WORKING FROM HOME: EXPERIENCES OF EMPLOYEES OF A GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT IN POLOKWANE, LIMPOPO PROVINCE

by

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DECLARATION

I, Hope Ralehlaka, declare that the mini-dissertation "Working from home: experiences of employees of a government department in Polokwane, Limpopo province", hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree Masters in Business Administration, has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my own work in design and execution, and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

08.04.2024

Signature   Date

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the benefits and challenges of working from home in a client services department of a public sector organisation in Limpopo. The study was conducted taking a qualitative approach, through in-depth interviews for data collection. The acquired data was processed using thematic analysis, from a combination of employees who were working from home, and those who had opted not to work from home. The study has highlighted the benefits, challenges, skills, and support required for employees to work effectively at home. The findings revealed common themes that employees have experienced while working from home, which are in line with previous studies.

KEY CONCEPTS

Coronavirus Disease 2019(Covid-19), Work from home (WFH) and Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

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CHAPTER ONE
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one provides an overview of the research study. The chapter presents the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, as well as showing how the overall study is outlined.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) "has challenged society in many ways and was considered unimaginable, forcing organisations to reconsider a wide variety of practices" (Vyas and Butakhieo, 2020:59). According to Chang, Machailo-Ellis and Rynhart (2020), governments around the world took measures to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. The President of the Republic of South Africa declared a 21-day nationwide lockdown. The nationwide lockdown was implemented in accordance with Disaster Management Act No. 57 of 2002 to reduce the overall number of infections and slow the spread of infections. The enforcement of the nationwide lockdown had a direct impact on restricting the movement of people, livelihoods, and the economy of the country.

"Governments have implemented measures ranging from physical distancing, restrictions on the freedom of movement and the closure of non-essential companies and undertakings" (Chang, Machailo-Ellis and Rynhart, 2020:5). Businesses had to implement alternative ways to operate and for employees to fulfil their contractual obligations while adhering to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID19) regulations. To adhere to government directives, the introduction and implementation of work-from-home (WFH) or remote work was an alternative.

WFH is a form of remote work where an employee or business operates away from being physically present, by using Information Communications and Technology (ICT). According to Benhura and Mojapelo (2021), the threats of new waves of COVID-19 infections underscores the importance of continuing to work from home. Vyas and

Butakhieo (2020) further add that working from home is likely to continue as employees get used to it and if found to make business sense.

This likelihood of continuing with working from home needs to be investigated to find out the advantages and disadvantages to have better managerial systems and processes to monitor it. In addition, WFH may come with challenges of employee engagement or monitoring employee productivity (Chaudhary, Mohanty, Malik, Mary, Maroon, and Nomani, 2021).

However, employees have emphasised the numerous benefits of working from home for both individuals and companies. "Since WFH offers a less distracting work atmosphere with no informal meetings or conversations, employees can concentrate better on their task. Following a similar way, when an employee is not under constant observation from their employer, trust is built between them, which inspires them to work more vigorously and diligently. WFH saves time by doing away with the requirement to be in the office" (Vaishali, Jadhav, Vivek, Kanade and Darekar, 2022:438).

Therefore, the study explored the possible benefits and challenges experienced by employees working from home during the adjusted lockdown restrictions comparing them with those employees who have opted to continue working from the office. This study was centred on the experiences of employees working in a government department, in Limpopo province.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Prior to COVID-19, very few organisations and their employees had proper knowledge and/or experience of working remotely. They were also unaware of organisational support structures or processes for remote work. The advancement and use of ICT have made work from home possible, which was fast-tracked by COVID-19. According to the McKinsey Global Executive Survey (2020), organisational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the adoption of digital technologies by several years. This has resulted in employees working from home. ICT developments have empowered and accelerated alternative working arrangements, such as WFH and remote working. WFH arrangements have multiple benefits to safeguard the well-

being of employees, providing services, maintaining productivity, and ensuring business continuity.

Employee experiences with working from home have revealed the advantages and difficulties of integrating to the new work arrangement. Employees from elected businesses within Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal province identified advantages such as shorter commutes, avoiding office politics, utilising fewer office spaces, better gender diversity, enhanced motivation, healthier workforces with lower absenteeism and turnover, higher talent retention, job satisfaction, and increased productivity, (Enaifoghe and Zenzile 2023).

However, the viewpoints of employees from a Debt Collection Organisation in Gauteng province of South Africa, mentioned challenges that they have encountered. These challenges ranges from increased workloads and working hours, loneliness due to isolation, and inadequate office infrastructure. Due to the peculiar conditions in which organisations find themselves; remote work is necessary. As a result, research was conducted to discover how to maximise the benefits of remote work. This can be achieved through conducting studies like this, which seek to understand the benefits and challenges of WFH.

1.4 MOTIVATION/RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

This study was motivated by the need to comprehend the benefits and challenges of working from home based on employee experiences. Whether this practice makes business sense could be determined if it is a practice that can be carried forward into the future to cut costs like commuting and office space costs. This study was motivated by the need to maintain organisational productivity while assisting organisations in minimising people contact and reducing the possibility of infections during a pandemic.

Working from home was required by organisations but was met with resistance from some employees and employers, while others welcomed the process with open arms (Davidescu, Apostu, Paul and Casuneanu, 2020). Accordingly, the current study postulates that it makes sense to embark on research like this one, which explores the experiences of employees for the future implementation of the WFH programme and policies.

On the contrary, working from home has certain disadvantages which both employees and employers needs to be aware of, to minimise the challenges. This could assist both interested parties to make the experience valuable and sustainable. The study invited the employees to share those challenges to make an informed decision by the interested employers and sceptical employees. Studies like Mohamad *et al.*, 2022 focused on the employee's perception, while this research was motivated by the employee's experience of this phenomena.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate the benefits and challenges of working from home in a client services department of a public sector organisation in Limpopo.

1.5.2 Objectives of the Study

The study's objectives were to:

- Determine what the employees of the client services department in the chosen organisation believe are the advantages of working from home.

- Investigate the challenges that the employees face when they are working from home.

- Analyse the kind of skills and knowledge that the employees in the study think they require for them to work effectively from home.

- Examine the kind of support the employees need for them to operate effectively from home.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study centres on the following research questions:

- What do the client services centre employees of the selected organisation believe are the advantages of working from home?

- What are the challenges that employees face when they are working from home?

- What is the kind of skills employees think is required for them to function effectively while working from home?

- What kind of support do the employees need for them to operate effectively from home?

1.7 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

- **Coronavirus Disease 2019**: COVID-19 is defined as "an illness caused by a novel coronavirus now known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, which was discovered during a respiratory illness outbreak in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China" (Medscape, 2020: 1).

- **Work from home (WFH)**: WFH is a working procedure whereby employees can perform their day-to-day duties while stationed in their own homes. This kind of working arrangement is made easier by the availability and advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) (Chang et al, 2020). According to Chang *et al*. (2020: 5), "working from home refers to home-based teleworking as a temporary, alternative working arrangement".

- **Information and Communications Technology (ICT):** ICT is a broad term that includes all technologies and services related to computing, information management and the internet (Brown, 2020).

1.8 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This mini dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: This chapter presents the introduction and background of the study, as well as the purpose of the study, i.e., the aim of the study, the objectives and research questions.

Chapter 2: The second chapter presents literature review on what other researchers have done on working from home.

Chapter 3: This chapter describes the research methodology, i.e., the research design, study area, population, sampling data collection method, and data analysis method.

Chapter 4: In this chapter, there is a presentation of the research results relating to the themes, which are related to the objectives of the study.

Chapter 5: This chapter contains the summary and discussion of results, conclusion, and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the literature review on understanding the phenomenon of working from home, experiences, benefits, challenges, skills required to work effectively from home, factors that support effective working from home and the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of working from home.

2.1 UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON OF WORKING FROM HOME

The concept of WFH originated around the beginning of the 1990s, when computing and technology connected people all over the world, businesses started to accept remote work as a feasible arrangement (Roy, 2022). Work From Home (WFH) is a concept in which an employee can do his or her job from home. Advancement in information and technology has made it possible for organisations to implement this phenomenon of employees' ability to work away from their physical work location. The concept of WFH has been made possible by digitalisation, which has been exacerbated by the global Covid 19 pandemic (Delwer and Boethe, 2020). Working from home has recently become popular as an alternative to working in an office.

According to the International Labour Organisation (2020), remote working arrangements including WFH, teleworking, telecommuting, and remote working, are terms which are often used interchangeably. These terms refer to new and evolving models of work outside the employers' premises or workplace. In another study by Aczel, Kovacs, van der Lippe and Szgaszi (2021) it is postulated that the phenomenon has been studied under numerous, partially overlapping terms such as telecommuting, virtual office, location-independent work, home office.

A study by European Foundation for the Improvement of living and working conditions, has proven that this working arrangement is not new and has been in existence. The research agrees with other studies around the world by proving that there has been an increase in this phenomenon due to new information and communication technologies (ICT) that have changes everyday work and life in the 21st century.

This increase has attracted researchers to expand more on this study which was fast-tracked by the global pandemic and restrictions imposed by governments around the world. In South Africa, the concept was not preferred especially in the government sector hence the model should be investigated further.

2.2 EXPERIENCES OF WORKING FROM HOME

Studies on the working from home phenomena have been conducted across the world. Some of the studies that have been reviewed have covered different perspectives of employees working from home. While WFH arrangements have typically been implemented in many developed countries, they have not been as common for other developing countries, which have always relied on strict supervision of employees (Basuki *et al*. 2022). South Africa, as a developing country was also forced to implement alternative ways of working without contact, which included the WFH phenomenon.

According to Flores (2019), the descriptive research method that was used to identify the challenges of remote working and how it affects the company's remote workers has listed findings of this phenomenon. The data was collected through survey questionnaires, which have assisted the researcher to identify some of the benefits and challenges of remote work.

A parallel study conducted by Green, Tappin and Bently (2020) on working from home before, during and after the relaxation of the lockdown restrictions on the implications for workers and organisations was completed in New Zealand. Chetty and Motala (2021) investigated WFH from a South African perspective, whereas Flores (2019) conducted research in the Philippines. Wang *et al*. (2020) focused on Wuhan province in China, while Chaudhary *et al*. (2021) completed the study in India.

In South Africa, this phenomena of WFH have been practiced in the private sectors but researchers have highlighted that some jobs and industries cannot be executed remotely. Findings from the study by (Benhura and Magejo, 2021:2) "Additionally, office support workers, service and sales workers, artisans and related workers, plant operators and engineers, and entry-level workers are less likely to work from home managers and professionals. The worst of these workers are in installation and factory and mechanical jobs. Other studies have found that workers in the mining sector,

private households, the construction sector, the community, the social service sector and the private sector are less likely to work from home compared to workers in the financial intermediary category''.

