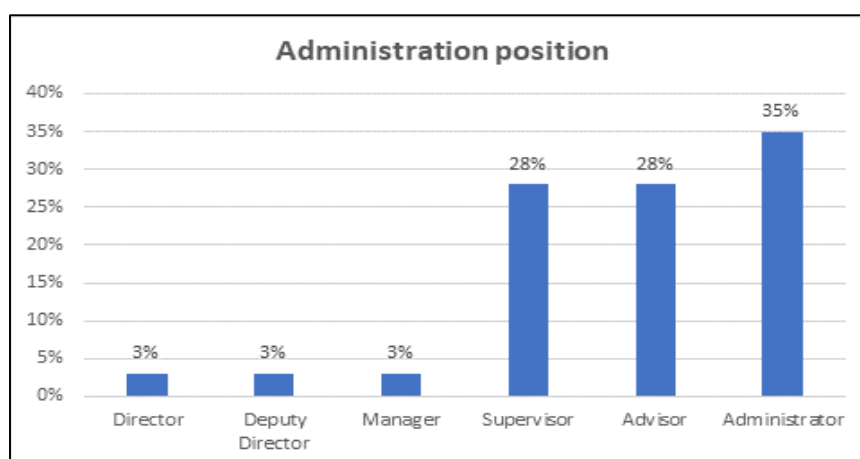
The responses show that employees in administration departments with 21 years or more are at 57%, followed by 25% of those with 11 years to 20 years of permanent employment and 18% of those who are between 5 years and 10 years of experience.

The respective positions at the ODeL institution have specific job descriptions for the different post grades within the institution, which outline and explain the purpose of the position, job requirements, key performance areas, and an explanation of what each key performance area entails. The job descriptions also state the qualifications, knowledge, and experience required for that specific post.

Question 6: What position do you hold?

The response to question 6 provided information on what was held by the respondents. The information obtained is displayed in Figure 6.6 below.

FIGURE 6.6: POSITION IN THE INSTITUTION

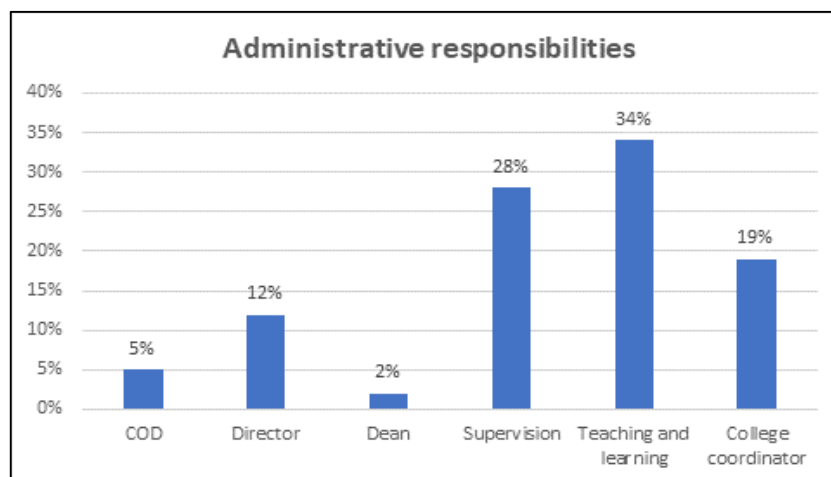


The responses revealed that 35% of the staff component are employed as administrators in the institution, 28% are student advisors employed to assist and advise students on their studies, and a further 28% are administration supervisors responsible for overseeing and supervise operations done by advisors and administrators. The executive management at administration departments is Directors, Deputy Directors, and Managers, with all three levels at 3%.

Question 7: Indicate your responsibilities.

Figure 6.7 illustrates the work-related responsibilities of the respective employment levels within the ODeL institution. The employee responsibilities and Key Performance Areas (hereafter referred to as KPA's) are stipulated in the different job descriptions.

FIGURE 6.7: EMPLOYEES' RESPONSIBILITIES



The responses indicate that 34% the employees are responsible for teaching and learning for both undergraduate and postgraduate students at the institution. The staff supervisors make up 28% of the staff component, while 19% are College coordinators at the academic division of the institution, and 5% are College coordinators at the seven colleges, also known as faculties at the institution. Directors of the administrative departments make up 12% of the staff component.

6.3 RESEARCH RESULTS: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ACADEMIC EMPLOYEES

This section describes the online questionnaire formulated to collect data from the academic staff at the ODeL institution of higher learning. The Microsoft Excel sheets were used, and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to interpret and analyse the data obtained.

6.3.1 Description of the Academic Employees Questionnaire

The majority of the institution's staff responded positively to the distributed online questionnaire and expressed keen interest in participating in the study, thus providing valuable input and contributing to the development of remote working employment strategies in order to perfect the institution's excellent service delivery.

The questionnaire distributed to the respondents firstly determined if the staff members were part of the administration or academic cohort of the ODeL, because this section describes the questionnaire formulated for the academic employees at the institution of higher learning.

6.3.2 Biographical Profile: Permanent Academic Staff

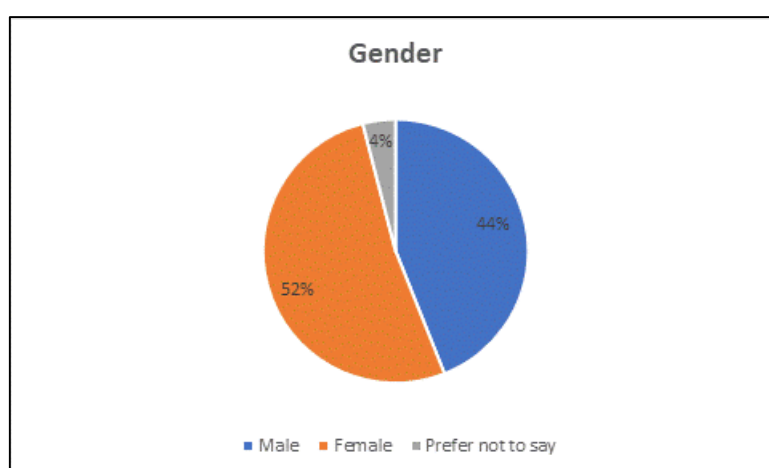
The section was included in the questionnaire to acquire data about the academic cohort. The following were the questions posed:

- Indicate your gender.
- State your age.
- State the highest qualification obtained.
- Indicate whether you are administrative staff.
- How long have you been employed at Unisa?
- Indicate your position.
- Indicate your responsibilities (select all applicable).

Question 1: Please indicate your gender.

The respondents had to reveal their respective genders. The gender data obtained is projected in Figure 6.8 as follows.

FIGURE 6.8: EMPLOYEES' GENDER

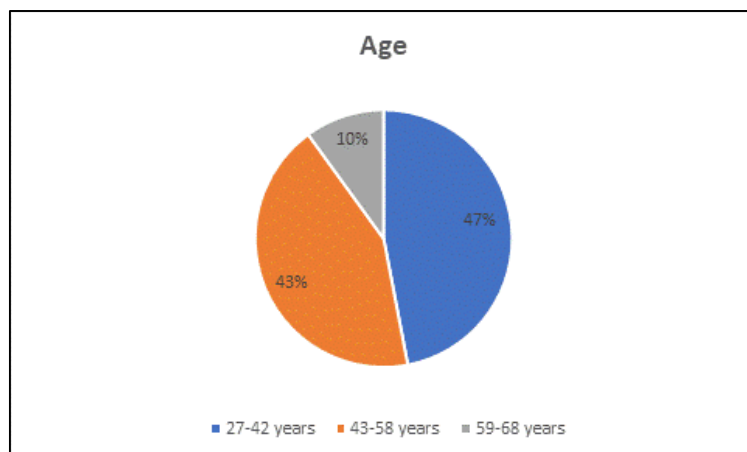


The responses show that 52% of respondents are female while 44% are male. The remaining 4% of respondents preferred not to say what their gender is.

Question 2: What is your age?

The question required the respondents to reveal their age. Figure 6.9 depicts the data obtained.

FIGURE 6.9: EMPLOYEES' AGE

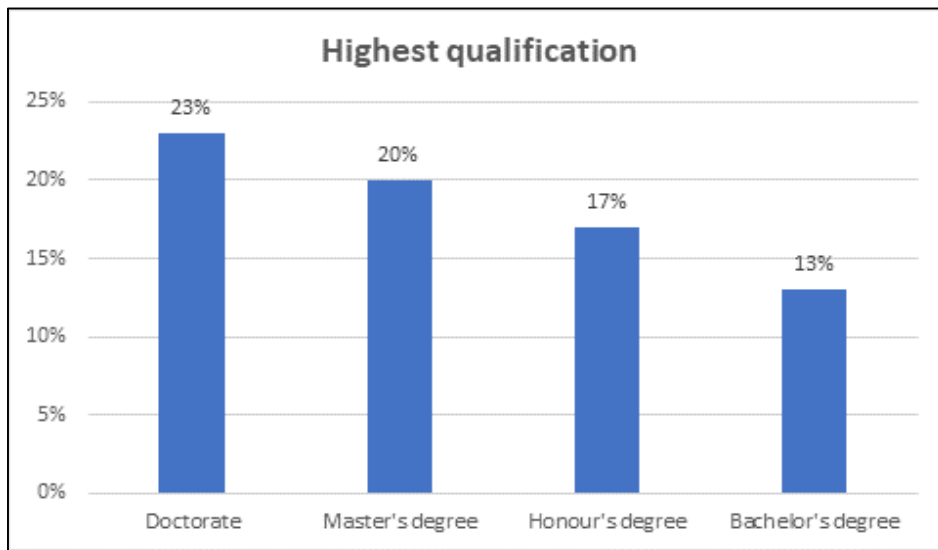


The responses indicated that the academic age profile is the economically influential generation with entrepreneurial tendencies, “Generation X” at 43% and the well-educated and technology-driven generation, “Millennials” at 47%. These generations dominate the working class globally, by contributing to the economy and wealth of their respective countries. The “Baby Boomers” generation only made up 10% of the respondents.

Question 3: What is your highest qualification?

In the academic sector, qualifications are of importance, hence the question about their highest qualification. The responses show that most of the academic employees have obtained either a master's qualification or a doctoral qualification. The academic sector is responsible for teaching and learning as well as Masters and Doctoral supervision. The data is displayed in Figure 6.10.

FIGURE 6.10: HIGHEST QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

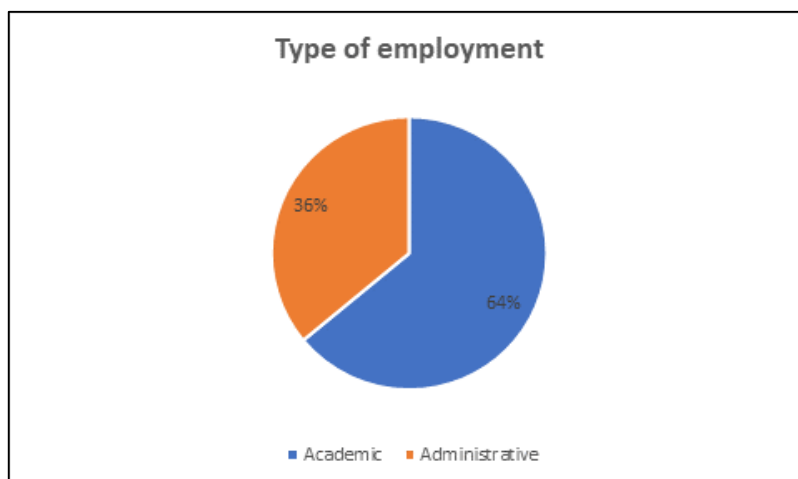


The responses obtained indicate that 23% the employees obtained a doctoral qualification, then 20% of employees obtained a master's qualification, while 17% obtained an honours qualification, and the lowest qualification obtained in academic colleges is a Bachelor's qualification at 13%.

Question 4. Indicate whether you are an academic staff member.

This question required the respondents to denote if they were part of an academic cohort, and the information obtained is depicted in Figure 6.11. According to the data collected, academics are the newest recruits at the institution as compared to the administrators.

FIGURE 6.11: TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT

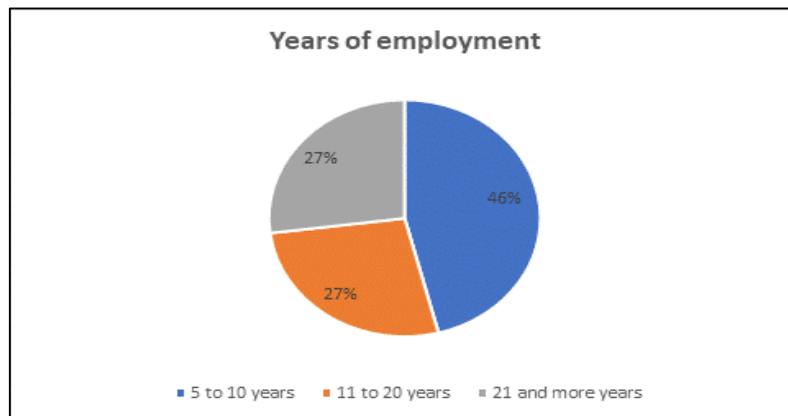


The responses show that academic staff are in the majority at 64% while administrative staff are at 36%.

Question 5. How long have you been employed at an ODeL institution?

The years of employment of the academic cohort are illustrated in Figure 6.12.

FIGURE 6.12: DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT

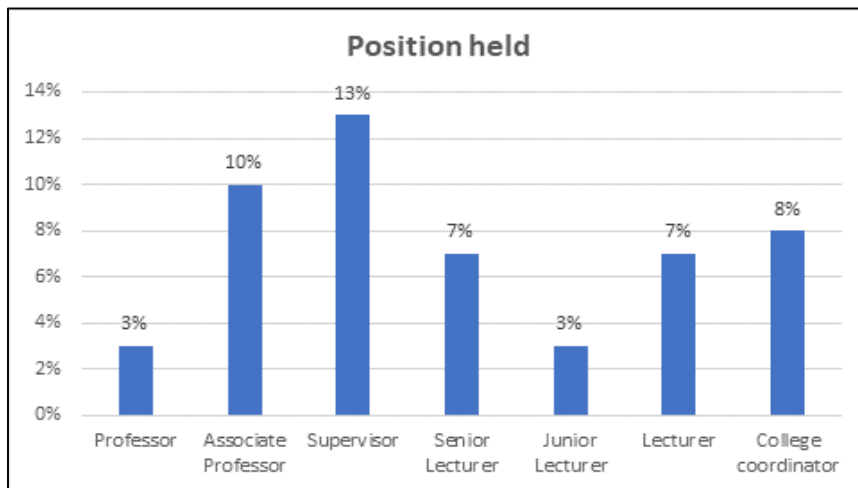


The years of employment are projected at 46% for those employees who are 5 to 10 years in service at the university, followed by those with 15 to 20 years of service at 27%, and those with 21 or more years at 27%.

Question 6. Indicate your position.

This question necessitated the respondents to state the position they held at the institution. The information obtained is displayed in Figure 6.13.

FIGURE 6.13: POSITION HELD

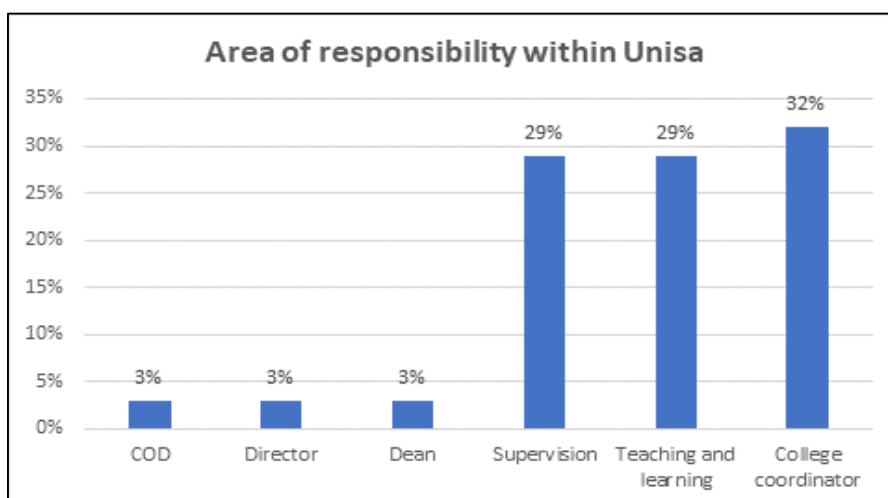


Responses revealed that the majority of respondents held supervisor positions at 13%, followed by associate professors at 10%, then college coordinators at 8%. Respondents who are senior lecturers and lecturers are both at 7%, while professors and junior lecturers are both at 3%. There are different functions essential and highly valuable amongst the academics at the institution. Responsibilities that cover administration support, research support, teaching and learning, assessment, as well as post-graduate supervision.

Question 7: Indicate your responsibilities (select all applicable)

This question clarifies the different responsibilities within positions in the academic sections. Figure 6.14. projects the respective responsibilities.

