

Remote work employee productivity in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The concept of remote work has become a popular buzzword, yet its impact on productivity remained an unanswered question. The pandemic gave companies the opportunity to adopt remote work on a larger scale, leading to a significant increase in the number of employees working from home in South Africa.

This study examined remote work impact on employee productivity, delving into the challenges, and factors contributing into feasibility of remote work in South Africa. The purpose of this research was to investigate the productivity levels of remote based employees in South Africa. There was a perception that remote work resulted in different levels of productivity, and this research aimed to understand if the perception was correct and further investigated this assumption.

This qualitative study is underpinned by the TOE framework and employed a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of remote workers. Through in-depth interviews, the purposively selected participants were able to share their personal insights and perspectives, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges, benefits, and complexities of working remotely. By using this method, the research aimed to give voice to the experiences of those directly affected by remote work, offering a rich and detailed account of how it affects their daily lives and influences productivity.

The key findings from the study reveal that while remote work offers certain advantages, such as flexibility and elimination of daily travel to the office, it also presents challenges like feelings of isolation and technology challenges such as poor network connections and load shedding pose as a significant risk for the success of remote work. Employee well-being, in particular, emerges as a critical factor that significantly affects employee's productivity, with positive mental well-being being linked to higher productivity, and poor mental health potentially leading to decreased productivity.

This study offers valuable insights into the significant impact remote work has on employee productivity and emphasizes the importance of maintaining positive mental well-being to ensure ongoing productivity. It further contributes to the body

of knowledge on changing perceptions of remote work productivity in South Africa. Additionally, the study explores the factors and challenges affecting remote workers and assesses the feasibility of remote work in South Africa.

KEYWORDS

Remote work, Employee productivity, Office-based work, Hybrid work, WOFA, Conducive space, Tools of trade, Work-personal life balance, Employee well-being, Productivity

DECLARATION

I, Thembi Khobane, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Digital Business at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Name: **Thembi Khobane**

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Signed at Johannesburg

On the 12th day of August 2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my incredible family, whose love, strength, and unwavering support have been the driving force behind every step of this journey.

To my dad, your resilience and fighting spirit have been my greatest inspiration. Watching you battle through challenges with such determination reminded me that giving up was never an option. You taught me the value of perseverance, and I knew I had to finish what I started.

To my mom, thank you for being the unwavering foundation of our family. Your endless care for dad, particularly as he fights cancer, and your constant support have been beyond words. Your love and sacrifices never go unnoticed, and I am endlessly grateful for all that you do.

To my baby brother, thank you for being there for me during the challenging times that came our way as a family while I was working on my research. Your constant belief in me has meant the world. You are the best brother I could ever ask for, and I wouldn't trade you for anything.

And to my one and only son, I am so proud of you. Your patience, understanding, and determination while I spent countless hours studying are truly remarkable. As you prepared for your matric exams, you inspired me to keep pushing forward. You are my rock, my best friend, and my confidant. Together, we proved that as a family, we are unstoppable, and I couldn't be prouder of you for successfully passing your matric exams.

This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

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I want to further express my deepest gratitude to my friends, family, and my partner. I apologize for not being fully present at times, but I hope you know I was there in spirit. I truly appreciate your amazing patience and understanding, and for giving me the space to focus on my research. Your support has been invaluable, and I am truly grateful for your love, sacrifices, and commitment throughout this journey.

As stated in the book of Matthew, *"With God, all things are possible"* (Matthew 19:26).

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
SA	South Africa
SSI	Semi-Structured Interviews
TA	Thematic Analysis
TOE	Technology, Organization & Environment
WAFO	Work Away from Home
ICT	Information Communication Technology

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of purpose

The research aimed to investigate the level of productivity of remote-based employees in South Africa. There had been a perception that remote work resulted in different levels of productivity, and this research intended to determine whether this was correct and to further investigate this assumption. The validity of this assumption is confirmed in the findings.

1.2 Background of the study

The research focused on the productivity of remote work employees in South Africa, a shift triggered by the global pandemic that began on December 31, 2019 (World Health Organization, 2021), when the People's Republic of China announced an outbreak of the Coronavirus (Lawrence, 2020). The event brought about a major shift in work practices, forcing organizations to implement changes in how work was performed, including the introduction of remote work (Howe et al., 2020). This raised concerns about the potential impact on employee productivity (Galanti et al., 2021).

The global pandemic crisis forced governments worldwide to enforce lockdown measures, restricting millions of people to their homes in an effort to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Saha & Dutta, 2020). During this time, most organizations in South Africa adopted working from home, providing a new level of flexibility for many employees (Marques et al., 2023).

It is over five years since the emergence of COVID-19, and remote work has gained popularity. This shift has led many employees to prefer remote work over returning to the office, with some people now viewing remote work as an employee entitlement (Ferreira et al., 2020). Marques et al. (2023) further shares the view that remote work is here to stay, a perspective also echoed by Smite et al. (2023), who highlight that many employees regard 2020 as the turning point

for the end of office-based work, with numerous organizations adapting to the remote work concept (Matli, 2020).

Remote work, while often considered a modern trend, is not a recent development. In fact, it has its roots in the 1970s, a time when IBM introduced the first portable computer, the IBM-5100 (Zaletov, 2022). This groundbreaking invention, coupled with the rapid advancement of technology particularly the internet and wireless networks, allowed employees to perform their work activities from locations outside of the typical office settings (Gillen, 2019). The concept of working remotely gradually gained traction over the years, especially as technology continued to evolve and become more accessible (Singh et al., 2022).

In South Africa, however, working from home was not widely adopted until more recently spiked by the pandemic (Marques et al., 2023). Before the pandemic, this model was not as popular as now, however, a significant shift occurred with the onset of Covid-10 pandemic, and there has been a marked increase in the number of South African employees working from home since then (Matli, 2020). The global health crisis forced businesses to adapt to remote work solutions quickly, and this shift in work culture has persisted, even post-pandemic (Vyas, 2022). Most South Africans worked in offices or factories even though the introduction of personal computers and better internet access started to make remote work possible, especially in fields like telecommunications and IT around early 2000s (Enaifoghe, & Zenzile, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 forced many businesses in South Africa to quickly switch to remote work to meet lockdown requirements (Saha & Dutta, 2020). This demonstrated that remote work could be effective even in challenging conditions, prompting a shift in how office work was perceived, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic time (Wang et al., 2021). After the pandemic, many companies in South Africa continued with remote work with some adopting to hybrid work arrangements, allowing employees to work both from home and the office (Marques et al., 2023). Although the digital divide in South Africa remains a challenge with unequal internet access in some areas such as rural and townships (Venter & Daniels, 2020), remote work continued post pandemic and

has since become a norm for most organisations, creating new opportunities for remote work employees.

There is a debate on how remote work could potentially impact employee productivity (Bloom et al., 2023). The physical presence of employees at their workplace does not necessarily signify their full potential engagement (Moletsane et al., 2019), and the main difference between remote and office-based work is the physical location where the tasks are performed. Da Costa and Loureiro (2019) regard employees as the most critical assets for organizations, and they can influence productivity positively or negatively regardless of the area where the work is conducted. Furthermore, Utete (2023) views an organization's success as highly dependent on its employees, and it is an absolute necessity for organizations to increase employee productivity and produce profitable results to survive in highly competitive, rapidly changing markets (Thatrak, 2021). In an era where remote work is increasingly becoming a norm, maintaining high employee productivity is crucial and should not be underestimated.

It is widely acknowledged that organizations are increasingly becoming more competitive (Kakabadse & Bank, 2018), and this has sparked the drive to keep employees highly productive, striving for excellence and long-term success. Productive employees play a crucial role in driving organizational success by consistently delivering high-quality work and contributing positively to the organization's success (Singh et al., 2022). Subsequently, high-performing organizations are regarded as those that encourage employee engagement in decision-making, which results in higher employee productivity (Chukwuemeka, 2020).

This research critically examined the real-world experiences and challenges faced by South African employees who were abruptly forced to shift to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also assessed the ongoing viability of remote work. While numerous studies have explored working from home, our primary focus was on its direct impact on employee productivity. By investigating this issue, we were able to examine the various factors influencing productivity, with a particular focus on the interaction between technology, organizations, and the environment within the remote work context. This research offers valuable

insights into how remote work impacts employee productivity, helping organizations decide whether to continue with remote work or return to the office.

1.3 Research problem

The remote work is a buzzword, that has gained the interest of employers and employees alike. Some having a preference to work from home while others choose to return to work (Bloom et al., 2023). How does it translate to productivity remained a question we needed to answer. The pandemic enabled organizations to experience remote work, and we have seen a significant rise in more employees working from home (Ferreira et al., 2020), a trend further supported by Van Rheede (2023). With the COVID-19 pandemic behind us, life has gradually returned to normal. However, there remains an ongoing debate among employees and employers (Bloom et al., 2023), with some advocating for a full return to the office, while others continued to support remote work. The employees have experienced working from home, and they prefer not to return to the office (Smite et al., 2023).

Magwentshu et al. (2019) emphasised that employees are seeking clarity regarding post-pandemic working arrangements, a sentiment further echoed by Alexander et al. (2021), who state that employees require clarity on post-pandemic work arrangements, a decision that remains uncertain for many employers. This uncertainty is important especially when evaluating the impact of remote work on employee productivity (Bloom et al., 2023). Research show that productive employees not only produce high-quality results but also significantly contribute to an organisation's profitability (Schneider, 2022). Da Costa and Loureiro (2019) state that employees are crucial to organisation's success and growth. In today's highly competitive market, organisations must focus on productivity to stay ahead on their competitors (Singh et al., 2022). This study examined the impact of remote work on employee productivity within a selected sample in South Africa, providing valuable insights into how remote work influences productivity. The research underscores the importance of optimising employee productivity as a key factor in ensuring a company's competitiveness and success.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions this study explored were:

1. How does remote work influence employee productivity?
2. What technological challenges do remote work employees face, and how does it impact productivity?
3. What factors contribute to the feasibility of remote work in South Africa, and how would this impact productivity?

1.5 Rationale

The measures implemented to manage the COVID-19 pandemic have played a significant role in reshaping the way we work, and while many aspects of life returned to a sense of normalcy, remote work remained a dominant trend (Matli, 2020). A large portion of the workforce continues to operate from home, indicating a shift away from traditional office-based work. This shift suggests that the conventional office environment may be fading into the past (Smite et al., 2023), as the world increasingly embraces the digital era (Perrin et al., 2022). Workers, having experienced the flexibility and benefits of remote work (Franken et al., 2021), have come to appreciate it, which has led to ongoing tensions between employers and employees (Bloom et al., 2023). The disagreement around calls for employees to return to the office, a demand that many workers find unsatisfactory, contributing to continued disputes on this issue.

A recent report by OfferZen (2024) in South Africa reveals that a large number of IT developers working remotely are more likely to resign if forced to return to the office. The findings indicate that remote work has become firmly embedded in the work culture and is expected to continue for decades (Marques et al., 2023). This shift is viewed as a transformative change in the way work will be structured in the future, with remote work now recognised as a permanent and fundamental approach to conducting business.

The study looked into the factors that affect remote work and how they impact employee productivity. It explored how productive remote employees are and aimed to help both employers and employees better understand the concept of working away from office (WAFO). By examining these important factors, the research aimed to bring both sides closer together, providing useful insights to help manage remote work more effectively. The study also offered clear and practical advice on how to handle remote work, giving recommendations that can help both companies and employees make better decisions and improve how remote work is set up and carried out.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

The research explored the experiences and perceptions of South African employees regarding remote work with a particular focus on how it impacts their productivity. The study is subject to certain delimitations, which are outlined as follows:

- i) The research was conducted with a small, diverse group of South African employees currently working remotely, representing a wide range of industries, roles, and experience levels. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of remote work across various sectors.
- ii) The research did not restrict on participants by geography or gender.
- iii) The research included technological factors that impact remote work productivity in the context of South Africa.
- iv) The study was of limited to examining the feasibility remote work within the context of South Africa determining its practicality.
- v) The research was conducted exclusively in English allowing consistency approach in data collection and analysis.
- vi) The research interviews were conducted online using the Microsoft Teams application, which facilitated remote communication and enabled the interviews to be recorded for future reference and analysis.

1.7 Definition of terms

Definitions used in this research are illustrated in the table below:

Table 1-1: Definition of Terms

No.	Term	Definition
1.	COVID-19	An infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (World Health Organization, 2021)
2.	Hybrid	Is a flexible work model that supports a blend of in-office, remote, and on-the-go workers.
3.	Pandemic	A transmittable disease outbreak that occurs on a global scale and affects many people across the countries (World Health Organization, 2021)
4.	Productivity	The overall efficiency with which inputs are transformed into outputs (Shao & Tang, 2024)
5.	Remote work	Refers to tasks that employees can perform from locations outside the usual office environment.
6.	WAFO	A term used to describe working away from the office
7.	Employee Productivity	The efficiency with which workers complete tasks and produce results, often measured by output per hour worked, quality of output, or goal attainment (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

1.8 Assumptions

The study explored the assumption that remote work affects employee productivity and that technological challenges play a role in influencing this productivity. Additionally, it explored the assumption that remote work will continue to be feasible in South Africa. The following further assumptions guided this research:

- i) The sampled participants shared their remote work experiences honestly and had sufficient experience to provide meaningful insights.
- ii) The participant's experiences with remote work were representative of the broader workforce in similar sectors and accurately represents challenges and remote work benefits.

- iii) The participants had a clear understanding of the remote work concept and could reflect on it accurately.

Based on these assumptions, this research explored the perception that remote work leads to varying levels of productivity. The assumptions underlying this study were based on the belief that the sampled participants were honest and open about their experiences with remote work, as they willingly engaged in the research. It is further assumed that the participants shared their genuine, first-hand experiences, which reflected the broader pool of employees in the similar sectors. Additionally, it was assumed that the participants had a clear understanding of the remote work concept and could accurately reflect on it. The study also assumed that the data collected would effectively represent the challenges and benefits of remote work, as the participants had sufficient experience and provided meaningful and insightful contributions. These assumptions guided the research and ensured the relevance and reliability of the findings.

1.9 Chapter Outline

This research examined the impact of remote work on employee productivity within South Africa. The significance of the study was highlighted by the rapid adoption of remote work practices, particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to understand how these changes impacted productivity. The study focused on South African employees engaged in remote work and excluded non-remote work arrangements and other countries to maintain a clear and specific focus. These delimitations helped streamline the research and ensured that the findings were directly applicable to South Africa.

The research questions were designed to investigate the impact of remote work on employee productivity levels in South Africa, seeking to understand the key dynamics that influence this relationship. The study identified the factors that either enhance or hinder productivity in a remote work environment, providing a comprehensive look at the various elements that shape remote work outcomes. Furthermore, the research explored the perceptions and experiences of employees, focusing on their views and understanding of how remote work

affects productivity. By examining the perspectives of these remote work employees, the study provided a balanced and in-depth understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with remote work productivity in the South African context.

The report is structured into six chapters, each with its own purpose. Chapter 1 forms the foundation of the study, providing a comprehensive overview of the research. It outlines the study's objectives, offers a clear definition of the research problem, and delves into the rationale behind undertaking the study. This chapter sets the stage for understanding the significance of the research. In Chapter 2, the existing literature on remote work is reviewed, covering key terms, factors, and challenges that are believed to affect employee productivity in remote settings. Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology, outlining the processes and techniques used for data collection and analysis. It describes the approach taken to gather relevant information, the tools and methods employed to ensure accuracy and reliability, and how the data was systematically analysed to address the research questions. Chapters 4 and 5 focused on presenting and discussing the findings from the data collected, providing insights into the patterns and results that were discovered. In conclusion, Chapter 6 wraps up the report by summarizing the key findings, synthesizing the results, and providing practical recommendations for future action or application based on the study's conclusions.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter represents a literature review on the key concepts relating to remote work employee productivity, specifically with an emphasis on the aspects of people and technology. This chapter explored in detail the factors that influence remote work productivity, highlighting the key elements that contribute to the perception of varying productivity levels. This research analysed existing literature on remote work, focusing on the factors and challenges that impact employee productivity while also assessing the feasibility of remote work in South Africa. It explored various definitions, theories, and approaches related to remote work productivity. Additionally, the review examined how remote work influences productivity, highlighting the key factors that affect it.

The review explored several critical themes in remote work employee productivity in South Africa. Firstly, this research explored the origins of remote work in South Africa and how it impacts employee productivity. It further examined various factors, such as work environment, communication methods, and flexibility, that contribute to or hinder productivity levels in remote settings. Additionally, the study considered how aspects like motivation, work-life balance, and team dynamics play a role in shaping overall productivity among remote employees. By analysing these elements, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between remote work and productivity outcomes.

Secondly, the research investigated the technological challenges associated with remote work and how these obstacles affect employee productivity. This includes examining issues such as unreliable internet connections, inadequate hardware or software, and difficulties with virtual collaboration tools. The study also explored the implications of these challenges on overall productivity. By analysing these technological factors, the research highlighted the critical role that technology plays in facilitating or hindering productivity in remote work environments.

Finally, the research investigated the future and feasibility of remote work in South Africa. This examination covered several factors, including current trends in the adoption of remote work, regional economic conditions, and the infrastructure needed to support a remote workforce. It also identified potential obstacles, such as cultural perceptions of remote work and access to reliable technology. Furthermore, the study analysed how changes in the global workforce and local policies impacted the sustainability of remote work practices in South Africa. By exploring these dimensions, the research sought to offer insights into the viability and long-term outlook for remote work in the country.

The chapter concluded by presenting the conceptual framework that underpins the study and providing a summary of the key insights on productivity in remote work environments in South Africa.

2.2 Evolution of remote work

Remote work is defined as work that can be completed outside of a traditional office environment, using information and communication technologies to enable flexible working practices according to Ng et al. (2022). It is a work setup where employees carry out their tasks elsewhere outside the office spaces (Enaifoghe, & Zenzile, 2023). Many businesses around the world use this work setting and in South Africa we have since seen the rise of this since emergence of Covid-19 pandemic (Smite et al., 2023). There are two types of remote work include full remote work, where employees work entirely from home, and hybrid remote work, where they split their time between home and the office (Collier & Osiki, 2024). Typically, remote work refers to working from home. This arrangement is also known by other terms such as telecommuting, virtual working, working from home (WFH), working away from office (WAFO), and teleworking, which are often used interchangeably (Sokolic, 2022).