The majority of African countries have not favoured the concept of WFH except in the private sectors just like in South Africa. Most African countries like Botswana, have temporarily implemented the policy to allow employees to work remotely as a contingency plan during the COVID19. A working from home (WFH) policy is a key element for an effective contingency plan to ensure business continuity, productivity, and job preservation according to business Botswana, 2020. Depending on the availability of resources to work from home, poorer countries reverted to working in the offices after the lifting of restrictions.

Hatayama, Viollaz and Winkler (2020), conducted research on 53 countries that covered Middle East and North Africa region on the concept of WFH. The study aimed to discover the jobs' amenability to working from home, across different countries. This comparative study discovered that more and more countries that have a better level of economic development are more open to having their employees work from home. The challenge in developing countries is that they tend to lag behind with information and communication technology, and, as a result, their jobs tend to be more labour intensive. Jobs in developing countries tend to be more manual. The finding was consistent irrespective of the country or continent that is aiming to implement the concept.

The concept of WFH has been popular in other countries like America, Europe and partially in Asia. Asian countries, such as Indonesia, where leadership and organisational cultures emphasising severe supervision and punishment are, still prefer to work in the office (Basuki *et al.* 2022). In a parallel study by (Singh, Watson, and Nair 2022), the work from home was perceived very positively by female academics both in Australian and Africa.

Previous studies have unanimously concluded that the concept of WFH has been implemented in most countries, but COVID19 acted as a catalyst to the phenomenon. Researchers have also highlighted factors that have influenced employers to implement WFH beyond the pandemic as the preferred mode of work. Research will

influence decisions to WFH based on the benefits and challenges associated with such a concept.

2.3 BENEFITS OF WORKING FROM HOME

To successfully implement the WFH working arrangements, both the employer and the employees must comprehend the benefits. Previous research in different sectors have demonstrated the benefits of this approach. The benefits are realised by the employers as well as the employees.

2.3.1 Benefits for the employees

Green, Tappin, and Bently (2020) conducted a study that listed the benefits and challenges of working from home, which were common and agreed with Flores (2019). Both studies have highlighted the benefits of working from home, which include improved work-life balance, increased autonomy, job satisfaction, and reduced psychological strain. According to Chetty and Motala (2021) some of the advantages of remote work include the fact that employees can experience better flexibility in terms of time, they are also able to have more time to spend with their families and as a result, organisations reap the rewards of better employee performance.

South African researchers like Enaifoghe and Zenzile (2023:4), stated that "the benefits include, but are not limited to, reduced commuting time, avoidance of office politics, use of less office space, increased motivation, improved gender diversity (e.g., women and careers), healthier workforces with lower absenteeism and turnover, higher talent retention, job satisfaction, and higher productivity".

Similarly, a study by Botha and Coetzee (2022), which agreed with that of Enaifoghe and Zenzile (2023), reported that employees benefit from the WFH arrangement. Employees were highly engaged in the workplace, predominantly due to organisational and leadership support. The flexibility provided by the work-from-home model, and organisational care contributed to employee health and wellness as well. Benefits and challenges of working from home should be viewed holistically from the employer and employees' perspective, to make an informed decision.

Ipsen *et al.* (2021), highlighted the broader advantages of WFH which include: (i) work–life balance; (ii) improved work efficiency and (iii) greater work control.

A similar study by Jadhav, Kanade, and Darekar (2022) highlighted the benefits and challenges, from the perception of both the employee and employer to make an informed decision about the phenomena. Their results showed that working from home allows employees to work with a diversified range of employees which helps to develop the professional relationship and can provide future advancement opportunities. Working from home provides the environment with less office distractions, no informal discussions, and meetings, as a result the employees can be more focused on their work. Similarly, the employee is not closely observed by the employer, it develops the sense of trust among the employees, and it motivates them to be more focused and committed to their work.

2.3.2 Benefits for the employer

Chetty and Motala (2021) agree with Green, Tappin and Bently (2020) about variables that enforce the benefits of working from home. A significant benefit for businesses was the reduction in the need for office space and the associated costs of running an office. Licite-Kurbe and Leonovica (2021), studied three IT companies in Latvia to identify approximate savings by an employer, assuming that all the employees work remotely. These benefits or savings have been expanded from associated costs of running an office as mentioned by Chetty and Motala (2021).

The authors listed several benefits or savings that the employers can enjoy. These benefits or savings included rental costs reduction, Telephone and Internet costs reduced, Equipment: includes expenses on printers, worktops, computer chairs and other office equipment; Electricity usage costs, Work environment risk assessment: In Latvia the Working Environment stipulates that an environmental risk assessment must be performed by each employer at least once a year, coffee and drinking water expenses reduced.

An Article by Harvard Business review in 2020, captured other benefits that the employers and organisation can enjoy "*Organizations can reduce or eliminate real estate costs, hire and use talent globally while mitigating immigration issues, and, research indicates, perhaps enjoy productivity gains*" (Choudhury,2020:5). These benefits can also be indirectly affected by the benefits and challenges of their respective employees.

A portion of the studies on this phenomenon concentrated on the advantages of work-from-home benefits that extend beyond the economic benefits for businesses and employers. One of the important benefits in encouraging people to work remotely is for maintaining competitiveness in the changing business world. An article by Indeed Editorial team (2023) which is advocating for the WFH mode, has highlighted some of the benefits of working from home beyond monetary advantages as:

- **Streamlined communication.** Employers can choose from a variety of platforms and methods for communication to centralise every interaction. This will allow the employers an opportunity to control the messages communicated to their employees.

- **Higher productivity due to more freedom enjoyed by employees and being comfortable while working from home.** Working from home allows employees to avoid social distractions from co-workers, which can increase efficiency and productivity. When employees can customise their own workspace, they may feel much more comfortable throughout the workday as well.

- **Improved work-life balance**. Employees who have a healthy work-life balance tend to be less burned out and more productive. Employees can better manage their personal time when they work remotely because it is typically more flexible.

- **Greater pool of talent and Global insights.** Companies are not limited to hiring people locally; instead, they can hire candidates globally. By hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds, businesses can acquire unique perspectives and ways of thinking. Having employees in these places may also allow employers to gain greater knowledge about various markets.

- **Lower rates of turnover, increased job satisfaction and fewer sick days or unplanned leave taken.** Businesses may also see reduced staff turnover because of flexible scheduling and high levels of job satisfaction. In addition, workers may be able to work through a minor cold without running the danger of spreading germs to their co-workers or becoming ill themselves while socialising with colleagues or working in the office.

- **Reduced overhead costs**. Building rent, utilities, office supplies, kitchen food, and coffee supplies are all expenses that companies must cover as some of the overhead costs that employers can reduce. Businesses stand to save an extensive amount of money as a result.

- **Time saved and reporting for duty**. Employees will save commuting time and avoid congestion on the roads. This will benefit the employer and employees who will report for duty on time, while being productive.
- **Better brand reputation**. Businesses that provide remote work opportunities might enhance their public image and attract more job applicants who would be thrilled to work for them.

2.4 CHALLENGES OF WORKING FROM HOME

The benefit of WFH cannot be overstated, but shortcomings must be treated carefully by both the employer and the employees. This will assist the affected parties to make vital decisions for the goals of various organisations and businesses. Challenges should not be viewed as hindrances in implementing any changes to the working environment, since business is evolving. Researchers that focused on the process of working from home, were influenced by the COVID19 restrictions hence it is important to explore such a phenomenon. Studies like Botha and Coetzee (2022) from a South African perspective, Ipsen *et al*. (2021) studied the European countries, Aczel *et al.* (2021) in Hungary and Singh, Watson, and Nair (2022) focusing on comparative studies of African countries and Australia looked at the disadvantages of working from home.

Green, Tappin and Bently (2020) compiled the challenges of employees working from home broadly as follows:

- Management: negative effect of trust, honesty, a focus on work objectives, and relationships with co-workers and supervisors.
- Working conditions: lack of dedicated space or privacy, comfort in the workplace, health and safety, and financial loss.
- Communication: collaboration, information flow, interaction nature (casual, rapid, or collective).
- Technology: inadequate infrastructures, software and tools, training, and support. Given the critical role that technology plays, providing adequate technology that is compliant with and supported by ICT policies can hinder the WFH model.
- Infrastructure. The actual workspace at home is frequently less conducive to productivity than an office setting. Factors like health and safety compliance and

costs of tools of trades should be incurred by the employer. When the employee is working from home, they should ensure that there is a dedicated area that will be conducive to work from. In addition, working from home can push through operating costs to employees, such as internet, equipment, and heating.

All the following challenges of working from home will have an impact on the employees' wellbeing and performance outcomes: work-home conflict, work intensification, extended work hours, difficulty disconnecting, and professional and personal social isolation. Enaifoghe and Zenzile (2023) summaries challenges of WFH as including a blurred barrier between work and family, diversions, and social isolation.

According to Shukla and Kumar (2023) and Ferreira, Pereira, Bianchi, and da Silva (2021) they have included communication barriers, feelings of isolation, work-life boundary conflicts, technical issues, distractions, and difficulties monitoring employee performance. Addressing these issues necessitates comprehensive strategies that enhance the establishment of a conducive remote work environment. These strategies will also assist both the employees and employers to meet their contractual obligations.

Lobe, Morgan, and Hoffman (2020) cautions researchers that challenges encountered during the Covid19 era may differ from those encountered after the epidemic. When evaluating difficulties, factors such as the working environment and diverse sectors should be considered. In addition, training interventions will also play a crucial role for the success of such arrangements, hence researchers need to explore the critical skills that are required to be able to work independently.

2.5 SKILLS REQUIRED TO WORK EFFECTIVELY FROM HOME

Employees must have a diverse set of skills to work unhindered, which should include both the soft and technical skills. Both soft and technical skills are acquired and developed through specialised education and experience. Lyu and Liu (2021) identified soft skills to include cognitive and social skills and well as the ability to manage people. Other identified soft skills include good interpersonal skills, the ability to service customers satisfactorily as well as project management skills. These abilities should not be applied independently, but employees need to incorporate other sets of skills for a successful remote work execution.

The other sets of abilities called the hard skills should be possessed by employees. Srinivasan and Thangaraj (2021); Malykhin, Aristova, Kalinina and Opaliuk (2021) have defined these skills that are related with specialised technical abilities or potent factual knowledge required to perform a task. While Neneh (2019) referred to them as "what you know" and depending on the job or role to be executed.

It is important to gain insight into the perspectives of the employees required skills, which will provide valuable insight into their perceived criteria for successful remote work from previous studies.

The study by Flores (2019) identified some of the important skills that employees must possess to work from home successfully. The ability to work independently and organise work tasks has been identified as the most important skill in remote work (Flores, 2019). Employees must also be capable of balancing work and personal life priorities, as well as setting and sticking to personal goals and troubleshooting technical problems.