FIGURE 6.14: RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN UNISA



Responses indicate that the majority of respondents' area of responsibility is college coordination at 32% followed by both supervision and teaching and learning at 29%. The remaining areas of responsibility are Dean, Director and College co-ordinators at the seven colleges, which are all at 3%. By fulfilling the different responsibilities, academics ensure that their operations contribute effectively to the integrity and success of the institution, to offer effective and excellent service provision, and provide an excellent throughput.

6.4 THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF REMOTE WORKING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The quantitative online questionnaire was designed to cover the institution's academic and administrative staff. The software used to analyse the data obtained is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The questionnaire consists of Sections A to E, and includes the following themes: Work practices, Systems, Performance management, and Change management. and is discussed below.

6.4.1 Section B: Questionnaire designed for both academic and administrative employees

Work practices within the OdeL environment entails the institution's mandate and the employee's perceptions in their working environment.

- **Theme: Work practices**

Ten questions were asked under this theme to probe individual perceptions and understandings of working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Responders had to indicate their choice on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree concerning work practices. 50% of the employees explained that due to the lockdown, employees were stuck at home, no one was able to access the working environments, and had to wait at home for guidance. 51% of the employees indicated that it was not clear what was expected from me working remotely during the 2020/2021 lockdown periods. No training was provided to work remotely, and management was also not clear. 44.7% explained that they did not have suitable working equipment, no supervision, communication nor stipulated goals to attain during 2020/2021. The lockdown periods became a learning curve for both the employer and employee on how operations are to happen as well as service delivery.

Communication was expected to guide employees on what was expected from employees working remotely during the lockdown periods.

6.4.2 Section C: This section focuses on determining how the student systems supported service delivery during the 2020/2021 period

Systems are the technology platforms used by the ODeL Institution of Higher Learning to execute different operations.

- **Theme: Systems**

Six questions were posed under the theme of systems. Institutions of higher learning have different “off-the-counter systems” in use. The ODeL institution has an in-house, tailor-made ICT system known as the Student System, and Wi-Fi connectivity named VPN. These platforms serve and enable, and support administrative, assessment, as well as teaching and learning processes. 61.1% strongly agree that Wi-Fi connectivity was not stable during 2020/2021 lockdown periods when they were expected to WFH or remotely. The questions in this section focused on determining how the student system supported service delivery processes during the pandemic, when work was performed and processed online and remotely. Connectivity also posed challenges of not being accessible and not stable during these lockdown periods. 89% of the employees propose that Unisa systems should be adapted to meet the 4IR requirements.

6.4.3 Section D: Focuses on performance management within the remote working environment

Performance management within the remote environment has become important.

- **Theme: Performance management**

Fourteen questions were asked to determine if there was any management of performance when employees were expected to work remotely. 64% of the respondents agreed that there was no performance measuring tool suitable to measure remote working performance. 44.4% pointed out that the negative impact of the pandemic reduced the support offered by the institution. 72% agree that the institution was not ready for such a crisis. The ODeL institution, just like the rest of the world, was ill-prepared to deal with such a crisis and the challenges it brought with.

6.4.4 Section E: Focuses on change management within the remote working environment

Change management is critical within the institution.

- **Theme: Change management**

Ten questions probed the employees about change management, as a new phenomenon during the pandemic and post-pandemic, that necessitated institutions to re-examine operations, procedures, and processes within the institution 87% of employees stated that the 2020/2021 effects of the pandemic accelerated institutional cultural change. 92% of responses revealed that the institution had to decide to review staff training and development, explore strategies to accommodate remote working, enhance the level of productivity, apply new methods to attract talent, enable transformation, and support the diversity brought about by the pandemic. 80% proposed that to be included in redesigning of the daily operations of the institution and aligning its aspects that allow the institution to remain resilient and sustainable, management must drive change and make all to embrace change.

6.5 STUDENTS AND STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire was developed for the students and the student representatives at the ODeL institution. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse data. The student questionnaire consisted of:

- Section A: Student Biographical information.
- Section B: Explores Unisa students' (Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students) experiences and perceptions of the online service provision during 2020/2021. 40 questions were posed under four themes, namely:
 - Theme: Online
 - Theme: Admissions
 - Theme: Assessment
 - Theme: Tuition

The responses of this questionnaire revealed the challenges related to students concerns about their specific studies. As much as 55% of students at the ODeL institution revealed that they were faced with real challenges during the lockdown periods of the pandemic. 60% of the students revealed that the challenges highlighted

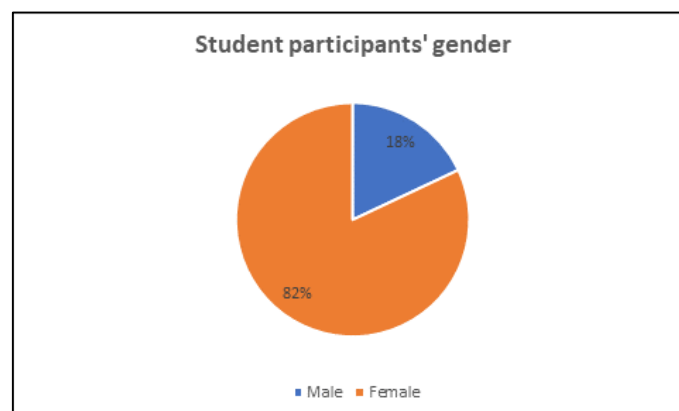
are issues around admission to tertiary education, acquiring digital devices to enable online learning, adapting to online teaching, and the ability to do formal and non-formal online assessments. The ODeL institutions cater mostly for 45% of students from Africa, students who are from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, which compounds the challenges of access and use of technology. The other 55% of students agreed that challenges brought forth are the economic decline, reduced budgets, rising tuition fees, inflation, and educational financial pressures, as well as the unpreparedness of students admitted to the respective institutions (Nonyongo et al., 2005).

6.5.1 Section A: Biographical Information

The biographic data obtained from students is displayed in Figure 6.15.

Question 1: Please indicate your gender.

FIGURE 6.15: STUDENTS' GENDER

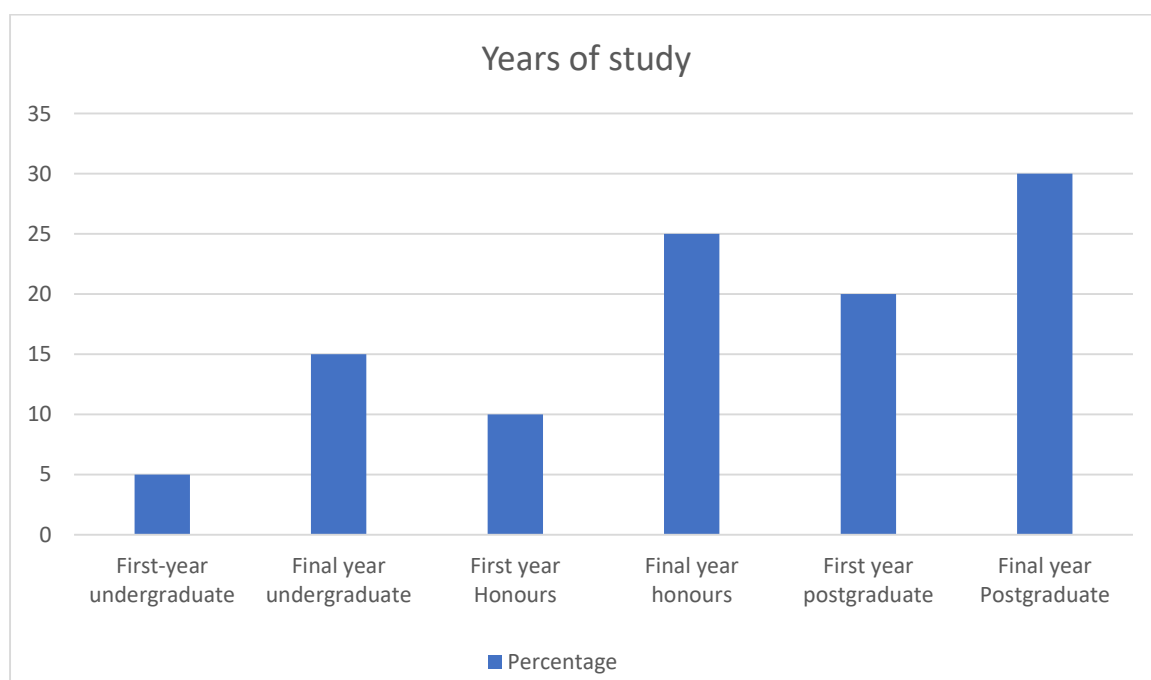


It is critical to determine the student's gender, which refers to the gender identity of individuals enrolled in an educational institution, such as male, female, or other identities beyond the traditional male/female classification. It is about how students identify themselves and how they prefer to be categorised in educational data. Therefore, only three classifications were provided: male, female, and prefer not to say. Responses revealed that the majority of respondents (82%) are female and 18% are male.

Question 2: Indicate your academic year of study.

It is critical to determine the years of active study because the year of enrolment informs the experience presented by the student in response to the questions posed. The mature students at the institution, 25% of final year honours and 30% final postgraduate students, had indicated that remote online service delivery is welcomed. First-year students: 5% of those who registered during the pandemic were not well clued up with online service delivery. 20% of first-year postgraduates knew and expected online remote service delivery. The respondents had to be either registered students or on active duty as an SRC member. The respondents' responses are illustrated in Figure 6.16.

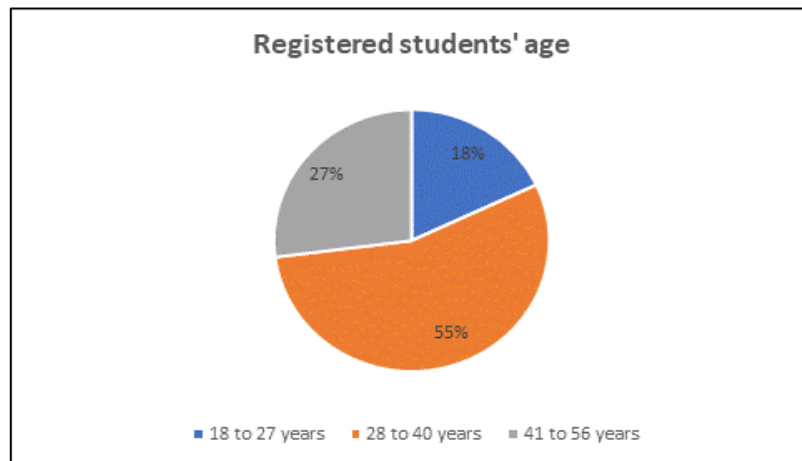
FIGURE 6.16: ACADEMIC YEAR OF STUDY



Question 3: What is your age?

This question mandated the respondents to provide their age. The information received is depicted in Figure 6.17.

FIGURE 6.17: REGISTERED STUDENTS' AGE



The student's age refers to how old students are while enrolled in an educational programme. The age is important to determine and understand learning needs and approaches, technology use and adaptation, social and emotional development, as well as diversity and inclusion. The age 18 to 27 is 18% the age bracket of mostly undergraduate 1st year, and 1st year honours. Age 28 to 40 years at 55% constitutes a combination of final year undergraduate, final year honours, and both first year and final year postgraduate. Student age determines how individuals learn and what support they need from the institution.

6.5.2 Section B: Explores the Unisa (undergraduate and postgraduate) students' experiences and perceptions of the provision of services during the pandemic

Online processing in administration is also referred to as real-time processing.

- **Theme: Online processes**

When responding to the questions about online processes, the postgraduate students, who were also referred to as the mature, experienced students in online services, were able to handle the online service provision. Therefore, the postgraduate students' comments and responses on online processes were in the affirmative at 90% to receiving services online supported by technology. Undergraduate responses were as follows: 60% requesting tools to work remotely as well as 45% require remote system straining.

- **Theme: Admissions**

During the pandemic lockdown periods, services were provided online remotely and 85% registered students had to have access to electronic or smart devices to access the institution. 2020/20221 intake was very low because processes and service provision were online, and prospective students were not ready and were caught unaware by the effects of the pandemic. During 2020/2021 lockdown periods, the university did not provide students with the necessary resources to access the institution.

- **Theme: Assessment**

During the pandemic and now beyond the pandemic into the future, institutions of higher learning are hard at work, capacitating students, and staff respectively to use smart devices in order to do be able to do online assessments. During 2020/2021, students knew to use the e-learning platforms. The set times attached to submission of assignments during 2020/2021 were not practical. 60% responded to needing student support services. Therefore, the institutions require a system rethink and development to be suitable for the 21st century and compliant with 4IR. System development and training are works in progress for the institutions. 62% responses reveal that the effects of the pandemic propel the ODeL institution to adopt online examinations and continue to use formal and non-formal online assessments that are in line with ODeL strategy.

- **Theme: Tuition**

71% of students indicated that online teaching and learning processes are met with mixed feelings from students. 69% students express a lack of electronic devices, Wi-Fi connectivity, and the absence of student support. There is also a need to educate students on remote working and encourage the refurbishment of homes into learning environments. 50% of the academics express the need to revisit processes to be able to deal with large numbers of students connecting at a given time during online teaching or online classes, as this poses a challenge when providing content delivery, connectivity, and content management.

6.6 AN ANALYSIS OF THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH HUMAN RESOURCES

Qualitative semi-structured open-ended online interviews were used to provide a distinctive opportunity to discover intricate information needed (see annexure D). Virtual interviews were conducted to advance the insights of the human resources head of departments' subjective insight, opinions, and experiences on remote working. The four HRM respective heads were interviewed to explore the broad areas of interest in policy development, policy implementation, and policy management. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse data obtained. The human resources heads contributed to the body of knowledge by sharing knowledge and information about the significance of policy development, policy management, and policy implementation in remote working environments and remote working performance management.

6.6.1 Section A: General work experience

The questions for interviews were divided into Section A and Section B. Section A provided the relevant experience of the respondents, which is necessary to ensure that their contribution is of value. The respondent had to share information about the work experience acquired, describe their duties as a manager, and share their experience of working remotely as HR specialists. The four participants who were interviewed included an HR policy specialist, an HR Administration manager, the manager of the division responsible for staff training and development, and an EAP specialist. The experience of the four HRD heads of departments will be discussed below.

The following are the biographical information and responses of the four HR specialists interviewed on the questions posed on the work experience related to this study:

6.6.1.1 Interviewee AA

An HR policy specialist was interviewed and is the head of the policy custodians' section of the HR department at the institution of higher learning, with 17 years of experience in this field. The experience stated in this regard is vital for it explains that the HR policy specialist interviewed possesses experience of work before the

pandemic, during the pandemic, and most probably beyond the pandemic period, to obtain the experience and readiness of human resources to support remote working and managing performance.

6.6.1.2 Interviewee BB

The HR administrative manager with 13 years of experience, who serves as a gatekeeper of HR processes and procedures within the institution, was interviewed. The relevance of the respondent is to bring an understanding of the deliberate intent of personnel resources to support remote working and managing output within the remote working environment beyond the pandemic, at an institution of higher learning.

6.6.1.3 Interviewee CC

The interview with the head of the division with 10 years of experience responsible for staff training and development is a critical because it outlines the readiness of the department to conduct training that will equip staff responsible for training and development to ensure skilled, trained, and competent staff in the institution to execute digitalised functioning and obtain the institution's proposition and plans on how the institution intends to ensure that there is skills transfer, protection of intellectual knowledge, and staff retention to keep operations successful.

6.6.1.4 Interviewee DD

An EAP specialist has 20 years of experience at an institution of higher learning was interviewed to determine the staff wellness and staff governance, as the health status of the employees is a priority after the pandemic negatively affected the staff morale. The EAP specialist's views are also important to determine the institution's plan for how to engage and accommodate staff in handling and dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the information obtained in section A, the information on the work experience obtained is knowledge that will enrich the area of expertise of the respective HR departments in future plans and ensure relevancy to the operations.

6.6.2 Section B: The strategic readiness of human resources to support remote working performance

In section B, the four respondents had to share information regarding HR's readiness to support performance during remote working. The interview questions in section B probed four themes: Performance management capabilities, performance measurement, performance areas that measure remote working, and human resource support, which will be dealt with in the subsequent sections.

6.6.2.1 Performance management capabilities

As indicated, the four respondents had to share the most important performance capabilities of the ODeL institution of higher learning and explain what capabilities were required to be measured when employees worked remotely during the 2020/2021 lockdown periods.