The literature suggests that remote work is not a modern idea; it has existed for centuries (Ferreira et al., 2020), a sentiment further supported by Popovici and Popovici (2020) emphasising that remote work has been in existence well before the creation of office spaces. The history of remote work highlights the benefits

of working from home and underscores how combining work and living spaces enables families and communities to share resources efficiently, optimize their space, and collaborate for everyone's advantage (Brie & Bibby, 2017).

The industrial revolution shift took workers out of their homes and into factories (Brie & Bibby, 2017). The early 20th century saw the rise of modern office spaces. The creation of the first commercial workspaces was groundbreaking, accelerated by innovations like the telephone, telegraph, electric power, and typewriter (Gillen, 2019). These inventions paved the way for the remote communication technologies we use today. Additionally, the growth of public transportation made commuting more accessible, becoming a common practice. This period also marked the expansion of professional opportunities for women, who moved beyond traditional craft or domestic roles (Asimeng & Balasubramanian, 2024). For both men and women, work became increasingly associated with leaving home to work in offices or factories.

In South Africa, the traditional nine-to-five office work model has historically been built on fixed schedules and locations for most sectors (Hofmeyr, 2022). Flexible working was not standard for most organisations; however, the emergence of Covid-19 has transformed the way work is approached (Saha & Dutta, 2020). Employers needed to explore new strategies to keep business operations running, and working from home became a clear solution. Consequently, the flexibility of working from home emerged as a new norm for many organisations (Matli, 2020).

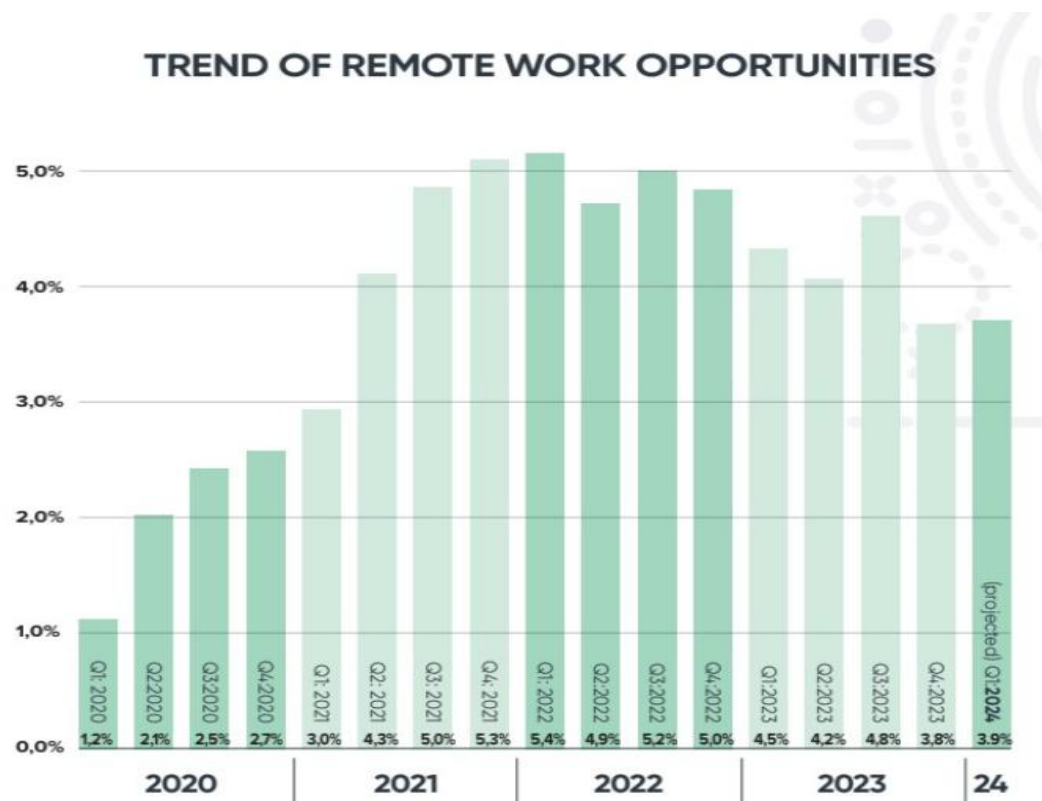
The adoption of remote work in South Africa became more popular during the COVID-19 pandemic as it became one of the technique methods used to minimize unemployment and allow employees to perform their duties outside the traditional confined office space settings, responding to curving the spread of the virus (Aleem et al., 2023). Remote work is a growing trend in South Africa, reflecting a return to a well-established work style, making it not a new concept. Marques et al. (2023) highlight that remote work is here to stay, a perspective reinforced by Smite et al. (2023), who stress that employees increasingly prefer working from home and demand greater flexibility in the future. It is further noted

that more employees post pandemic prefers a more flexible working model (Alexander et al., 2021).

2.2.1 Technology influence on remote work

The World is rapidly changing, and the convergence of digital technologies has become a driving force for digital transformation, which is disruptive and will continue to change how people communicate, interact, and transact (Vermesan & Bacquet, 2022). As a result of these vast technological advancements, the state of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) sector in South Africa has shown slight growth over the recent years and continues to be an important contributor to the GDP (Shava, 2021). According to BusinessTech (Fraser, 2024) states that approximately 4% of job vacancies in South Africa currently include remote work options, with certain roles providing more opportunities than others in the post-pandemic era, as illustrated in the table below:

Table 2-1: Remote work opportunities trend (Source: Fraser, 2024)



Additionally, the increasing penetration of the internet is driving the South African citizens to become tech-savvy and since the emergence of COVID-19, and South Africa is ranked third among the African countries with the largest number of internet users on the continent. Internet connectivity in South Africa has grown considerably, with 45.34 million active users reported at the start of 2024. This surge highlights the broader availability of online services throughout the country, fuelled by improvements in infrastructure and mobile technology (Statista, 2024). The internet remains the most popular and powerful communication digital technology tool.

Despite all these advancement developments, the South Africa still faces challenges like the digital divide that placed more people at a greater societal disadvantage due to poor or lack of access to internet connectivity (Lembani et al., 2020), further mentioned in the State of the ICT Sector report (Independent Communications Authority of South Africa, 2023). The high unemployment rate is another challenge that makes affordability an issue, as well as infrastructure constraints in the underserved markets. The overall industries in South Africa are constantly changing, with new technologies being introduced, and the country is heading in the right direction. The citizens continue to demand faster connectivity and improved services at affordable prices, and companies will need to become more innovative to remain competitive and adapt to the changing markets (Telesa Comms, 2024).

It is a known fact that South Africa has an ongoing power crisis, and President Cyril Ramaphosa declared it a State of National disaster in his national address in February 2023. The long stages of load shedding disrupt the internet, preventing employees from performing their tasks remotely (Erero, 2023). Employees using Fiber or VDSL connections are required to switch to data connections during load shedding, which is an additional cost for data usage, and many may not be able to accommodate the expense. Some network towers also do not have battery backups, and people relying on 3G or 4G networks are not able to access any connectivity during load shedding as the network is down (du Venage, 2020). The challenges discussed here influence the effectiveness of

technology; however, we have determined the productivity levels of remote workers while considering these technological challenges.

2.2.2 Remote work governance

In South Africa, the right to work remotely is not included in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (No. 75 of 1997) or the Labour Relations Act (No. 66 of 1995). South Africa has a robust framework of labour and employment regulations, with various bargaining councils and industry-specific agreements that govern the minimum employment standards across different sectors. Additionally, organisations manage remote work guided by their own internal policies and they are not allowed to change the terms and conditions of employment outlined in these agreements without consulting the appropriate stakeholders (Hofmeyr, 2022). Remote employees require organizational support, which requires strategies to be implemented to ensure that they remain productive, engaged, and connected (Chandan, 2024). Clear work policies need to be in place with defined hours, availability, communications, expectations, and agreed performance metrics (Smite et al., 2023). Organizations must comply with Tax policies to understand and address the implications of employees working in different regions. Implementing these strategies can help establish a supportive remote working environment for employees, fostering better engagement and well-being. This research examined how these strategies translate and impacts employee productivity.

2.3 Remote work employee productivity

According to Felstead and Henseke (2017) and Gillen (2019), remote work employees are individuals who perform their job duties from a location outside their organization's office or workplace. Remote work involves shifting of job tasks to the home environment, with the expectation that the tasks themselves remain unchanged. The main difference lies in the work location and the technological tools used to connect to the office, as well as how collaboration occurs with coworkers (Moletsane et al., 2019).

According to Shao and Tang (2024), productivity is closely linked to efficiency, a view further supported by Wang et al. (2021), who emphasize the strong connection between the two concepts and further highlights that productivity functions as a performance metric that includes both efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, productivity has been demonstrated to significantly enhance both employee and organizational performance, playing a crucial role in organization's ability to gain and sustain a competitive advantage over its rivals (Singh et al., 2022). As a result, employee productivity plays a crucial role in the overall success of an organizations (Turner, 2019), making it essential for organizations to prioritize and foster high levels of productivity among their employees.

The purpose of this study is to investigate remote work employee productivity. There is an ongoing debate about how remote work affects productivity (Bloom et al., 2023), with contrasting viewpoints and evidence from various literature being explored. The Scholars argue that remote work enhances employee productivity as it allows flexibility (Franken et al., 2021), autonomous and employees are in control of their work schedules which allows them to perform the WAFO in the way that suits them without any office distractions (Anakpo et al., 2023).

Furthermore, it has been explored that WAFO saves time and costs as it eliminates factors such as logistics, transportation costs, and travelling to the office (Kajanová & Barteková, 2022), which can negatively impact employee's productivity when working physically at the office (O'Brien & Aliabadi, 2020). The greater benefit that remote work also brings is the ability for employees to continue their careers while starting families and the unanticipated advantages, such as increased creativity resulting from an improved balancing of their personal life and work (Hunter, 2019).

Conversely, some scholars critique that WAFO is not suitable for all employees as some perform better in teams, and lack of team cohesion can result in poor productivity performance (Van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Remote work can hinder productivity due to potential home environment distractions, lack of face-to-face collaboration, and potential feelings of isolation (Lal et al., 2023). The home environment is typically not designed for work, it is

purely meant for personal and families (Charalampous et al., 2020). In a remote work setting, this can create challenges, as employees have to share the space with other family members, and this could lead to potential distractions and a lack of privacy to perform work tasks (Parry, 2025).

Galanti et al. (2021) further argue that the home environment can be extremely distracting, especially when young children are present. The situation becomes even more challenging if there is no assistance and the responsibility to prepare meals for the family and help with schoolwork adds to the distractions. Alexander et al. (2021) acknowledge that many employees perceive remote work as a source of anxiety and burnout, a sentiment further supported by Costin et al. (2023), with numerous individuals reporting these feelings which has a negative impact on productivity. Another downside of remote work is that remote workers often face a range of personal and professional challenges. These challenges, whether related to personal-work-life balance, isolation, or the lack of a structured work environment, can negatively impact their overall well-being. As a result, this decline in well-being can have a detrimental effect on their productivity, making it more difficult to maintain high levels of performance and focus (Popovici & Popovici, 2020).

It is easy to assume that remote work leads to lower efficiency due to home environment distractions such as watching television, home chores and any other activities irrelevant to work. However, this study clarified this assumption and provided a deeper understanding of its validity. While the full extent of remote work's impact on employee productivity still remains uncertain, this research delved into how remote work influences productivity and the broader implications it holds for organizations. Additionally, the study explored the viability of work-away-from-office (WAFO) settings in South Africa, assessing their sustainability and the potential for long-term incorporation into future workplace practices.

2.4 Proposition 1: Explore whether remote work influences employee productivity

Remote work has an impact on both employees and employers. Chiguvi and Bakani (2023) highlight that the impact of remote work on employees can either be positive or negative and similarly, employers can experience the advantages or disadvantages of WAFO. Some of the advantages for remote work employees, as viewed by Beno (2021), include but are not limited to employees saving on costs where they don't have to spend any money traveling to the office and also not spending on food. The employees also have the privilege to work flexible hours where they can attend to their other affairs during working hours and still be able to meet the deadline for the tasks (Jalagat & Jalagat, 2019). Employees also are able to perform the task from any location and are not limited to their homes, and what is required is access to the technological tools that enable remote work (Gillen, 2019); this is a great advantage as work can be done anywhere away from their superiors, and employees are free to move around. The employee has the privilege of deciding when to complete the tasks within the specified deadline timeframe.

While WAFO can also be seen as a benefit for remote work employees, the debate is that it is not suitable for all employees. Even though most employees prefer personal comfort to performing the work away from the office, Yusuf (2021) highlights that one of the biggest challenges for remote work employees is time management and some employees find it difficult to switch off and this has resulted in more hours worked than the formal working hours and balancing work time with some home errands remains a challenge. Being away from the office also means that employees are disconnected from co-workers due to physical and social distance, and some might feel isolated and lonely (Wang et al., 2021). Some scholars argue that the home distractions that remote work come with cannot be ignored. Employees with the presence of young children or family members in their homes might be distracted with relatives popping in and out, babies crying, television noise in the background, barking dogs and all these form part of the challenges faced by WAFO and there is no peace and quietness (Xiao

et al., 2021). In contrast, Lal et al., (2023) argue that office environment is more distractive especially if the whole team is in the office.

The employers are also at a greater remote work advantage, and they can save costs on physical buildings and office spaces whereby they do not have to rent or own buildings, which means that there will be no monthly utilities to be paid, no office suppliers, and any materials that might be required to run the office (Gembalska-Kwiecień, 2023). There are also big savings benefits on overheads, as positions for receptionists, cleaners, and security guards will not be required (Ferreira et al., 2020). The employers are also exposed to a talent pool of remote work resources and can hire the best teams anywhere across the country. Geographical location is also viewed as an advantage in the sense that employers do not have to relocate employees closer to their clients or their superiors; the work can be performed from anywhere.

All these advantages and disadvantages are linked to employee productivity. The scholars have connected the benefits of remote work to an increase in employee productivity (Jalagat & Jalagat, 2019) and the success for any organisation is highly dependent on boosting productivity (Turner, 2019). This study examined the assumption that productivity levels differ for remote workers.

2.5 Proposition 2: Explore the effect of technology on remote work productivity

The Information Communication Technology (ICT) sector in South Africa has been at the forefront of the shift to remote work, which was accelerated by the changing work landscape driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. The IT Web reports that, despite the challenges posed by load shedding, the South African ICT sector outperformed the overall economy in 2022. Many remote workers are employed in the ICT sector or within IT departments, which are known for driving technological advancements that enable remote work. Technological advancements contributed to acceleration of the adoption of remote work, making this setting feasible, and the new way of working has prompted organizations in

South Africa to relook at traditional work structures and embrace remote work as a long-term solution (Ng et al., 2022).

In South Africa, the technology woes continue to be a challenge for everyone including remote workers. The unequal access to the internet and other information and communication technologies is a challenge (Venter & Daniels, 2020). For remote work to be feasible, a stable internet connection is required (Enaifoghe, & Zenzile, 2023). South Africa faces a significant digital divide, with many regions, especially townships and rural areas, struggling with underdeveloped infrastructure (Lembani et al., 2020). This lack of development creates a significant barrier to accessing digital technologies, hindering opportunities for growth and connection in these areas. These areas often have limited or no access to reliable internet connections, making it difficult for residents to engage in remote work.

According to the United Nations (2015), the South African government has acknowledged the digital divide challenges, and they have made infrastructure development a top priority and Goal 9, as it is crucial for advancing progress toward the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. The progress made thus far highlights that as of 2022, 95 percent of the global population had access to a mobile broadband network, although some regions are still underserved, and South African government is working towards closing this gap by 2030. Remote work relies on a strong and reliable infrastructure that ensures fast network connectivity, as activities such as video conferencing, file sharing, and ongoing communication are central to remote work environments (Munyeka, 2024). It is promising to see that South Africa is actively working to address the infrastructure gaps and enhance connectivity, which will be essential for supporting the growth and efficiency of remote work in the future.

Energy is another important resource that underpins nearly every aspect of human life and plays a crucial role in improving the overall quality of life. It powers industries, supports essential services, and enables everyday activities, making life more efficient and convenient. Lack of energy hinders productivity and limits contribution to the economy. Without access to stable and affordable energy, the potential for economic advancement remains a challenge. South Africa is faced

with a national energy crisis (du Venage, 2020), which President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a disaster during his State of the Nation Address in February 2023. The long stages of load shedding disrupt the internet (Erero, 2023), and in this study, we investigated the impact that technology challenges pose on remote work employees.

2.6 Proposition 3: Examine the feasibility of remote work in South Africa

Like many countries worldwide, South Africa was forced to adapt to remote work due to the pandemic, raising the question of whether the country was prepared for this shift (Franken et al., 2021). The feasibility of remote work in South Africa relies on several factors that enable its success, with internet connectivity being a key requirement. However, the country faces challenges due to aging infrastructure, which makes it difficult to maintain reliable internet connections, particularly in townships and rural areas (Aruleba & Jere, 2022). While the government has initiated projects to address these infrastructure issues and have made infrastructure development as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (Goswami, 2018), the problem persists still. This ongoing issue continues to affect remote workers in areas with limited or no network connectivity.

Another significant factor impacting the feasibility of remote work in South Africa is access to a stable electricity supply. The country is currently struggling with a national power crisis, which has an impact on all sectors and industries (du Venage, 2020). Power outages, a common occurrence due to load reductions and load shedding, create substantial challenges for individuals and businesses alike, as without electricity, working becomes impossible (Erero, 2023). Unfortunately, the situation is further worse in some areas where the loss of power also affects mobile network towers. When these towers go offline, entire regions that rely on them for network connectivity are left without access to the internet, making remote work even more difficult or entirely unfeasible. Despite efforts to address the power crisis, the ongoing instability in electricity supply continues to hinder the ability of many to engage in remote work, particularly in areas with unreliable or no access to both power and network services.