Henke, Jones, and O'Neill (2022) have identified technology literacy, being independent, communication, strong work ethic, ability to manage distractions, time management, personality (extraversion), proactivity and supporting co-workers as set of skills that are required to thrive remotely. Amongst the listed skills, researchers have identified the following skills as the most important amongst the listed:

- **Technology literacy:** Digital literacy and technological competency are basic abilities for remote job performance in the digital age. This set of skills should be developed since technological usage is at the centre of the working from home phenomenon. Kasperski, Blau, and Ben-Yehudah (2022), included technological proficiency in addition to technological literacy. Knowing how to use such applications enables effortless interaction, efficient collaboration, and beneficial task management, which leads to improved efficiency while working remotely.

- **Communication:** Arunprasad, Dey, Jebli, Manimuthu, and Hathat (2022) highlighted that the foundation of remote work is effective communication and collaboration. In addition, Stanier (2022); Waight, Kjerfve, Kite and Smith (2022) included the need for a clear and precise communication, active listening, and the capacity to effectively transmit ideas in a remote context are essential. Furthermore, despite physical separation, having effective collaboration skills,

such as virtual team building and remote dispute resolution, is critical for successful project outcomes and cohesive teamwork.

- **Time management**. Forbes, Birkett, Evans, Chung, and Whiteman (2020) cautioned the employer and employees about time management. Since line managers will not be physically supervising employees, time management is a key skill for success in remote employment. Employees must be able to prioritise jobs, set attainable goals, and manage their time successfully.

- **Individual skills**: Bennett and McWhorter 2021 developed a study that focused on virtual human resource development and identified critical skills that employees should possess when working from home. They argued that in addition to hard skills that have already been listed by several studies, there are critical skills that should either be reskilled or upskilled to empower employees. Building key skills, emphasises the necessity of learning and development efforts to sustain worker productivity. Reskilling on the other hand, prepares employees for new jobs and changes, while upskilling prepares employees for advancing within their current career tracks.

- Those critical skills will assist employees to cope, be productive and transition between working virtually and in the office. Several skills identified included: Adaptability/agility/mind shifting, Creativity, Digital leadership, Empathy, Innovative, Interpersonal skills, Negotiation, Resilience, Social/emotional skills, and Teamwork. Collaboration, Emotional intelligence/self-awareness, Intuition and Mentoring were also grouped as soft skills that will assist employees to transition between virtual working model.

In addition, the researchers have identified managing virtually, technology literacy, time management, maintaining rapport virtually, communication, virtual soft skills and self-management as skills that needs to be developed on a continuous basis.

The International Labour Organization (2020) emphasised the importance of staff training and development. Chang, Machailo-Ellis and Rynhart (2020) highlighted the importance of training and development as to ensure that "workers are equipped with the required knowledge and skills to keep up with the latest information and technologies". In addition, to be able to work independently at home technical as well as ICT skills are required. This requirement highlights the need for such training in ICT and overall computer literacy.

2.6 FACTORS THAT SUPPORT EFFECTIVE WORKING FROM HOME

Researchers, employers, and employees must all have an in-depth understanding of the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of WFH. These factors will assist all the stakeholders to make the remote work arrangements a success. Although certain characteristics are common, it is vital to recognise that the list is not exhaustive and must be interpreted through the perspective of the employer. In addition, few research have tried to explain and analyse the factors influencing the adoption of working from home practises. Support for the effectiveness of working from home is from the workplace and from the home domain.

2.6.1 Support from the Workplace

From the perspective of the employers Thirimanna and Devadas (2022), developed knowledge in the domain of working from home effectiveness by exploring how organisational components and job characteristics affect working from home effectiveness among middle-level management in the manufacturing industry. The researchers found that identifying the degree of effectiveness of working from home is necessary before analysing its inherent factors. Management support and technical support have been identified as the core factors that contribute towards the effectiveness of working from home.

The study agrees with that of Aropah, Sarma and Sumertajaya (2020). Aropah *et al* (2020) identified several factors as important for working effectively from home. The factors include:

1) *Organisational support*: where the employer will provide the employees with the necessary tools of trades and any form of support needed. Afrianty, Artatanaya and Burgess 2022, listed factors that include IT training, digital infrastructure will influence lecturers' productivity during working from home arrangement.

2) *A conducive work environment*: this will motivate employees while providing security and allows employees to work optimally. Employees who have opted to work from home should experience a similar situation like working in a conventional office, such as having privacy, quality lighting, and adequate equipment.

3) *Transformational leadership:* This leadership style will also form part of the organisational support, by allowing managers the ability to transform organisations through their vision for the future, and by clarifying their vision. Managers and

leaders should be flexible and able to adjust their management style while employees are not reporting physically in their respective workplace. Positive relationships have been shown between work-from-home characteristics and transactional leadership, as well as between transformational and transactional leadership characteristics and productivity at work (Kairupan 2023).

Other factors that had some impact on the effectiveness of working from home were task identity and feedback. According to Green, Tappin, and Bently (2020: 7), other variables such as "organisational social support (a combination of perceived social and organisational support) and support for the individual WFH" influence the benefits and challenges of employees working from home "(comprising of manager trust and support, and technical support). Green *et al* Bently (2020) agree with Chetty and Motala (2021) on the variables that support the effectiveness of WFH, which include company support, internet access, and a non-distracting home environment.

2.6.2 Support from the home Environment

Wong, Cheung, and Chen (2020) focused from the perspective of employees, and discovered WFH effectiveness is improved by personal and family well-being but reduced by environmental and resource constraints. When workers are experiencing higher WFH effectiveness, they have a higher preference for WFH even after the pandemic.

Tsang, Liu, and Nguyen (2023) investigated the relationship between Family–work conflict (FWC) and work-from-home productivity. This factor occurs when conflicts occur because the requirements or expectations of one role are incompatible with those of another function. Employees WFH might experience stress as a result of the way that the work and family spheres overlap, manifesting out as a sense of FWC. Employee's personal issues spilling into the workplace may result in time wastage and a loss of concentration for the employee, due to spending time at home and affecting their performance and productivity. The study added that another issue that can affect the effectiveness of WFH due to home environment is another issue that arises is psychological interference. It occurs when an employee transfers their emotions or moods from the work realm to the family domain and vice versa. These conflicting issues might affect the performance of the employee, which will render WFH either effective or not.

The support from the home environment plays a vital; role in rendering the WFH model either effective or not. Employees need to clarify their roles while working from home and engaging their family members. In additional to making the resources available to WFH, emotional issues should be dealt with and the skills that have been identified should be upskilled or reskilled.

2.7 EFFECTIVENESS OR INEFFECTIVENESS OF WORKING FROM HOME

Vyas and Butakhieo (2021) concluded that WFH was once desired, highly favourable but has not proved to be one of the best options for majority of Hong Kong workforce. Interest in WFH remains, but not in its current form. According to Vyas and Butakhieo (2021) better guidelines and policies from the government should be in place to properly regulate and make WFH feasible.

Bloom, Liang, Roberts, and Ying (2015) conducted a study where the employees were divided into those that have volunteered to work from home and others were office bound. The study discovered that home workers reported substantially higher work satisfaction and psychological attitude scores. There was also a highly significant increase in performance from homeworking. Sharma, Saini, and Virani (2022) focused their study on employees who were working from home. They have highlighted three themes that are interlinked and in the context of the technology enabled WFH to make the phenomena effective or ineffective. The themes which emerged are the personal factors, employee performances, and technological aspects.

Ramadhanti (2021), study on how effective it is to work from home after the pandemic by looking at performance and health analysis in Indonesia has highlighted the effectiveness of the phenomena. Comparing several studies, the study has concluded that 78% of workers continue to work productively, while the rest feel they cannot work productively from home. It is also important to consider some of the factors and experiences of employees who have volunteered to work from home while others have opted not to work from home.

In addition to the WFH problems that can determine whether the arrangements are effective or not, there are additional environmental factors that can influence the process. Since employers operate in a macroenvironment or are exposed to external environmental influences, the efficiency of WFH is certain to be impacted. These

factors are beyond the control of the employer or the employees. Factors such as political, economic, social, environmental, technological, and legal factors have a major impact on the success of businesses to implement the WFH successfully.

Saltiel (2020), conducted research on ten developing countries, including Armenia, Bolivia, Yunnan Province in China, Colombia, Georgia, Ghana, Kenya, Laos, Macedonia, and Vietnam. The aim of the research was to measure the feasibility and effectiveness of working from home. Their results indicated that a small share of workers in the developing countries may feasibly carry out their jobs from home, ranging from 6% in Ghana to 23% in Yunnan (China). However, numerous disadvantaged groups, such as high school dropouts, informal labourers, and those in low-asset households, are more likely to face the negative impacts because their occupations cannot be done from home. The extent of these relationships, on the other hand, varies by country.

The findings agreed with another comparative reflection of Australian and African female academics on working from home during COVID-19. Singh, Watson, and Nair (2022) highlighted that the work from home was perceived very positively and effective by female academics in academia both in Australia and Africa. Both cohorts reporting the ease of managing working from home with others; children, partners, parents, friends, or co-residents. Regardless of WFH's efficacy or ineffectiveness, there are interconnected variables that employers and employees must be aware of.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The chapter provided an overview of the literature that is relevant to the research study that was outlined in the chapter one. The current research has been contextualised and its relevance and significance of contribution have been positioned, focusing on subsections that covers benefits and challenges of employees working from home. Prior research has been examined from a South African perspective and expanded globally to obtain an extensive understanding of the subject matter being studied.

The research methodology is covered in detail in the next chapter, along with the related techniques and the reasons for the selection of those methods.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research methodology, research design, study area, target population and sample for the current study are presented. The chapter also outlines the method used to collect data for the study, method of analysing data and includes measures of trustworthiness.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research, according to Leedy, Ormrod, and Johnson (2021), focuses on phenomena that occur or have previously occurred in natural settings. According to the authors, qualitative research entails capturing and studying the complexities of phenomena. This study has been influenced by the interpretivist philosophy, which works well with the selected research approach of phenomenology (Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge and Van Aardt (2019). The authors emphasise how the approach is concerned with the questions of how individuals make sense of the world around them.

As a result, the study was conducted as a qualitative study with in-depth interviews. A qualitative research design is relevant for the study to research the phenomenon. According to Jeffers (2018), qualitative research focuses on phenomena that are occurring or have previously occurred in natural settings. The study's goal is to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of employees working from home, which is consistent with the goal of the current study. This phenomenon of working from home is novel to the study's chosen organisation, and an exploration, as will be achieved through in-depth interviews, is appropriate. Accordingly, this study has explored the experiences of the participants gathered through in-depth interviews and make interpretations and reflections from those experiences to construct the knowledge that has been documented in the study.