All four HRD participants agreed that the year 2020/2021 performance output was at its lowest in the institution because the institution was not ready to work online remotely, and there was no technology support. All four interviewees agree with Dirani et al. (2020), explaining that there existed a tool used to measure the traditional methods of service delivery, but it cannot be adapted to manage remote working nor evaluate remote working performance. Remote working necessitated a remote performance management tool needed to examine, evaluate, and measure online remote working, set goals, encourage strategic planning, and adaptability. Capone et al. (2021) express that this exceptional period has changed the models of work and engagement with stakeholders and employees, and these times brought new approaches, as the future work model is accommodated. The EAP specialist at the institution of higher learning expressed the importance of the EAP department of the institution in partnering with medical aids, insurance, and medical facilities to ensure the well-being of employees. All four interviewees emphasised the need to reassure staff to ensure maximum performance and encourage workers to remain positive and handle the challenges brought by the pandemic. Performance capabilities are interconnected and form the foundation for achieving business success. High-performing institutions continuously assess and strengthen these capabilities to remain competitive, resilient, and responsive to change.

Good governance ensures ethical practices, accountability, and compliance with laws and regulations and describes institutions' capabilities that influence skill sets required and necessitate training and education to inform the capabilities required (Bonacini et al., 2021). All four interviewees recommended that there is a need for training for both line managers and staff on performance management, employee engagement, and leadership development. All four interviewees were also in agreement with one another that employee training and development are essential to develop an understanding of how remote working teams should perform. Smith and White (2022) say that staff also needed training and development even though WFH and working remotely were not a new phenomenon (Naidoo & Naidoo, 2023). All four interviewees also cautioned the institution to provide valuable insight into the diverse population of the university, emphasising that HR continues to keep able-bodied staff motivated. The HR administration head also indicated the importance of including the disabled employees, as they should also be catered for at the development stages and not included as an afterthought, as is the current practice.

6.6.2.2 Performance measurement

The response to the questions posed required information on the process to be positioned or to be implemented to support remote working. HRD heads had to reveal if the measures put in place were effective in measuring performance and express how HR measures performance during remote working periods. The HR policy specialist highlighted that it was necessary to encourage the significance of employer and employee engagement to obtain information to make informed and relevant input when effecting change in policies, procedures, and processes. The manager of the HR Administration department emphasised that the professional departments involved in determining the future strategies of the workers and operational plans for the institution should be held responsible for effecting change, in this instance, online remote working. The HR Policy Specialist interviewed stated that there is no need to "reinvent the wheel, but just to make sure the wheel is running". The policy specialist is also in agreement with Frawley (2022) in that the best innovative work takes place when the focus is on collective attention on a single task and keeping everyone engaged. Working off-site makes it more likely to have spontaneous communication, increasing workers' feelings of connection with their teammates compared to at the

office. The aftermath of COVID-19 brought with it challenges around performance and how to measure output.

All four interviewees said there should be recruitment plans in place to attract technology-oriented and knowledgeable incumbents to join the institution and training needed to develop the workplace and existing workforce. For future planning, lessons learned during the pandemic should influence future procedures and processes. The EAP specialist said to normalise the work environments, over and above implementing remote working and hybrid models. In certain instances, where workers are influenced to go to the office, managers must continue to be cautious around the determination and involuntary characteristics affecting employees. Some individuals may have challenges dealing with anxiety. A perceived inactivity and desolation are still existing feelings confronting workers. The EAP specialist further stated that it is not always obvious when employees are anxious and therefore, work-related wellness and well-being of staff are crucial to any institution.

WFH, as well as developing and implementing a technology-driven strategic plan to work remotely, has shown benefits that oppose presentism. This also enhances higher engagement and high-performance levels. The remote working model is adaptable to circumstances, reduces high costs associated with the rental and maintenance of workplace space, and limits time and commuting expenses (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The EAP specialist stated that the EAP office continues to educate staff, subordinates, and managers alike on how to behave and handle each other during this volatile period, to bring an understanding between the employer and employee. Advocate a healthy, balanced work life addressing the effects of COVID-19, workplace management, how to navigate through the ongoing pandemic, now and beyond the pandemic, to reduce employees' stress, anxiety, and uncertainty levels.

6.6.2.3 Performance areas that measure remote working

The respondents were obligated to provide information on what measures were put in place to encourage and support remote working. They were also expected to share the key performance areas that measure remote working and confirm if remote working was a viable solution during the lockdown periods. Presently, contact universities are venturing into this space of ODeL, and therefore, for the existing ODeL institution to remain the leaders in this educational environment, they should aspire to

be a high-performance institution by supporting staff, promoting, and embracing online remote working. The challenges of the pandemic led to vulnerability and uncertainty in the working environment in ODeL institutions, amongst others, resulting in a shift to online service provision, online education as well and online evaluations. Two of the interviewees outlined that the institution needs to embark on health and wellness programmes that provide and equip staff with coping mechanisms and necessary skills to be effective in working remotely. ODeL institutions should also expose employees to planned talent management strategies to enable them to perform and advance in their careers (Yildiz & Esmer, 2023).

All four interviewees agree that HR plays a key role in recruitment processes, training and developing staff, succession, and retention planning. At the ODeL institution of higher learning, the academics are allowed to work outside the dedicated work office space, which amounts to remote working. Therefore, the new mandate for HR is to ensure that online remote working supported by technology becomes a reality and to put matters in perspective concerning operations by ensuring that each environment works out the model to use. McMahon (2017) states that a successful implementation of systems requires a balance between social and technical components. TAM is a theoretical framework developed by Fred Davis in 1989, an abstract outline that explains how users come to accept and use technology. TAM advocates for acknowledgment of the intention to use technology, and use of individual employees, and promotes the change to remote work technologies and platforms (O'Dea, 2025).

The four interviewees brought insights that the employer should invest in consultation sessions with staff, students, internal and external stakeholders to recognise emerging digital trends suitable to the employer, employee, students, and clients, respectively to remain relevant (Van der Westhuizen, 2016). The systems theory emphasises input, process, output, and feedback loops, a perspective useful for analysing how technologies interact with users, processes, and environments. Communication is necessary, and frequent feedback sessions inform managers with information to develop processes and procedures. Frawley (2022) stipulates that strong leadership provides direction, motivation, clarity, and decision-making. The HR administration interviewee stated that staff inputs, engagements, and brainstorming sessions craft

operations, enable performance reviews and performance checks, and balances to be put in place.

The manager training and staff development expressed that communication and personnel engagement sessions also assist in enabling the achievement of the stipulated targets, set goals, key performance areas, learning, development, and facilitating personal development (Janczewski et al., 2023). Consultations and negotiations with employees remain a priority for employers because employees who value their workplace produce innovations, inspired ideas, problem-solving tactics, critical thinkers, and remain positive in the workplace.

6.6.2.4 Human resources support

Information required in this instance was to establish the role played by HR in developing a remote working policy, and what could have been done better by HR in supporting remote working, or encouraging better management of online remote working. Before the dawn of COVID-19, operations were conducted from the offices, and all the processes in place to measure performance were measuring work done in the office, and never meant to measure work done remotely. The research revealed that during the pandemic lockdown periods, staff were required to work from home, while the employer needed to provide tools of trade, as well as specialised tools for persons with disabilities, hence the need to develop a remote working performance tool. Performance areas that measure remote working should be clear, have well-developed job descriptions, outline job responsibilities, set goals, targets, time frames, and performance expectations. All four interviewees agree that the new remote working strategy has to be communicated to staff by their line managers.

Institutional performance capabilities refer to the collective abilities, systems, and resources that enable an institution to achieve its goals effectively and sustainably. Wheatley (2021:123) expresses that these capabilities determine how well an institution performs in terms of productivity, output, innovation competitiveness, and overall effectiveness. All four interviewees agreed with Conradie and De Klerk (2019) and expressed that the pandemic caught the world unaware, and staff were subjected to lockdown, therefore they had to use what they had because many employees at the institution used desktops, their tools of trade were office bound, and due to the

lockdown, there was no access to the offices. In addition, employees were stranded on what they should do; they lacked guidance on what to do, and the isolation and uncertainties brought by the pandemic and lockdown did not help the situation either (Annosi, Foss, & Martini, 2020, 61-70).

The interviewee, the manager of HR Administration at an institution of higher learning, highlighted that the institution was not ready with ICT equipment, as no necessary hardware and software were in place, and he also explained that managers and supervisors were not prepared to manage staff working away from the office. McHenry et al. (2021) stated that the need for strategic capability by line managers that offers strong leadership, provides direction, motivation, and decision making is of importance in planning for remote working. The interviewee responsible for staff training and development emphasised that good governance ensures ethical practices, accountability, and compliance with laws and regulations. The other two interviewees added that agile leadership is needed to clarify and guide operations, to communicate, and execute a clear vision and long-term strategy, which will guide operations and employees, which is consistent with findings by Pullokaran and Paulachan (2023). In preparations to make remote working a reality, the institution started with a laptop and Wi-Fi connectivity roll-out to enable employees to work from home.

The responses of section B provided valuable information to incorporate into the development of HR policies, processes and procedures of working remotely, management, and performance of remote working.

6.6.2.5 The legislative framework

The legislative framework that guides performance management typically consists of laws, regulations, and policies that ensure accountability, fairness, and efficiency in employee performance within an institution, particularly in the public sector. The specific framework can vary by country, but generally includes several key components. These laws set the groundwork for employer-employee relationships, including performance expectations.

In South Africa, the following legislation governs performance:

- Labour Relations Act (LRA) 1995. This Act deals with the employment relationship. It gives rights to both parties and dictates how the employer and employee are to conduct themselves in the employment relationship.
- Equal Employment Opportunity laws, to manage discrimination and unfair labour practices.
- Employment Equity Act, to protect fair procedures for evaluation and dismissal.
- Disabilities Act to address and protect disabled staff.
- Institutional HR Policies and Frameworks.
- Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).

In the working environment, the LRA establishes merit-based appointments and evaluations, provides guidelines for performance appraisals, defines values for underperformance, and promotes accountability and service delivery. It further ensures that performance management does not compromise employee well-being because staff well-being is important as it impacts on productivity. Establish performance improvement, performance expectations, and performance evaluation as part of the performance management system.

6.7 THE RESULTS RELATING TO THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study was to bring forth resolutions to address the effects of remote working on performance management at an ODeL institution of higher learning to develop and enhance on line service delivery, improve on line administration systems, and electronic teaching and learning platforms, facilitate access to education and knowledge, promote the new technology-supported approaches to accessing higher education institutions, as well positively impact the education environment and steer the development of a remote working performance management system. This will encourage ODeL institutions of higher learning to embrace remote working as a means and as a fundamental aspect to drive operation and work arrangement's long-term and promote viability and sustainability of the institutions, develop an ODeL remote working framework that will accommodate support staff at an ODeL institution, contribute to the theoretical framework of working remotely in an ODeL environment, and influence policy and encourage other institutions of higher learning to effect

change in policy structures. The research objectives justify the data obtained, observations made, experiences, and influences of respondents to explore, analyse, measure this study, and guide the outcomes as follows:

6.7.1 Objective 1: To investigate working from home as a viable solution to execute service delivery at an ODeL institution

Working from home has unquestionably become one of the most extensively employed techniques to minimise unemployment, keep institutions operating and financially viable, and contribute to the economy of the country. The ODeL institution's purpose is to offer electronic distant education, flexible, accessible, reputable, and comprehensive qualifications recognised nationally and internationally. Therefore, the institution needs to have accessible, functional, practical, academic and administration platforms that house processes and procedures that enable online remote service delivery, favourable to supporting the students online ODeL institutions also encourage institutional governance and advance institutional objectives and mandates by promoting virtual service delivery sustenance, foster employee support in advancing remote working infrastructures, value remote working outcomes such as reduced turnaround times in service provision, and lower absenteeism, which are a positive contributing factor to impacting and improving productivity, and flexibly in the current working environment. ODeL institutions are dependent on the environments in which they operate, therefore, a change in institutional culture and service delivery was necessitated.

6.7.2 Objective 2: To contribute to the development of a remote working framework for an ODeL institution

When the institution has a well-informed strategy defining which roles can and should be performed remotely, it is clear what is expected of the employees who will work from home or remotely online. Line managers must create and plan for the execution of operations, produce a long-term remote work approach and adjust to operational digital tools and platforms. Policy development is of importance to enable service delivery, promote a change in service provision and also to make future working arrangements for institutions to make remote working a success.

In the ODeL context, managing staff performance in remote settings is essential to maintaining quality service delivery, accountability, and operational efficiency. A Remote Working Performance Management Framework provides a structured approach to measuring, evaluating, and enhancing the performance of staff working remotely. The aim of the framework is to ensure that remote work does not compromise staff productivity, service quality, or learner outcomes. The employer and employee have to adapt to numerous levels of technological competence that expand their ability to effectively participate in promoting remote working. Amidst the factors to relieve the effects of the pandemic, and to bridge the break in time, space and employee engagements, the employer should invest in communication platforms that allow engagements, and make provision for collaboration tools that are able to assist in planning to keep employees well-informed and involved in implementing change.

Institutions should allow policymakers to revisit and rework institutional policies, develop the necessary framework for the policy on remote working and clarify expectations and measurable outcomes. An ODeL remote working framework should ensure compliance with working remotely, reviewing, and managing performance, as well as aligning individual and team goals with institutional strategy. Performance monitoring tools are essential to enhance productivity within ODeL institutions as they embark on the process of transformation, and building successful institutions, encourage staff development and engagement. A well-developed Remote Working Performance Management Framework manages performance but also supports staff development, strengthens institutional culture, and contributes to better learner outcomes.

6.7.3 Objective 3: To examine the role of performance management as a tool to measure remote working

Presently, in the respective work environments, the traditional performance management system (PMS) tools that measure productivity are no longer applicable for certain remote jobs or roles. The study explored the perceived effects of remote working on performance management at an ODeL institution of higher learning. The study also explored the need to investigate the change in the operation platforms to enable the current digitalised engagement initiatives, maintain accountability, productivity, and quality assurance to develop and unleash an agile leadership that is

proactive in managing the diverse workforce's employee engagement. Correspondingly, enable managers to support, evaluate, and develop remote staff effectively, encourage interaction with employees to obtain information valuable to impact and contribute to the design of remote performance, productivity, and policies to inform and guide remote working. The line managers should track remote working productivity, evaluate institutional goals and the specific needs of remote teams. Furthermore, they should promote the implementation of a shift to outcome-based performance evaluations and define performance evaluation timelines.

The ODeL institution has an in-house IPMS policy that influences job descriptions. The IPMS policy informs performance agreements that promote individual employee performance, compliance, and accountability. A performance agreement is a contract between the institution and the employee outlining the key performance indicators and satisfying the strategic objectives of the institution. A well-developed Performance Management System for Remote Working is essential to effectively oversee distributed teams, especially in ODeL or similar knowledge-based environments. Such a system fosters a culture of accountability, recognition, and continuous improvement, ensuring that remote work is not just viable, but also productive and engaging. A Remote Working PMS offers flexibility that accommodates various work styles and time zones. It is therefore advisable to conduct annual reviews of the PMS's effectiveness including review off-line manager's skills on remote team leadership and virtual performance coaching, as well as the use of self-assessments and peer reviews to encourage self-reflection and growth.

6.7.4 Objective 4: To explore the perceptions and experiences of academic and administrative staff on remote working

Remote working has become increasingly dominant, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The employee's psychological state, mental health and well-being have become a significant concern of the employer because, during the pandemic lockdown, most employees experienced isolation, which led to depression, anxiety, and uncertainty over job security. The study discovered that some employees (70%) appreciated the flexibility of remote work, while others (30%) resisted due to the inability to sustain a work-life balance, connectivity challenges and digitalisation of operations. Therefore, meaningful engagements, clear guidelines, and policies that

promote a balanced work-life became essential in helping employees to embrace change, set boundaries amid personal and work life, and bring an understanding to improve the well-being of the workforce. Employees' experiences in service delivery during the pandemic were used to craft, enhance, and effect an understanding of the new mode of conducting operations and delivering a service. Consequently, there arose the need to implement comprehensive training programmes to upskill the technological proficiency and enhance computer literacy of staff.

6.7.5 Objective 5: To determine the students' experiences in obtaining remote service delivery at an ODeL institution of higher learning

Students' engagement, access to resources, suitable study environments, time management, and self-discipline are among elements required from the student side to make studying at an ODeL institution a success and a reality. Receiving remote online services during the pandemic was a challenge to most students. There were challenges due to a lack of access to necessary resources, inability and inconsistency to access internet connections, online study materials, and online assessments, and most of all, suitable study space at home. To ensure the success of students, the ODeL institutions depend on the commitment, dedication, self-management, and trust of the administrative and academic staff, as well as the involvement of functional and effective communities. The challenge facing the institutions of higher learning is to effect mind-change, empower students, academic and administrative staff to provide the best online remote working services that meet students' expectations and educational needs, and provide financial or logistical support where needed.

Institutions of higher learning are essentially social institutions that are unique in their missions, visions, and statements of responsibilities, which differ from one institution to the other. To deal with student needs and challenges amongst the social uncertainty is crucial and necessitates the accommodation and shift to remote working. Although all higher learning institutions operate within the same confines of offering undergraduate, postgraduate, as well as professional programmes, there is a need for change that facilitates and contributes to institutional governance. This study's findings inform how to harness the 4IR prospects to determine the format of learning that encourages student support and opportunities to examine the new learning technologies and reaffirm the commitment to academic integrity in the ODeL context.