The environment is another important factor to consider when evaluating the feasibility of remote work, as it takes place in people's homes. Homes are typically designed for family activities and personal time, not for work (Charalampous et al., 2020). Some scholars argue that working from home can be highly distracting, particularly when the space is shared with family members, especially young children (Parry, 2025). On the other hand, others argue that they find remote work is less distracting than working in an office environment. These individuals claim they are able to focus better when working alone at home, as there are fewer interruptions like office talks and tea breaks, which they consider more distracting (Methot et al., 2021).

Anakpo et al. (2023) argue that the flexibility inherent in remote work makes it an attractive option for many employees, as it allows them to better manage their time and environment. This autonomy, they suggest, enables individuals to focus more on their tasks and, as a result, become more productive. The ability to design their own workspace, avoid travelling time to the office (Beno, 2021), and have control over their daily schedules (Yusuf, 2021) can significantly enhance their overall productivity. However, some scholars suggest that the flexibility that remote work come with is a disadvantage as some employees lack discipline and struggle with prioritising work and balancing it with family time and personal life (Van Veldhoven et al., 2020). In addition, there are some employees who believe that remote work leads to feelings of isolation (Wang et al., 2021). For some employees, the lack of social interaction and the absence of an office teams can negatively impact their mental well-being. This sense of detachment leads to lack of support feelings, and they become less motivated as employees struggle with the emotional and psychological effects of working in isolation (Lal et al., 2023). In this view, while remote work offers flexibility, it can also present significant challenges in maintaining both personal connection and sustained productivity.

Some scholars highlight that many employees face difficulties in balancing their personal life with work when working remotely (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Discipline plays a crucial role in remote work, and a lack of it can negatively impact job performance (Tupti, & Arif, 2020). There are two main ways in which a lack of discipline manifests. On one hand, some employees struggle to

disconnect from work, often working extended hours that interfere with their personal time, which can lead to burnout (Costin et al., 2023). On the other hand, some employees have trouble getting into the working mode while at home, allowing personal activities to take priority and ultimately letting their work suffer. Both scenarios highlight the importance of maintaining a balance and self-discipline when working remotely.

This study examined the various factors that influence the feasibility of remote work in South Africa, aiming to assess whether both employees and employers are adequately prepared for the shift to remote work. By analysing these factors, the research aimed to uncover the challenges and potential benefits associated with working away from office (WAFO). Furthermore, it sought to assess whether the required infrastructure, mindset, and support structures are established and ready to foster a successful shift to remote work, ensuring its long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

2.7 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks will be discussed in the sections below.

2.7.1 Theoretical Framework

The TOE framework, developed by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990), is an organizational level theory that emphasizes the key technological, organizational, and environmental factors that impact an organization's decision making. By using the TOE framework in the context of remote work, South African organizations can successfully implement remote work setups that promote effective adoption. Finding a strong balance between these three areas will benefit both employers and employees. This framework offers a solid theoretical base for examining the organizational and environmental challenges, as well as the supporting factors, that affect remote work.

According to Utete (2023), an organization's success is closely tied to its employees. In order to thrive in highly competitive and fast-paced markets, it is

essential for organizations to boost employee productivity and generate profitable outcomes. The effectiveness of an organization is largely determined by how well it aligns with both internal and external factors. Having said that, organizations should take environmental, organizational, and technological factors into account when making decisions about WAFO.

The impact of working from home on employee's productivity is ambiguous from a theoretical point of view. Organizations must carefully decide how they will manage remote work employees, and measures must be put in place to ensure that productivity is not affected. In this research, the three key determinants that affect employee productivity were identified as technology, organization, and environment. Therefore, the TOE framework will be adapted to help organizations make decisions about remote working by examining the factors that affect employee productivity. The degree of WAFO is important, as the longer employees continue to work from home, the larger the effect it has on employee productivity.

2.7.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research explores the factors influencing the productivity levels of remote work employees, as depicted in Figure 2-1 below. Technological factors significantly impact employee productivity, and remote workers and organizations must carefully manage these factors due to their influence on productivity. Additionally, it is crucial to address other factors that affect remote work employees, as they also play a role in productivity. Laws, regulations, and policies are significant environmental factors that need to be reassessed to ensure remote work employees have a conducive environment. The TOE framework is adapted to maintain a balanced approach to remote work productivity, considering all the factors outlined in the diagram. This research aimed to investigate the productivity of remote work employees in South Africa.

In addition, social and psychological aspects are also crucial in shaping remote work productivity. Feelings of isolation, absence of direct supervision, and difficulties in maintaining work-life balance can all affect employee's motivation and productivity (Wang et al., 2021). Additionally, the effectiveness of

communication and collaboration within teams, along with the support provided by managers, plays a vital role in creating a productive remote work environment. By considering these factors, this research offered a thorough understanding of the key drivers of productivity in remote work, particularly within the context of South Africa's distinctive challenges and opportunities.

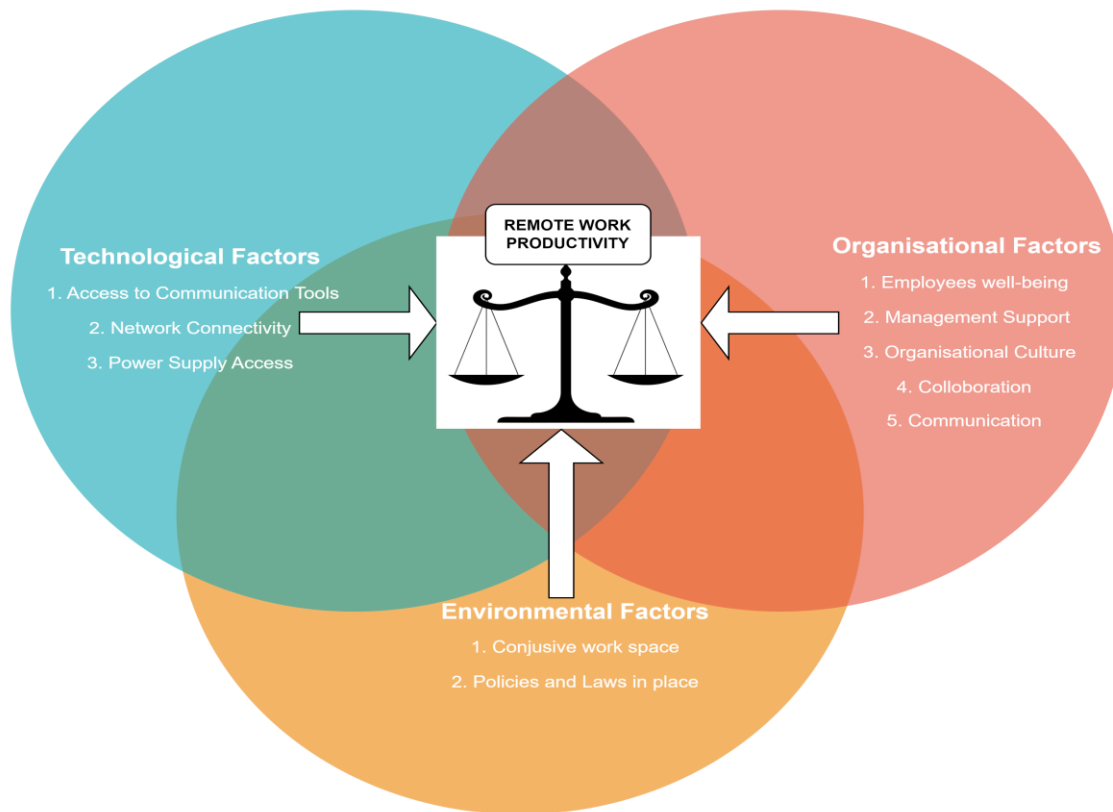


Figure 2-1: Conceptual Framework

2.8 Summary

Remote work has steadily become the preferred way of working across various industries in South Africa and it has gained significant traction. For organizations to effectively manage and regulate remote work, it is essential to establish clear policies that make remote work more practical and sustainable. These policies should focus not only on operational efficiency but also on providing the necessary technological tools that enable employees to perform their tasks effectively from remote locations. Additionally, organizations must place a strong emphasis on prioritizing employee well-being by offering the right support

structures to ensure that remote work is not only feasible but also beneficial for both the organization and its workforce.

Despite the growing trend of remote work, there was still a need for further research to evaluate its impact on employee productivity, hence this study was conducted. Understanding how remote work influences productivity, job satisfaction, and overall work dynamics is crucial for organizations to refine their remote work strategies. The next chapter will examine the research methodology employed in this study, outlining how the data was collected and analysed to assess the effectiveness of remote work in South Africa.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section presents the comprehensive research design and methodology that underpins this study, followed by the data collection and sampling techniques employed to interpret and analyse the collected data. It also addresses the aspects of validity, reliability, limitations, and ethical considerations, with a discussion of the paradigm guiding the research.

The research focused on capturing the lived experiences of remote work participants, which was key to providing an in-depth understanding of the influence it had on productivity and therefore a qualitative design and phenomenology theory was deployed in this study.

The research used the TOE framework to explore the factors affecting remote work employee productivity, employing a generic methodology. This flexible approach provided a thorough descriptive and interpretive perspective on the collected data, facilitating its analysis, and understanding thereof.

3.1 Research approach

Qualitative research focuses on studying phenomena within their natural settings to understand and interpret the meanings people attach to them. It involves gathering and analysing different types of data to explore people's experiences (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The qualitative research methodology is known for its flexible and often unstructured approach, focusing on exploring different descriptions of a situation or issue. As a result, sample sizes are usually smaller, with a limited number of respondents addressing a wide range of topics (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The qualitative methodology is also inherently subjective, as it seeks to interpret the meanings that individuals attach to various phenomena through the collection of data. This includes examining personal experiences and observations that capture the nuances of daily routines and significant moments in people's lives (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In this study, a qualitative approach was employed to gain deeper insights into the research subject.

The focus of qualitative research was on understanding phenomena within their natural contexts, emphasizing the importance of capturing the lived experiences of participants. This was achieved in the current study through the use of interviews, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participant's perspectives and experiences during the data collection process. By embedding the research in natural settings and capturing real-life observations, qualitative research offered a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the topic of remote work employee productivity. The qualitative method is appropriate for this research study because it allowed a small number of employees in the South Africa within different industries who have experienced remote work to share their lived experiences and perspectives on productivity. Qualitative research is more flexible and inductive, and allowed adjustments to the approach based on the findings throughout the process.

3.2 Research design

The research design guides the research process, and it is referred to as a structured plan of methods and techniques selected by a researcher to integrate various components of a study in a coherent and logical way, ensuring the research problem is addressed effectively (Khanday & Khanam, 2023). It provides a structured approach for answering research questions using empirical data to ensure validity and reliability and produce meaningful results for the study. Its goal is to determine the strategy for carrying out the research, including how data will be collected, the sampling methods used, and the approaches for data analysis. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was selected as the most appropriate method to study the impact of remote work on employee productivity.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has been established as a unique method for conducting qualitative research and providing both a theoretical framework and a comprehensive procedural guide (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA's research approach is committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. It uses small and specific samples, allowing for a detailed analysis of each participant (Enaifoghe & Zenzile, 2023).

This research sought to integrate action by collecting, interpreting, and analysing data related to remote work employees. To examine the impact of remote work on employee productivity, a series of interview sessions were conducted with the few selected participants in South Africa.

3.3 Data collection methods

The participants identified for this study are lower-to-middle level employees and management in South Africa within various sectors who have experienced remote work. The inclusion criteria encompass lower-to-middle level employees and management. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method for collecting the data. An interview strategy that was carefully prepared enabled a relaxed discussion, effectively alleviating tension and promoting a smooth, natural flow of conversation (Ruslin et al., 2022). This approach provided a thorough understanding of participant's remote work experiences. Semi-structured interviews (SSI) were employed as the most suitable data collection method, as they are an ideal data collection method for exploring the impact of remote work on individual's lives and how it impacts productivity. This method offered flexibility in data collection allowing us to generate a richer and more detailed data insights allowing participants to talk about their experiences on remote work and construct their own narratives (Karatsareas, 2022). This method not only facilitated a more detailed understanding of their perspectives but also encouraged a deeper exploration of how remote work has impacted their productivity.

The interviews were conducted remotely through the Microsoft Teams online communication platform to explore whether the shift to remote work is noticeable and to assess its impact on productivity. Data collection occurred during these interviews, with the entire process being anonymous to ensure confidentiality. Prior to the sessions, participants were asked for their consent to record the conversations, which allowed for accurate documentation and analysis of the discussions. This method ensured that all insights were captured while maintaining privacy and respect for the participants.

3.4 Population and sample

This section will give an overview of the research sample.

3.4.1 Population

The sample for this study targeted lower-to-middle level employees and management in South Africa who have experienced remote work. Employees are crucial assets for any organization (Da Costa & Loureiro, 2019), and they are responsible for carrying out business operations and contributing towards the organization's success (Goswami, 2018). The selected sample shared their lived experiences on remote work, and that provided insights into how it influences productivity. The exclusion criteria eliminated individuals who had not engaged in remote work.

3.4.2 Sample

In this study, a small group of twelve participants were purposefully selected and planned to be interviewed to help us understand the impact of remote work on employee productivity. The sample is pertinent to the research question and aimed to provide insights, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of remote work. A purposive sampling method is non-random and represents a group of non-probability sampling techniques, considers participant's experiences and intentions, and leverages the expertise of the researcher (Nikolopoulou, 2022). This method is well-suited for the qualitative research on remote work we aimed to investigate and answer the research questions as the sample includes the small group participants South Africa who have experienced remote work.

The study included ten participants in the interviews, as this number reached the saturation point. The saturation point refers to the stage in data collection when no new or significant information emerged from the interviews, indicating that further data collection would likely yield repetitive insights (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The table below depicts the participant's description, and the number of interviews conducted:

Table 3-1: Participants Profiles

Participants Profile	Number of Participants	Number of Interviews Conducted
Lower-mid-level employees	6	6
Management	4	4
Total	10	10

A total of ten participants were selected and interviewed for this study. They were formally invited to participate via e-mail, and they signed a participation consent form. The insights shared by the participants were valuable, offering a deep understanding of how remote work impacts employee productivity.

3.5 The research instrument

For this study, a semi-structured interviews guide was employed as the primary research instrument to gather direct insights from participants about their experiences, opinions, perceptions, and awareness of remote work and its effect on productivity. The interview guide is organised into different sections each focusing on specific topic that helps answer the research questions.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

For this study, a semi-structured interview guide was employed as the primary research instrument to gather in-depth insights from participants regarding their experiences, perceptions, and awareness of remote work and its impact on productivity. This qualitative tool facilitated the exploration of complex themes by allowing flexibility in probing and follow-up questions, while still maintaining consistency across interviews.

The interview guide was systematically organized into four key sections; each designed to address specific aspects of the research objectives and contribute directly to answering the overarching research questions.

1. Introduction and Informed Consent

The interview began with a formal introduction to the study. Participants were welcomed and thanked for agreeing to take part in the research. A comfortable and open environment was established to encourage honest and reflective conversation. Participants were reminded of their rights, including the confidentiality of their responses, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

2. Research Overview and Rationale

Following the introduction, the purpose and objectives of the research were clearly communicated to participants. This section ensured that participants understood the relevance and importance of the study, helping them to contextualize their responses within the broader research aim.

3. Interview Questions

This section of the interview guide was divided into thematic subsections aligned with the study's research questions.

a) Participant Background

General demographic and occupational information were collected to contextualize participant's responses. Questions explored participant's job titles, industries, geographical locations, and levels of experience with remote work.

b) Remote Work Experience

This subsection explored participant's personal experiences with remote work, particularly focusing on changes in workload, working hours, and overall well-being. It also examined participants' perceptions of how remote work has influenced their productivity.

c) Remote Work Technology Challenges

Here, participants were asked to discuss any technological barriers encountered while working remotely, such as issues with internet connectivity, software tools, or hardware limitations. The questions also probed into whether these challenges had psychological impacts and how participants believed such challenges affected their productivity.

d) Feasibility of Remote Work

Participants were invited to reflect on the overall feasibility and sustainability of remote work in their specific contexts. The discussion included key enablers and barriers, as well as participants' preferences regarding returning to a traditional office environment versus continuing with remote or hybrid models.

4 Closing

The final section provided participants with the opportunity to share any additional thoughts or experiences not previously addressed. This open-ended segment aimed to capture any further insights that could enrich the data and provide additional depth to the research findings. Participants were once again thanked for their time and contributions.

The interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants, allowing for the collection of valuable information relevant to their respective roles. This approach helped to address the research question concerning the perception of remote work on employee productivity, the technological challenges faced by remote workers, the impact of these challenges on productivity, and the overall feasibility of remote work South Africa. The participants were invited for interviews, and the invitation outlined what the research entails, their rights, and the details of what collected data will be used for. The cover invitation letter can be found as Appendix C, while the research instrument, including the interview questions, is provided in Appendix B, located at the end of the report.

3.6 Procedure for data collection

Data was collected through semi-structured online interviews that were scheduled at the participant's convenience, and questionnaires derived for the study as outlined in Appendix B were used. The research questions were designed to ensure that the participants will feel comfortable and not judged for their lifestyle or behaviours, which is key for qualitative research, especially when dealing with sensitive personal data (Dunwoodie et al., 2023).

The data collection process followed for this research encompassed the flexible semi-structured interview with predefined questions and the freedom to explore topics in more depth and allowed a room for clarification if the answer unclear. The participants are the remote work employees who shared their experiences and were sampled purposively with the aim of getting an insight into how remote work impacts productivity. The participants were approached directly, and they were requested to form part of the research through an e-mail, and the format is outlined in Appendix C. The interviews were scheduled and conducted at convenient date and times for the participants, and data is managed and stored in a password protected device to protect participant's confidentiality. The data was analysed and interpreted to identify key findings and insights. These findings are presented in a structured and clear manner, offering a comprehensive view of how remote work impacts productivity.