3.3 STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in the client service department of a government organisation based in the Polokwane town of the Limpopo Province. The selected organisation has several branches in all the provinces and across South Africa. The Polokwane branch is situated in the heart of the city.

3.4 TARGET POPULATION

A population is also known as a target audience group, which is defined through the objectives of a research study (Shukla,2020). Furthermore, the research findings can be applied or generalised based on which group the findings are feasible to. The current study has identified a population from the client service department that has one (1) branch manager, four (4) operations managers, six (6) consultants and eleven (11) agents. The population is represented in table 3.1.

The target audience will consist of a combination of employees who were working from home, and those who have opted not to work from home. It was critical for the study to incorporate individuals with various responsibilities within the department, as well as participants who have chosen to work from home or not.

3.5 SAMPLING

Makwana, Engineer, Dabhi, and Hardik (2023) described sampling as the process of taking data, by selecting a population sample from a large group for a certain sort of research objective. There are different types of sampling methods that can be used in research. The researcher chose to use the purposive sampling. Purposive sampling's goal is used to strategically sample participants so that the sample is relevant to the research question (Bryman *et al.*, 2019). It entails selecting a sample with certain criteria that are linked to the purpose of the study. For the purpose of this study, subjects who had been with the selected department during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown were included in the sample. Those employees who chose to work from home and those who opted to work from the office were included in the sample.

For the current study, the total sample was 13 as represented in table 3.1. The intention was to interview at least 13 participants making sure that those who worked

from the office and those who opted to work from home were included. In addition, interviews would have continued if after 13 participants new information was still being given by the participants, i.e., point of saturation not reached.

Table 3.1: Target Population and Sample of the Study			
Category	Target Population	Number who WFH	Sample
Branch Manager	1	1	1
Operations/Junior Managers	4	4	2
Client Consultants	6	5	3
Client Agents	11	9	7
Total	**22**	**19**	**13**

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

3.6.1 Data Collection Instrument

An interview guide was designed for the purpose of the current study (see Appendix B). The guide consisted of semi-structured questions. The reason for the semi-structured questions was for the study to be sure that similar questions are asked without being too rigid. A total of thirteen (13) individuals participated in the study due to data saturation. There was no new information coming from the participants, i.e., a point of saturation had been reached at about 11 participants, but interviewing continued until participant 13 as a way of making sure that indeed saturation had been reached. The concept of data saturation, also known as 'information redundancy' or the point at which no new themes or codes 'emerge' from data (Braun and Clarke 2019). The concept is commonly used in thematic analysis (TA) research which is in alignment with the current study. The idea carried out since gathering more data from other participants beyond the thirteen employees would not have provided new insights or themes because they had already been uncovered.

3.6.2 Method of Data Collection

Individual interviews were conducted using virtual platforms i.e., Microsoft Teams. Where the candidate could not use a virtual platform, they were interviewed in person. Social distance protocols were followed during this type of interaction. Notes were taken during data collection and recordings were made with the permission of the research participants.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Thematic analysis was used for this study. It is a method of qualitative data analysis that is considered appropriate for any study that seeks to understand the potential of an issue more widely using interpretations of data (Mason and Francis, 2022). Lochmiller (2021) states that this method entails the identification of repeating patterns, which researchers portray as overarching statements or themes. Furthermore, Thematic analysis enables scholars to define and describe what a participant's reality is using their own written or spoken account.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Researchers must adhere to certain principles and rules to ensure that their studies are carried out in an ethical and responsible manner (Arifin, 2018). These considerations are intended to safeguard research participants' rights, safety, and wellbeing as well as the validity and reliability of the research itself. The following principles were adhered to:

- **Ethical clearance:** Ethical clearance was requested and approved by the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) before the study was conducted (see Appendix E).
- **Permission to conduct the study:** Approval to conduct the study has been requested and approved by the management of the selected organisation where data was collected (see Appendix C and D).
- **Informed consent and voluntary participation:** The participants were informed about the purpose of the study before interviewing them and asking for their consent to interview them. They were also informed that they could withdraw their

participation if, for any reason, they felt uncomfortable and wished to stop participating.

- **Confidentiality:** All the data collected in the current study have been kept confidential. The information is stored in a document that is password-protected. Furthermore, the information was not shared with those who were not supposed to know about it.

- **Anonymity:** The researcher has kept the identity of the participants anonymous. No personal information has been requested. Furthermore, to safeguard the participants' identities, even if it is known, it will not be kept on record.

- **Risk of harm:** The researcher will not divulge who said what to management or any other member of the organisation so that there are no opportunities for harming the participants in any way.

3.9 MEASURES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

Nassaji (2020) has highlighted the notions of reliability and validity in quantitative research which have always been used in relation to consistency or accuracy of tests or measurements used. The following has been incorporated in the proposed study:

- **Credibility:** Credibility determines if the findings of the research accurately reflect the initial opinions of the participants and are based on information that can be obtained from their original data, (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). In-depth, personal interviews with the participants were conducted to make sure the study and its findings are credible. The sessions were extensive, the shortest being 30 minutes long and the longest was an hour and 60 minutes.

- **Transferability:** consists of providing details regarding the methods used in the current study so that other researchers can know, if they choose to conduct a study that is like the current one. The participants involved are clearly defined as well as the process followed to collect and analyse data, so that should other researchers wish to conduct similar studies, they may know how to go about undertaking them.

- **Dependability** as an alternative notion to reliability in quantitative research, entails how participants assess the study's conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations and how each is bolstered by the information gathered from study participants (Nowell *et al*. 2017). The researcher was able to record the

interviews and take notes which assist with reflexivity. The researcher was also helped by the data audit trail to pay attention to the methodological, contextual, interpersonal, and personal aspects that were involved during the interviews by listening to the recordings and comparing them with the notes.

- **Confirmability** concerns the extent to which others confirm the researcher's interpretations and conclusions (Nassaji, 2020). To minimise bias and inconsistent interpretation of the data, one individual collected the data for the current study. Data was recorded to compare with the notes and data collected at any given steps during analysis of information.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the methodology that was followed for the current study. The study area, target population, sample as well as method of data collection were presented. The method used to analyse data was also discussed. The qualitative research methodology has been employed for this study. It focused on phenomena that have occurred in natural settings. In addition, thematic analysis is compatible with the chosen methodology. The next chapter presents the results of the study from the collected data.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the study from data collected from the participants. Data for the study were collected using a qualitative method, using semi-structured individual interviews. Data were analysed using thematic analysis method. The results of the study are presented in line with the research objectives as outlined in the first chapter of the study. The presentation starts with the demographic information of the participants.

The outline of the results in this chapter has been reported in the following order:

- Demographic information.
- Themes that resulted from the interview questions, followed by the related discussion.
- Summary of the results and themes from the qualitative interviews chapter.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The demographic information of the participants who took part in this study are explained in more detail in this section. The selected Polokwane's client service department had a total population of twenty-two (22) employees. A total of 13 participants were interviewed for purposes of the current study. The study presents the gender, age group and number of years of experience in the selected department. The reason for particularly taking note of the demographic information of the participants is so that it can be determined whether there is a need to assist or have special programmes tailor-made for specific groups.

4.2.1 The gender of the participants

The participants consist of ten (10) Females, and three (3) males (demonstrated in table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Gender of the participants

Gender	Frequency
Males	3
Females	10
Total	**13**

4.2.2 Age group of participants

There was an almost equal split in the age groups 36 – 45 and 46 – 55 years old (see figure 4.2).
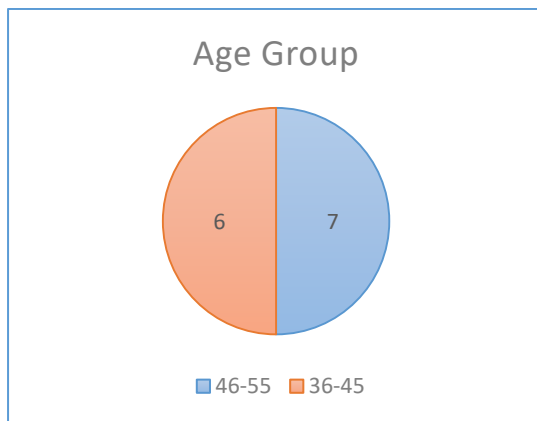
Figure 4.2: Age group of participants

4.3 Number of years of working experience

There is variation in the number of years of working experience ranging from 6-10, 11-15, more than 15 and more than 20 years (see figure 4. 3).
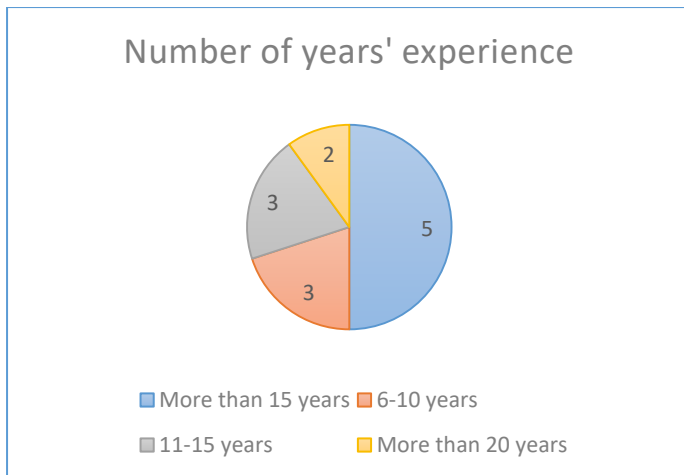
Figure 4.3: Number of years' working experience

4.4 RESULTS FROM THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

This section presents the results of the study from the interviews that were collected. The presentation is in line with the research objectives of the study starting with reasons why the participants opted to work from home or from the office.

4.4.1 Reasons for opting to work from home or from the office

The first question posed to the participants in the study was to determine how many employees have opted to work from home, as allowed by their employer. Ten (10) participants had chosen to work from home as allowed by their employer, while three (3) chose to work from the office despite being given the option to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Of those participants who chose to work from the office, one (1) was female and two (2) were males. This then does not show any gender differences in terms of who prefers to work from the office.

The employees that opted to work from the office listed several reasons that included: a non-conducive home environment; problems with network coverage/connectivity; the inconvenience of not being able to work during electricity loadshedding or outages as they do not have any back-up system unlike at work; lack of resources like those that are readily available at the office, e.g. printing facilities; technical challenges and not being able to get immediate help with those; and high crime rate in their residential areas.