6.7.6 Objective 6: To explore the insights of the human resources staff on compiling a remote working policy for an ODeL institution

In the current situation, institutional frontline managers need to highlight how to establish employee engagement to impart the culture change for remote working employees and teams. Institutional theory focuses on the recruitment processes, succession planning, and retention of experienced and skilled employees, as well as observing the structure and economic status of the institution for the future. Therefore, HRM departments, amongst other responsibilities, should establish the growing sustainable capacity and the development of remote workforce at ODeL institutions. HR should continuously examine the effects of employee working relationships and optimise awareness that is formed among operators of a collective network, to comply with remote working needs. From time to time, HR departments should analyse the institution's productivity and performance to improve measures that secure institutional knowledge, motivate expanding the attributes and abilities of the human resources, and establish the growing sustainable capacity development of the workforce at ODeL institutions. Observation of digital skills can be used as instruments to disclose, protect, and manage knowledge within the institution and explore prospects for generating inventions for digital platforms and guarantee that employees stay motivated to perform, thus contributing to institutional sustenance.

Developing and ensuring that the remote working policy is a function of HR in ODeL institutions globally, it is therefore important that the developed remote working policy:

- Promote communication and feedback sessions for employees to preserve contact with employers about performance and well-being.
- Allow and ensure regularly scheduled check-ins to ensure employees remain accountable and responsible.
- Stipulate output expectations with monitoring systems in place to account for productivity and turnaround time.
- Specify areas to expand in pursuit of expanding future business success.
- Outline the day-to-day fundamental shifts in the global economy going forward and plans for the recovery and revival of comprehensive economic relationships.

6.7.7 Objective 7: To develop a remote working performance management system

Remote work is not just a better option for institutions of higher learning; it is also beneficial to employees and employers, respectively. Post the pandemic era, with amplified fears of job security and uncertainty in the working world, there exists keen feedback by managers of the remote working cohort, who must prove that as a remote workforce, they are productive while working from home and should therefore be allowed to continue as such. Creating a performance management system for remote working does not necessarily mean “reinvent the wheel,” but rather visit the traditional performance management systems that were tried and tested to develop systems to be suitable for online and supported by technology.

To have a suitable performance management system means developing agile leadership, an agile workforce, and transformational strategies that accelerate digital transformation. Building institutions to be flexible, adaptive, and productive across these changing surroundings. Every job has a job description, which is meant to set out the institution’s objectives and key performance areas for employees to know what is expected from them. The SMART principle should be applied in this instance to ensure that the key performance areas are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and have a time frame.

Communication and feedback sessions form an important aspect of performance management because it is important for managers and employees to find each other pertaining to operations. Performance output is important for the well-being of the employer and employee alike. The performance system in place should be able to measure and manage individuals working remotely or remote working teams, while advancing a supportive and qualifying environment for sharing ideas and building institutional agility.

6.8 THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings discussed hereunder are the results that emerged from the data collected when conducting research on this study. The conceptual thinking approach informs and addresses the modelled research objectives in this study. This section

provides answers to research questions posed and provides evidence gathered from data collected and analysed. Critical thinking is applied to encourage key analysis of the information obtained and assess the ideas and thoughts to develop a technique to be used by the university now and into the future. Essential information was obtained, observed, measured, and discovered during the research process. The research findings are descriptive and inferential, providing recurring themes, behaviours, or outcomes identified from the data. ODeL institutions went through unstable periods. The following conversation resonates with the outcomes and conclusions derived from the research. The study also projects empirical evidence derived from observations, experiences, and opinions by real people in the real world. The change to remote working supported by technology necessitated a rapid adaptation to digital tools and platforms used for service delivery.

The study also confirms that the data gathered is adequate to explain implications of this study because these findings have a feasible impact to inform and encourage collective change and create an intense consideration of meaningful involvement. The findings inspired the approaches and governance procedures that can develop work situations. It further supports and confirms the importance of the information obtained to make informed decisions in line with the transition and comply with the imminent changes. The study produced the following findings, which are beneficial to the employer to remain financially viable, resilient, and in business, offer job security to employees, and provide accessible education and support to the students. The study also established that institutions must change the way the business of the day is conducted.

6.8.1 Finding 1: Inspire the development of technology infrastructure to facilitate and support remote working performance

According to Sahni and Sharma (2020), employees must deal with the complications attached to disasters and all the changes applicable. It is undeniable that individual employees' reactions are different in dealing with frustration, discomfort, modification, fear, and anger, including complete resistance to change. While technology enabled continued operations, issues such as poor internet connectivity and inadequate digital tools hindered performance. This study aims to inspire the development of technology

infrastructure that facilitates and supports remote performance, especially in the context of remote work at an ODeL institution.

The research revealed a strong correlation between well-integrated technology infrastructure and effective performance management in remote settings. Staff and managers had to adapt to remote performance management systems. Participants emphasised the need for reliable and stable connection of the digital tools. Participants further advise the ODeL to design plans that reintroduce institutional goals and ensure that these goals are accomplished. Performance evaluations shifted from time-based assessments to outcome-based assessments. Some employees perceived this as a more accurate reflection of their contributions, while others struggled with the lack of clarity in expectations. Employers' expectations, which are applied simultaneously with the theory of motivation which ensure that individual employees contribute and perform to acceptable levels in exchange for remuneration and incentives.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that ODeL institutions of higher learning invest in a centralised performance management platform that includes real turnaround time for tasks to be performed, realistic deliverables, integrated communication and collaboration tools, that provide a platform for engagement, transparent dialogue to communicate, provide feedback, and analyse performance and collaborations. Systems that support both academic and administrative staff in remote settings enhance administrative, teaching, and learning productivity and sustainability.

6.8.2 Finding 2: Job satisfaction, flexibility, and work-life balance

The majority of participants reported increased flexibility in managing their work schedules when working from home. Employees appreciated the autonomy afforded by remote work, which led to higher job satisfaction and perceived productivity and the ability to control their working arrangements to a particular level, stabilise and balance their work and private lives during the pandemic. Given the present circumstances, employers should focus on the productivity their employees are delivering, provide assistance to make remote working a reality, and emphasise meeting deadlines. Productivity and producing good work should be the focal point of employers. Both employees and managers indicated a need for more structured training on remote

work tools and virtual performance management techniques because institutions were seen as reactive rather than proactive in providing support systems during the transition.

The survey conducted shows that with all the uncertainties in the workplace, employees raised mental fatigue and social isolation as concerns that potentially affected job performance. There were mixed responses regarding work-life balance. Some reported better personal time management, while others felt overwhelmed by blurred work-home boundaries. Employees indicated that working remotely requires preparation and a lot of adjustment to ensure performance and fulfilment of the expected output. There is evidence within the administrative departments that the institution experienced its highest productive period while working remotely. However, the institution has to ensure that staff and students acquire the needed equipment, are trained, and are equipped to perform a balance between work and home responsibilities. Most of the responses of the survey reveal that if more employers push toward the old way of working, insist that employees return to the office, or being physically present at workplaces, this can drive attrition and retaliation by employees. The responses also highlight that employees in the institution are in support of not returning to the office but rather to work from home or remotely online.

The survey also reports that remote work options are the primary benefit employees look for in jobs, which has major implications for institutions looking to hire skilled professionals or retain knowledgeable, experienced, and trained staff. WFH will develop to be the model that presents job satisfaction, flexibility, and work-life balance, increased utilisation of technology, and increased team engagement.

6.8.3 Finding 3: Reputable online learning experience, facilitates student engagement, accessibility, and support

The study examined the impact of COVID-19 on education, studies, students' access to education, academic progress, and social development. The research findings in this area can be applied to inspire and guide innovation in technology, reputable online learning experience, facilitate student engagement, accessibility, and support. A reputable online learning platform will also address poor handling of the applications, delays in the delivery of study material, effective assignment feedback system. The

research also encouraged the development of technology infrastructure to facilitate access to ODeL institutions to develop effective teaching methods, and systems that result in quality online learning experiences, design new educational programmes, and improve learning outcomes that benefit students. Further development includes the increase of accessibility and flexibility to quality teaching and learning experience and support. Open distant learning institutions require access to reliable support systems to provide service delivery and performance to expected levels. Students must be a priority in the provision of accessibility and support so that the distance in remote service provision is bridged.

6.8.4 Finding 4: Provide and maintain communication channels, networks, and collaborations beneficial to the institution stakeholders, employees, and students

Communication gaps and collaboration issues led to weaker team cohesion and reduced opportunities for spontaneous collaboration. As institutions navigate in dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic, collaborations with other institutions of higher learning paved the way for institutions to communicate and reach common ground rather than compete against one another. Since the lockdown pandemic periods, ODeL institutions and contact universities were forced to offer hybrid teaching and learning, and as such, they are competing over student attraction. The findings promote the implementation of institutional digital transformation strategies that are student-friendly and promote student support, enhance user operations experiences and develop new strategies, and increase profitability.

Leadership style can make or break the workplace. Effective leadership is the biggest asset in the digital transformation process; therefore, training and development of an agile leadership cohort will be beneficial to the ODeL institution. Psychological empowerment and reinforced communication are key elements in ensuring quality leadership. A remote flexible workplace has become a certainty, giving institutions more possibilities to consider improving workplace practices, attracting, and retaining talented employees. Strong communication and trust are tools that increase agreement and productivity in remote work arrangements.

Managers should not put pressure on themselves to always make sense of everything for employees, their teams, or provide solutions to challenges experienced. Maintaining open lines of communication and remaining flexible and willing to adapt are key to streamlining processes. Managers should therefore focus on team meetings to obtain information, give feedback, and consider input on changes to ensure awareness of influential inclusivity and clear expectations. Brainstorming and feedback sessions should be used to obtain information for planning, new initiatives, and co-create the team's work mode to ensure acceptance and buy-in on decisions for implementation. There is an emphasis that institutions must advance in remodelling the prevailing office spaces to meet the requests of the flexible working environment. This includes creating sustenance structures that are open to working remotely, designed for support staff, academics, and the student population.

Access to technology and equipment should be a standing action plan for institutions, which includes ICT services, access to in-house systems, and Wi-Fi data to facilitate connectivity for the best performance and productivity. ODeL institutions should propose and implement remote working as well as hybrid models to enhance functionality, and online systems designed for seamless communication with remote international and national stakeholders, staff, and students. The study revealed that digitalisation and the implementation of 4IR and AI support the model that advocates for a balanced work-life lifestyle, and healthy living because there is job security, and a noticeable increase in the production and performance of operations. WFH also saves time, which is reserved for enhancing productivity because employees need not commute to work and are saved and free from delays brought by traffic challenges, free from office chatterboxes, and office politics, which consume production time.

6.8.5 Finding 5: The development of a remote working performance management system

Remote working across institutions is seen and confirmed as a viable solution to execute service delivery, revive operations, and allow recovery of operational losses suffered during the pandemic. Remote working performance plan incorporates, stipulating, and defining key performance and expectations to establish if these are attainable and reasonable. Each of the aspects of the framework and the contribution

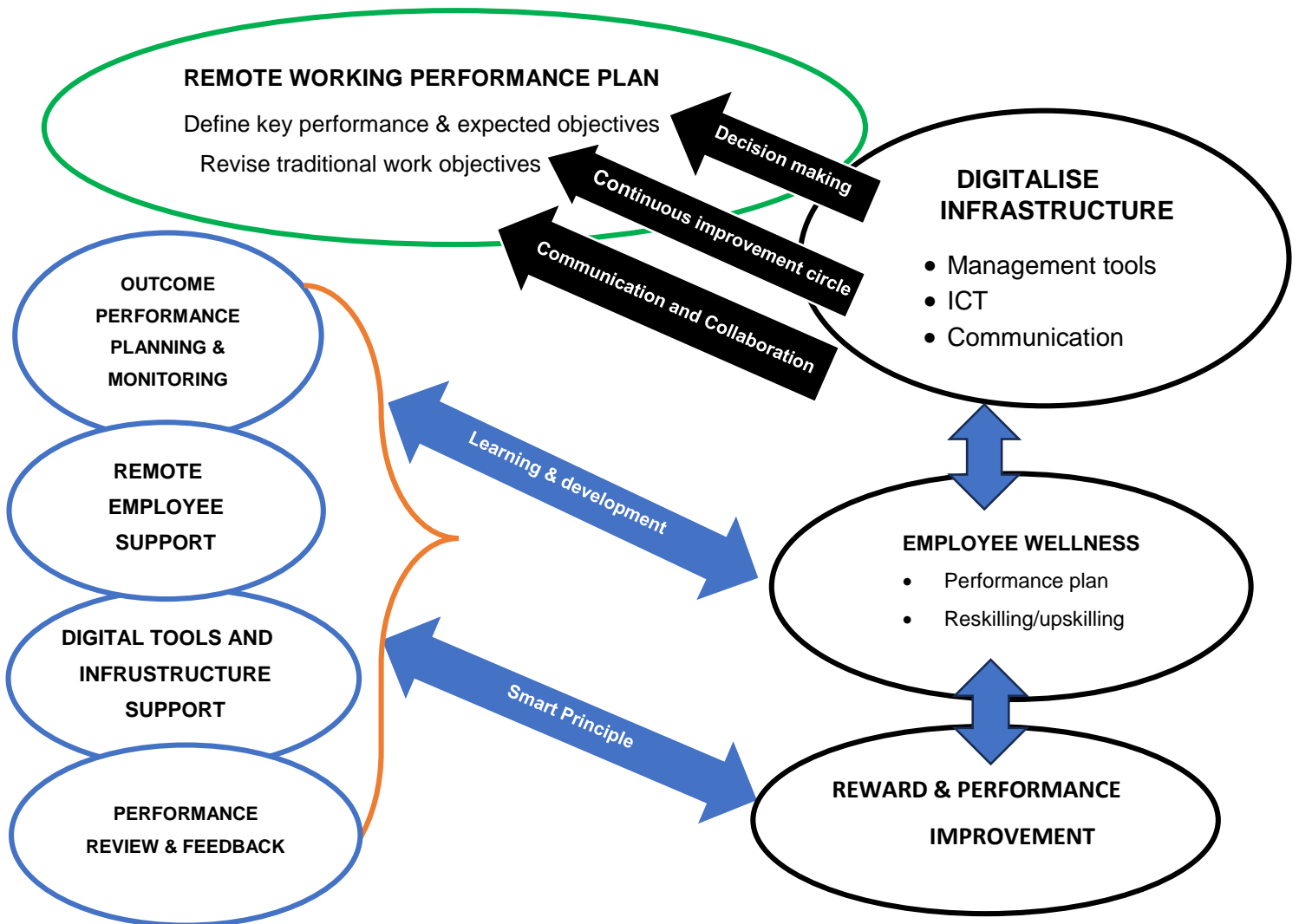
to the skills and development training framework are explained in the section that follows.

The remote working performance management system consists of the following; digitalised infrastructure that entails ICT platforms, communication channels and management tools that will be utilised to revise the traditional work objectives to suite remote working model; and communication and collaborations that allow employee engagements, where new ideas, innovations are shared to ensure inclusiveness in decision making and allow engagements to be a continuous circle. Online remote working model requires reskilling and upskilling for staff to embrace change to digitisation. The legislative framework (discussed in Chapter 6 section 6.6.2.5) provides the applicable legislation that guides performance management to ensure accountability, fairness, and efficiency in employee performance within an institution, particularly in the public sector. The LRA establishes merit-based appointments and evaluations, provides guidelines for performance appraisals, defines values for underperformance, and promotes accountability and service delivery.

The LRA ensures that performance management does not compromise employee well-being because staff well-being is important as it impacts productivity, performance improvement, performance expectations, and performance evaluation. Performance management is dealt with in Chapter 3 (section 3.3), while performance evaluation is discussed in Chapter 2 (subsection 2.4.3). Performance evaluation and performance management are elements important in establishing productivity and expected outcomes. Staff training and development (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.4.4) sets the groundwork for learning and development, promotes employer-employee relationships, including performance expectations. The SMART principle (see chapter 1, 1.1, and 1.3) allows measurable outcome-based performance, performance review and feedback, and rewards high performance. SMART also enables outcome performance planning and monitoring of operations, ensures development of digital tools and infrastructure support for remote working employees, and a continuous improvement circle. Applying the SMART principle allows HR specialists to develop a framework for setting effective goals that specifically refer to remote working goals that are measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Figure 6.18 illustrates the

Remote Working Performance Management System, developed to measure remote working performance.