The diagram below represents the process followed for data capturing:



Figure 3-1: Data Collection Process

3.7 Data analysis strategies and interpretation

Thematic analysis was used for this research study. As described by Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that systematically identifies, organizes, and offers insights into patterns within a data set, making it well-suited for this study. Thematic analysis (TA) helps create a shared understanding and interpretation of participant's lived experiences. Its accessibility, flexibility, and provision of foundational skills for qualitative data analysis make it an especially appropriate method for this study. The Thematic Analysis (TA) approach consists of six sequential phases, providing a structured method for effectively implementing the approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The data was collected in the recorded interview sessions, and thematic analysis was applied using manual method.

The initial phase of the thematic method involved familiarizing oneself with the data, and the detailed notes were captured while listening to the interview recordings and reviewing the transcripts. The second phase focused on data analysis, offering a deeper insight into the data and uncovering similarities and patterns. The next phase involved constructing and naming potential themes, with ongoing review and refinement through manual techniques to define and label them. Finally, the analysis was concluded with the production of a report that interprets the analysed data. The thematic analysis approach helped explore the research questions related to remote work and its perceived impact on productivity, using data gathered from the participant's shared interview experiences.

Finlay (2024) outlines several limitations of thematic analysis, highlighting key assumptions that need to be fulfilled for its effective use. These include having an appropriate sample, ensuring the accuracy and high quality of the collected data, and the researcher possessing a deep understanding of the relevant literature and theory. These assumptions were carefully considered in this study. While the analysis provides rich thematic data, it may lack depth and transparency, with findings potentially being subjective due to the nature of the qualitative case study.

3.8 Possible limitations and challenges of the study

Interviews are efficient and powerful tools in qualitative research that are used to gain a deep understanding of human experiences (Dunwoodie et al., 2023). For this study, online semi-structured interviews were conducted to get insight into how remote work impacts productivity, and the significant planning and preparation time was done. Virtual interviews depend heavily on the reliability of networks and computer software, and connectivity challenges and program glitches had a potential to disrupt the quality of the interview. A limitation of the study was its focus on a small sample of remote work employees in South Africa, which makes it challenging to assess the relevance of the findings beyond this group and to generalize them to a larger population across different industries.

Time presented another potential limitation of this qualitative study, as both the data collection and analysis processes were highly time-consuming. Due to the need for a thorough and in-depth understanding of the data, a manual approach was employed for data interpretation and analysis. This process was iterative in nature, requiring multiple rounds of review and refinement, which contributed to the increased time required to complete the analysis. It is assumed that the data was interpreted accurately and that the patterns and themes identified throughout the process genuinely reflect the true meaning of the data. However, the time-intensive nature of this approach could have affected the efficiency and scope of the analysis.

Additionally, another limitation of the study was the researcher's ability to create an environment in which participants felt comfortable enough to share their thoughts while also maintaining objectivity. The assurance was provided to the participants that the study will be treated anonymous, and that the information will be safeguarded, and any questions and concerns were addressed prior to commencement with the interviews. Establishing trust with the participants was a crucial aspect of this process, as it was necessary to ensure that the responses provided were honest and accurate. However, building this trust took additional time and effort, as the researcher needed to foster a sense of openness and ease among the participants, which have also impacted the overall time frame of the study.

3.9 Quality Assurance

Trustworthiness is a cornerstone of qualitative research methodology, highlighting the inherent quality that supports both the rigor of the research process and the relevance of the findings (Daniel, 2019). Purposive sampling has been selected for this study to ensure a diverse group of participants, capturing a broad spectrum of experiences, and providing rich, relevant information to address the research questions. The research sample size is sufficient for this qualitative study, and the participants were informed about the study's objectives in the invitation to participate, with the intention of enhancing trustworthiness. The participation was based on their willingness to take part. Quality assurance for

this study incorporated credibility, reliability, and dependability, ensuring trustworthiness for this qualitative study on remote work, which was measured through the interview sessions.

3.9.1 Transferability

Transferability is a method of generalizing information gathered from specific individuals, contexts, and time periods and applying it to other situations that have not been directly examined (Drisko, 2025). It refers to the extent to which a study's findings can be applied to various contexts, settings, or groups. It highlights the need to provide readers with enough information to assess whether the findings from one context are relevant or suitable for other contexts in which they are interested. To achieve transferability, the study examined the impact of remote work on productivity by employing purposive sampling. This approach allowed for the careful selection of a diverse group of participants from various sectors, each holding different roles within their respective organizations and industries. By including individuals with varied professional backgrounds and perspectives, the study aimed to capture a broad range of experiences and insights, thus enhancing the potential to apply the findings to similar contexts beyond the specific sample. This strategy was designed to ensure that the results could be meaningfully transferred to other settings, making the findings more relevant and applicable across different industries and organizational structures.

3.9.2 Credibility

Credibility is about how reliable the research findings are (Vella, 2024), and whether those findings provide a trustworthy and accurate interpretation of the original data (Shufutinsky, 2020). To strengthen the credibility and validity of this study on the impact of remote work on productivity, a triangulation method was applied. Noble et al. (2019) describe research triangulation as a method aimed to enhance the trustworthiness and accuracy of research findings. The credibility was achieved through interviews with the participants and general observations on remote work. The researcher utilized evidence from various sources to apply triangulation, ensuring that the findings were supported by different perspectives.

By combining these different data points, the study aimed to strengthen the reliability of the conclusions drawn, providing a more comprehensive and robust understanding of how remote work influences productivity. This approach helped to confirm the accuracy of the research findings and ensure their validity.

3.9.3 Dependability

Dependability pertains to the stability and consistency of research findings over time (Andersson et al., 2024). It involves providing detailed documentation of the research process so that other scholars can evaluate the reliability of the results. This study aimed to understand the perspectives of participants regarding remote work and its perceived impact on productivity. Given the nature of the research, it was anticipated that no two participants would provide identical responses or insights, meaning the findings might not produce uniform results. However, the selection of participants from various industries and roles was designed to enhance the dependability of the study. Additionally, triangulation was employed by incorporating data from employee interviews to enhance the credibility of the findings. The purposively selected participants shared their diverse experiences through virtual interviews to enhance the study's credibility. The researcher also sought to strengthen the research process by incorporating their own general experience with remote work, further increasing the dependability and validity of the study's conclusions.

3.9.4 Confirmability

To strengthen the confirmability of this qualitative research, several deliberate strategies were applied to ensure that the findings accurately represented participant's lived experiences of remote work, rather than being influenced by personal beliefs or assumptions. One of the central methods used was the development of a comprehensive audit trail, which functioned as a transparent and detailed account of the research process from beginning to end. This included thorough documentation of data collection procedures, such as preserving audio recordings of interviews and maintaining full transcripts, allowing the ability to revisit the original data as needed for accuracy and

consistency. In addition, a structured spreadsheet was created to track the coding process, clearly showing how codes were developed, applied, and refined throughout the data analysis phase. Key analytical decisions were also recorded to ensure that interpretations could be logically traced back to the raw data. By maintaining such transparency and traceability, the audit trail not only supported the integrity of the research process but also outlined the steps taken, allowing others to follow or replicate the study's procedures and conclusions if needed.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The research ethics in this study prioritizes, human rights, dignity, safety and aims to foster a positive collaboration learning environment with participants and this will be achieved by adhering to the institution's students Code of Conduct. It was crucial to uphold ethical values and cultivate morals throughout the study, as this fostered respect for the institution and established a foundation for personal and professional success. Ethics and a code of conduct are essential in guiding behaviour and ensuring morally sound decisions.

This study aimed to maintain transparency throughout all aspects of the research, including the methodology, data findings, and other related components, in order to ensure the integrity of the process and uphold the institution's reputation. To achieve this, the participants were fully informed about the research objectives (see Appendix C) before the study began. A consent form outlining the details of the study (see Appendix D) was provided to them, which they were asked to sign if they agreed to participate. The participants willingly signed the consent forms and expressed a clear desire to do so before the interviews took place, demonstrating their informed consent and commitment to the research process. This approach was intended to foster trust and ensure ethical standards were met throughout the study.

3.11 Summary

The study adopted a qualitative approach, grounded in phenomenological theory and TOE framework to explore the lived experiences of individuals engaged in remote work, with a particular focus on its impact on productivity. The study targeted South African remote work employees, including both current and past remote workers, from a range of industries. The sample was drawn from both low-middle level employees and management to capture a diverse array of perspectives on the subject. Data collection was carried out through online semi-structured interviews, which were selected for their practicality, cost-effectiveness, and alignment with the principles of qualitative research. This interview format allowed for flexibility and in-depth exploration of participant's experiences while maintaining a consistent framework for comparison.

The data analysis was conducted manually, following a thematic approach, which was chosen for its flexibility and ability to provide a coherent interpretation of the participant's experiences. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify key patterns and themes across the data, offering insights into the nuances of how remote work influences productivity. However, a limitation of the study was the considerable time required for data analysis. The iterative process of reviewing and refining the data, particularly with the selected sample, was time-intensive and required careful attention to detail.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study underwent rigorous quality assurance checks throughout the research process. This was essential in upholding the integrity of the research and ensuring that the findings were credible and meaningful. Adherence to the institution's ethics and Code of Conduct was of paramount importance throughout the study. The research prioritized human rights, dignity, and safety, ensuring that ethical guidelines were strictly followed in every aspect of the research process. The study also aimed to foster a collaborative learning environment with participants, encouraging an open dialogue that would contribute to a deeper understanding of remote work and its impact on productivity. Ultimately, the study was designed to produce credible, valid findings that could inform future research and policy discussions on remote work.

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative research findings that address the core research questions of this study. To analyse the data effectively, a manual method was followed, and a thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative information collected through interviews with remote work employees across various organizations in South Africa. These employees represent a range of positions and experiences, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the concepts that emerged from their well-lived experiences and insights. This analysis deepened our understanding of the remote work landscape and its implications within the South African context. The research findings are presented according to the research propositions that emerged in this study.

In this chapter, we will further delve into the key concepts that emerged from the interviews conducted with the ten participants. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was thoughtfully scheduled to ensure a comfortable and engaging environment for discussion. To maintain confidentiality and protect the identities of the participants, anonymous naming conventions was employed throughout this analysis. By doing so, we aimed to provide a clear outline of the insights and experiences shared by the participants, allowing for a richer understanding of their perspectives.

A total of ten participants willingly consented to participate in this study, agreeing to engage in online interviews that were recorded for the research study. Everyone completed a consent form prior to the interviews, ensuring their understanding and agreement with the process. The interviews were conducted using the Microsoft Teams application, allowing for a seamless virtual meeting experience. To accommodate the varied schedules of the participants, interviews were arranged on different days and times according to their availability. Throughout the sessions, participants were encouraged to share their genuine lived experiences related to remote work. The participants were reassured that the study would maintain their anonymity and that all measures would be taken

to protect their identities throughout the research process. The interview process was carried out in strict adherence to the ethical standards set forth by Wits Business School, ensuring that all procedures were followed appropriately. As a result, the data collected during this process is considered valid and reliable.

4.2 Participants demographics

The demographics of the participants interviewed provide a diverse range that enhanced our understanding of the research question. This variety allowed us to capture different perspectives and experiences, ensuring a more comprehensive analysis. The demographics of the participants included various factors such as gender, age range, location, industry, and their position levels within their respective organizations. This comprehensive overview enabled us to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives, enriching our analysis and understanding of the research topic and by including individuals from various backgrounds and roles, we were able to address the complexities of the topic at hand and draw meaningful conclusions from the data collected.

To maintain anonymity of the participants involved in this study, a specific naming convention has been established, as detailed in Table 4.1 and the accompanying demographic information. This system is designed to clarify and categorize the roles of participants within the study. The management interviewed in this study will be designated as “P-Man,” while individuals in lower-middle level employees holding operational roles, will be labelled as “P-OE.” Each designation will be further supplemented by a unique participant number, formatted as “P” followed by the respective number. This approach not only protects the identities of the participants but also allows for clear identification of their roles within the context of this research study.

The table below outlines the naming convention that will be used throughout this research study. For clarity and ease of reference, participants will be assigned codes based on their roles. For example, Participant 1 will be referred to as P1-OE, indicating that this individual is classified as a lower-middle level employee.

Table 4-1: Participants Demographics and Naming Convention

Participant Number	Gender	Age Group	Industry / Sector	Location	Role	Conversion Code
Participant 1	Female	50+	Public	Urban	Office Administrator	P1-OE
Participant 2	Male	50+	Banking	Urban	Lawyer	P2-OE
Participant 3	Female	40-49	Banking	Urban	Wealth-Administrator	P1-OE
Participant 4	Male	40-49	Public	Urban & Rural	Chief Director	P4-Man
Participant 5	Female	50+	Public	Urban & Township	Executive Manager	P5-Man
Participant 6	Female	30-39	Private	Urban & Township	Service Desk Operator	P6-OE
Participant 7	Male	40-49	Private	Urban	IT Consultant	P7-OE
Participant 8	Male	40-49	Public	Urban	Executive Director	P8-Man
Participant 9	Female	30-39	Mining	Urban	Jnr Project Manager	P9-OE
Participant 10	Female	40-49	Public	Urban	Executive Director	P10-Man

4.3 Remote work influence on productivity

The overall findings on experience of remote work are largely positive, with many participants reporting increased productivity and improved communication with their managers. *“I am more flexible and the communication between myself and my supervisor is also effective”* (P1-OE).

The results suggests that the flexibility of remote work contributes to a better work-life integration, allowing for participants to have quality family time which is more valued. *“I am a parent to two children, one of which is nine. Working from home gives me time, I have time to take my child to school drop them off and pick them up and assist them with school homework. I'm able to spend more time with my daughter”* (P3-OE).

The participants also highlighted that remote work gives them time for personal hobbies and reduces typical workplace distractions that are being faced at the office like travelling to work traffics, office small talk, and many coffee breaks. *“Remote work has really really worked because I don't have to, you know, chitchat having a coffee break or a smoke break with some of the colleagues. So, the productivity has increased because, there's less chit-chat and distraction when you are at home, and you can purely focus on your ****ishh****”*. (P2-OE)

However, there are challenges noted such as feelings of isolation, the need for self-discipline, and accountability issues among team members. Some employees miss the office atmosphere as they deal with distractions at home *“We have kids at home, so sometimes instead of focusing on your work, you might be distracted. The little ones might come to you and distract you a little bit. So, in the office you just have your own space”* (P6-OE).

Some employees find costs associated with remote work not affordable *“Most of the people in the public sector like your lower-level employees you know, in terms of earnings, they would rather go to the office and bring “scaftini” you know than to go and buy data which is not a need. What is data going to do for them? You know, so they those are the challenges, we need to look at, as a country”* (P10-Man).

Even though participant's roles have remained the same, many reported a substantial increase in their workloads, which often results in late-night work, and it is reported that managing teams effectively has also become a challenge. *"I sometimes sleep around 3:00am due to the workload but the good thing is that I don't have to rush and wake up early in the morning to go to the office"* (P5-Man).

Although real-time communication tools have facilitated improved better communication, the overlap of work hours has created expectations of participants being always available for work even after regular working hours leading to some participants reporting that they work up to 18 hours a day. *"The whole issue around normal working hours fell out of the window, so we find ourselves working almost eighteen hours a day"* (P8-Man).

4.3.1 Personal experience with remote work and its effect on well-being

The findings suggest that experience of remote work is quite positive for most participants. P1-OE stated that it has been the best thing that ever happened to them and in their own words they further emphasised the flexibility that remote work provides *"I am more flexible and the communication between myself and my supervisor is also effective"*.

P5-Man emphasized that remote work aligns well with their introverted nature, as there is less face-to-face interaction. When asked to describe their personal experiences with remote work, P5-Man responded by saying that: *"I enjoy it very much because I am not a people's person, I'm a loner"*.

This sentiment is echoed by P10-Man, who mentioned that they are not a people person and had avoided working in the office even before the drastic shift to remote work in South Africa *"If I don't want to go to the office, I don't force myself to go to the office. So, I can say that I indirectly started before COVID"*.

However, P6-OE highlights that, in contrast, while working from home offers certain benefits, it also comes with considerable challenges. Balancing work tasks with parenting can be quite difficult, making the experience more inconvenient than anticipated. The absence of a dedicated workspace at home

and the necessary resources to perform work tasks remains a significant challenge for P6-OE. In their own words they stated that *“We have kids at home, so sometimes instead of focusing on your work, you might be distracted. The little ones might come to you and distract you a little bit. So, in the office you just have your own space”*.

Even though there is a workaround in place, the inconveniences associated with remote work, along with the associated costs, cannot be overlooked. P8-Man shares a similar perspective, noting that although remote work can be enjoyable, homes are primarily designed for relaxation and family activities rather than for work. This shift has led to inconveniences and additional costs, as individuals have had to create dedicated workspaces and purchase necessary furniture for comfort. Moreover, family members have had to be more understanding and accommodating as work becomes a part of their daily lives. In their own words: *“OK, the first thing is that we must all agree that the home is not designed for work. It is designed for relaxation and is also designed for household matters. So my experience is that one had to make a shift in the home to create a space for working. That itself has an impact because the furniture's at home are not designed for office. And then the second issue is that the tools of trade that require to do the work had to be augmented, and one had to also get some other gadgets that are easier to navigate”*.

Communication is another important factor highlighted in the findings. P1-OE notes that interactions with managers have greatly improved in the remote setting, a perspective echoed by P8-Man, who states that the team now conducts more online meetings to coordinate and address key tasks. Additionally, P2-OE adds that the weekly team catch-up sessions conducted online further enhance collaboration and communication among team members which is more effective for remote work and this sentiment is further supported by P9-OE who find remote work more effective as connecting with fellow team members online is much faster and more efficient. *“I find it very efficient because you can connect with people as and how you want quickly (P9-OE)”*.