For instance, participant 3 stated that "*The environment at home was not conducive for me to perform my duties. The area where I am staying at has network coverage problems which is made worse by the current loadshedding. There is also a high crime rate, and property or assets of the organisation might be stolen hence I have decided not to risk working from home.*"

Furthermore, participant 7 stated that "*I have briefly worked from home during the lockdown restrictions, but when we were allowed to come to the office, I was the first person to do so. I will never work from home, due to the logistics that I have encountered. Staying in a remote area, if I experience power outages or technical challenges, I might not be back in the office due to transportation and other logistics. This will in turn affect my performance for that day. It is best to work from the office, where all the resources are available.*"

Rose and Brown (2021) have captured the underlying challenges of employees who are unable to work from home that employers and employees need to understand. According to their findings they have explained that despite the advantages and disadvantages of work from home, not every employee is able to work from home even if they want to. Rose and Brown (2021) reported that not every employee prefer to work from home due to challenges especially with access to working resources. They thus recommend the adjustment of management strategies to meet the diverse needs and problems of each employee and assist them in their transition to a new virtual workplace.

The employees who opted to work from home gave the advantages that were in line with the second objective of the study.

4.4.2 Advantages of Working from Home

The results that are presented in this section are in line with the second objective of the study, which wanted "to identify what the employees of the client services department in the chosen organisation believe are the advantages of working from home". Under this theme, there were five sub-themes that emerged from the participants (see figure 4.4). the sub-themes include the reduced costs, time-effectiveness, flexibility, and the advantage of being able to spend time with family.

Theme	Sub-themes	Description
	Reduced Costs	Reduction in travelling to work expenses
Advantages of working from home	Time-Effective	Spending less time on the road
	Flexibility	Employees can attend to personal matters without impeding on deliverables
	Spending time with family	Employees that work from home get more time to spend with loved ones
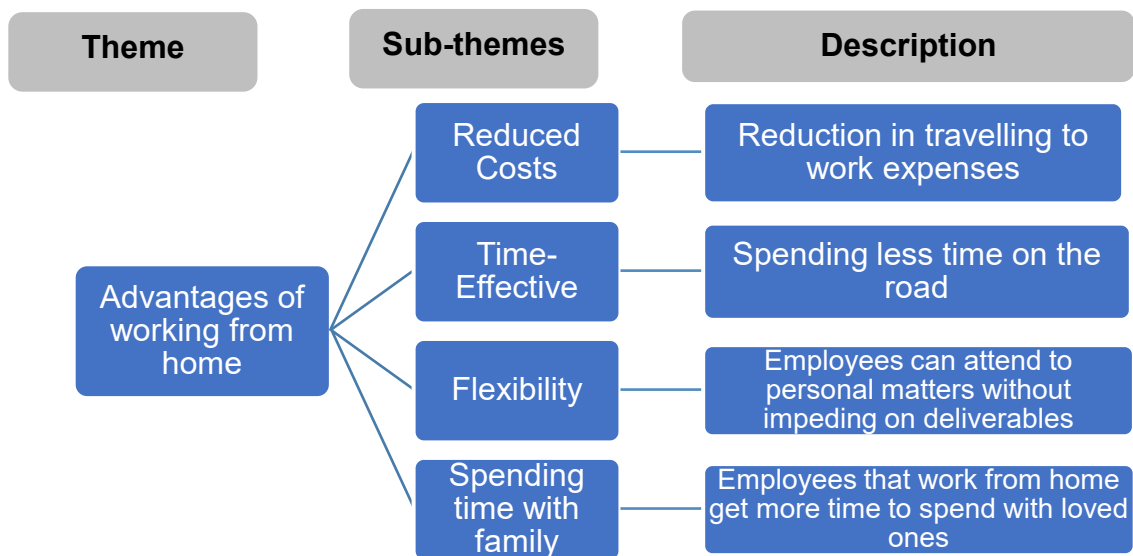
Figure 4.4: Advantages of working from home during the Covid Pandemic

1) Reduced costs

According to the participants, having the option to work from home has helped them save costs of transportation, i.e., travelling, parking, aftercare for children and saving costs for the employer. And other expenses associated with commuting to and from work. Participant 4 stated that "*The cost of driving to work and back, and you find yourself saving on petrol when you work from home.*" Participants 9,11 and 8 highlighted costs savings as "*…saving money and transportation costs like petrol.*" While participant 10 said "*When you are working from home, you don't need to pay for the aftercare.*" Participant 5 included "*This has assisted us to save parking fees…*"

Some participants have iterated that working from home did not only reduce their personal costs, but it also reduced that of the employer. Some of the workspaces or buildings that were rented had to be unleased to utilise the funds elsewhere. Participants 1 and 2 emphasied that "*The employer saved money by terminating some of the rental costs by allowing employees to work from home. This will help the employers to use the money for other projects.*"

2) Time-Effectiveness

Most participants have embraced working from home since it allows them to avoid traffic and gives them more time for task preparation and completion. Participant 6 explained that "*It saves time well, because the time that you will be spending travelling to work and back, you would find yourself trying to figure out how to finish some of the work that you have when you're working from home.*"

In addition, participants 13 and 9 emphasised that "*When I work from home, you know it, helps because I know that there's no need for me to be stuck in traffic. Instead, I use the spare time to prepare for the day ahead*".

Additionally, employees indicated that working from home has also allowed them to sleep extra hours. Participant 4 agreed that "*…now I can sleep until six in the morning and can rest a little bit more.*" While the participant 10 said "*…also working from home, you don't have to wake up as early as you are used to when going to the office.*"

3) Flexibility

Participants highlighted having flexible work schedules that allow them to take care of private issues without compromising their regular work duties. This adoption has enabled employees to improve their work-life balance, where participant 5 said "*…you are also able to tap into things that you wouldn't normally do when at the office.*"

Participants 11 shared that "*I have time to pick up my kids from school during my lunch time*" and participant 10 said that "*…during your lunch time you can just rush to the school. You pick up your kids.*"

4) Spending time with family

The work-life balance concept has been echoed by spending time with family, which corresponds to the flexible working arrangement that was mentioned before. Individuals who previously missed the time to stay in touch and connect time with their loved ones embraced the work-from-home choice.

Participant 4 explained that "*Spending time with family, I think I mentioned because there was this other week where I was working from home. I was with my grandmother. So, you get to spend time with your loved ones.*" Participant 12 felt that "*A relationship with my daughter. Previously I didn't have enough time to stay with my daughter to strengthen our relationship.*"

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4.4.3 The challenges that employees face when they are working from home

Another objective of this research question was to investigate the challenges that the employees face when they are working from home. Figure 4.5 gives the themes and sub-themes of the results of the study.

Theme	Sub-themes	Description
	Loadshedding	Reduced electricity supply
	Shortage of tools of trade	Employees not equipped with appliances to enable their work
Challenges of working from home	Household Distractions	Factors that divert your focus from your work
	Performance	conduceive work environment affecting quality of work
	Work-Life Balance	the allocation of attention and time between job and family

Figure 4.5: Themes and sub-themes about the disadvantages of working from home

1) Electricity Loadshedding

Participants have repeatedly stated that load shedding will make it challenging for them to accomplish their goals. Working without power supply for extended periods of time, has impact on output and reduces turnaround times. Furthermore, the network connection deteriorates greatly without electricity supply or during power outages. Employees have unanimously highlighted the following challenges that are associated with loadshedding:

Participant 7 stated that "When you want to start up, and loadshedding happens, it becomes impossible to reach your target."

Participant 3: "When loadshedding starts, it is difficult to reach your target because sometimes it takes four hours a day that you didn't have any electricity."

Participant 9: "The most common challenge would be electricity because we use desktops. They only work when they are connected to electricity.".

Participant 1: "If you don't have electricity at home, then you must make sure that you report to your line manager and reach your target by the end of the day. So, you can imagine if there is no electricity, you must make it a point that the work is still done."

Participant 12: "Power supply and loadshedding. The loadshedding stages that have been implemented in South Africa have been affecting network coverage."

Participant 8: "The biggest challenge of working from home is load shedding. Loadshedding has a negative impact even though the employer has given us the dongles that comes with Wi-Fi. When there's load shedding, the network connectivity is not 100%."

Yet participant 5 explained that *"…the load shedding part of it. If you don't have all the resources that will assist you in terms of load shedding, like the power inverters or so, you might be stuck for hours without doing anything because there's no electricity."*

2) Shortage of tools of trade

The participants have highlighted several devices that they need to be productive while working from home. The tools of trade, i.e., resources, mentioned included laptops as compared to desktop computers, Virtual Private Network (VPN) with sufficient data for internet connection and backup batteries for employees who are using desktops.

On the challenge of computers, a participant 11 has highlighted that *"Some of my colleagues who do not have laptops and using desktops can be a challenge. Most of the colleagues are avoiding the movement of desktop and would like to WFH if they had laptops".*

Participant 5 expressed that*: "connectivity part with the VPN that we are currently using, instead of the router then I will be able to connect even though there are*

connectivity issues. I will be able to search for other networks. In additions, laptops that are fully charged, we will be able to work even though there is loadshedding, instead of driving to the office. Carrying desktops to WFH can de tedious because of the movement from the office to home. Connectivity from home to back to the office it is a challenge. If it were laptops, it would have been easy".

Participant 13: "When an employee is using a desktop and not back-up battery it is a challenge. Unlike using a laptop where you can charge it and the battery last longer without power."

3) Household distractions

Participants noted that working from home presents several distractions, which, if not managed appropriately could inhibit work progress. One respondent stated that they get tempted to tidy the house during working hours and the participant 10 stated that *"…if I see my house dirty, I may be tempted to just take a few minutes and clean it up."*. Participant 8 said they sometimes feel obligated to respond to the family's need for attention from family members. They *explained that: "…the elderly people staying with you was the issue because you're at home. It was difficult for them to understand that you must work, because you're at home and they had that mindset, but you're at home, you're not at work. Then if you didn't stand up and help them, they get quite agitated, which was the big issue for me."* Another employee further explained that *"Your family members when you are around might cause a disturbance because you might have to share attention with them. Children especially, might not understand that you are working while at home"*, participant 2.

4) Performance

Working from home can affect the quality of the performance, which will be affected by the surrounding environment where the employee resides. A participant 9 explained that: *"Employers should bear in mind that working from home can be different as compared to the office, especially on performance. The home environment cannot be controlled and will differ from employee to employee. For example, there are sound disruptions around the area while executing their duties. It might create doubt that the employee is not working."*

Participant 5 stated that: "maybe during non-peak periods, the employer can allow employees to work rotationally between the office and at home. However, during peak period it is when employees should report back at the office full time. Or consider working rotational way as the new arrangements."