FIGURE 6.18: A REMOTE WORKING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



Source: Authors' own

6.8.6 Finding 6: An ODeL Remote Working Framework

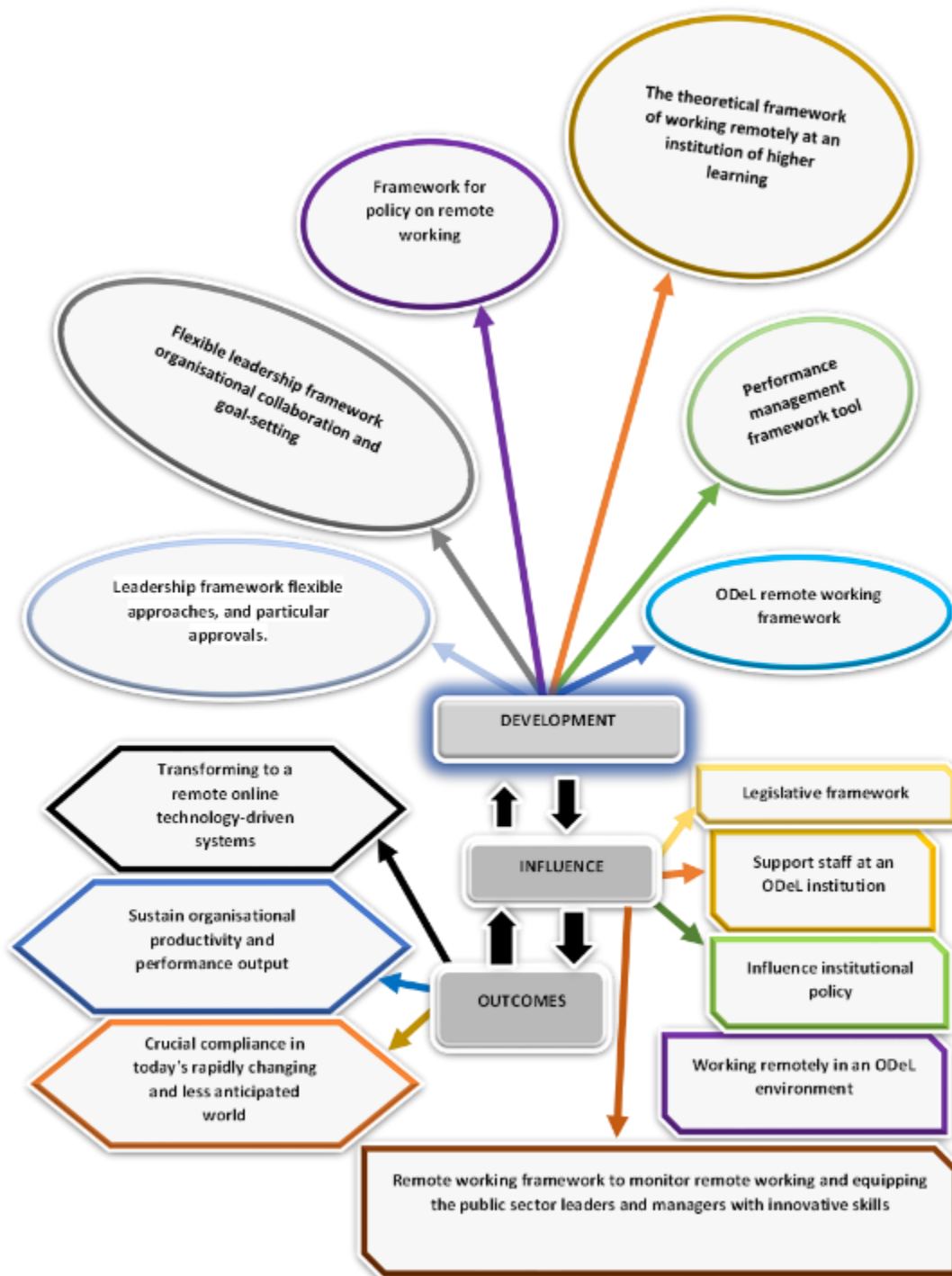
An ODeL institution of higher learning increasingly relies on digital tools and remote work environments to support administrative, academic, and technical operations, now and going forward into the future. A Remote Working Framework entails the development stage that includes a framework on remote working policy to govern remote working processes and procedures, as well as the theoretical framework on working remotely at an institution of higher learning. The Technology Acceptance Model (hereafter referred to as TAM) is a theoretical framework and an abstract outline that explains how users come to accept and use technology (TAM is discussed in

detail in Chapter 2, subsection 2.7.1). It advocates for acknowledgment, for the intention to use technology, and use of individual employees and promotes the change to remote work technologies and platforms. The theoretical frameworks provide a particular perspective, or lens, and these lenses are the psychological, social, institutional, and economic theories.

A Remote Working Framework within an ODeL context offers structured guidance on how remote work can be efficiently managed and implemented, while ensuring accountability, performance, and learner support. In an ODeL context, a Remote Working Framework offers structured guidance on how remote work can be efficiently managed and implemented, while ensuring accountability, performance, and learner support. Leadership framework, flexible approaches, institutional collaborations, and goal setting and particular approvals are of critical importance in the development stage. Factors outlined in the development stage influence the legislative framework to support and protect the staff at the ODeL institution.

A Remote Working Framework for ODeL is a strategic, policy-driven structure that influences institutional policy, outlines processes, technologies, roles, responsibilities, and support systems enabling staff to work effectively from remote locations. The final stage in developing an ODeL Remote Working Framework is the outcomes, which are a transformed remote working system supported by technology, a rapidly changing environment, compliant in this less anticipated working world, and systems designed to sustain institutional productivity and performance output. Figure 6.19 shows an ODeL remote working framework which was developed to inform remote working performance management, monitor remote working performance, and measure performance.

FIGURE 6.19: AN ODeL REMOTE WORKING FRAMEWORK



Source: Author's own

6.9 SUMMARY

A structured approach was utilised to gather the empirical data and the data was effectively analysed and interpreted for presentation. The research objectives

provided a foundation for the analysis to produce informed conclusions. To confirm the correctness of data and integrity, graphs and charts were utilised to translate raw data into actionable conclusions that are practically significant to generate conversation and suggest implementation. Influence the strategic outcomes and interventions required from policymakers to improve some of the concerns caused by all the affected staff at the university. The experimental indication afforded showed that reduced and deficient initiatives within the university context are likely to cause breakdown and disturbance, and therefore may indicate removal from work, and reduced incentive and obligation from employees.

Many institutions are looking into which mode to implement, engage, and best motivate their employees to be committed and dedicated once more. Improving staff performance is a crucial characteristic of managing a successful, productive institution. Management also needs to implement an enduring strategy that requires constant effort, attention, and regular evaluation and adjustment to usher in change. ODeL institutions encourage managers within its respective departments to develop tailor-made strategic plans and operational frameworks to fit in with the broader institution's mandate and operational plans. Empirical research, when done thoroughly, helps in making informed decisions. This study is systematically done to advance precise knowledge and information to address actual problems and challenges presented with evidence-grounded solutions.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The study investigated how remote working has influenced performance management at an Open and Distance e-Learning (ODeL) institution. The findings revealed that remote work brought both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, employees benefited from increased flexibility, autonomy, and a shift toward outcome-based evaluations. On the other hand, performance management was hindered by limited face-to-face supervision, technological constraints, reduced communication, and unclear performance expectations. Mental health concerns and work-life balance issues also emerged as critical themes. Both staff and management emphasised the need for improved support, training, and digital infrastructure to optimise remote performance management. The stipulated objectives enabled the study to gather insights of interest in the effectiveness of working remotely, maintaining or enhancing institutional performance and to appreciate the influence of COVID-19 on management capabilities and human resource development.

The problem statement was formulated and detailed in Chapter 1, Section 1.6. The effects of COVID-19 restrictions on the change from face-to-face service provision to remote working on performance management in institutions of higher learning.

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions brought a change from face-to-face service delivery from an office environment to online remote working supported by technology. The effective implementation of remote workforce performance management informed the objectives stipulated and discussed in chapter 1, section 1.8, and included:

1. To investigate working from home as a viable solution to execute service delivery at an ODeL institution (Chapter 2).
2. Explore perceptions and experiences of academic and administrative staff on remote working (Chapter 2).
3. To examine the role of performance management as a tool to measure remote working (Chapter 3).
4. To advance insight into a performance management system to manage remote working (Chapter 3).

5. To provide information obtained to guide the development of a framework for a policy on remote working (Chapter 3).
6. To determine the students' experiences in obtaining remote service delivery at an ODeL institution of higher learning (Chapter 5).
7. To probe the insights and knowledge of the HRM on compiling a remote working policy framework for ODeL institutions (Chapter 5).

The effects of the pandemic continue to harm institutions' sustainability, leadership style, and accelerate the digital transformation. It is important to safeguard a successful transformation of leadership and attach leadership indicators and leadership elegance, that align with employee performance. Challenged by this epidemiological disaster, employees and leaders globally are pressed to guide a form of response to the effects of COVID-19. Hence, all corrections and interventions are done to address the ills of the pandemic and manage the present situation and challenges to equip institutions to better prepare in dealing with future crises. This include empowering staff with new futuristic skills and values that are found to be vital in strengthening operations, collectivism, selflessness, employee engagement, and cooperation.

7.2 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1 is the background, which introduces reasons why this researcher undertook this study. The chapter also explains the two major contributions intended by the research. First, it illuminates the obstacles to making a transition from face-to-face work versus remote work supported by technology within an ODeL context.

Chapter 2 identifies the tools and processes that have to be developed to enable the evaluation of the performance of remote workers, clarifies the concept of remote working or working from home, terms that are used interchangeably throughout the study and explains the principles that informed this study. The chapter further explores and examines the literature on the outlook of the workforce and the working environment engulfed by uncertainty after the pandemic.

Chapter 3 focuses on the positive contributions to the education environment, improving online education platforms, admission to higher education institutions, and

the development of technology-supported ways of access to institutions. The chapter further discusses how performance management is supported by technology, an online performance management device that helps managers observe and evaluate outcome-based performance of employees, and also encourages workers to perform at their highest and create a working environment where worker's abilities align with the institution's mandate.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology that is necessary to ensuring that research is conducted in a structured and consistent manner. It further entails the study strategy applied throughout the study, the investigation of the problem, explanation of peculiar techniques and tools used to collect data. These include using random sampling to distribute questionnaires to collect data or information and conducting virtual interviews and dialogues to gather in-depth information on policies, procedures and processes applied in the institution. Theoretical data analysis certifies that the study is reliable, valid, and trustworthy, addressing the ethical implications.

Chapter 5 focuses on the locus of the study, an ODeL institution in South Africa known as a leader in the ODeL education environment within the African continent. The employees and students at the institution are utilised as respondents to the surveys conducted, to collect information from.

Chapter 6 explains the aim of collecting objective and measurable evidence to respond to posed questions. Data collected by the distribution of quantitative online closed-ended questionnaires, with a Likert scale question of 1 to 4, where respondents rate how they feel about something or share their experience, as well as conducting virtual conversational qualitative interviews.

Chapter 7 provides findings, recommendations, and conclusion. The purpose of this study is to observe the perceived effects of remote working on performance management at an ODeL institution to equip and enlighten ODeL institutions of higher learning HRMs, productive professionals, and administrators to continue technology development to make learner-focused content accessible and enable human interaction systems, to increase the body of knowledge and direct the continuous research on dealing with the effects of COVID-19 post-pandemic, in preparation for

how to handle future catastrophes. Explore the encounters and influences conveyed by the COVID-19 pandemic and address vulnerability and uncertainty existing in the working class globally.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Remote working has significantly reshaped the performance management landscape within ODeL institutions. While it has enhanced flexibility and encouraged a focus on results, it has also exposed weaknesses in traditional supervision models and digital preparedness. Institutions should revise performance evaluation systems to reflect remote work realities, with clear goals and deliverables. Performance tracking has become more complex in virtual environments, requiring institutions to rethink and redesign their evaluation systems such as providing reliable access to digital tools, internet connectivity, and virtual collaboration platforms to support performance monitoring and teamwork. Without adequate tools, training, and communication structures, remote working may undermine the fairness, accuracy, and effectiveness of performance management.

7.3.1 Recommendation: Line managers need to attend training on managing remote working

Line managers are responsible for ensuring the health and well-being of employees, operations, production, and employee output simultaneously with adhering to and supporting the institutional mandate. The research conducted indicates that the ideal training programme needed for line managers is to be equipped with the skills and knowledge on how to manage remote working and measure remote working. A flexible leadership framework with clear goals and expectations is needed to ensure institutional collaborations, performance, and productivity (see Chapter 7, sections 7.3.1 to 7.3.4). Line managers are responsible for encouraging compliance, which is crucial in today's rapidly changing and less anticipated world. All activities performed should focus on bringing harmony and understanding between the employees and the institution. The leadership framework should allow for stability between specific regulations, flexible approaches, and particular approvals. The ODeL institution of study has to design a system that will drive operations, accommodate the employees in all respects, produce the expected productivity and output to the institution's

expectations as discussed in section 4.3. Therefore, the institution will need to facilitate the transformation and support performance strategies, approach new models, and value inputs from all stakeholders. Embrace and accept digitalisation, new learning technologies, implement artificial intelligence (AI), and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) that are relevant and comply with the requirements of the 21st century.

7.3.2 Recommendation: The need for employee support in remote working

Secondary data highlights prospects and ambiguity in sustaining the relationship between the employee and employer as institutions continue to plan in response to the trends and needs to address the challenges and impact of the pandemic. There arises a need to introduce staff wellness programmes, implement staff support initiatives that provide job security, and address the existing uncertainties in the working environment. An effectively designed institutional conceptualised improvement plan and strategy to encourage institutional culture change is important as an intervention and recommendation to ease the effects of the pandemic, as discussed in section 4.4.2. The uncertainty and ambiguity imposed by the hybrid workplace redefined the quality of work and well-being of employees, hence the introduction of remote working, application of conceptual thinking, an ability to think and understand abstract concepts, ideas, observations, and experiences, as well as provide suggestions on solutions and performance plans regarding service provision, agreement on resource requirements, clarification of performance expectations, and performance management (see Chapter 2, subject 2.4). Dedicated training, appropriate recognition of performance, ensuring that different workers accomplish the arranged performance results, skills development, and subscribe to institutional planned objectives. The institution also provides staff with ICT services, enablers, and training to do their best work and ensure job security and financial security, not overlooking institutional sustainability, as working relationships to better suit the transformation and anticipated changes.

7.3.3 Recommendation: Remote service delivery and student support at an ODeL institution

Support for students and resource provision are vital for the effective implementation of online remote teaching, learning, and evaluation. An operational process that

connects students and the institution is necessary to address the isolation challenges experienced during pandemic periods and to establish an appropriate remote service delivery system. A procedure should be developed, incorporating feedback from student leadership and students about their experiences with online service delivery during lockdowns. The remote working model improves online systems, introduces a smooth remote service process to support teaching and learning, and is particularly supportive of student services in an ODeL institution of higher education.

7.3.4 Recommendation: A shift towards a flexible remote working model

WFH is the most preferred model for the change in service provision, conducting operations, processes, and procedures in administration at the ODeL institution (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.4.1.6). The responses from employees in the administration prompted the institution to revise traditional performance evaluation tools to better accommodate remote working needs and abilities and to update systems to reflect remote work realities, with clearly defined goals and deliverables. Most of the respondents in administration were females, which explains why the preference for a model that leans more toward WFH rather than WFO because females prefer WFH as it is a flexible model that allows them to manage and balance work life, home responsibilities, and social obligations. The work-from-home arrangement fostered healthy living, staff well-being, and positive working conditions, contributing to a balance between work and family life.

7.3.5 Recommendation: Operational change and transformation of strategies at an ODeL institution of higher learning

The ODeL institution of higher learning is a legend in the ODeL education environment (see Chapter 4). The research established that the staff component in administrative departments of the institution consists mostly of the Millennials and Generation X. This population group is still caught up in the old way of handling operations and service delivery. The Millennials and Generation X are resistant to change, a common human behaviour stemming from a variety of factors, including fear of the unknown, and loss of trust. Therefore, line managers need to understand the reasons behind this resistance as it is crucial for effectively managing change initiatives. This population group is important because they are a generation brought up to be optimistic,

independent, resourceful, and pragmatic. They maintain a good work-life balance and work ethic. Most of all this population group are the custodians of institutional knowledge. The knowledge they have refers to the collective expertise, experience, and information accumulated within an institution over time. It encompasses everything from documented processes and policies to the unspoken "know-how" and cultural nuances that shape how things are done (see Chapter 6).

Millennials and Generation X institutional memory contribution to transformation is a crucial asset for efficiency, continuity, and informed decision-making as change is implemented. A high percentage of employees are 10 years and above in the employment of the institution, meaning they were employed by the institution before the outbreak of the virus, during the pandemic periods, and are still part of the institution post pandemic (see Chapter 4, section 4.2). Therefore, their contribution of shaping service delivery, operations and productivity is essential. The research also revealed challenges facing line managers in the administration departments amongst others dealing with the effects of the pandemic, the need to navigate through the wellness of employees, encouraging employees to work towards reaching the level of expectations, dealing with the inability of staff to perform as expected, and the existence of disturbing elements like stress, anxiety, and mental illness in the workplace as well as adjusting to change and transformation. The constant downtime of the internally developed student system, poor Wi-Fi connectivity contributed to the challenges facing remote working. The ODeL institution should invest in a well-developed system to enhance online remote working model, allow reskilling of employees, systems training and open lines of engagement so that change can accommodate all. The institution should further develop a performance and management systems to govern remote working, monitor, and evaluate performance and output.