In contrast, P4-Man feels that communication in a remote work setting is not effective because of the lack of face-to-face interaction. They observe that online

meetings often take on a different dynamic, leading to diminished engagement among participants and a noticeable lack of commitment. *“My observation, when people do not see face to face, they tend to can say anything that they can say anything, they can lie, they can say anything, they don't care, but when you are in a face-to-face environment, people happen to take meetings, and engagement takes a different shape (P4-Man)”*. Additionally, the virtual environment makes it easier for some individuals to provide inaccurate information, which can lead to frustration and adversely affect overall well-being. This disconnect creates a challenging atmosphere where effective collaboration becomes difficult, ultimately impacting both team morale and productivity.

The flexibility that WAFO provides is highly valued and enables participants to spend more quality time with their children and engage in their personal hobbies which contributes to a better overall well-being. For P3-OE, a key benefit of remote work is the ability to plan and manage school homework and drop-offs for their kids, making work more enjoyable. *“I am a parent to two children, one of which is nine. Working from home gives me time, I have time to take my child to school drop them off and pick them up and assist them with school homework. I'm able to spend more time with my daughter”*.

P9-OE echoes this sentiment, noting that remote work promotes a positive sense of well-being by allowing more time for family, which in turn makes them happier and positively impacts their mental health. *“Remote work allows me to also have more family time to have a life outside of work because you're able to manage your work and not have time wasted in traffic in in all these things that come with going back to the office you know”*.

P3-OE further notes that the flexible hours that remote works comes with, provide opportunities to engage in personal hobbies, such as going to the gym. P3-OE echoes the following in their own words: *“I like yeah, the flexi hours, I love the flexibility of it. Amazingly so, remote work has a very positive impact on my well-being and allowed time for myself. I have more time of going to the gym, more time of cooking, more time of doing what I like over and above my weight and more time with family”*. In contrast, P8-Man emphasises the negative impact on well-being as remote work comes with a lot of pressure and one indulges on

unhealthy snacks during hectic day as there is no time to prepare proper meals and find no time for physical activities.

The lack of common workplace distractions, like coffee breaks, enhances efficiency, as noted by P2-OE, who emphasized the disruptive nature of office chitchats and frequent coffee and smoke breaks. *“Remote work has really really worked because I don’t have to, you know, chitchat having a coffee break or a smoke break with some of the colleagues. So, the productivity has increased because, there’s less chit-chat and distraction when you are at home, and you can purely focus on your **ishh**”*. This view is further supported by P7-OE who notes that there are fewer distractions at home, allowing individuals to concentrate better and perform their work more effectively. P10-Man concurred, noting that the office environment can be overly distracting making it difficult for employees to complete their work.

In contrast, P6-OE disagrees and notes that office environment is missed as kids can be very distractive at home and they said the following: *“We have kids at home, so sometimes instead of focusing on your work, you might be distracted. The little ones might come to you and distract you a little bit. So, in the office you just have your own space”*.

Another significant factor highlighted in the findings is the freedom from the stress of being stuck in traffic while commuting to work a sentiment echoed by P7-OE highlighting that more time is wasted while stuck in traffic and with remote work they said: *“You don’t waste time on the traffic and stuff like that”*. P9-OE agreed with P7-OE and added that these delays greatly affect one's well-being, often ruining the day and leading to irritability.

Remote work has led to greater positive experience and personal satisfaction for many; however, it also demands adjustments and presents difficulties for others.

4.3.2 Changes to the role, workload and working hours due to remote work

All participants report that while their roles have not changed, their workloads have significantly increased, often leading them to work late into the night. Despite the flexibility of remote work, boundaries around working hours have become blurred, leading to expectations of constant availability and this is echoed by P4-Man highlighting that traditional working hours are no longer honoured, and there's a general assumption that it's acceptable to work late. *"When you are doing online work, the employer or any other colleagues or any other stakeholders do not realize that you have normal working hours of 7:30am to 4:30pm. At any time of the day, somebody can call me and say have you seen the e-mail that I sent through? Please attend to it, forgetting that we have knocked off at 4:30pm"* (P4-Man). P2-OE alluded that the teams have adopted and are comfortable to making work-related calls in the evening and see nothing wrong with it. P8-Man further supports that the concept of standard working hours has effectively disappeared, highlighting the issue of working up to 18 hours a day at times due to the drastic increase in workload.

The findings also suggest that there is a slight change in some responsibilities for some participant and this is noticeable with P1-OE mentioning that their role now comes with greater responsibilities, and they appreciate managing their own workload as it supports their career growth and P5-Man further agrees that their responsibilities now include overseeing the reworks of subordinates, which adds to their long hours and this challenge stems from the difficulties of managing teams remotely, where the quality of work often falls short of their standards.

P10-Man, on the other hand, suggests that while the core tasks of their role remain unchanged, the nature of their responsibilities has fundamentally shifted. Although this change is not formally documented, they now find themselves handling administrative work typically assigned to office administrators. The role of the office administrator is increasingly becoming redundant, as managers are now required to take on tasks outside their original scope. In a remote work environment, it has become difficult to delegate certain tasks, such as filing and printing, to office administrators. In P10-Man in their own words they said the

following: *“I now have to do my own filing and administration work. The officials who are doing admin, they now have to be very innovative to find space in terms of the working environment because their role is becoming more redundant”*. Consequently, P10-Man notes that they are often overwhelmed with work, which not only contributes to longer hours but also increases their overall workload.

4.3.3 Remote work impact on productivity

The research findings reveal a noteworthy increase in productivity, even amidst the heightened demands for task completion, a sentiment echoed by all participants. Specifically, the data indicates that remote work settings contribute significantly to this boost in productivity, largely due to the reduced distractions typically found at home. Participants P2-OE, P7-OE, and P9-OE all highlight how the quieter, more focused environment of remote work enables them to concentrate better, ultimately leading to greater output. This collective insight underscores the positive impact of remote work on efficiency, despite the additional pressures to perform.

Participant P6-OE linked their increased productivity to the comfort of working independently without anyone monitoring them. They noted that being in their own space and setting their own schedule allows them to generate more output. P6-OE echoed the following: *“You know in your mind, you tell yourself that, OK, nobody is watching me. Maybe they might feel that I'm not working, let me push more instead”*.

Participants P1-OE and P3-OE observed that the pressure associated with a remote work environment boosts their productivity. They explained that managing this pressure encourages them to meet deadlines and put in extra hours. P1-OE emphasized that utilizing real-time communication tools like WhatsApp has increased their effectiveness.

Participants P4-Man and P10-Man connected productivity to personal discipline, emphasizing that disciplined individuals are generally more successful in their work, while others may face challenges. They believe that maintaining discipline is vital for achieving desired outcomes, noting that those who lack it tend to be

less productive. P4-Man further suggested that distractions from family members and neighbours may contribute to this lack of discipline which has an impact on productivity.

Participant P8-Man shares their own view that productivity has increased since transitioning to remote work; however, it often conflicts with household and personal responsibilities. *“Other household matters that are supposed to be given its time. What suffered is more personal matters than the work itself. Because you have to then make a provision for the work to be done”*.

While remote work has enabled individuals to accomplish more due to the elimination of commuting time and allowing more time for the work to be done, it has also led to challenges in managing other aspects of their lives.

4.4 The effect of technology on remote work productivity

The findings reveal that most participants face challenges with network connectivity and technological issues, including server outages that prevent access to emails and applications. This disruption increases stress, particularly as it affects their ability to meet work deadlines. *“The most frustrating thing is when the server is down, when one cannot actually have access to the work e-mails and sometimes it takes them the whole day for to fix it”* (P1-OE).

South Africa’s ongoing power issues, a national concern, have been highlighted by participants as significantly affecting remote work. Some individuals have gone to great lengths to set up backup power systems to minimize the impact on their work and ensure delivery is not disrupted. *“One always has to have backup when loadshedding occurs, I switch to battery so I can be able to work. For those without a backup, it is a challenge to continue with work”* (P9-Man).

Most participants highlighted network connectivity issues as a major challenge when working remotely. Faster and more stable connectivity is crucial, especially during video meetings, as a reliable connection is needed to ensure smooth communication without disruptions to both video and audio quality. Some participants have gone above and beyond to ensure they have a reliable and fast

internet connection by setting up fibre networks in their households. Recognizing the importance of uninterrupted connectivity for remote work, they've invested in this technology to guarantee a more stable and efficient online experience allowing them to meet work demands more effectively and with fewer technical setbacks. *"We were all stressing about data connectivity and all those things, but as time progressed, we've all now found ways that you connect to the wi-fi and pay"* (P9-OE).

Load shedding worsens network connectivity issues because prolonged power outages drain the batteries at network power stations. When the towers go offline, no one can connect. While alternative solutions, such as backup power systems like inverters, help ease the power crisis, participants have raised concerns about the high cost of data. This deepens the digital divide, as those with fewer resources struggle to afford both expensive data charges and the installation of fibre lines in their homes. *"Network connectivity is an issue more especially when you are in the rural setting, the network can be very troublesome than when you are in cities"* (P4-Man). Additionally, inverters themselves are also costly and not everyone is able to afford them. Despite these obstacles, many participants have enhanced their home setups to improve productivity by installing fibre and backup systems.

The participants have further highlighted that technological glitches can cause anxiety and pressure, with some experiencing negative psychological effects, especially during critical outages that has an impact on their delivery. Overall, while technology can facilitate tasks, it also presents challenges that can impact well-being, highlighting the need for effective communication and collaboration to navigate these issues. The participants emphasized the importance of having the right tools and infrastructure for effective remote work.

4.4.1 Remote work technology challenges

The findings show that majority of the participants highlighted network connectivity as a major technological challenge they are faced with. Participant P3-OE mentioned that accessing work applications was initially a challenge when they started working remotely. However, their employer addressed this issue by

providing employees with SD cards installed in their laptops and moving away from using dongles. This solution allowed everyone to work from anywhere without the risk of connecting to unsecured networks.

Participant P1-OE also highlighted the network connectivity challenge, explaining that servers often experience downtime, preventing access to work emails and essential applications. This issue can sometimes last an entire day, causing their workload to accumulate while the problem persists. *“The most frustrating thing is when the server is down, when one cannot actually have access to the work e-mails and sometimes it takes them the whole day for to fix it”*.

P4-Man further emphasized the impact of network connectivity challenges, particularly in rural areas, where the lack of proper infrastructure leads to much poorer connections compared to urban areas. This disparity significantly worsens the situation, making reliable connectivity even more difficult to achieve in these regions. *“Network connectivity is an issue more especially when you are in the rural setting, the network can be very troublesome than when you are in cities”*.

Participant P6-OE also mentions that the network in rural areas is quite poor, explaining that the signal strength is so weak that individuals often must switch between service providers to find a usable connection. As a result, many people in rural areas end up owning multiple SIM cards to secure a more reliable network connection. *“I myself found a challenge with network connectivity, and I had to change from one connection to another because while I work from rural home, I find I had to change from one connection to another because you would find that connectivity is very poor, and I have to change between the sim cards”*.

This is largely due to the lack of infrastructure, such as fibre-optic cables, cellular towers, and power grids, which leads to unreliable or even absent connectivity. Many rural areas also lack sufficient broadband infrastructure, causing mobile networks and internet access to be inconsistent or unavailable. Although participant P10-Man is not personally impacted by technological challenges, as they have all the necessary resources to make remote work effective, they emphasize the importance of having proper infrastructure in place to enable employees to work remotely.

Another key factor influencing the technological challenges faced by participants is the availability of efficient IT support. Participant P2-OE highlighted the benefit of having responsive IT support that is always on standby, noting that it has played a crucial role in ensuring a smooth experience with fewer technology-related issues. *“Technology challenges will always be there, but what is nice about our organisation is that our IT department is top notch; they always resolve issue promptly”*. In contrast, P4-Man pointed out that their IT support is less effective, which is disappointing, as the service level agreement with the IT provider is often not met. The support team takes too long to resolve technical issues, creating a challenge that impacts their ability to deliver work on time.

The high cost of data is a significant concern highlighted by P6-OE, who stressed that affordability remains a major barrier to connectivity. Without access to data bundles, individuals are unable to connect to the network, creating a serious challenge as remote work more relies on the internet for work to be done. In their own words, P6-OE raised data costs inconvenience concerns and said the following: *“Some of us, we don't have wi-fi's and you have to buy data for yourself to do the work, and if it cuts off before month end you have to buy again, although in our work environment you can claim it back”*.

Participant P9-OE also raised similar concerns, pointing out the expensive pricing of data and how it has forced them to opt for a Wi-Fi subscription instead, however, this solution is not without its own financial strain, as Wi-Fi connections also come at a high cost, further compounding the affordability issue for many users. *“We were all stressing about data connectivity and all those things, but as time progressed, we've all now found ways that you connect to the wi-fi and pay”*. Participant P8-Man further highlights the cost associated with remote work and their view were as follows *“Technology creates convenience and simplify certain aspects of work however it does not come cheap, certain applications needs to be downloaded and some gadgets like microphones and fast laptops.”* (P8-Man).

Participant P10-Man reinforced the issue of high data prices, adding that employees at lower levels simply cannot afford the cost. For them, the priority is putting food on the table, not purchasing data. The view is that many would rather bring their lunch to the office and avoid using data, as it allows them to save

money. *“Most of the people in the public sector like your lower-level employees you know, in terms of earnings, they would rather go to the office and bring “scaffini” you know than to go and buy data which is not a need. What is data going to do for them? You know, so they those are the challenges, we need to look at, as a country”.*

These challenges disrupt connectivity and impact productivity as one is unable to do their work efficiently. The energy crisis affects all participants, and while some have implemented backup power solutions to reduce connectivity risks, the lack of power still hinders work and network connection for remote workers.

4.4.2 The effects of technology on psychology

The participants noted in the findings that ongoing technological challenges result in increased stress and frustration, as they heavily rely on technology to perform their tasks remotely. Participant P1-OE emphasizes the psychological toll of technological challenges, explaining that these disruptions lead to feelings of anxiety and pressure to make up for lost time when technology malfunctions occur. *“Becoming anxious is when I know that time is running out and I'm not even closer to finishing whatever that has been allocated to me. That is the only time technology challenges affect me, and probably maybe because of my perfectionist nature”.*

Participant P4-Man further supports this, pointing out that the anxiety is also intensified by the uncertainty of how long the disruptions will persist. The anxiety is also triggered when there are no alternative workaround solutions available as per participant P6-OE highlighting that they are often forced to search for a suitable location to continue their work. Participant P7-OE further adds that technological challenges cause a lot of worrying and in their own words they alluded that: *“Let's say when you're experiencing those technology challenges, when you don't have power, you don't have network and then now you can't be able to connect and do your work”.*

The findings also indicate that in certain work environments, the nature of remote work is not practical, as highlighted by participant P5-Man. They emphasized that

the sector they work in is highly sensitive, where the quality and reliability of services directly impact people's lives. As a result, any technological glitches or disruptions in remote work infrastructure could have severe consequences. In such environments, the demand for constant, uninterrupted service means that relying on remote work technologies is simply not feasible, as the risks associated with potential system failures or delays outweigh the benefits of WAFO. Participant P5-Man further shares that they frequently experience feelings of depression when technological glitches occur, especially when these issues lead to an increase in fatality rates. The thought of people losing their lives because of these failures deeply affects them, leaving them with a strong sense of guilt and anguish for not being able to prevent such outcomes or save lives in those critical moments.

Additionally, participant P8-Man voiced concerns about the technological challenges of remote work, specifically regarding the personal information shared through the applications used. They expressed worry that more sensitive data is being exposed, raising questions about data privacy and security. Security concerns are reinforced by participant P5-Man, who noted that security skills in South Africa are limited. As a result, their organization has enlisted a third-party international service provider for assistance, though this comes at a significant cost. It is further noted by Participant P9-OE acknowledging that technological challenges can be extremely frustrating, but they found that effective team collaboration and communication can help mitigate these issues more effectively.

Although participants P2-OE, P3-OE, and P10-Man indicate that they are not currently experiencing direct challenges related to technology, the impact that technology can have on an individual's psychological well-being and overall productivity should not be underestimated. Even if these participants aren't feeling the immediate effects, the potential for technology to influence mental health, focus, and efficiency remains significant and should be acknowledged as a factor that can affect anyone in the long run.

4.4.3 The effects of technology on productivity

Remote work, while offering flexibility, presents several challenges that can significantly hinder productivity, particularly when deadlines are tight. For some participants, the shift from traditional paperwork to digital tools has been smooth, with no noticeable impact on their performance. However, for others, technological difficulties, such as connectivity issues or software malfunctions, can severely disrupt their ability to complete tasks efficiently. In some cases, these disruptions may even lead to unforeseen responsibilities, like managing backup power systems or ensuring the proper functioning of servers, which can further detract from core work activities.

The consequences of these technological problems can be far-reaching, especially when critical tools or systems are affected, leaving participants struggling to maintain their workflow. On the other hand, some participants and organizations have been proactive in addressing these challenges by investing in high-speed internet connections, such as fibre optic networks, and implementing backup power solutions, which help minimize downtime and ensure a more stable remote work environment.

The research findings suggest that technology-related challenges have a detrimental impact on productivity, as participants reported being unable to complete their daily tasks effectively when such issues arise. These technological issues often create significant disruptions, preventing employees from meeting deadlines and fulfilling their responsibilities on time. Participant P1-OE, P3-OE and P4-Man specifically highlights the frustration of not being able to meet deadlines as when such problems arise, they are prevented from performing their tasks, underscoring the direct link between technological difficulties and diminished performance. The inability to rely on stable and efficient technology appears to hinder workflow, leading to delays and decreased overall efficiency in the workplace.

The impact of technology on productivity is particularly severe for some participants, who find themselves taking on tasks outside their usual responsibilities to mitigate the situation. *“We often find ourselves having to use*

our own cars to buy diesel for the power generators that keep the servers running. The consequences of the servers going down are severe, as it directly affects people's lives like ambulance services, for example, cannot operate without those servers" (P5-Man). This often involves stepping in to handle issues that should ideally be addressed by other departments, further straining their time and resources which has an impact on productivity.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that success of remote work is heavily dependent on having the proper infrastructure, tools, and proper planning in place, a view shared by participants P10-Man, P8-Man, and P9-OE. Without these critical resources, the likelihood of facing significant setbacks rises considerably, underscoring the need for thorough preparation and continuous support. Ensuring that employees have access to the necessary technology, systems, and assistance is crucial for sustaining productivity and efficiency, especially in a remote work environment where even small disruptions can have a large impact.