5) Challenges with maintaining work-life balance

Participant indicated that it is difficult to balance work responsibilities with those that are expected from the home domain especially if they are working from home. *"I have learnt that you have to balance your life. I was always working. Strive the balance between work and personal life. Being closed the whole day and not interacting with other people can be a challenge, because in the office I am able to interact with other colleagues socially. One needs to balance their life, work and be professional, participant 2."*

4.4.3 The kind of skills that employees believe they require in order to perform well when working from home

The participants were able to identify five common themes namely working independently; computer skills; time management; self-management; and thorough knowledge of policies and procedures of their organisation. These skills have been highlighted, to assist both the employees and employers to be able to perform well while WFH. These skills are presented in figure 4.6.
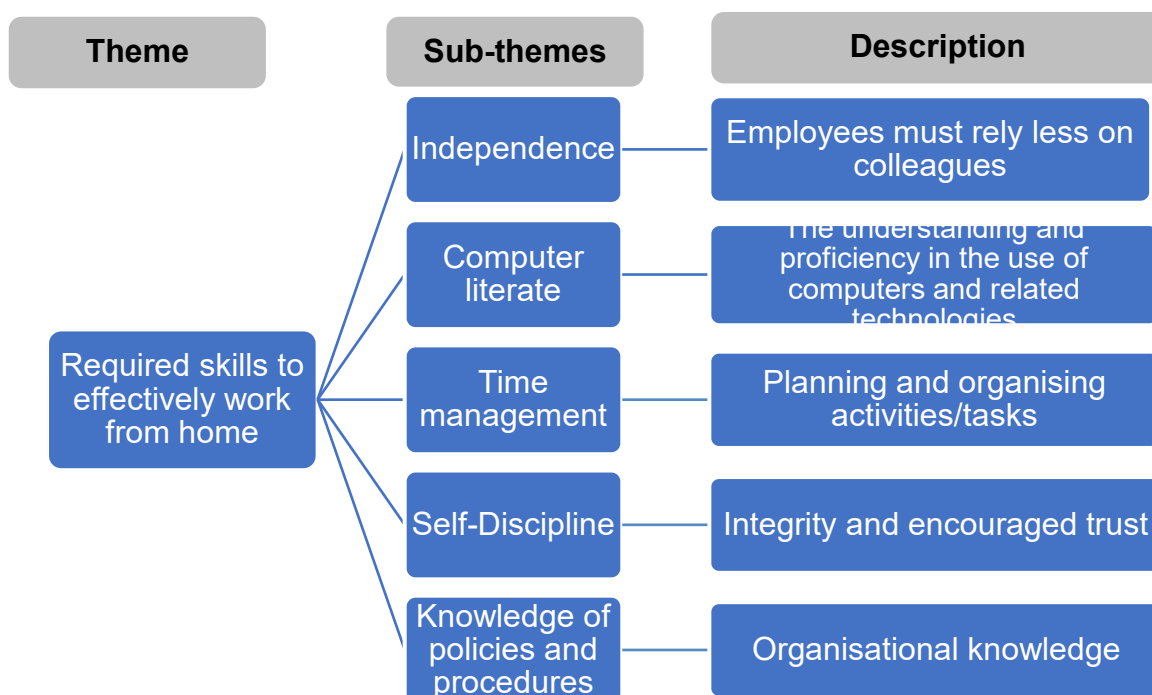
Figure 4.6: Required skills to effectively work from home

1) Ability to work Independently.

Responses to this concept concerned being able to operate on your own in any capacity regardless of your function when there would be no other colleague close by for support. Participants 1, 3 and 7 emphasised that: *"I would say you have to be independent. You must be able to work by yourself. I can put that as a skill because if you depend on other people, then that's when you're going to struggle."*

Participant 6 agreed with and felt that *"I think one needs to have the ability to work independently because in the office when you're struggling with other things, you would have support where you would ask questions to colleagues."* And participant 1 stated that: *"…whatever your role is, you need to be competent on it and you should be able to be independent to perform because no one will be there to assist you."*

2) Computer literate

WFH home is highly dependent on technological advancements and knowledge thereof. Employee responses have shown that to be effective and productive, they must make sure that they are skilled in the fundamentals of computer usage. They have also emphasised the importance of training where there is a skill or knowledge gap. Hence participants 10 and 13 have agreed that "*Equipped more with computer skills like navigating the system and screens. It took me more time to resolve a query*

unlike when I was in the office where I could print the documents to confirm." And the other participant felt that *"First of all, they will have to give us proper computer training on how to do the setup, how to do the connection …"*

3) Time management skills

One of the most essential aspects of working from home is the ability to plan your day. This allows employees to stay focused and reach deliverable timelines. As the participants stated:

> *"You must be able to plan your day. If they need something for you to do, you need to report on time…, participant 9".*

> *"…when you're working from home there is that skill that is required to manage your time, participant 12."*

4) Self-Discipline

The participants indicated the need to be able to discipline yourself when working from home. For instance, participant 4 reported that *"When you're working from home you get to relax. Sometimes you don't even do what you're expected to do. It needs someone who would know what is expected from them."*

"One must be punctual. We must have self-control and a lot of discipline, participant 7."

5) Knowledge of policies and procedures

Majority of the participants emphasised the importance of equipping and adhering to the policies and procedures of their organisation when working from home. They have emphasised the importance by stating that:

> Participant 5 explained that *"Members need to know their job. When I say they need to know their job I'm talking about processes. We are being provided with the standard operating procedures, so when members are working from home, there's no one that they will be asking if they don't know how to resolve a case. They need to go and check the standard operating procedure so that they can know how to resolve cases on their own …"*

Participant 3 said that*: "They need to know how to interpret the standard operating procedures and the policies."* In addition, participant 2 expressed that: *"Interpretation of policies and procedures can be an added crucial skill. Holistic policies and procedures that cover communications, ethics, risk, professionalism, and performance…"*

4.4.4 The kind of support employees need for them to operate effectively from home

The study investigated the kind of support the participants think employees need for them to operate effectively from home. The results are displayed in figure 4.7.
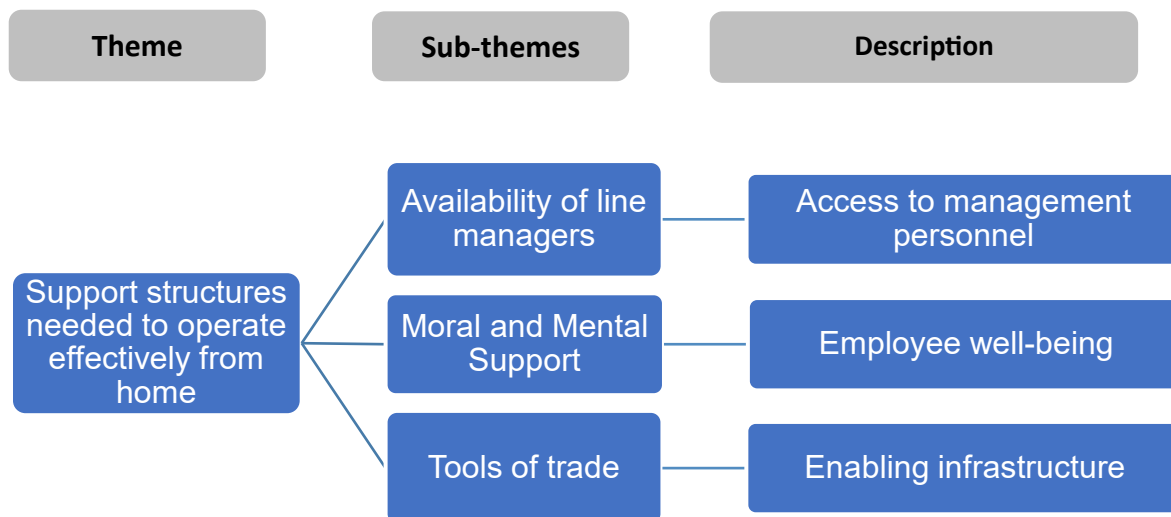
Figure 4.7: Support structures needed to operate effectively from home

1) Availability of line managers

One of the support measures that the participants reported that would be needed is the element of being able to reach out to their seniors at a time of need. According to the responses, it has proven to be difficult to access managers when approval is needed to proceed with duties. Participants 8 and 10 have explained that *"…the manager or team leader must be available when we contact them for approval or I feel we must have regular meetings on feedback, so that we know where we stand."*

Participant 12 said that*: "…also, availability of our managers, especially with regards to things like requiring approval or even wanting clarity on an issue. Sometimes you might need to arrange with the client beyond resolving their issue, and having access to your manager at that time or when needed will make life easier."*

Dealing with clients at a branch front end has its challenges. At times, employees get queries that need intervention from the seniors or direct managers and the adoption of work from home approach has made access to managers one of the shortcomings. Clients will occasionally want management's intervention on their query; this will not derail the process and will improve turnaround times. Hence several participants have strongly expressed that:

"If you can have access to that dedicated person or individual within the office who's able to provide the support, especially for queries that are more complex or might need intervention, participant 3."

Participant 6 explained that *"It is frustrating if the direct manager or leadership is not available to support any employee. For example, while assisting a client and explaining the process when the client is not happy and wants someone senior, there should be someone available. The client might need a second opinion to validate the response. Intervention from the direct line manager will be crucial."*

According to participant 7*: "The other support is that you need to be there if you are required to step in. When you're not available, it's derailing the whole process. Someone might be at the critical end of finalising the report or anything and you are not there, so you are stunting all the process, and the deadlines may not be met."*

Participant 11 emphasised that *"It's frustrating when you are working from home, and you are having challenges, and you want to reach out to the person that you report to or to the leadership and there's no one to listen or to understand your situation…"*

2) Moral and mental support

The participants opinion of support structures needed to operate effectively from home include their perception of the organisation's value and commitment to their well-being. Insights from the responses referred to emotional support and constructive feedback on allocated duties. Participant 12 has explained that: *"We need more encouragement like emotional support instead of negative feedback. A word of encouragement instead of being demoralised if you are not meeting your target. I am not saying that if an employee is wrong, they must turn a blind eye, but the managers should strike a balance instead of reprimanding all the time."*

Emerging insights from the responses regarding the support structures from the employer is their well-being. Employees feel that there is a need for continuous check-in meetings and informal coaching sessions, to check on their mental state when working from home. Hence participants 5 and 13 felt that: *"Maybe the employer should encourage mental fitness when you're working from home. Maybe checking on the employee whether they are fine, not a daily basis, but just to check on them at least twice a week because working from home can be stressful."*

Participant 5 *felt that: "Emotional support in the form of wellness programme and change management in order to engage the employees or have a check-in session to ascertain the emotional state of the employee."*

3) Tools of trade

According to the participants, for them to function effectively when working from home, the employer must provide employees with equipment and devices that will enable them to pursue their daily duties. This must be in the form of laptops, desktops, and data. The importance of provision of resources was also mentioned when participants listed the challenges of WFH. There was a unanimous feeling amongst participants on the supply of tools of trades that:

"The kind of support that I can think of are the tools of trade. If the employer can be able to provide employees with laptops with dongles that come with Wi-Fi…, participant 1".

"We must have the tools like the router and enough data, participant 8."

"We need to be given the support in terms of the resources, availing all the resources that we need, participant 6."

"Reliable tools of trade, because if employers are not providing us with the relevant equipment for us to be able to work at home, we may find it very difficult to do so and actually give the outcome that is not required, participant 5."