7.3.6 Recommendation: Adaptability of academics at an ODeL institution to remote working

The COVID-19 pandemic revolutionised the education environment, reshaping the employment landscape and altering the workforce outlook. The study revealed that working from home was not a new phenomenon for the academics of the ODeL institution of study. Academics had one of their practices as working out of office work,

which in essence is working from home or any other space convenient to the employee and acceptable to the institution. This exercise afforded academics with more flexibility and freedom in dealing with the institution's interests and fulfilling its mandate. Therefore, remote working is a model academics in the institution support. The academics responses also highlighted the need to ensure that staff are provided with the necessary tools of trade, and the students are provided with laptops and reliable data to ease teaching and learning. The academic cohort are employees with the highest qualifications either at master's or doctoral level. The collected data indicate that 23% of academics obtained a doctorate qualification, followed by those who obtained a master's also at 23%, and honours graduates at 17%(see Chapter 6, section 6.3.2). The projection of the highest qualifications is in line with the job requirements for academic recruitment criteria of HR. The ODeL institution, is widely recognised as one of the mega-universities and most substantial. The adoption of remote working must be well crafted, with policies and procedures revised to align with remote working criteria. The approach used by academics is one of balance, understanding, and convenience.

The academics at the ODeL institution preach participation and inclusiveness because they are responsible for teaching and learning both prospective and already registered students and providing educational achievement. Academics also express that remote work sets a positive outlook for their family and work life. A combination of the past and present culture, context, and the correct positioning of what is valuable input is crucial in assisting and influencing the needed change. An effective technology-driven system, adaptability processes, and procedures are matters known to the academic staff. Therefore, it is easy for academics to embrace remote working in fulfilling their mandate within the institution, decision-making, and service delivery, to take the institution's functionality beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. In academia, flexible working arrangements can enhance the level of productivity, support the diverse student population, and produce graduates needed by the market for employment. The pandemic challenged the institution to rethink and position online service provision, tuition, and assessments, redesign teaching and learning operations, and the daily operations to remain sustainable and resilient. As discussed in section 6.3.2, a total of 42% of the millennials are academic staff who are well-educated and technology-driven, factors that boost online remote working and economic growth. Up

to 47% of the total of the employee respondents are Millennials, a generation beneficial to the employer because Baby Boomers are a generation of mature ages, with their experience, knowledge, and skills that are relevant to enhance the new model. 52% of the employee respondents are academics, a generation that seeks attainable labour that is inspiring and focused, and prefers undertakings that have them involved in the production of quality work.

7.3.7 Recommendation: Bridging the institutional gap and strengthening student support and service delivery at an ODeL institution

A transactional distance theory was used in this study to support and highlight the distance that exists between students, the lecturers, and the institution. The transactional distance theory suggests that there are three considerations made when designing a transaction between lecturers and students in distance learning: learner autonomy and structure, as discussed in section 2.7.2. The study reveals numerous student support-related challenges experienced during the lockdown periods of the pandemic, including student administration, registration process, poor handling of the applications, delays in the delivery and receiving of study material, ineffective assignment feedback system. The findings also exposed insufficient student support services, technology access, and enablers to be able to access online services. Service delivery across various departments within the institution, and in the administrative departments responsible for student services or other student-related functions, were significantly disrupted during the pandemic lockdown periods. ODeL institutions must develop improvement plans as a matter of urgency around student-institution relations to improve student support services and university staff support services (see Chapter 4, 4.6).

7.3.8 Recommendation: Advancing online remote working service provision and delivery in an ODeL institution

Restrictions initiated by the respective governments to control, contain, and contain the virus drastically impacted service delivery, especially face-to-face tutoring and physical assessment. Institutions had to forcefully transition to offer online services without preparations. Even though the universities were already offering some electronic services, the pandemic caused all processes to be fully fledged online. This

move required commitment and accountability from the students, academic staff, administrators, and all other institutions' internal and external stakeholders. Therefore, ODeL institutions, as discussed in Chapter 4, must establish remote working teams that are able to offer the full circle of online assessment, teaching, and learning. The pandemic accelerated the demand for digital services or digitalisation because institution has to provide services to national and international students. Challenges in integrating technologies for institutions mean embracing the ICT integration process. Technology and systems are adapted to support this new dispensation. The poor infrastructure and internet connectivity in developing African universities necessitate open distance learning institutions to ensure the successful integration and digitalisation of administration processes to remain in the ODeL environment. The ODeL institution should lead in transformation of systems and digitalisation of operations to serve as platforms to drive administrative, assessment, as well as teaching and learning processes, serving as an example and a beacon of hope in the African continent.

7.3.9 Recommendation: Continuous information seeking sessions on policy, procedures, and wellness of the remote workforce

Qualitative information collected and analysed sought to understand human behaviour and obtain perspectives and experiences of those who lived through the phenomena. The questions were theme-focused, probing the knowledge and insight on how to develop and prepare future policies, deal with remote HR resources, and ensure institutional compliance and adherence. The ability of HR to enhance support infrastructure, implement changes, conduct follow-up, prioritise staff development, and evaluate policy impact and user satisfaction as discussed in chapter 4, section 4.4. Additionally, ensure the institution remains staff-centred and maintains its mandate. In dealing with the aftereffects of the pandemic, HRD remains responsible for introducing mental health support services and promoting a healthy work-life balance through flexible scheduling and wellness initiatives. Workers who experienced positive remote flexible work through the pandemic want employers to prioritise working remotely and work-life balance by allowing working remotely moving forward. At the ODeL institution of higher learning, the respective HR departments are policy developers, policy managers, and performance watchdogs. These departments are critical in helping institutions address the challenges brought by the pandemic (see Chapter 6).

7.3.10 Recommendation: Performance management shaping a flexible and accountable remote work culture at the ODeL institution

Goal precision and an agile remote workforce are critical for effective remote performance management (see Chapter 3, section 3.3.2). When employees understand the business goals, they can envision their role in helping the institution execute its mandate. Institutional leadership should regularly assess the effectiveness of remote performance management systems and adjust policies as needed. Purposeful goal planning guides the continuation of extraordinary workers and ensures transference and development of other workers to match and maintain high levels of productivity. This encourages a results-driven culture that empowers employees to take ownership of their work while maintaining accountability. Create a well-defined framework and theory to deliver a solid base for understanding, arranging, and supporting the research objectives in this study. HR, as discussed in Section 1.9.7, also ensures that the institution makes the adoption of remote working seamless. This involves developing and implementing policies and procedures to support remote working, which in turn better supports increased recognition and reasonable flexible arrangements. Given that remote working is inevitable, it provides a sensible decision for employees to be on board and familiarise themselves with the shift, rather than resisting change. The study also showed that, universally, employees are becoming more willing to forego promotions to maintain flexibility.

7.4 THE VALUE OF THIS STUDY

This study contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge by addressing the evolving challenges and opportunities in performance management within remote work environments at ODeL institutions. This study's value is a combination of improving existing ideas and phenomena by introducing a new and innovative way to address an existing gap identified in the educational environment at open, distant, electronic institutions of higher learning. The study explored a human problem based on the observations and interpretations of academic and administrative staff's perceptions on working remotely online during the pandemic, offering online services remotely, and interrogating the skills reported as particularly important for the successful application of online remote working. The precise emphasis was the students' overall insights and knowledge of receiving online services, and the

transition to remote online services. All of the named factors are to fully equip institutions to deal with the challenges facing service delivery and allow the recommendations prescribed for future remote Work Integrated Learning (hereafter referred to as WIL) programmes that connect university students to a workplace related to their environment of education. The existing literature focuses on traditional performance management systems; hence, the findings of this study are to bridge a crucial gap by exploring how remote work accelerated by global shifts in work culture requires a reimagined approach to managing staff performance in virtual academic settings.

7.4.1 Designing an Effective Remote Performance Management Framework

The value of institutions of higher learning is an opportunity to offer specific insights tailored to the unique operational structure of an ODeL institution. The study proposes a conceptual or practical framework for developing and implementing a performance management system suited for remote work environments. In this instance, the response to the questionnaire about staff performance management, 40% of the line managers indicated that they were knowledgeable on how to measure remote performance, while 60% of the respondents disagreed with this statement, meaning there was no policy or training on how to measure online remote performance. Therefore, there is a need to develop a new tool relevant to the preferred remote working model to guide remote working performance output and management. Designing an effective Remote Performance Management Framework is essential in today's hybrid and remote-first work environments. The goal is to ensure productivity, engagement, and accountability while respecting flexibility and autonomy. Remote Performance Management Framework has to consist of framework components that set out objectives and key results that align employees with team and institutional objectives. These include tracking outputs and outcomes, creating platforms for communication, encouraging collaboration and visibility that focus on growth, creating personalised development plans, and training managers in remote leadership, coaching, trust, well-being, and empathy.

7.4.2 Empowering agile leadership, flexibility, and workforce well-being in ODeL Institutions

Implementing an institutional cultural change strategically is a procedure that necessitates careful execution and a plan with a continuous effort. A plan that encourages a results-driven culture that empowers employees to take ownership of their work while maintaining accountability. Promoting change management that remodels the working environment begins during recruitment. Provide evidence-based recommendations for building or enhancing technology infrastructure to support remote performance monitoring, feedback, and development. In today's working world, digital transformation in education encourages job seekers to expect work procedures to be outlined for them to make informed decisions when taking up employment. The following aspects are necessary to change an institution's culture, consultation, engagement, confidentiality, and trust.

Psychological safety is very critical, and it involves the introduction of mental health support services and promotion of a healthy work-life balance through flexible scheduling and wellness initiatives. Besides the capability to work flexibly, which is no longer a voluntary benefit, there is also an important benefit to consider: a higher salary. Employees seeking new roles consider keeping a healthier work-life balance, and a higher salary to be essential motivating factors if expected to move, and it is also key in accepting a new position. Effecting a change in leadership to agile leadership is beneficial because agile teams work and perform better together. A remote workforce produces effective results and better business outcomes. Employers are increasingly admitting that flexibility and working from home arrangements are fundamental to what employees want from their jobs.

7.4.3 Intellectual knowledge

The study contributes to original empirical data regarding perceptions, experiences, and outcomes of remote work performance systems, which can inform future research, policy formulation, and best practices in similar institutions. Institutions should focus on establishing a psychologically safe environment where employees can openly share their fears. Enhance systems to support and monitor remote working and enable online service delivery support by flexible, modern digital technologies. Regular

training should be provided to both staff and managers on remote work practices, digital tools, and virtual performance appraisal methods. The aftermath of the pandemic increased mental instability, stress, and anxiety when employees were called back to the office after working remotely and in isolation. Employees are encouraged to become proactive, which allows improvement of capacities and reskilling. Institutions should create ideas to manage institutional knowledge, storage, and the transfer of knowledge.

Bridge the existing generational gaps to attract relevant staff cohorts dubbed digital natives, and retain the flexible, knowledgeable, and experienced workforce who are talented and competent to work remotely comprehensively. The theory of quality by itself is subjective as it depends on the individual assessment of the user of a service. The institution needs to embrace employees' need for a healthier work-life and the ability to resolve family or work conflict, as well as being able to perform tasks from anywhere.

7.4.4 Performance Management

ODeL institutions should provide reliable access to digital tools, internet connectivity, and virtual collaboration platforms to support performance monitoring and teamwork. Wheatley et al. (2021) confirm that COVID-19 has necessitated the rapid move to a predominantly virtual workforce. The challenges of the pandemic led to vulnerability and uncertainty in the working environment in ODeL institutions, amongst others. This resulted in a shift to online service provision, online education as well and online evaluations. In reaction to the pandemic, ODeL institutions scrambled to develop and implement innovative strategies, teaching methods, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Staff at ODeL institutions had to now perform their work online, remotely, giving rise to the challenge of how to measure remote working.

Performance management encourages agile leadership, business support, business productivity, and the well-being of its employees. Operations require employees to have clarity about their goals, performance expectations, and growth prospects. It further facilitates the development of a remote working framework to monitor remote working and equip public sector leaders and managers with innovative skills to do their best to provide staff well-being, invest in mental health services, address the

psychological influence of the plague on employees, and provide counselling and stress management are among the wellness initiatives. Nevertheless, during such extreme and continued pressure, the questions at the top of the institution's agenda persistently revolve around what else managers can do to advance the well-being and quality of work-life.

7.5 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

The world was caught unaware, not prepared to deal with the pandemic. One of the main solutions applicable and speaking into the future is an institution's remote working model that recognises benefits such as flexibility, actual productivity, the overall balanced life, work, and well-being of employees. The technologies that make remote working a reality have arrived increasingly high level. Frawley (2022) states that work obligations no longer require lengthy and hectic commuting, but rather a few steps to the kitchen to fetch a cup of coffee and back to the dining room table to continue working.

Due to two years of remote work, many institutions are hesitant to call for a full-blown return to the office. ODeL institution, just like all other institutions, has to accept and embrace the implementation of digitalised innovations, 4IR, and AI to accommodate the revised factors concerning employment and operations, and to pursue institutional cultural change that transforms the service provision model from a physical office-based environment to an online, remote working model. The ODeL institution should therefore adapt to a new normal characterised by a positive VUCA environment with distinctive attributes, namely Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility, that encourages training, positive relations amongst colleagues, and a trusting relationship between employees and line managers, foster a remote working model to enhance service provision and embrace the knowledge and findings into actionable recommendations to contribute to a positive VUCA environment and bridge the generational gap in the work environment to bring parity.

The outcomes of the empirical research are deliberated to give a more credible and reliable understanding of what is already known about this phenomenon, identify gaps that exist in the knowledge about this research, respond to the debates, as well as develop a theoretical framework. The applied implications research are the

applications and consequences of the research conclusions and insights generated through the study process. The results of the distributed questionnaire to the administrative support staff, academic staff, and students revealed that the institution's technology readiness to work remotely is at 48%. Staff responded that the existing job architecture to fully support a compliant and agile workforce also stands at 48%. 52% of staff are not in agreement with the readiness of the system and further stated that the in-house student systems were not stable during the 2020/2021 pandemic period, when most operations were carried out online and remotely. Up to 61% of employers maintain that there is no formal policy to manage flexible remote working arrangements, while 39% indicated that they are aware that HR is working on developing a remote working policy.

The employees had to rapidly change and adopt technologies, which allowed them to continue to be employed by the institution and work together efficiently, all while working remotely (Nkate, 2020). Figure 7.1 illustrates the practical implications of the research, the real-world applications and potential outcomes of a study, idea, or plan. The practical implications focus on how the findings of the study can be used to improve policies, practices, or solve problems in a tangible way. Challenges to be resolved in this instance are the challenges brought by the pandemic. The findings of the study and its relevance are:

7.5.1 Advancing innovation through technology and systems development

In order to correct the ills brought by the pandemic and manage the present situation and future crises in the event of eventualities, this study informs the review of the institutional strategy, decision-making, and performance management, re-examines the market entry strategies, digital readiness, and marketing campaigns to resale and develop its product. The ODeL institution is no longer monopolising the e-learning environment because the pandemic also imposed online service delivery at traditional contact universities. The enhancement of new technologies, administrative processes, teaching, and learning, as well as assessments at open distance education institutions enhances the competence and success of the institutions, improves sustainability, resilience of the institution, and the excellence of life of the workers, as well as the most important participants, the national and international students at the university, and limits competition from contact universities.

Employees are showing enthusiasm that there is a need and believe in a new hypothesis in their working interaction with employers. A paradigm where their well-being and requirements are made significant and one with flexible mode, reasonable work expectations, decent remuneration, better staff support, increased recognition, and workspaces. Preparations of institution to shift to a working remotely model to confirm that the transformation and change become a reality should put forward a work-from-home strategy, plans that support and promote remote working, and support remote working, as well as developing a performance management strategy that engages the employees, enhances, and sustains institutional productivity and performance output, encourage a results-driven culture that empowers employees to take ownership of their work while maintaining accountability.

7.5.2 Policy formulation and advancement

Institutional leadership should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of remote performance management systems and adjust policies as needed based on staff feedback and changing conditions. The research findings indicate that the university needs to develop a remote working policy that supports, guides, informs, and directs operations. It should be evidence-based, recommending which model the institution should follow, even if it means separating administrative support staff from academic staff. The institution should create a performance tool that guides managers on how to manage and measure performance in remote teams. Managers should be encouraged to share insights and guidance on which jobs can be performed remotely and whether some require a hybrid model. They should also be prompted to set realistic, achievable targets and goals, clear communication of expectations, open lines of communication, and consultation with employees are essential. The practical implications of the collected data and study findings will serve as advice for developing, modifying, or reforming the institution's policies and regulations. This will enable informed decisions about staff performance, performance measurement, staff well-being, and safe working environments, as well as accessible education for students, inclusive institutions, and student support.