4.5 Factors influencing the viability of remote work in South Africa and its impact on productivity

It is notable in the findings that South Africa is making significant strides toward adopting remote work, with the government at the forefront of developing the infrastructure and IT policies necessary to support this shift.

The COVID-19 pandemic played a crucial role in demonstrating the benefits of remote work, such as increased productivity, cost savings, and better work-life balance. These advantages have fuelled the growing recognition that remote work is not only feasible but also beneficial for both employers and employees.

However, while the potential is clear, several challenges remain. To make remote work sustainable and feasible, the findings from the participants indicate that a reliable infrastructure, particularly stable internet, and electricity supply, along with access to quality devices and effective tools for managing remote teams, are essential. *"Network connectivity is a major challenge especially when working from home in the rural area. Broadband services need to be rolled-out to the entire country and load shedding is another key national challenge"* (P4-Man).

Without these in place, the shift to remote work risks would be a challenge in particular, issues like load shedding, frequent power outages and high data costs pose significant obstacles, especially for lower-income workers who may struggle to afford the necessary connectivity. A nationwide broadband rollout and long-term sustainable energy solutions are crucial to address these gaps and ensure more people can participate in remote work.

Moreover, while many employees appreciate the flexibility remote work offers, there are additional challenges related to working from home. These include issues like isolation, home distractions, and the need for a quiet, focused workspace. *“A quite space is also needed, and I often lock myself in the bedroom to get away from kid’s distractions and to get more work to be done”* (P6-OE).

Companies must take proactive steps to address these concerns by providing backup power options to mitigate the impact of power outages and creating environments that support concentration. As South Africa continues its transition to remote work, it is crucial that this shift happens gradually and is tailored to the specific needs of different departments and industries. Collaboration between the government and the private sector will be essential in ensuring that all workers, including those from underprivileged backgrounds, have equal access to remote work opportunities.

Despite some resistance from employers who are pushing employees back to the office, the majority of workers prefer remote work, citing the stress of commuting and the improved personal well-being that comes with more flexibility. Many workers also report when working from increased productivity home, as they are able to better manage their time and focus on a less distracting environment. Looking ahead, hybrid work models combining both in-office and remote work seem to be the most likely future, as they allow for the flexibility that employees value while maintaining some physical office presence. The success of remote work in South Africa is perceived to be dependent on continued investment in infrastructure, effective policy development, and the creation of systems that allow remote work to thrive while addressing the broader socio-economic challenges.

4.5.1 Feasibility and the future of remote work

It is well noted in the findings that the South African government is leading the charge in adopting remote work by implementing IT policies and establishing the necessary infrastructure to support this shift, which could have significant implications for South Africa's economy. Participant P1-OE mentioned that the Department of Communications and Digital Technology is responsible for implementing policies that promote remote work and is currently working on rolling out the necessary infrastructure to make it more feasible. *"The department of Communications and Digital Technologies are mandated to implement ICT policies, and it is within their responsibility to be the ambassadors of ICT. So, where I am I am thinking that they should be leading and embracing remote work"* (P1-OE).

Participant P5-Man highlighted the importance of moving forward with the required legislation and emphasized that the government must support the public by providing the resources needed to enable remote work. As stated by P5-Man, *"People must be given the opportunity and financial support to build homes that are conducive to remote work"*. Participant P5-Man further emphasizes the need for collaboration between the South African government and the private sector to make remote work more accessible and feasible for all.

Although the findings indicate that the country is prepared for remote work, there is still work to be done to ensure full readiness. Participants largely agree that South Africa is ready to embrace remote work, but Participant P4-Man points out that with the right tools and infrastructure, remote work can become more viable. P4-Man further believes that the country is not yet fully prepared, emphasizing the need for greater technological awareness to address existing gaps. This viewpoint is echoed by P10-Man, who highlights that the ongoing broadband roll-out project will help make remote work more feasible by ensuring the necessary infrastructure is in place. Participant P3-OE further notes that the Covid-19 pandemic served as an eye-opener for South Africa, demonstrating that there is no longer a need to commute to the office, and highlighting the country's ability to adapt to remote work.

The advantages and disadvantages of remote work were also highlighted by the participants with some pointing out the cost saving it offers for both employer and employees. Participant P7-OE in their own words said that *“Remote work will save organisations more costs as it comes with huge savings and employees turn to produce more work for the same salary scale. Bum on the office seat does not necessary mean that one is productive and going to the office is viewed as a compliance than doing the work”*. This view on cost savings is further supported by participant P9-OE, who explained that employers will benefit from reduced office rental costs, while employees will save on commuting expenses.

In contrast, the study also highlighted the disadvantages of remote work. P5-Man raised concerns that the shift to remote work could negatively impact local businesses, with coffee shops and office buildings becoming less relevant. P4-Man also highlighted the lack of electronic systems and software to monitor remote employees, stressing the importance of having these tools in place to make remote work more feasible. They pointed out that, although remote work is being adopted due to current circumstances, the country is not yet fully prepared for it. Participant P8-Man also shares the sentiment that South Africa is not yet prepared for remote work, and it was pushed by Covid-19 pandemic. The technology advancement and physical home infrastructures were not considered which has become very costly for the employees.

As remote work continues to prove its effectiveness, the findings suggests that it is here to stay. The participants also expressed the view that South Africa should gradually implement remote work through a hybrid model, allowing roles that can be performed remotely to continue while some employees return to the office. Hybrid work models are likely to become more common, with some employees continuing to work in the office when we look at the future of remote work in South Africa.

4.5.2 Factors influencing feasibility of remote work

The findings reveal that successful remote work relies on several critical factors, ensuring that both the infrastructure and work environment are conducive to and aligned with productivity. The key factors emphasized by all participants include

reliable network connectivity infrastructure, stable electricity, and access to high-quality devices and software, a perspective echoed by many. Participant P1-OE highlighted that while having backup power is critical, it is often insufficient during extended load shedding power outages, which can disrupt remote work. Participant P3-OE and P7-OE further suggested that for a more conducive feasible remote work environment, it would be beneficial if organizations and the government could support employees with backup power solutions, as it is expensive and not affordable for everyone.

Many participants have made significant efforts to minimize interruptions while working remotely. However, it is also important for organizations and employers to do their part in supporting remote work to ensure it remains feasible and successful. Addressing the ongoing energy crisis with sustainable solutions is crucial for long-term remote work feasibility. To truly enhance remote work accessibility, improving connectivity, ensuring power stability, and providing employees with quality devices should be prioritised.

Additionally, a productive work environment requires access to basic resources like water and a quiet, distraction-free space where individuals can focus. Participant P2-OE expressed concern about the water crisis in South Africa and hopes for a prompt solution, as the lack of water makes it difficult to create a conducive environment for remote work. *“People are literally, you know, concerned about shortage of water. I think that for me it is something that our government needs to take care of as soon as possible, because if we don’t have water working from home, it will definitely impact our ability to work”.*

Participant P6-OE shares a view that working from home can be distracting, as balancing work and taking care of kids can be challenging. They often find themselves locking themselves in the bedroom to focus and get work done.

The findings from participants further highlights that strong digital infrastructure is crucial for effective remote collaboration. Organizations must implement strategies to manage and support their teams efficiently. Participant P4-Man further emphasizes the importance of establishing methods for people management, as effective management remains essential to ensure that work is

completed both efficiently and effectively. While a national remote work policy exists, it should be adapted by individual departments and organizations to better align with their specific requirements, needs, and challenges to make remote work more feasible, a perspective also shared by P8-Man.

It is also necessary to consider the affordability of data costs to ensure that all employees can participate, regardless of their financial situation and these views are echoed by participant P10-Man. Additionally, P10-Man further emphasises that promoting digital literacy is key to bridging the digital divide, particularly for underprivileged communities, and ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to benefit from remote work opportunities. In the words of P10-Man: *“People want to put food on the table, and prioritizing data for work is not feasible and this gap needs to be addressed”*. The cost of data should be fairly regulated to ensure it is affordable for everyone. Participant P5-Man raised an economic concern regarding office rental spaces and coffee shops, emphasizing the need to address and manage these issues to ensure they are used effectively. With all these measures discussed above in place, the people of South Africa could truly potentially become global citizens.

4.5.3 Thoughts on returning back to the office

The findings from the participants indicated that many are reluctant to return to the office, citing the negative impact of commuting and the stress it places on their well-being. Participant P1-OE expressed that they would be very unhappy to return to the routine of waking up early and facing traffic again. They have become accustomed to remote work, to the point where, even when unwell, they continue working from home instead of taking sick leave, as they enjoy the flexibility of working remotely (WAFO). These sentiments are echoed by P2-OE and P3-OE, who suggest that they would not be at all impressed by the change. They feel they are more productive working from home than in the office and emphasize that such a shift would disrupt their daily routines, negatively impacting their lifestyle and increasing stress levels.

The research findings further suggests that participants appreciate the flexibility and comfort of remote work, often finding that it boosts their productivity.

Participant P5-Man expressed that their employer's introduction of hybrid work has been poorly received by many employees. They feel disappointed by the requirement to return to the office and share a sentiment that they would prefer to work extra hours or take on additional tasks rather than go back to the office. They are determined to continue working remotely at all costs. The sentiment around hybrid work is further echoed by Participant P9-OE, who shares that their employer also implemented a hybrid model, but the experience has been frustrating. They feel exhausted from the long hours spent commuting in traffic and note that office distractions reduce their productivity. As a result, they are unable to put in the extra hours they typically did while working remotely. *"I've been made to go back to the office, and it is terrible!"*.

Returning to the office is often seen as a setback, with worries about increased stress and disruptions to daily routines. Participants also point out that the office environment can be distracting and less efficient, with factors such as traffic and uncomfortable conditions further hindering productivity. Participant P6-OE adds that they would feel disheartened about returning to the office, as the flexibility of waking up at any time and having adaptable hours makes their work more enjoyable. In their own words when asked how they would feel about returning to the office they said the following: *"I would be a bit sad, you know, because I am used to waking up at my own time and then be comfortable and then just get ready to work"*.

Participant P10-Man further emphasized that requiring employees to return to the office should be a last resort. They believe employers should focus on innovative strategies to protect jobs and invest in infrastructure that supports remote work. They also suggest that working remotely offers cost benefits for both employers and employees, and that a balance should be struck to ensure both satisfaction and productivity. *"I will not be happy to go back to the office and that should be the last option on the table. Innovative strategies are required to be put in place to save peoples jobs and to put together the infrastructure that will enable remote work. Quality time with family is also one of the motivation factors not to go back to the office. Happy mind produces positive results you know"* (P10-Man).

In contrast, the findings also reveal that participant P4-Man mentioned that they would not feel sad to return to the office as that brings the social face-face interaction opportunity with the colleagues which is something they value and greatly missed. *“I like going to the office for the reason of networking, social life experience is very important for human beings”*. They further emphasized that, while they have adapted to remote work, the lack of face-to-face interaction with others is something they miss significantly. They stressed that this aspect should not be underestimated, as it plays a crucial role in one's social well-being and has a notable impact on psychological health.

Participant P10-Man is a strong advocate for remote work, citing the quality time it provides with family as a key motivator for continuing this arrangement. They also emphasize that maintaining a positive mindset contributes to improved outcomes and increased productivity.

Overall, there is considerable support for remote work, with many recognizing its potential benefits, especially when it is backed by the appropriate infrastructure and tools. *“Primary factors to make remote work to be more feasible include the infrastructure to allow seamless internet connectivity and load shedding issues must be addressed. It would be nice if organisations can assist employees with backup power to mitigate power challenges”* (P3-OE). The flexibility and convenience that remote work offers are highly valued, but it is clear that certain concerns need to be addressed for it to be fully effective.

Issues such as connectivity, isolation, and the challenge of maintaining work-life balance should not be overlooked, as they can impact both productivity and employee well-being. By ensuring these concerns are carefully considered and managed, remote work can be a sustainable and productive solution for many organizations.

4.6 Align findings with research questions

This research is underpinned by the TOE framework and the findings aligned with the themes that have emerged from each research question and are presented in the table below.

Table 4-2: Research Key Themes

#	Questions	Sub-Questions	Sub-Themes	Themes
RQ1 E	1. How does remote work influence employee productivity?	1.1 Describe your personal experience with remote work and how it has impacted your well-being.	1. Time Management 2. Discipline 3. Flexibility 4. Accountability 5. Communication , support, and collaboration 6. Social Connections 7. Distractions	1. Work-life balance 2. Employee well-being 3. Conducive workspace
		1.2 Has anything changed in terms of your role, workload and working hours since you started working remotely.		
		1.3 In your opinion, describe personal experience with remote work and how it has impacted your productivity.		
RQ2 T	2. What technological challenges do remote work employees face, and how does it impact productivity?	2.2 What technology challenges have you experienced specifically in relation to internet connectivity, software, power connectivity.	1. Power and water supply access 2. Network Connection 3. Work Equipment 4. Access to communication tools	1. Well established infrastructure 2. Tools of trade
		2.3 How would you describe the psychological effects that technological challenges have on you?		
		2.4 Tell me how you would describe the effect of technology on your productivity?		
RQ3 O	3. What factors contribute to the feasibility of remote work in South Africa, and how do they impact productivity?	3.1 Elaborate more on your thoughts about the feasibility of remote work in your South Africa and what do you think about the future of remote work in South Africa?	1. Remote work readiness 2. Conditions of employment 3. Remote work policies 4. Organisations process 5. Team authority and trust 6. Organisational readiness and employee adaptability	1. Viability of Remote work 2. Remote work policies and laws 3. Organisational culture
		3.2 In your own opinion, what do you think are the primary factors that influence the feasibility of remote work and with all these factors would you say South Africa is ready and why?		
		3.3 How would you feel about going back to the office?		

4.7 Summary

The research findings highlights that the transition to remote work has largely been embraced by the participants, with many reporting improvements in productivity, work-life balance, and flexibility. Working away from the office (WAFO) has helped people to avoid common office chit-chat distractions, and long commutes and frequent interruptions, leading to more focused and efficient work. Additionally, remote work has allowed employees to spend more time with their families while they get the job done and allowed them to also engage in personal hobbies, contributing to greater overall personal satisfaction. However, this shift has also introduced some challenges, including feelings of isolation, the need for greater self-discipline, and concerns about accountability within teams.

While remote work offers greater flexibility, it has also blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, with many participants reporting that they work longer hours, often stretching into evenings and weekends. This increased workload has created pressure, with some struggling to balance professional and personal responsibilities, which can lead to stress and burnout. However, taking on new responsibilities and participating in more meetings that they would not be engaging on if they were working at the office, has also provided opportunities for personal growth.

It is further noted that technological challenges, such as unreliable network connectivity, power outages crisis, especially due to load shedding, and insufficient IT support, have posed significant hurdles to remote work. Although some participants have mitigated these issues by investing in home infrastructure like backup power and Fiber-optic internet, others still face difficulties that hinder their productivity. These challenges are more pronounced in rural areas, where access to reliable internet and electricity can be limited. Furthermore, the studies highlight the significant costs associated with implementing mitigation measures to address technological challenges, emphasizing that these solutions are not affordable for everyone, and it is suggested that the organisations should consider assisting the employees where possible.

Despite these obstacles, the benefits of remote work are evident. Increased productivity, fewer office distractions, and greater flexibility in managing personal life have led many participants to prefer remote work over traditional office environments. The elimination of commuting has also saved both time and money, making remote work even more appealing. However, this shift emphasizes the need for strong infrastructure nationwide to provide reliable internet, power, and the necessary tools, ensuring that all employees including those in lower-income areas have the resources required to work effectively from home and they are not disadvantaged in anyhow.

The South African government has supported remote work by introducing IT policies and promoting digital infrastructure, but for remote work to be fully effective, greater collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential. Addressing regulatory issues and ensuring that employees have access to the necessary tools is crucial. It is suggested by the participants that perhaps a gradual transition to remote work should be considered than a big bang approach, with hybrid models likely to become the norm in the near future.

In conclusion, remote work has proven to be a viable and sustainable option for many participants, provided there is adequate support, infrastructure, and flexibility. The findings show that many employees are reluctant to return to the office, citing the negative impact and the stress it would add to their well-being as their lives will be disrupted. They highly value the flexibility and comfort of remote work, which often leads to increased productivity and better work-life balance.