4) Training and development interventions

Participants have reiterated the importance of continuous and refresher training, to be empowered in performing the assigned duties. One participant 7 said: *"…Referring to the training that are available, and when you have spare time, it is important to equip yourself with skills and other work. Use the training interventions that the employer has made available to your advantage."*

4.5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results of the current study show some similarities with what other researcher have documented before.

1. Benefits of working from home

The current research has uncovered themes or benefits that are prevalent worldwide. Previous research on South Africans' readiness for remote work, such as Chetty and Motala 2020, identified the advantages that the current studies have shown. Their study reported that the benefits for employees working remotely included greater flexibility, more time to spend with children, higher productivity, and commuter cost savings. From the perspective of the employer, the study identified reduced need for office space and therefore less expenditure on the associated costs of running an office.

The same advantages of working from home were found in parallel research that compared it against working from an office (Aczel, Kovacs, van der Lippe and Szaszi, 2021). The researchers found that benefits of working from home include less commuting, more control over time, more comfortable environment, and more flexibility with domestic tasks. Another report by Aksoy, Barrero, Bloom, Davis, Dolls, and Zarate (2022), who studied 27 countries including China, South Korea, France, Taiwan, Canada, Brazil, Singapore, and the United States documented the benefits of saving on time and money costs of commuting, offers greater flexibility in time management, and expanding personal freedom.

2. Challenges of working from home

The most common challenge of loadshedding, which is the term for scheduled power outages or electricity supply shortages was listed by almost all the participants. Other associated network issues, such as connectivity problems and related constraints to employee performance and productivity, have been brought on by this problem. Previous studies like studies the one conducted by Ipsen et al. (2021) have highlighted similar challenges that employees have experienced while working from home. Their study has mentioned work uncertainties and inadequate tools, which was also mentioned by the current study. ICT equipment and workstation set-up as the main challenges that employees will face while working remotely have also been reported (Chang, Machailo-Ellis and Rynhart, 2020). The study emphasised that staff may

experience technical challenges, such as connectivity problems, if WFH arrangements were deployed quickly and possibly in an unorganised fashion.

An employer's guide on working from home in a response to COVID19, by the International Labour organisation(ILO,2020) has compiled a comprehensive and extensive list of challenges namely: communication, data protection and security, staff management and possible abuse of WFH arrangement, organisation of working time, occupational safety and health, health and mental well-being, skills, staff training and development, keeping up with the government's policy and directives, work-life balance and caring for children and dependents. These similar challenges were also documented in a study that was conducted in South African by Chetty and Motala (2020).

3. Skills required to be effective when working from home

For one to be productive when working from home, individuals need to possess a variety of skills and competencies. Skills and competencies can either be technical or soft skills. Employers need to ensure that staff members have the necessary tools or training to carry out their responsibilities when working on their own. The basic skills and abilities required of an employee will depend on the type of work they do. Participants have identified five common themes namely working independently, computer skills, time management, self-management and thorough knowledge of policies and procedures of their organisation. Proficiency with computers, encompassing both transactional and fundamental technical skills, is the most common requirement for all employees working from home.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented and analysed results of the data collected from participants. The results answer the questions of challenges of working from home, the benefits thereof, the skills required for employees to work effectively from home as well as the kind of support required for them to be effective. The next chapter presents the summary of results, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The current study aimed to investigate the benefits and challenges of working from home in a client services department of a public sector organisation in Limpopo. This section presents an overview and description of the research findings, and it is followed by recommendations, study limitations, and conclusions. The results are based on the themes that have emerged from the analysis of participants' responses, that were presented in detail in chapter four.

5.2. SUMMARY OF STUDY RESULTS

5.2.1. Demographic information of the participants

In the current study, the demographic information was recorded to identify if there are specific groups that particularly prefer either to work from home or to work at the office. A total of 13 participants were interviewed from the selected Polokwane's client service department that has a total population of twenty-two (22) employees. The study demographic was as follows:

- Gender. Participants consist of ten (10) females, and three (3) males (demonstrated in table 4.1).
- Age group. There was an almost equal split in the age groups 36 – 45 and 46 – 55 years old (see figure 4.2).
- Number of years of experience in the selected department. About 50% of the participants had more than 15 years of working experience in this selected department (see figure 4. 3).

5.2.2. Summary of the results from interviews

Thematic data analysis method was used to analyse data for the current study. Common themes were identified in line with the research objectives. Both participants who opted to work from home and those who opted to work from the office were interviewed for the study.

The summary of study results is presented in line with the study objectives.

1. Advantages of working from home

This aligns with the study's first objective, which was, to determine the benefits experienced by participants who worked from home. One of the advantages of working from home identified by participants is cost saving, which includes travelling or commuting costs reduction, including saving money on fuel or travelling fees, and money spent on buying lunch or refreshments while the employee is working from the office, parking costs. Previous studies like Chetty and Motala (2021) agree with Green, Tappin and Bently (2020); Licite-Kurbe and Leonovica (2021) have summarised these benefits on behalf of the employer and included rental costs reduction, Telephone and Internet costs reduced, Equipment: includes expenses on printers, worktops, computer chairs and other office equipment; Electricity usage costs which are classified as overheads costs. Some of the participants have also mentioned these benefits that the employer can enjoy as well.

Other advantages of working from home that have been mentioned by the participants included: Time-effectiveness, which is affected by reducing the time spent travelling from home to the office and focused on being productive; being flexible where employees can attend to personal matters without impeding on deliverables and Spending time with family is when employees that work from home get more time to spend with loved ones.

Xiao Becerik-Gerber, Lucas, and Roll, S.C. (2020) highlighted specific advantages for WFH workers, such as reducing daily commute times and providing greater freedom for employees to care for their family. They have emphasised that WFH gives workers the ability to work when they are most productive, and it can help them avoid distractions from other employees especially in open-plan offices. The findings were similar a recent National Bureau of Economic Research study, that has concluded that working from home and cutting down on commutes to the office result in higher productivity (Mearian,2023).

2. Challenges of working from home

This is consistent with the study's second objective, which was to determine the challenges experienced by participants who worked from home. The most common challenge that has been highlighted by all the participants, which affects the employer too, is reduced electricity supply called load shedding "is a controlled process that responds to unplanned events to protect the electricity power system from a total blackout. While we generally use the word blackout loosely to mean "no lights" in our local area, a country-wide blackout has much more serious consequences. Blackouts occur when there is too much electricity demand and too little supply, bringing the power system into an imbalance and consequently tripping the power system in its entirety". To reduce the strain on the power supply system when Eskom is unable to meet a high demand for electricity, loadshedding is the action taken by the electricity provider (Eskom) in the form of rolling power cuts according to Mabunda, Mukonza and Mudzanani (2023). The authors have emphasised that Loadshedding remains one of the country's most critical challenges and has affected day-to-day business activities in South Africa.

Other identified challenges include shortage of tools of trade, for instance, equipment, devices, and machinery that are normally used in the profession. Similar to research conducted by Al Azzawi (2023), who studied MENA countries like Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Tunisia. The study emphasised that a reliable connection to the internet and the ability to access the right devices are essential for telework to be successful.

In South Africa, a study by Van Wyk, Kotze, Tshabalala and Mukhati (2021), discovered that establishing reliable tools of trade and devices to optimise productivity while working remotely. This was supported by a finding on access to infrastructure such as technological devices and an Internet connection was also identified as one of the obstacles that hinders the success of online work and learning, according to Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo (2020). This study emphasised this challenge which is primarily related to a lack of Internet connectivity and electronic devices.

Employees mentioned themes like Household Distractions which are factors that divert an employee's focus from work; quality of performance being affected by lack of conducive work environment and employee failing to delineate between time for work and that for home responsibilities, i.e., struggling with maintaining work-life balance.

These challenges are similar to those in previous studies like Botha and Coetzee (2022) from a South African perspective, Ipsen *et al.* (2021) studied the European countries, Aczel *et al.* (2021) in Hungary and Singh, Watson, and Nair (2022) who all reported similar results from their studies.

3. The kind of skills and knowledge required for employees to work effectively from home

The required skills can be classified into soft and hard or technical skills (Lyu and Liu, 2021; Srinivasan and Thangaraj, 2021; Malykhin, Aristova, Kalinina and Opaliuk, 2021). These identified skills include being computer literate and understanding use of computers and related technologies. Other soft skills themes that should be possessed by employees to work from home effectively, include being able to work independently; time management, i.e., being able to plan and organise activities/tasks; self-discipline, i.e., being able to monitor self in terms of meeting deadlines and working as required by the working environment and knowledge of organisational policies and procedures.

4. The kind of support the employees need for them to operate effectively from home

The participants identified the availability of line managers as well as the need for moral and mental support as crucial for them to function effectively from home. Tsang, Liu, and Nguyen (2023) found similar results in their studies. They have further explained that employees who work from home might experience stress because of the way that the work and family spheres overlap, manifesting out as a sense of family to work conflict. As a result, there should be a balance in the moral and mental support from either the employer or the family structure of the employee, which will help in reaching a state of homeostasis. An employee needs to reach or attain the tendency towards a relatively stable equilibrium between interdependent element to be productive.

Tools of trade which participants have defined as enabling infrastructure, is also identified as one of the most significant elements required to be effective when working from home. These themes that have been identified by the participants of this study, are common with numerous research around the world (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė and Goštautaitė, 2019).

Themes that emerged from the interviews were either internal or external to both the employers and employees as the external variable include for instance, loadshedding, which is specific to the business environment in South Africa. The results have been summarised as in table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Summary of results

Themes	Advantages of working from home	Challenges of working from home	Required skills to work effectively at home	Support structures needed to work effectively at home
Sub-themes	Reduced Costs	Load Shedding	Independence	Availability of line Managers
	Time Effective	Household Distractions	Computer Literacy	Moral and mental support
	Flexibility	Shortage of tools of trade	Time Management	Tools of trade
	Spending time with Family members	Performance	Self-Discipline	
		Work-Life Balance	Knowledge of policies and procedures	

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this section of chapter five (5) are linked to the research objectives and questions that have been outlined in chapter one (1). The organisation that has been selected for purposes of the study intends utilising the hybrid mode of work from now going forward, i.e., having employees come to the office only on some days that will be determined but work from home the rest of the time. The aim of these recommendations is to assist employers and employees to minimise the risk or close the gap on the challenges experienced by the participants while working from home. The current study recommends the following:

5.3.1 Education and Training

- ***Knowledge and skills required to work effectively from home:*** The organisation, through their department of organisational development. should arrange training in skills that the participants identified as essential for them to work effectively from home. Those skills training include time management; computer literacy and understanding the use of computers and related technologies; being able to work independently; and knowledge of organisational policies and procedures. The identified training interventions can be delivered using web-based platform or virtually, peer-to-peer learning, remote coaching, policy discussions and continuing support for software and other tools.