7.5.3 Teaching and learning approaches

Education Pedagogy refers to the theory and practice of teaching and learning. It encompasses the methods, strategies, and approaches that educators use to deliver knowledge, foster critical thinking, and support the development of learners. The ODeL institution has to provide an opportunity to the relevant departments to revise the principles, strategies, and methods used in teaching and learning, teaching methods, curriculum development but also consider how learners are but also how it is taught, considering students' needs, cultural contexts, learning styles, and developmental stages. Effective pedagogy encourages active learning, collaboration, and continuous assessment, aiming to create an inclusive and engaging educational environment. A platform for active discussion and knowledge exchange, emphasising the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence in education. Merge AI in programme design, and learning design. Enable the educator's necessity to advance the effectiveness of online education processes, familiarise teaching practices to be suitable, and applicable towards 21st-century educational environment. Promote students' provision of electronic enablers to access online e-learning platforms, introduce access to a conducive learning environment, guided on how to manage, and balance a student's personal or family life and work life as well as social responsibilities. Flexible online communication to remote engagement between the students and lecturers and allow student collaborations that encourage student interaction and student networks nationally and internationally. Educate and train students to take full responsibility and be accountable for their studies.

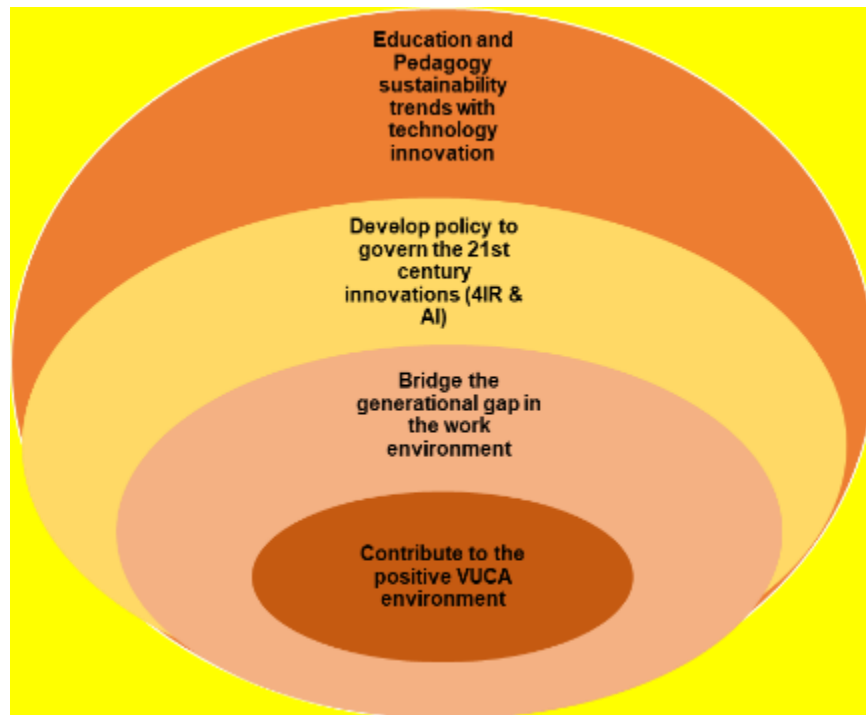
7.5.4 Innovative and forward-thinking

The research findings in the education environment can be used to modify effective teaching methods, design new educational programmes, that are student-centred approach to teaching that emphasise active learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Promoting independency, progressive education values the development of intellectual, social, emotional, and physical to improve learning outcomes. The study reveals numerous student support-related challenges, therefore, the study recommends that ODeL institutions endeavour to strengthen their administrative services to be more responsive to students, ensure education and pedagogy

sustainability trends with technology innovation, and student support in an online environment.

To ensure progressive education success, it is imperative that Clayton Christensen's theory of innovations that predicts competitors in the sector be implemented, aimed at the low-end or non-consumption section of the market-enriched perspectives and actionable insights to inform future curriculum practices in the digital age (McCausland, 2023). Encourages collaboration, creativity, and experiential learning, often integrating interdisciplinary projects and hands-on activities. In a progressive classroom, the teacher acts more as a facilitator than a lecturer, guiding students to explore ideas, ask questions, and construct their own understanding of the subject matter.

FIGURE 7.1: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH



Source: Author's construct

7.6 CONSIDERATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The results of the research contribute to and enhance the frame of knowledge in the education environment, influence the improvement of electronic learning and teaching platforms, ease admission to education knowledge, and influence the development of new technology-supported ways to offer student support at ODeL institutions. There is an essential expression of the effects of the change to online remote working and the increased demand for online and digitalised services. The rapid shift in service provision at institutions of higher learning to remote working, significantly impacting traditional performance management systems. This shift created challenges in how remote working affects staff productivity and motivation over extended periods, especially considering evolving technologies and institutional policies, valuable to analyse how national and institutional policies support or hinder effective performance management in remote settings.

Further research is required to address emerging issues, in line with working remotely such as digital fatigue, accountability challenges, and motivation in remote settings. To study academic inquiry and experimentation in performance strategies within e-learning environment. Research the impact of digital competency, digital literacy, and

performance outcomes in remote settings, which may inform training and support needs of staff. Inclusive of how remote working affects staff productivity and motivation over extended periods, especially considering evolving technologies and institutional policies. Evaluating how remote working by academic staff influences student engagement and performance and overall institutional effectiveness.

Remote working in ODeL institutions of higher learning is a broad scope to harness, however since many institutions transition to hybrid models, future studies could assess how blended working arrangements affect employee performance and institutional outcomes.

7.7 SUMMARY

The study on the perceived effects of remote working on performance management at an ODeL institution of higher learning highlights several key findings, including improved productivity and streamlined performance. Remote working has proved to be both productive and beneficial for many organisations and the respective countries' economies globally. The study revealed that remote working enabled flexibility and autonomy to enhance efficiency for self-motivated staff, motivate underperformance as well as suggest solutions to challenges such as distractions and lack of supervision that hinders performance for others. Digital tools facilitate the dissemination of information, train, reskill staff are communication and collaboration. Also, promoting interaction that leads to misunderstandings, delays, and reduced teamwork efficiency. Remote performance management tool to be developed monitors performance and assists in employee contributions, job reviews, and evaluation. However, traditional performance management systems require adaptation to accommodate remote work dynamics. Institutions must invest in robust IT systems to optimise remote work efficiency. Employees appreciate the flexibility of remote work and work-life balance, while technology and infrastructure ensure access to reliable internet, digital tools, and technical support significantly affect employee performance. Promoting employee support, regular check-ins, and support systems are essential for maintaining productivity and accountability in a remote working environment. The after-effects of the pandemic are still felt, even though it seems that the pandemic is under control, uncertainty continues to persist across institutions, and organisations are signalling that things may never be the same. Moving forward, the study reveals that remote

working is here to stay. Remote working was seen and introduced as a temporary solution and means to manage the crisis and its effects but has since become a permanent development in how we work.

Therefore, the researcher endeavours to communicate these findings effectively to the institution's internal stakeholders, policymakers, and the university decision-making bodies. To impact processes, procedures, and policy development in the university. To participate in the role of enabling the acceptance of outside working, and its work strategies. Provide evidence that organisations and institutions are knowledgeable of their productive periods while working remotely. State that under no uncertain terms, the integration of new technologies is the success and future of business. Influence the development of remote working performance measurement tools for use by ODeL universities and physical contact universities, respectively. Contribute to the development of an ODeL remote working framework that will accommodate support staff at ODeL institutions. Recognise, confirm, and adopt the practical implications of this research and utilise the findings to make positive changes and influence other ODeL institutions of higher learning to position remote working, create remote working environments that support performance, productivity, innovation, improve and boost the institution, employees, and students' well-being.

The study also continues to advocate for student support, especially in online environments, and suggests solutions to connecting the distance between the student and the university. Strive to instill success, maintain financial sustainability, and resilience beyond the pandemic, into the future because it is essential to advance the well-being, support, and encourage productive, independent thinkers who take initiative as the future workforce. Demonstrate and advise on how to empower the respective workforces to work anywhere, supported by flexible modern digital technologies. How to transform complex, ambiguous work environments into productive working environments with increased job satisfaction scales.

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ANNEXURE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 21 December 2022

PAM/2022/CA032 (Mahlangu-Matjila)
Name of applicant: ML Mahlangu-Matjila
Student#: 31082858

Dear Ms Mahlangu-Matjila

Decision: Ethics Clearance Conditional Approval

Details of researcher:

Ms ML Mahlangu-Matjila, student#: 31082858, email: 31082858@mylife.unisa.ac.za,
tel: 0824402676

Supervisor: Dr R Wessels, email: RWessels@unisa.ac.za

Research project: 'The Impact of Remote Working on Performance Management at an Institution of Higher Learning'

Qualification: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Thank you for the application for **research ethics clearance** submitted to the Department: Public Administration and Management: Research Ethics Review Committee, for the above mentioned study. Conditional Ethics approval is granted. The decision will be tabled at the next College RERC meeting for notification/ratification.

Conditional approval: The application was reviewed in compliance with the *Unisa Policy on Research Ethics* and the *Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment*.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

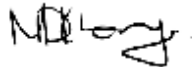
- 1) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics.



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- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to this Ethics Review Committee.
- 3) The researcher will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
- 4) Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
- 5) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study, among others, the **Protection of Personal Information Act 4/2013**; **Children's Act 38/2005** and **National Health Act 61/2003**.
- 6) Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
- 7) Field work activities **may not** continue after the expiry date of this ethics clearance, which is 21 December 2025. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of the ethics clearance certificate for approval by the Research Ethics Committee.

Kind regards



Ms MP Khanya (*person presiding*)
Obo. ND Baloyi
Chairperson: Research Ethics Review
Committee
Department of Public Administration and
Management
Research Ethics Review Committee
Office tel. : 012 429-6181;
Email : ebaloynd@unisa.ac.za



Prof MT Mogale
Executive Dean:
College of Economic and Management
Sciences
Office tel. : 012 429-4805;
Email : mogal@unisa.ac.za

ANNEXURE B: GATEKEEPER LETTER



RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE (RPSC) OF THE SENATE RESEARCH, INNOVATION, POSTGRADUATE DEGREES AND COMMERCIALISATION COMMITTEE (SRIPCC)

26 May 2023

Decision: Permission approval 26
May 2023 to 21 December 2025
(aligned to ethics approval
certificate)

Ref #: 2023_RPC_025
Ms Maskhosana La-Portia
Mahlangu-Matjila
Staff#: 1109227

Principal Investigator:

Ms Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila
Postgraduate Student Administration (PGAD)
matjml@unisa.ac.za; 082 4402 676

Supervisor: Dr Rochelle Wessels; RWessels@unisa.ac.za; 082 4988 701

The perceived effects of the Impact of remote working on performance management and Institutions of Higher Learning

Your application regarding permission to involve Unisa staff, students and data in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of the UNISA Senate, Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) on 22 May 2023.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for the study. You may invite the following groups to partake in voluntary questionnaires and selected voluntary interviews:

n=136 permanent administrative staff

n = 14 College co-ordinators;

n=18 Academics (Teaching and learning)

n=4 Human resource management officers (e.g. 1 Director policy Developer, 1 Organisational Department; 1 Labour Relations Director and 1 Executive Director HR)



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n=13 Student Representative Council members (.e., 1 undergraduate student + 1 Postgraduate student, from each Regional Office (9 provinces in South Africa).

ICT will act as a gatekeeper for the study. You may access the staff directory for e-mail addresses of staff that will be participating in your study. You may include the following demographic data: Gender, Position, Age and Highest Qualification and in selected interviews only the position, highest qualification, and the number of years in this position.

You may obtain access to the following secondary data:

Remote working Policy

The M&D Rules, Teaching and learning policy.

Integrated Performance Management Policy.

Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be promoted: " Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible."

The personal information made available to the researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) will only be used for the advancement of this research project as indicated and for the purpose as described in this permission letter. The researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) must take all appropriate precautionary measures to protect the personal information given to him/her/them in good faith and it must not be passed on to third parties. The dissemination of research instruments through the use of electronic mail should strictly be through blind copying, so as to protect the participants' right of privacy. The researcher hereby indemnifies UNISA from any claim or action arising from or due to the researcher's breach of his/her information protection obligations.

You are requested to submit a report of the study to the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC@unisa.ac.za) within 3 months of completion of the study.

Note: The reference number 2023_RPC_025 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants and the Research Permission Subcommittee.

Kind regards,



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Dr Retha Visagie – Deputy Chairperson

Email: visagr@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-2478

Prof Lessing Labuschagne – Chairperson

Email: llabus@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-6368



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ANNEXURE C: INTERVIEW: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

RESEARCH TITLE: THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF REMOTE WORKING ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AT AN ODeL INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING

Research conducted by:

Ms M. L. Mahlangu-Matjila (2023_RPC_025)

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by **Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila**, currently registered for a PhD degree in the Department of Public Administration at the University of South Africa (Unisa). The study envisages investigating remote working as a viable solution to execute service delivery at an institution of higher learning and examines the role of a performance management system as a tool to measure remote working performance.

Please note the following:

- This is an anonymous study as your name will not appear on the report. The response you give will be treated as strictly confidential so that you cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give.
- This is a voluntary consent to take part in the survey with no personal gain, nor remuneration. It is agreed that the response provided will be used for research purposes only.
- Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- Please answer the questions in the attached questionnaire as completely and honestly as possible. This should not take more than thirty minutes of your time.
- The purpose of the questionnaire is to determine what you think should be included in generating a conceptual framework for understanding that working remotely is technology-driven.
- Systems as an effective solution to deliver a service and develop a performance management strategy in institutions of higher learning.

- You will not receive any payment or reward, financial or otherwise, and the study will not incur undue costs to you.
- The data obtained will be stored in a securely locked cupboard and the data stored in a computer will be protected using a password.

Dear Participant

INSTRUCTIONS TO TAKE PART IN THE INTERVIEW

- Do not state your name, surname, or any other personal details or personnel numbers during the interview.
- The interview will not take longer than 60 minutes.
- Please note that the information you provide in this section will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

YOU CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE.

By accepting the meeting schedule on MS Teams, you consent and understand that my participation is voluntary and anonymous, that the information will be kept strictly confidential, and that I may withdraw at any stage without negative consequences.

**ANNEXURE D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: UNISA HUMAN RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT OFFICERS**

**RESEARCH TITLE: THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF REMOTE WORKING ON
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AT AN ODeL INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING**

SECTION A: GENERAL/WORK EXPERIENCE

- **Work history (at Unisa and before)**
 - a. What is your work experience?
 - b. Describe your duties as a manager.
 - c. Do you have any experience working remotely, please share.

SECTION B: THIS SECTION EXPLORES THE STRATEGIC READINESS OF HUMAN RESOURCES TO SUPPORT REMOTE WORKING AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE WITHIN THE REMOTE WORKING ENVIRONMENT.

- **Performance capabilities.**

What should be the most important performance capabilities of a Unisa employee?

 - a. What performance capabilities were required to be measured when employees worked remotely during 2020/2021?
- **Measure performance.**
 - a. What measures are required to be put in place to support remote working?
 - b. Were those remote working measures effective in measuring performance?
 - c. How did HR measure performance during remote working period (2020/2021)?
- **Performance areas that measure remote working.**
 - a. What measures were put in place to support remote working?
 - b. What are the key performance areas that measure remote working?
 - c. Were the remote working targets measurable during 2020/2021?
 - d. Why was remote working a viable solution during the 2020/2021 lockdown periods?
 - e. What was your experience with communication between line managers and employees during the 2020/2021 remote working period?

- **Human resources support.**

- a. What do you think could have been done better by HR in supporting remote working?
- b. Were you involved in developing the remote working policy?
- c. How could performance during 2020/2021 be managed better?
- d. Is there anything you would like to add?

ANNEXURE E: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

RESEARCH TITLE: THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS ON THE IMPACT OF REMOTE WORKING AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is **Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila**, currently registered for a PhD degree in the Department of Public Administration, at the University of South Africa. I am conducting this research under the supervision of **Dr R Wessels**, affiliated with Unisa. My study is entitled: **The impact of remote working on performance management: the case of the University of South Africa.**

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that will inform and generate a conceptual framework to put forth a comprehension that remote working supported by technology-driven systems is the viable effective solution, to continue service delivery within Unisa. The study will also show the importance of developing a remote working, performance management strategy to ensure the institution's competence in service provision.