Despite challenges like increased workloads, isolation, and tech issues, the consensus is that remote work is here to stay, with a promising future in South Africa. *“South Africa has embraced remote work, and the future looks bright”* (P2-OE). P2-OE further notes that *“Covid-19 was an eye opener and there is actually no need to work from the office and we need to move with times”*. Furthermore, P4-Man in their own words highlighted that *“Remote work is already in South Africa, and with the right infrastructure and tools it will be more feasible”*. The positive remote work experiences shared by numerous participants indicate that remote work will remain a significant aspect of South Africa’s work practices in the long run.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings from Chapter 4 are thoroughly examined and discussed in detail to help us answer the research questions. The analysis aims to offer a deeper understanding of the results and their implications, shedding light on how they contribute to addressing the key issues explored in the study. The study investigates the following research questions:

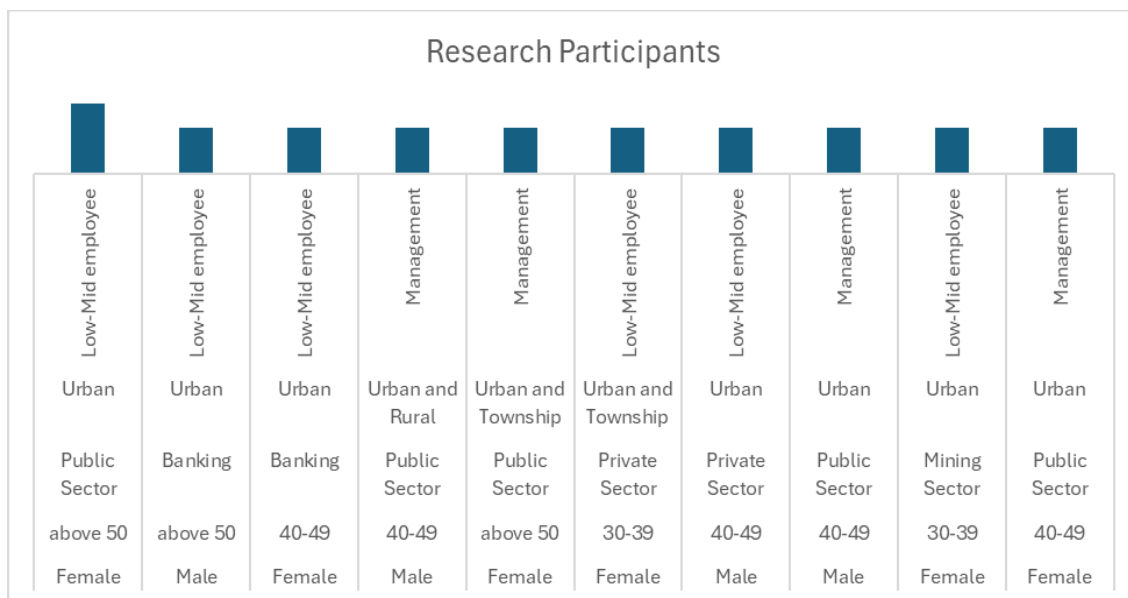
1. How does remote work influence employee productivity?
2. What technological challenges do remote work employees face, and how does it impact productivity?
3. What factors contribute to the viability of remote work in South Africa, and how would they impact productivity?

This chapter will examine the participant's lived experiences with remote work, focusing on how it has affected their productivity. By closely examining their perspectives, the chapter seeks to identify the key factors that shape their remote work experiences and how these factors contribute to their overall work performance. Additionally, the chapter will explore the technological challenges faced by remote workers, analysing how these obstacles affect their ability to maintain productivity. It will highlight the various technological barriers that hinder efficient remote work and evaluate their broader impact on performance outcomes. The chapter will also investigate the specific factors that determine the viability of remote work in South Africa, examining how these elements influence productivity within South African context. Moreover, the chapter will explore the participants' views on the future of remote work, considering their thoughts on emerging trends, technological advancements, and evolving work practices. Through this exploration, the chapter aims to provide valuable insights into how these factors collectively shape the sustainability of remote work, as well as its ongoing impact on both individual and organizational productivity.

5.2 Demographic profile of respondents

The different backgrounds of the people interviewed gave us a wide range of views, which helped us better understand the research questions. These variety allowed us to see things from different angles and made our analysis more complete. The participant's backgrounds included factors like gender, age, location, industry, and their job positions in their respective companies as stipulated in the figure below.

Figure 5-1 : Research Participants Demographics



The demographics were purposively selected as they are relevant factors for remote work employee productivity in South Africa research study and it was important to understand how different people experience and adjust to remote work. Gender is an important factor that allowed us to investigate if women may encounter specific challenges related to cultural expectations or home duties responsibilities, which can have an impact on their work and how that would affect productivity. The study revealed that remote work for women with small children is a bit challenging due to home distractions. This sentiment was echoed by P6-OE, a female participant with young children, who said, *“I actually miss the office; kids can be very distracting at home”*. These results align with Xiao et al. (2021), who emphasized the distractions posed by having small children at home and

Nakayama et al. (2022), further highlights that distractions at home can negatively impact remote work productivity.

In contrast, some participants valued the chance to work from home, as they found the office distracting and the home environment quieter. Participant P2-OE expressed a similar view, stating “*The office is very distracting with all the chit-chat and coffee breaks; more work gets done at home*”. This observation aligns with the findings in Kajanová and Barteková's (2022) study, which highlighted office distractions.

Another important factor explored is age, as we wanted to see if younger workers, who are more comfortable with technology, have an easier time with remote work compared to older workers who might struggle with new tools or balancing work and home life. However, the findings showed that age was not a significant factor, as all participants, regardless of age, were familiar with the technology used for remote work.

Location is another key factor, especially considering the digital divide in South Africa, with significant differences between urban and rural areas. The research findings indicate that participants in rural and township areas face greater challenges, such as unreliable internet connectivity and power outages, which make remote work more difficult. Participant P4-Man echoed “*Network connectivity is a major challenge especially when working from home in the rural area. Broadband services need to be rolled out to the entire country and load shedding is another key national challenge*”. This aligns with the findings in Venter and Daniels (2020) who highlighted the technology challenges and digital divide in South Africa. In contrast, in urban areas typically they have access to reliable resources and more people have taken steps to manage load shedding, often using backup power solutions like inverters.

The industry was also considered as an important factor, the public and private sectors have different policies and levels of access to resources. The private sector typically has more financial capacity to invest in remote work infrastructure and technology, while the public sector often faces challenges due to slower adoption of new technologies, lengthy budget approval processes, and limited

funding. The findings revealed that network connectivity and electricity access are very crucial to make remote work possible.

The final factor considered was job position to determine if managers may have different experiences compared to regular workers. The perception was that managers might have more freedom to work remotely, while junior employees could face challenges like not being visible enough or missing out on career growth opportunities. However, the findings revealed that both managers and employees more or less face similar challenges and the job position is not a determining factor in remote work productivity.

By considering all these factors, the researcher was able to gain a clearer understanding of how remote work affects different groups in South Africa, leading to recommendations for making remote work fairer and more effective for everyone.

5.3 Proposition 1: Explore whether remote work influences employee productivity

The impact of remote work on employee productivity has become an increasingly important topic in today's work dynamics, especially with the rise of flexible work arrangements in South Africa (Matli, 2020). To gain a deeper understanding of this dynamic, a series of research interviews were conducted with employees across various sectors. To explore how remote work affects productivity, the interviews findings reveal that factors such as time management, discipline, flexibility, accountability, and overall productivity are important for remote work settings. Participant P10-Man said, *"Time management and discipline is very critical for remote working employees"*. Participant P4-Man further expressed the lack of accountability in some remote work employees *"The observation is that there is a lack of commitment and accountability in most officials thus making remote work less effective"*.

The findings from these discussions provide valuable insights into how remote work influences employee's ability to stay focused, meet deadlines, and maintain high levels of output.

The following themes below are linked to Proposition 1

Table 5-1: Themes linked to Proposition1 - Explore whether remote work influences productivity

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Work and personal life balance	The findings suggest that for remote work to be efficient and enjoyable, employees must effectively manage their time, maintain discipline, and take responsibility. This ensures they can fully benefit from the flexibility that remote work offers.
2. Employee well-being	To maintain a healthy psychological well-being while working remote, it has been noted from the findings that continuous communication, management support, team collaboration and social connection is key for remote work employees and positive well-being enhances their job performance.
3. Conducive workspace	A comfortable environment free from distractions is required to foster good work habits and enhance concentration for employees to be productive.

The experiences with remote work discussed in the interviews highlighted people's views and assumptions about it and its impact on productivity. Proposition 1, which explores whether remote work influences productivity was explored revealing the following factors:

5.3.1 Work-Personal Life Balance

Work-life balance is defined in the Cambridge dictionary as “the amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing things you enjoy”. The concept of work-personal life balance in the context of remote work and employee productivity in South Africa, refers to the ability of employees to effectively manage work commitments and personal responsibilities while working from home. Employees can manage their personal and family responsibilities without compromising their work performance. This view is further emphasised by Gashi et al. (2022), who regard remote work as a significant advantage for employees, as it enables them to fulfil their work duties while also supporting personal or family commitments. The research findings agree with Gashi et al. views and reveal that most employees highly value family time and appreciate the flexibility of remote work, as it allows them to better balance their personal and professional lives. *“I am a parent to two children, one of which is nine. Working from home gives me time, I have time to take my child to school drop them off and pick them up and assist them with school homework. I’m able to spend more time with my daughter”* (P3-OE).

It has been noted in the research findings that work flexibility offered by WAFO, has a significant impact on employee’s attitudes and overall productivity. This is further supported by Saygılı and Öztırak (2024), who highlight that flexible working enables employees to achieve a better balance between their work and personal life, ultimately enhancing job satisfaction.

Many employees in the study revealed that they are even willing to work extended hours without overtime pay, recognizing the benefits of spending more time with their families and pursuing personal hobbies. Lester (2024) highlights the growing concern of burnout, suggesting a negative correlation between higher levels of burnout and a poor sense of balance between work and personal life. This issue is also reflected in our research, where many employees reported working longer hours, often extending beyond traditional working hours. While remote work offers flexibility, this same flexibility appears to encourage employees to push their boundaries, often blurring the lines between work and personal time. It is revealed further that employees find it hard to detach from work and often they

find themselves doing additional tasks. Although the additional hours worked are positively associated with increased productivity, as employees are going beyond their required tasks, the risk of burnout remains a concern for remote work settings.

The research findings indicate that one of the key benefits of remote work is the increased autonomy it provides, allowing employees greater control over how they structure their day. This autonomy not only enhances their ability to manage time more effectively but also plays a crucial role in improving their work-personal life balance. By having the flexibility to allocate their time based on personal and professional priorities, employees are able to create a more balanced integration of their work and personal lives. As a result, time management emerges as a critical factor in the remote work environment, contributing significantly to overall employee well-being and productivity. This supports our research findings that time management is crucial for remote workers to master.

5.3.2 Employees well-being

Well-being refers to having a positive mindset that enables one to be able to perform their tasks effectively and efficiently without any mental distractions to achieve their fullest potential. The rise of remote work has not only transformed how work is performed but also how employees engage with one another socially. In South Africa, the increase in remote work was not a voluntary shift but rather a reaction to the emergency brought on by the pandemic (Michael Page, 2024). In our research findings, it is suggested that the well-being of remote employees positively impacts their productivity. These findings are further supported by the research of Shamsi et al., (2021), who emphasized the connection between positive mental health and higher work engagement. Their study revealed that individuals who experience low levels of pleasure often struggle with anxiety and depression, which can negatively affect their well-being and work performance. In contrast, those who experience higher levels of pleasure tend to have more enthusiasm, which not only enhances their mood but also leads to greater motivation and the production of higher-quality work. This highlights the

significant impact that mental health and emotional well-being can have on both individual performance and overall work engagement.

Jaiswal and Prabhakaran (2024) examined the impact of employee well-being on performance within remote work settings in India, identifying several challenges faced by workers in this environment. These challenges, including poor internet connectivity, inadequate resources, and the absence of designated workspaces, which are similar challenges experienced in South Africa highlighted in the findings. Their study highlighted the essential role organizations played in prioritizing the well-being of remote workers. Recognizing the high levels of anxiety and stress among employees, organizations took proactive measures to address these concerns and support their employees mental and emotional health. Focusing on well-being was crucial for sustaining productivity and helping remote workers manage the challenges they faced by prioritizing their mental health. The research findings indicated that some employees were significantly impacted by these challenges, which in turn, affected their mental health.

The interview data showed that the flexibility allowing employees to work from any location, in their own time, using the organization's tools and internet connections, which enables operations to continue without requiring employees to be physically present in office buildings, is a key factor contributing to their positive well-being. The remote work flexibility enables individuals to manage their time, balance work and personal life, and organize their schedules around work, has a beneficial effect on their overall well-being and productivity. These findings are further reinforced by Chatterjee et al., (2022), who emphasize that workplace flexibility improves worker efficiency. Employees can work from home, where they can manage personal tasks, while organizations also benefit from maximizing employee's potential (Kajanová, & Barteková, 2022). It was also observed that remote work flexibility is shaped by factors such as workplace flexibility, adjustable work hours, the ability to balance family time, and the absence of travelling to work. These factors also affect productivity and employee satisfaction, which in turn, have an impact on overall employee productivity.

The research findings also indicate that employees have the flexibility to manage their own time, track their working hours, and handle their tasks. However, they

often find themselves working late into the evening and spending additional time adjusting to workload demands. This is further supported Yusuf (2021), who note that flexibility increases the number of decisions employees must make, such as when to start work, take breaks, end the workday, how long to work, and when to pause for breaks. Without a predefined workplace, employees are required to make individual decisions about where to work and which work environment best aligns with their tasks and personal needs (Yusuf, 2021). In our findings we discovered that due to challenges such as unreliable power supply and inconsistent network connections, employees do struggle to work from home sometimes or at other locations that do not have stable infrastructure. As a result, workers are often forced to adapt to different work venues, such as public spaces sometimes, depending on what best suits their tasks and working style at the time. While this flexibility can provide greater autonomy, it also presents challenges as employees must navigate the complexities of maintaining a productive and comfortable workspace outside of a traditional office environment.

5.3.3 Conducive Workspace

In remote work settings, it is clear that work and personal life often overlap within people's homes, leading to an intrusion of personal spaces that can affect other family members. The research findings suggest that homes are primarily designed as family environments, not workspaces. In their study, Charalampous et al. (2020) supported these findings by noting that individuals reported remote work interfering with their personal lives and found it particularly challenging to maintain boundaries between work and personal time which leads to having a negative impact to their mental health. With remote work, both work and personal life now occur within people's homes, challenging the traditional idea that work is limited to employment, pay, and a specific location (Adisa et al., 2021). The findings emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance between work and family life while managing work responsibilities without compromising productivity.

The findings further note that home distractions can be quite disruptive, and if not managed properly, they can impact one's ability to complete tasks. In remote

work settings, a private and quiet environment is preferred, as more communication is visual, and background noise can become distracting leading to decreased focus. For employees with young children, concerns were raised about the level of distraction caused by kids, leading some to find a room in the house to retreat to. In this study, gender is a key characteristic of the participants. While it may be premature to draw definitive conclusions at this stage, early empirical evidence, with ongoing growth in the literature, suggests that women with young children find the WAFO environment highly distracting. In their study, Sharma and Vaish (2020) also note that female respondents experienced an increase in household chores while working remotely, with conflicts between work and caregiving responsibilities proving to be particularly challenging for mothers with young children.

Additionally, it was noted that home furniture is often not ideal for work, and more comfortable furniture is needed in the working environment. These findings are reinforced by Tleuken et al. (2022), who highlight the significance of furniture and a comfortable environment in making remote work both enjoyable and productive.

5.4 Proposition 2: Explore the effect of technology on remote work productivity

The ICT sector in South Africa is growing rapidly, enabling seamless communication that is transforming how communities live and work (Shava, 2021). Technology has significantly changed the way individuals and organizations interact with and utilize data and information. This shift is particularly evident in the rise of remote work, which became widespread during the pandemic and allowed work to continue despite physical limitations. The interview findings emphasized how technological tools developed by the ICT sector have eliminated geographical boundaries and restrictions, allowing for seamless communication and collaboration between individuals and organizations, a sentiment that is further supported by Munyeka (2024). In South Africa, having access to a reliable internet connection continues to be a significant challenge, particularly in rural and township areas, where infrastructure remains underdeveloped (Aruleba & Jere, 2022). The findings agree with the literature

and Participant P6-OE who conducts remote work from the township and rural area highlighted the network connectivity challenges and said *“Personal experience with remote work has been a bit challenging even though it is nice to do the work from home but some of the issues such as load shedding and poor network connection make it a bit challenging and one will have to look for the nearest quite restaurant in to go and do the work”*. This issue has become a key priority for the South African government, and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (2023) is working to resolve it through ongoing broadband roll-out projects, as highlighted in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These initiatives aim to bridge the digital divide and tackle connectivity challenges.

In this research study, the findings further suggests that the rise of remote work has brought the digital divide into focus, highlighting the challenges individuals face while working remotely. This has also created an opportunity to explore the impact of technology on remote work productivity. The effect that technology has on remote work and how it impacts employee productivity has become an increasingly important focus, particularly with the growing adoption of remote work practices in South Africa. The crucial role that technology plays in remote work, influencing factors such as reliable computers, network connections, software, and reliable desktop support is further emphasised in the interview results. *“Remote work experience has been smooth sailing, and no technological challenges experienced as the organisation has efficient IT support team on high alert to assist with any challenges”* (P2-OE). Participant P5 shared frustrations and said *“Network connectivity is very challenging and often when the systems are down, the impact is severe and affects people’s lives. The type of services provided have zero tolerance of systems downtime”* (P5-Man).

Although these technologies play a crucial role in helping employees remain connected and productive, they also bring about certain challenges. The findings provide valuable insights into both the positive contributions and the potential disadvantages of technology in supporting remote work productivity.

The following themes below are linked to Proposition 2

Table 5-2: Themes linked to Proposition2 - Explore the effect of technology on remote work productivity

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Well established Infrastructure	The findings indicate that for remote work to be effective and enjoyable, employees need a reliable network connection, access to power and water, all of which depend on a well-established infrastructure.
2. Tools of Trade	The findings highlight that for remote work to be effective; employees must have access to the necessary tools and resources required to perform their tasks efficiently. This includes having reliable computers, appropriate software, and a reliable desktop support team to address any technical issues that may arise.

The interviews discussed participant's experiences and perspectives on how technology affects remote work productivity. Proposition 2, which examines the impact of technology on remote work productivity, was explored and revealed the following factors:

5.4.1 Well Established Infrastructure

The digital divide is both an economic and social issue that has attracted considerable attention in South Africa. The term often refers to the global gap in access to the internet and other Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which play a key role in driving globalization for individuals, households, and businesses (Aruleba & Jere, 2022). The interview findings revealed that South African communities remain divided along rural, township, and urban lines,

with internet connectivity access continuing to be a challenge in rural and township areas compared to urban regions. This is not surprising, considering that South Africa's political system, policies, and laws before the advent of democracy in 1994 were structured to enforce racial discrimination and establish political and economic segregation for non-White South Africans. According to Tigere and Netshitangani (2022), the political system had a profound impact on the geographic and spatial distribution of the country, affecting the delivery of public services. Basic services were limited in rural, township, and non-white areas. Additionally, infrastructure investments were significantly underfunded, contributing to the perpetuation of poverty and inequality which as a result contributed to the digital divide.