- *Coaching and mentoring:* some of the skills required can be enhanced through coaching and mentoring. The skills such as professional competencies as well as time management for instance.

- *(Re)orientation and refresher training on policies and procedures:* Employees suggested that the employer conduct reorientation, refresher training, ongoing training interventions, and policy updates. Existing data protection, confidentiality and security policies should form part of the critical training interventions by ensuring awareness and compliance. This will guarantee that the employees are well-informed of their rights, responsibilities, and the appropriate actions to take in various employment-related events. The refresher and reorientation training interventions will also assist the employees to close the skills gap and be productive while working from home.

5.3.2 Support

The support measures recommended resonate with what the participants identified as what they need for them to be effective when working from home. The study recommends:

- *Information and Communications Technology support:* When an employee encounters a technical issue, an information and technology technician should be readily accessible. The technician must be ready to support the employees by remotely connecting to their computers and accessing their electronic devices. If the technician was unable to resolve the technical problem remotely, arrangements should be made for that employee to physically connect in the office.

- *Employee Wellness Programme:* The primary goal of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) is to provide expert guidance and support to both employers and employees in addressing work-related mental health concerns that could impact an employee's productivity (Azmi, Ahmad, Mustafa, and Mohd Zaki, 2022) the participants explained that they need emotional support due to the loneliness of working alone from home as well as struggles that are personal (e.g. financial) but can impact the quality of work.

- *Availability and accessibility of Supervisors:* To be offered any kind of support, participants have highlighted how important it is that their direct managers, line

managers, and supervisors be reachable, accessible, and available to offer them professional support.

5.3.3 Resources:

- *Equipment:* for the participants to work effectively from home, they need to be provided with tools of trade in the form of laptops with substantial storage capacity, computer software, access to the Internet, access to host applications. The provided tools of the trades should be in good working conditions, and there should not be limitations on internet connectivity. This necessity of equipment was also emphasised by the participants themselves.

- *Budget: A* budget should be allocated for procuring tools of trade, i.e., resources, and replace outdated devices, and purchase all the equipment needed.

5.3.4 Way forward in terms of working from home or from the office:

To capitalise on the numerous benefits of working from home as outlined by the participants, the employer can implement a hybrid working arrangements or working model. It is a work arrangement that combines remote working and being physical in the office. This model entails a combination of weekly or daily work schedules which alternate between working remotely and in person. The implementation of the hybrid model will also assist employees who are unable to work from home due to challenges that some of the participants mentioned in this study and perhaps more that are not mentioned here.

Before implementing the model, a policy or standard operating procedure needs to be crafted and communicated to all involved stakeholders for their understanding and buy in.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to investigate the benefits and challenges of working from home in a client services department of a public sector organisation in Limpopo. The research study used a qualitative research design and conducted in-depth interviews to collect data from the participants.

Thematic data analysis method was used to analyse information, which resulted in common themes that were identified in line with the research objectives. The

participants identified advantages that include reduced costs, especially travelling cost; time effectiveness; flexibility and spending time with family members. The fact that now they perceive one of the advantages of working from home as being able to spend time with family may be an indication of family interfering or conflicting with work responsibilities, a phenomenon known as work-life conflict, specifically life-to-work interference.

Challenges of working from home according to this study include electricity outages due to load shedding; household distractions (agreeing with the life-to-work interference already alluded to above) and shortage of tools of trade, i.e., resources that are vital to utilise to be effective and productive employees.

The participants further identified the kind of skills and competencies that they require for them to work effectively from home. Those identified skills include computer literacy; confidence in the professional knowledge of their jobs; knowledge of policies and procedures; and some soft skills such as time management.

Recommendations include the need to mount training programmes, mentoring, and coaching support of employees and crafting policies for the hybrid way of working proposed going forward.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has the following limitations:

1. The study focused on a client services department of a public sector organisation in Limpopo Province only implying that the results might not be generalisable. However, the results may be used by similar institutions and can guide future research.
2. Utilisation of a qualitative method also implies that only a small sample was used in this study. Therefore, future research might want to focus on bigger samples to see if they offer similar or different results.

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APPENDIX A - CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant

My name is Hope Ralehlaka, and have enrolled to study, for a masters degree in Business Administration at the University of Limpopo. I am currently writing a research project for completing my studies. I invite you to participate in this research study by conducting an interview. The aim of the study is to determine the benefits and challenges of working from home, and the experiences of employees of a Government Department in Polokwane.

Due to the current Corona Virus restrictions, I cannot conduct these interviews face to face. Therefore, this interview will be conducted via telephone or through MS Team. Please note that participating in this study is voluntary, you may opt not to take part altogether or not to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You are assured that the responses given will remain confidential and anonymous. The collected data from this study will be protected and no one else will know your answers to the questions to be asked.

This interview is scheduled to take 45 - 60 minutes. If you agree to participate, kindly sign underneath. Your participation is highly appreciated.

For any enquiries, please feel free to contact me at 0732764371 or hralehlaka@yahoo.com.

_____

Signed (Participant)   Date

APPENDIX B - INTERVIEW GUIDE

Title of study: Benefits and challenges of working from home: experiences of Government employees working in Polokwane.

SECTION A: Demographic Information

Kindly tick or cross the applicable box:

1.Age Group	18-35	36 - 45	346 - 55	56 - 65	Other, please specify
2. Gender	Male		Female		Other, please specify
3. Race	African	White	Asian	Coloured	Other, please specify
4. Occupation category	Student		Staff member		Other, please specify
5. Rank/ Occupation al level					
5. Number of years' experience					

SECTION B: To determine experiences of working from home:

7. Did you opt to work from home, as allowed by your employer? Yes/No

 If yes, indicate reason/s

_____

_____

If no, indicate the reason/s for your decision

_____

_____

8. What do you think are the benefits of working from home?

_____

_____

_____

9. What do you think are the challenges of working from home?

_____

_____

10. According to you, what kind of skills do employees require for them to work efficiently from home?

_____

_____

_____

11. What kind of support do employees who work from home require from their organisation for them to perform effectively?

_____

_____

_____

12. Do you have any other information to add on the topic under discussion?

_____

_____

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS MUCH APPRECIATED

APPENDIX C - LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

5099

7 Motse Street,

Celtic Meadow Estates,

Bendor.

0699

14 December 2022

Research Head,

████████████████████

██████████

████████████

██████████████

██████████████

██████

████

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request for permission to conduct research

I, Oniccah Hope Ralehlaka, am a registered masters' student in the Faculty of Management and Law at the University of Limpopo. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am required to conduct a research study. The proposed topic of my research study is: "working from home: experiences of employees of a government department in Polokwane, Limpopo province." I hereby request permission to conduct the research within the South African Revenue Services (SARS).

The purpose of the study is to investigate the benefits and challenges of working from home in a client services department of a public sector organisation in Limpopo. Data collected will be kept confidential and will not be shared with any unnecessary parties.

In addition, it will be ensured that the research activities do not interfere with any employee's own work, including me as an employee of the institution. In addition, the service delivery in the organisation will not be affected during data collection processes.

Attached to this letter are:

(a)   A copy of the research proposal

(b)   A copy of an ethical clearance certificate issued by the University.

(c)   A copy of the research instrument to be used in the study.

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide SARS with a bound copy of the mini dissertation.

Your permission to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

Should any further information be required, please do not hesitate to contact me at hralehlaka@sars.gov.za or 073 276 4371.

Yours sincerely,

_____   _____

Ms O.H. Ralehlaka   **Date**

(Researcher)

APPENDIX D - APPROVAL TO COLLECT DATA FROM THE ORGANISATION

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

DATA AND INFORMATION REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

TO	███████████ ███	CC	█████████ ██████
FROM		REFERENCE	
TEL NUMBER	012	DATE	
PRIORITY	High		
SUBJECT			
RECOMMENDATION	Approval of data/information for research purposes		

☒ Approval   ☐ Verification

☐ For Your Records   ☐ Information

☐ Action as required   ☐ Proof Reading

Funding for this study:

☐ Bursary   ☐ Self-funded

On completion, please forward to:

☒ Sender   ☐

Other

Comments:

Provide a high-level summary of the request

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

1. Background

Provide a brief background that relates to the context of your study.

2. Project Description

Provide brief description of the following:

- Research questions/hypothesis
- Analysis
- Expected processes for disseminating findings.
- Why such data are needed instead of public data.

3. Request

Request the data sets/information required – List, preferably in table format, the specific data elements you are requesting.

Indicate the timeframe in which the data request to be sourced.

4. Data Security and Access Plan:

Describe the procedure for protecting privacy and confidentiality of any Individual, including encryption, handling, transmitting and/or storing of the data, including reported results.

5. Signatories

REQUESTOR: **APPROVED / NOT APPROVED:**

                                                                             On behalf of ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

▮▮▮▮▮

Name: **Name:** ▮▮▮▮▮▮

Title: **Designation:**

Date: **Date:**

APPENDIX E - ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 4713, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email:
trec@ul.ac.za

TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: **09 January 2023**

PROJECT NUMBER:

TREC/16/2023:PG<u>PROJECT:</u>

Title:	Working from home: experiences of employees of a government department inPolokwane, Limpopo province
Researcher:	OH Ralehlaka
Supervisor:	Dr MF Rachidi
Co-Supervisor/s:	N/A
School:	Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership
Degree:	Master of Business Administration

PROF D MAPOSA
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research EthicsCouncil, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**

Note:

i)   This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.

ii)   Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol.

iii)   +l to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.

iv)   PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

APPENDIX F – SCHOOL APPROVAL

STUDENT NAME: RALEHLAKA OH (202176644)
TURFLOOP GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP
MASTER OF BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION

Dear OH Ralehlaka

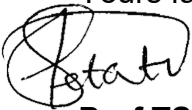**FACULTY RATIFICATION OF SCHOOL APPROVED PROPOSAL**

I have pleasure in informing you that the Faculty of Management and Law has ratified the decision for the approval of Masters Research proposal. The research proposal has served at the School Higher Degrees Committee meeting on **02 September 2022,** and it was approved as follows:

Title: ''Working from Home: Experiences of Employees of a Government Department in Polokwane, Limpopo Province.''

Note the following: The study.

Ethical Clearance	Tick One
Requires no ethical clearance Proceed with the study	
Requires ethical clearance (Human) (TREC) (apply online) Proceed with the study only after receipt of ethical clearance certificate	√
Requires ethical clearance (Animal) (AREC) Proceed with the study only after receipt of ethical clearance certificate	

Yours faithfully,

Prof TS Setati
Research Professor: Faculty Research Higher Degrees Committee
CC: Supervisor, Prof MF Rachidi; Acting Programme Manager, Prof TJ Musandiwa; Acting Director of School, Prof SK Mokoena.