WHY AM I INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been invited because of your invaluable experience and because you are part of the community of Unisa, the researcher invited to participate in this study. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Chapter 7, section 151-164, puts forward that performance management is thus critical to ensure that plans are being implemented, that they have the desired developmental impact, and that resources are being used efficiently to establish and maintain a service-orientated culture of operation. Within Unisa employees, i.e. academic, administrative staff, first-line managers as well as human resources, are important role players in attaining the university's strategic goals, and performance excellence, according to Van der Westhuizen (2016:143), performance management is the over-arching system in the assessment of performance. Performance management is an integrated process of

identifying, appraising, managing, and developing employee's work performance and development of competencies. Human resources practices contribute to organisational performance while human resource management influences employee performance.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

You are invited to participate in this research study that forms part of my formal doctoral studies. Data for this study will be collected through questionnaires. Both qualitative as well as quantitative questionnaires, which need 30 min to be completed, will be distributed online amongst the respondents, Unisa's employees and students respectively. Seeking the employees' input, experience, views, and perceptions, on remote working. Feedback and verification of the employee's responses will be sourced from the student representative council, on behalf of the students, who are the recipients of the services provided. Participants will be allowed to complete the questionnaire in their leisure, time, and safe environment, with no risk to them, or the institution.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

As a participant, please be informed that:

- In this study, your participation is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to consent to participation.
- If you decide to take part, you will be given an information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form.
- You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason nor be penalized, but be informed that it will not be possible to withdraw once you have submitted the questionnaire.
- Your identity will be protected and remain anonymous. Confidentiality is ensured.
- The findings of this study will be processed into a research report, and submitted as part of the thesis, there will be journal publications and/or attendance of conference proceedings, but your participation will be kept confidential.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You are invited to participate in my research study that forms part of my formal doctoral studies. I trust that you may indirectly benefit from this research as part of the Unisa community. If you agree to participate your input, experience, and viewpoint on digitalised/technology-supported remote working will influence and contribute to the understanding and implementation of remote working and the development of, performance management strategy as well as the findings and recommendation of this study, to Unisa.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

You will be allowed to complete the questionnaire in your leisure, time, and in the safety of your environment. Therefore, there is no risk, no harm, or injury expected of your personality as a participant. Your identity will be protected and remain anonymous.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your identity, and/or name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Confidentiality is ensured. Your answers will be pseudonyms and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. However, your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that the research is authentic, and done properly, including the transcriber, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available to the researcher and only to people working on the study.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a minimum period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet, at Unisa for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. The data kept will be destroyed according to the ICT information destruction policy and permanently deleted from the hard drive.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be compensated to participate in this research. There won't be any cost for you in this research either.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

An ethics application has been submitted for approval to the Department of Public Administration Higher Degrees Committee and the Research, to allow, grant the researcher permission to conduct this study using the University of South Africa's employees and students.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, require any further information, or access to the findings, or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact, the researcher: La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila, at matjimi@unisa.ac.za, or on 066 064 7954. Should you have concerns about how the research has been conducted, you may contact, the Supervisor: Dr. Rochelle Wessels at RWessels@unisa.ac.za, mobile number: 082 498 8701 and Work number: 012 429 6941. You can also contact the Research Ethics Advisor: Dr Marianne Engelbrecht at Engelm1@unisa.ac.za who will provide information on the ethical aspects of the research. You will also receive a copy of this information and informed consent form.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila'.

Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila

ANNEXURE F: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications, and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the <insert specific data collection method>.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname: **Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila**

Researcher's signature:



Date **30/10/2022**

ANNEXURE G: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR UNISA EMPLOYEES

RESEARCH TITLE: THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF REMOTE WORKING ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AT AN ODeL INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING

Research conducted by:

Ms M. L. Mahlangu-Matjila (2023_RPC_025)

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by **Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila**, currently registered for a PhD degree in the Department of Public Administration at the University of South Africa (Unisa). The study envisages to investigate remote working as a viable solution to execute service delivery at an institution of higher learning and examines the role of performance management systems as a tool to measure remote working performance.

Please note the following:

- This is an anonymous study as your name will not appear on the questionnaire. The response you give will be treated as strictly confidential so that you cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give.
- This is a voluntary consent to take part in the survey with no personal gain, nor remuneration. It is agreed that the response provided will be used for research purposes only.
- Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- Please answer the questions in the attached questionnaire as completely and honestly as possible. This should not take more than 30 minutes of your time.
- The purpose of the questionnaire is to determine what you think should be included in generating a conceptual framework in understanding that working remotely supported by technology-driven systems is an effective solution to deliver a service and develop a performance management strategy in institutions of higher learning.
- You will not receive any payment or reward, financial or otherwise, and the study will not incur undue costs to you.

- The data obtained will be stored in a securely locked cupboard and the data stored in a computer will be protected using a password.
- The survey data will be destroyed when it is no longer of functional value (after five years).
- A copy of the dissertation will be available in the library at the Muckleneuk Ridge Campus of the University of South Africa (Unisa), Pretoria.

Please sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study voluntarily.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Indicate your choice for each of the statements listed below with an X)

1. Please indicate your gender

1	Male	
2	Female	
3	Prefer not to say	

2. What is your age?

1	27 to 42 years	
2	43 to 58 years	
3	59 to 68 years	

3. What is your highest qualification?

1	Doctorate	
2	Master's degree	
3	Honour's degree	
4	Postgraduate Diploma	
5	Bachelor's degree	
6	Diploma	
7	Certificate	
8	Matric/Grade 12	

4. Indicate whether you are academic staff or administrative staff

1	Academic	
2	Administrative Staff	

5. How long have you been employed at Unisa?

1	5 to 10 years	
2	15 to 20 years	
3	21 or more years	

6. Indicate your position

1	Deputy Director	
2	Director	
3	Professor	
4	Associate Professor	
5	Manager	
6	Supervisor	
7	Senior Lecturer	
8	Junior Lecturer	
9	Lecturer	
10	College co-ordinators	
11	Advisor	
12	Administrator	

7. Indicate your responsibilities (select all applicable)

1	COD	
2	Director	
3	Dean	
4	Supervision	
5	Teaching and learning	
6	College coordinator	

SECTION B: THIS SECTION EXPLORES INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF REMOTE WORKING IN 2020/2021 DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

[Remote working is the practice of working from one's home or another space rather than from an office (Marino and Capone 2021:1516)].

PLEASE CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE ANSWER ON THE FOLLOWING SCALE:

- 1 = Strongly disagree**
- 2 = Disagree**
- 3 = Agree**
- 4 = Strongly agree**

Themes		Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Work practices	The procedure to work remotely was clear to me during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
2		It was clear what was expected from me working remotely during the 2020/2021 lockdown periods.	1	2	3	4
3		I was trained to work remotely during the pandemic in 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
4		I was adequately supervised and managed in 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
5		During 2020/2021, I had suitable working equipment.	1	2	3	4

6		There was regular communication between my manager and I.	1	2	3	4
7		During 2020/2021, there were interactions to motivate and enable employees to remain focused on work.	1	2	3	4
8		I achieved the stipulated goals during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
9		During the pandemic, my health and well-being was a priority for my line manager	1	2	3	4
10		The hybrid mode remains the mode of service delivery.	1	2	3	4

Any comments on work practices?-----

SECTION C: THIS SECTION FOCUSES ON DETERMINING HOW UNISA SYSTEMS SUPPORTED SERVICE DELIVERY DURING 202/2021

[Unisa systems refer to ICT platforms tailor-made to support, enhance, and provide service delivery to the university’s internal and external stakeholders (Annual report 2021:17)].

PLEASE CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE ANSWER ON THE FOLLOWING SCALE:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Strongly agree

Themes		Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11	Systems	ICT responded timeously to system inquiries.	1	2	3	4
12		Having stable Wi-Fi connectivity was important during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
13.		The Unisa systems were stable during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
14		During 2020/2021, I depended solely on Unisa systems to ensure organisational productivity.	1	2	3	4

15		Systems facilitated teaching and learning during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
16		Unisa systems should be adapted to meet the 4IR requirements.	1	2	3	4

Any comments on systems?-----

SECTION D: FOCUSES ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE REMOTE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

[Performance management is the achievement of organisational goals, objectives, and continuous employee development through training, mentoring, and coaching (Van der Westhuizen 2016:143)].

PLEASE CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE ANSWER ON THE FOLLOWING SCALE:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Strongly agree

Themes		Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
17	Performance Management	Performance was measured by the Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS) during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	
18		My manager and I had discussions about performance targets for 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
19		The IPMS used during 2020/2021 was suitable to measure remote working performance.	1	2	3	4
20		I knew the key performance areas measured during remote working.	1	2	3	4

21		My line manager created a culture of trust to increase work morale.	1	2	3	4
22		Performance management was designed to encourage performance.	1	2	3	4
23		During 2020/2021 my manager focused on strengthening communication between employees.	1	2	3	4
24		During the pandemic, there was a management criterion to ensure that employees remained productive and motivated.	1	2	3	4
25		Employees had access to programs that provided confidential and professional counseling.	1	2	3	4
26		During the pandemic, my employer implemented working flexible hours.	1	2	3	4
27		Employees were provided with personal protective equipment to support their overall health and wellness.	1	2	3	4
28		The negative impact of the pandemic was reduced by the support offered by the organisation.	1	2	3	4

29		During 2020/2021, employees were assisted to balance personal and work-related concerns.	1	2	3	4
30		During 2020/2021, the employer was proactive in managing the pandemic.	1	2	3	4

Any comments on performance management?-----

SECTION E: FOCUSES ON CHANGE MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE REMOTE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

[Change management refers to the process of changing from a known way of dealing with and conducting business processes to a new way of conducting business (Trumbach, Payne, and Lundberg 2021:56)].

PLEASE CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE ANSWER ON THE FOLLOWING SCALE:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Strongly agree

Themes		Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
31	Change Management	The 2020/2021 effects of the pandemic accelerated organisational cultural change.	1	2	3	4
32		During 2020/2021 my line manager encouraged a culture of responsibility and accountability.	1	2	3	4
33		The working environment during 2020/2021 enabled the university to be productive.	1	2	3	4
34		During 2020/2021, employee engagement	1	2	3	4

		ensured that employees remained dedicated.				
35		Change management influences skills development.	1	2	3	4
36		Organisational change affects employees' psychological well-being.	1	2	3	4
37		As an employee I contribute effectively towards achieving the objectives of the organisation.	1	2	3	4
38		Management styles influence employees' acceptance of organisational change.	1	2	3	4
39		Change management strategies are adapted to encourage organisational operations.	1	2	3	4
40		The pandemic has impacted how organisations define and measure performance.	1	2	3	4

Any comments on work practices?-----

ANNEXURE H: STUDENT/STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH TITLE: THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF REMOTE WORKING ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AT AN ODeL INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING

Research conducted by:

Ms M. L. Mahlangu-Matjila (2023_RPC_025)

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by **Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila**, currently registered for a PhD degree in the Department of Public Administration, at the University of South Africa (Unisa).

Please note the following:

- This is an anonymous study as your name will not appear on the questionnaire. The responses you provide will be treated as strictly confidential so that you cannot be identified in person based on your answers.
- This is a voluntary consent to take part in the survey with no personal gain, nor remuneration. It is agreed that the response provided will be used for research purposes only.
- Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- Please answer the questions in the attached questionnaire as completely and honestly as possible. This should not take more than thirty minutes of your time.
- The purpose of the questionnaire is to determine what you think should be included in generating a conceptual framework on the understanding of working remotely supported by technology-driven systems as an effective solution to deliver a service and develop a performance management strategy in institutions of higher learning.
- You will not receive any payment or reward, financial or otherwise, and the study will not incur undue costs to you.
- The survey data will be stored in a securely locked cupboard and the data will be stored on a computer and will be protected using a password.

Dear Participant,

INSTRUCTIONS TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

- Do not sign your name, surname, or any other personal details or numbers on this questionnaire.
- The questionnaire will not take longer than 30 minutes to complete.
- Please note that the information you provide in this section will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

Please sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study voluntarily.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Indicate your choice for each of the statements listed below with an **X**)

1. Please indicate your Gender

1	Male	
2	Female	
3	Prefer not to say	

2. Indicate your academic year of study.

1	First-year (1 st) year undergraduate registration	
2	2 nd year, or plus undergraduate registration	
3	Final year undergraduate registration	
4	Postgraduate Diploma registration	
5	Advanced certificate registration	
6	First (1 st) year Honours registration	
7	Second (2 nd) year, or plus Honours registration	
8	Final year Honours registration	
9	First-year (1 st) year postgraduate (Master's or Doctorate) registration	
10	2 nd year, (Master's or Doctorate) registration	
11	Final year (Master's or Doctorate) registration	

3. What is your age?

1	18 to 27 years	
2	28 to 40 years	
3	41 to 56 years	

4. What is your highest qualification?

1	Doctorate	
2	Master's degree	
3	Honour's degree	
4	Postgraduate Diploma	
5	Completed first degree	
6	Postgraduate Diploma	
7	Diploma	
8	Advanced Certificate	
9	Certificate	
10	Matric/Grade 12	

SECTION B: EXPLORES THE UNISA STUDENT’S (The Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students) EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTIONS ON THE PROVISION OF SERVICES DURING 2020/2021.

(Provision of services refers to the administrative and academic interaction, about online admissions, registrations, assessments, online teaching, and learning).

PLEASE CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE ANSWER ON THE FOLLOWING SCALE:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Strongly agree

Themes		Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Online process	During 2020/2021, online systems were ready to handle admissions and registration processes.	1	2	3	4
2		I was content using the online platforms to interact with Unisa during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
3		During 2020/2021, online systems enabled me to access the university at anytime, anywhere.	1	2	3	4
4		The Unisa online systems allowed access to a wide variety of teaching and learning resources.	1	2	3	4

5		The university makes me aware whenever it effects system changes and online processes.	1	2	3	4
6		The online systems bridge the gap between me and the institution.	1	2	3	4
7		Online systems allow me to expand my career opportunities.	1	2	3	4

Themes		Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8	Admissions	Online admissions and registrations were seamless during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
9		During 2020/2021, administration responses were within the 48 hours, stipulated in the student rules and regulations policy.	1	2	3	4
10		Unisa responded timeously during 2020/2021 for me to make informed decisions about my studies.	1	2	3	4
11		Admission requirements were clear during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
12		Follow-up administration services were efficient	1	2	3	4

		during 2020/2021 to prospective as well as registered students.				
13		As a student during 2020/2021, I was able to upload my application documents.	1	2	3	4
14		The Unisa student websites were useful platforms to contact the university during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
15		As a student I was provided with an electronic device and data during 2020/2021, to attend to my studies.	1	2	3	4
16		Staying connected to Unisa student support systems was a challenge during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
17		Unisa was accessible online during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4

Any other comments?-----

Themes		Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18	Assessments	During 2020/2021, the university provided me with the necessary resources to access the university.	1	2	3	4
19		During 2020/2021, I was orientated to use the Unisa system.	1	2	3	4
20		During 2020/2021, I had the knowledge to use the e-learning platforms.		2	3	4
21		The set times attached to submission of assignments during 2020/2021 were practical.	1	2	3	4
22		The e-learning platforms allowed me to take full responsibility and accountability for my studies.	1	2	3	4
23		In 2020/2021, I developed connections and networks to cope with the ODeL environment.	1	2	3	4
24		During 2020/2021, Unisa ensure fair and unbiased assessment practices				

30		Online tutoring facilitates flexible communication engagements between me and the lecturers.	1	2	3	4
31		Online tuition provides me with a variety of search engines for research to add value to the body of knowledge.	1	2	3	4
32		I preferred the online classes during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
33		Online tuition encourages independent, self-management skills.	1	2	3	4
34		I was content using the e-learning platforms during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
35		The university supported me as a student during 2020/2021.	1	2	3	4
36		During 2020/2021, I benefited from online classes.	1	2	3	4
37		As a student in the ODeL environment, I have the responsibility to balance my studies, work, friends, and family.	1	2	3	4

ANNEXURE I: TURNITIN REPORT

Similarity Report

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MASKHOSANA LA-PORTIA MAHLANGU-MATJILA

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Summary

ANNEXURE J: EDITOR'S DECLARATION



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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to confirm that I have edited and proofread the thesis entitled

**The Perceived Effects of Remote Working on Performance Management at an
OdeL Institution of Higher Learning**

prepared by Ms Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the subject Public Administration at the University of South Africa, according to the specifications of the University, where available, and the latest standards for language editing and technical (computer-based) layout.

Editing was restricted to language usage and spelling, consistency, formatting and the style of referencing. No structural writing of any content was undertaken.

As an editor I am not responsible for detecting any content that may constitute plagiarism.

To the best of my knowledge, all references have been provided in the prescribed format.

I am not accountable for any changes made to this dissertation by the author or any other party after the date of my edit.

Electronically signed (actual signature withheld for security reasons)

MONICA BOTHA
15 November 2024

Sole Proprietor: Monica Botha

*Business Planning Corporate Systems Engineering Corporate Document Standards
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20 July 2025

DECLARATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITING

This is to confirm that I, Patricia Raphesu - an employee of Thala Corporate Solutions, a company that provides editing services - has language edited the completed PhD Thesis of Maskhosana La-Portia Mahlangu-Matjila with student number 3108-285-8, to be submitted to University of South Africa (Unisa) entitled: *"The perceived effects of remote working on performance management at an ODeL institution of higher learning"*

The responsibility of implementing the recommended language changes rests with the author of the Thesis.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patricia Raphesu", is written over a yellow highlight.

MP RAPHESU