The findings clearly show that reliable internet connectivity is crucial for remote work to be feasible. Without it, remote work becomes nearly impossible. Additionally, for internet connectivity to function effectively, the required infrastructure must be in place. The challenges related to internet connectivity are especially prominent in rural and township areas. This is not surprising, considering that South Africa's political system, policies, and laws before the advent of democracy in 1994 were structured to enforce racial discrimination and establish political and economic segregation for non-white South Africans (Tigere & Netshitangani, 2022).

The interview results further emphasize the ongoing energy crisis in South Africa, stemming from the deteriorated country's electricity generation infrastructure which needs replacement (Aruleba & Jere, 2022). The energy crisis has resulted in frequent load shedding, and these power outages have a significant impact on various sectors, including remote work. They disrupt internet connectivity, limit access to essential technologies, and have a negative impact on productivity (Erero, 2023). With unreliable power supply, individuals working from home often face interruptions that make it difficult to carry out the work, leading to inefficiencies and causes frustration and impact on one's mental well-being. The frequent load shedding worsens the challenges of remote work, highlighting the critical need for a more reliable and stable energy supply to support the growing demand for remote work in South Africa.

5.4.2 Tools of Trade

In the context of this research, the term "tools of trade" is used to refer to the digital devices that are crucial for effectively performing remote work. The interview findings show that employees rely heavily on laptops, mobile devices, and stable Wi-Fi connections to perform their tasks effectively. Equally important, the findings highlight the need for an efficient desktop support team to ensure smooth operations and resolve any technical issues that may arise. These technological tools are not only essential for day-to-day activities but also enable seamless communication and collaboration between the teams. Moreover, the findings emphasize the challenges posed by the ongoing load shedding crisis in South Africa, which disrupts power supply and, consequently, remote work. To mitigate the effects of these power outages, employees who can afford it have made investments in portable power backups, such as inverters and uninterruptible power supply (UPS) systems. These investments help ensure that remote work can continue uninterrupted despite the frequent power disruptions.

It is further noted in the findings that the teams have the right technology tools to ensure seamless and efficient remote work. However, these same tools have introduced new challenges, as the ability to stay connected anytime and anywhere has blurred the lines between work and personal life. As a result, the constant connectivity that these tools provide has led to higher expectations for availability even outside of traditional working hours. Singh et al. (2022) share the same view, pointing out that mobile technologies allow people to stay connected whenever they want. This convenience can make people forget about work hours, as they get used to communicating at any time. This shift has made it harder to maintain a healthy work-life balance, as individuals feel the pressure to always be accessible and responsive and they often find themselves working long hours without even realizing it. It is clear that the right technology tools are essential for remote work to be effective. However, it's equally important to use these tools wisely to maintain a healthy work-life balance and prevent it from being compromised.

5.5 Proposition 3: Examine the feasibility of remote work in South Africa

The literature highlights that in South Africa, the traditional nine-to-five office work model has long been based on fixed schedules and physical office spaces for most industries. Flexible working arrangements were not commonly adopted, but the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced a shift in how work was approached. Employers had to quickly adapt and find ways to keep business operations running, and working from home became a practical solution. As a result, remote work began to gain traction as a new standard for many organizations (Matli, 2020). The feasibility of remote work in South Africa is a fascinating topic that warrants exploration. The findings investigated this feasibility, and the following themes are linked to Proposition 3.

Table 5-3: Themes linked to Proposition3 – Examine the feasibility of remote work in South Africa

Theme	Sub-theme
Viability of remote work	The findings suggest that the feasibility of remote work depends on several factors, including but not limited to technology, the work environment, and organizational structures.
Remote work organisational culture	The findings highlight the importance of establishing an organizational culture for remote work that protects boundaries and ensures it is carried out effectively.
Remote work policies and laws	Governance structures must be established to ensure that remote work remains feasible and effective.

5.5.1 Viability of remote work

The interview findings indicate that remote work is sustainable in South Africa, despite being a concept that was quickly adopted due to the pandemic. The response has been largely positive. It is evident that employees have adopted remote work, despite the absence of specific laws that recognize it as a right or govern it as a new mode of work (Hofmeyr, 2022). In the findings it is well noted that organisations develop their own policies to regulate remote work in line with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) of 1997 and the Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1995. Remote work is increasingly viable in South Africa especially with advancements in technology that allows teams to collaborate seamlessly even though there are some challenges that still need to be addressed. It has been noted that effectively managing home distractions can make remote work more viable and increase productivity. This is further supported by Nakayama et al. (2022), who highlighted that distractions at home can negatively impact remote work performance.

Remote work has demonstrated significant cost-saving benefits for both employees and employers (Kajanová & Barteková, 2022). For employees, it reduces the need for daily commuting, which can save time and money and also eliminates office distractions. Employers also reap the benefits of remote work by reducing costs associated with maintaining office space, including rent, utilities, and other operational expenses. The flexibility that remote work offers further enables organizations to streamline their operations, resulting in a reduction of overall overheads. These combined savings make remote work an attractive and efficient solution for both employees and employers, fostering more sustainable business practices. Kajanová and Barteková (2022) emphasize these benefits, noting that employees see the ability to work from home as a valuable advantage not just for themselves, but for their employers as well. This arrangement not only helps eliminate distractions from colleagues but also contributes to cost savings for both parties. Findings show that employees have embraced the flexibility of remote work, as it enables them to determine their own start and end times for the workday, making the traditional 8-hour workday or 8am to 5pm schedule less significant. Employees have demonstrated that remote work is viable in SA.

5.5.2 Remote Work Organisational Culture

According to Dewar (2025), organizational culture is defined as the set of shared values, beliefs, and behaviours that guide how people work in an organization. Organisational culture is also seen as essential in conveying company goals and inspiring individuals to actively pursue and share knowledge with their colleagues. A positive culture fosters an environment of trust, where employees feel comfortable assisting their peers without the fear of being exploited or having their knowledge misused (Radu, 2023). In remote settings, where employees work from various locations, the importance of organisational culture in remote work cannot be overlooked. It plays a crucial role in maintaining a sense of connection, collaboration, and shared purpose among employees, despite the physical distance.

Galanti et al. (2021) suggest that organisational trust is linked to how remote workers perceive their relationship with their manager. During the interviews, we found that organizations place a high level of trust in their teams, granting them the authority to carry out their tasks with autonomy. *“The remote work experience has been an amazing and best thing that ever happened. One has also learned accountability and gets work done without being pushed”* (P1-OE). This approach reflects the organizational culture that has been established to support remote work, where employees are empowered to manage their responsibilities independently while maintaining a strong sense of accountability. The trust placed in teams fosters a more flexible and productive work environment, and the employees demonstrating more committed to their organizations and going the extra mile to deliver results. *“A lot can be done when working from home and one puts more hours on the work that needs to be done and there is no time wasted travelling to work and being stuck in traffic”* (P7-OE).

Furthermore, the findings highlight that communication, and collaboration is key for remote workers. Keppler and Leonardi (2023) examined how digital communication technologies can promote collaboration and knowledge sharing. In this study, a culture of trust among employees was found to be highly effective, as the trust within teams fosters a more flexible and productive work environment.

5.5.3 Remote Work Policies and Laws

The interview results revealed that employees are typically required to adhere to their company's policies regarding their physical location and the conditions for remote work. Every organisation has its own policy governing remote work, and the majority of employees indicated that their homes are designated as their primary work location. An alternative location is only considered when challenges arise that prevent them from working effectively at home. As employees work from home, there is uncertainty regarding who is responsible for their health and safety. With many working long hours and facing burnout, it's unclear how employers are addressing these issues, or if they even acknowledge long working hours as a problem. The South African Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) outlines fundamental employee rights, including working hours, leave, and occupational health and safety (OHS) standards. As a result, remote employee's working conditions must adhere to this law. However, the findings so far indicate that employees may not be fully complying with the law. The flexibility of remote work creates a lack of clear boundaries, making it difficult to distinguish when work should be done and when it should not.

The findings also highlight that there are no legal obligations for employers to reimburse expenses related to remote work arrangements. Based on the interview results, it was found that many employees have personally funded the installation of backup power systems and Fiber internet at their homes. This puts lower-level employees at a disadvantage, as not everyone can afford these expenses. Bonnett (2024) noted that many employers are unaware that remote workers are still eligible for compensation. In our findings, we observed that some employers provide compensation to some extent, while others do even try. South Africa faces high data costs, and connectivity is essential for remote work. Additionally, the power crisis makes remote work challenging, and there are no regulations in place to address how these costs can be reduced or how the energy crisis can be managed to better support remote work. Collier and Osiki (2024) highlight the need to review and regulate remote work laws in South Africa to ensure a balanced approach that promotes productivity and benefits both employers and employees.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the insights and experiences shared by remote workers play a crucial role in influencing productivity levels, particularly in understanding the factors that affect remote work productivity in South Africa. The current study highlighted the critical need for balancing personal life and work responsibilities while also fostering a healthy mindset in a remote work setting. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Shamsi et al. (2021), who highlighted the connection between positive mental health and higher work engagement, showing that individuals with low levels of pleasure are more prone to anxiety and depression, which can negatively impact both their well-being and productivity.

It is also emphasized that a conducive workspace is essential in remote work settings. Our findings indicate that home environments tend to be less distracting than office spaces; however, maintaining discipline and effective time management is crucial for successfully managing work responsibilities. It is further noted from the findings that employees who struggle with time management and planning often find themselves working long hours, which can lead to burnout. While the findings did not directly indicate that participants complained about burnout, it remains an issue, as it can negatively affect productivity. The burnout concerns are echoed by Costin et al. (2023), who emphasized the need to manage mental health, balance workloads effectively, and take time off to prevent burnout and boost productivity.

The findings further highlight that South Africa is struggling with significant challenges that directly impact remote work and, if not addressed, can hinder productivity. One of the key challenges is the ongoing power crisis, a national issue affecting all sectors. The findings reveal that some employees have taken proactive steps to manage the situation by installing solar systems and securing backup power systems from their own pockets. These efforts are vital in mitigating the disruptions caused by the power crisis, which, if left unaddressed, could affect not only remote work but all areas of business operations. Without a clear plan in place, the power crisis poses a considerable threat to overall productivity as work cannot be done. As of January 21, 2025, Eskom reported that loadshedding has been suspended for 300 days. This achievement is a result

of the Generation Recovery Plan that Eskom began implementing in March 2023, which has led to consistent improvements in the Generation fleet (Eskom, 2025). However, while there has been progress, it is important to recognize that these improvements are not a permanent solution and still carry the risk of future power outages, which continues to pose a threat to remote work and all sectors reliant on a stable power supply.

Another significant challenge highlighted in the findings is the technological barriers, which include, but are not limited to, issues with network connectivity and the need for advanced tools of trade to perform the work effectively. It is clear that remote work demands a well-established infrastructure to ensure smooth and uninterrupted network connections. Employees expressed frustration with the digital divide in South Africa, which prevents them from working in different locations and provinces. Many areas, particularly in rural regions and townships, experience poor or no network connectivity, limiting the feasibility of remote work. The need to work from different locations stems from South Africa's history, where non-white South Africans were restricted from living in cities (Tigere & Netshitangani, 2022). This legacy has led many people to have multiple homes across different provinces. While most come to the city for work, their primary residences may be in rural areas or even in different provinces, complicating the logistics of remote work. These technological challenges pose a significant risk to remote work productivity (Erero, 2023) however the findings show that the employees have went an extra mile and put mitigations in place.

Finally, the feasibility of remote work in South Africa was examined, and the findings clearly indicate that remote work is a viable option, with returning to previous work methods not being a feasible alternative. While there are challenges, it is evident that the country is actively addressing these issues and implementing solutions. Employees have shown a strong preference for remote work and are willing to go the extra mile to continue in this format. Notably, remote work has a positive impact on employee well-being, leading to a healthier mindset, longer working hours without expectations of extra compensation, and increased productivity. The advantages of remote work in terms of productivity far outweigh the challenges currently being faced.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we summarize the findings and provide a conclusion that addresses the research questions we aimed to answer. This final chapter outlines the key contributions to addressing the research problem, particularly within the context of literature on remote work employee productivity in South Africa. It also presents recommendations for improving remote work practices, outlines the limitations of the study, and offers suggestions for future research.

This research aimed to explore remote work employee productivity in South Africa. The study addressed the ongoing debate regarding differing perceptions of remote work, with some employers advocating for a return to the office, citing concerns over productivity differences.

The research questions were outlined as follows:

1. Does remote work have an influence on employee productivity?
2. What technological challenges do remote work employees face, and how does it impact productivity?
3. What factors contribute to the viability of remote work in South Africa, and how would this impact productivity?

To address the research questions, the study used a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews (SSI) with purposively selected remote work employees with various demographics. These individuals shared their lived experiences of remote work, providing insights into the challenges, benefits, and realities they faced. The study is grounded in phenomenology theory and the TOE (Technology-Organization-Environment) framework, though other theories, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), could have also offered valuable perspectives on remote work productivity.

6.2 Conclusion for Each Proposition

The research questions are summarized and concluded as follows.

6.2.1 Proposition 1: Explore whether remote work influences employee productivity

The debate over whether remote work impacts productivity is a growing concern for many organizations. With many companies asking employees to return to the office, and some opting for hybrid models, it's clear that there are issues that need to be addressed. On the other hand, employees are expressing dissatisfaction with the decision to return to the office.

The study's findings revealed that the impact of remote work on employee productivity is a complex issue, with both positive and negative effects. Many employees appreciate remote work and are even willing to go above and beyond, sometimes working extra hours without pay, because they value the flexibility it offers. This flexibility allows them to spend more time with family, pursue personal hobbies, and better balance their work and personal lives. As a result, employees often report a positive shift in their mindset, which leads to increased productivity and greater enjoyment of their work. One of the key positive benefits impacting remote work productivity is the elimination of daily travel to the office. With heavy traffic during both morning and afternoon hours, many employees experience significant stress and fatigue from the journey. This exhaustion often leads to decreased productivity, as employees are already drained before they even begin their workday.

The findings further indicate that employees experience fewer distractions while working from home compared to the office environment. In the office, frequent breaks and casual conversations among coworkers can often disrupt focus and hinder task completion. However, at home, employees tend to have more control over their surroundings, allowing them to concentrate better and work with fewer interruptions. This quieter, more controlled environment enables them to perform their tasks more effectively and stay on track with their responsibilities. As a result, many employees report higher productivity when working remotely, as they

can avoid the disruptions typically found in office settings. Additionally, improved communication and team collaboration have been highlighted as positive outcomes. Employees reported that faster response times and regular meetings contribute significantly to their efficiency. With quicker feedback and more frequent check-ins, they are able to complete tasks more promptly, which directly contributes to increased productivity. It is well noted that remote work requires a proper time management, discipline and ability to balance personal life and work.

In contrast, the research findings reveal that some employees acknowledge that their homes are not set up for work, and this affect their families. They feel that remote work imposes on their home life, requiring their family members to adjust to this new dynamic. Although this doesn't necessarily impact their productivity, employees feel that organizations should be more considerate. For some employees, especially mothers with small children, remote work can be quite distracting. Additionally, those living in smaller homes without a designated workspace, like a study, often find remote work challenging as well.

In conclusion, the effect of remote work on productivity differs greatly based on individual preferences, job responsibilities, and the amount of support offered by their organization. While many employees find remote work to be a boost to their productivity, particularly due to the flexibility it offers, others face challenges related to distractions at home, lack of dedicated workspaces, or difficulties in balancing family responsibilities. Additionally, the absence of daily travelling to work also contribute positively to productivity, as employees experience less stress and fatigue.

However, for remote work to effectively boost overall productivity, organizations must provide the essential resources, promote a supportive remote work environment for collaboration, and empower employees with the autonomy to work independently. In conclusion, the effectiveness of remote work in enhancing productivity largely depends upon how well organizations address these diverse needs and create an environment that enables employees to thrive and be productive. The findings emphasize that a fostering a positive work culture mindset contribute to increased productivity (Radu, 2023).

6.2.2 Proposition 2: Explore the effect of technology on remote work productivity

The development of basic infrastructure in South Africa has been a key focus for many years, especially after the country transitioned to democracy. This goal is also in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, which highlight the critical role that enhanced infrastructure plays in driving economic growth and improving overall quality of life (United Nations, 2015). South Africa has worked towards providing internet access to its citizens through a national broadband policy and implementation project called SA Connect which was approved by the cabinet in the year 2013. SA Connect is a long-term project, with significant milestones set for 2016, 2020, and 2030. This project main focus is on expanding access to affordable, high-speed internet in all provinces across the country.

Although efforts to provide reliable, high-speed internet connectivity are still underway, the findings indicate that access to connectivity is crucial for remote work. A significant challenge remains in areas such as townships and rural areas, where connectivity is still limited. The impact of technology on remote work productivity in South Africa has gained significant attention especially since the country is adapting to remote work settings. The findings highlighted technology challenges particularly the underdeveloped infrastructure. It was noted that without reliable connectivity, employees struggle to work remotely effectively. There is also a lack of ability to work from any province, as certain areas experience poor or no network coverage which make remote work difficult.

The study further emphasises the importance of remote workers to be equipped with the right tools of trade such as laptops and software's that will allow the teams to stay connected, collaborate efficiently, and manage their tasks efficiently. It is revealed that the lack of consistent connectivity hampers employee's ability to work effectively, leading to frustration and reduced productivity. Additionally, the study further revealed that some employees, particularly those at the low-middle levels, lack access to alternative solutions such as faster network options like Fiber connections in their homes, which further affects their performance if they don't make alternative arrangements.

In conclusion, while technology has proven to be a crucial driver of remote work productivity in South Africa, its success depends on reliable network connectivity, and access to the right tools of trade. For remote work to thrive and be a long-term work arrangement, both the South African government and organisations must work together to tackle infrastructure challenges and bridge the digital divide by ensuring equal access to technology. Achieving the full benefits of remote work in South Africa requires these efforts, which would allow it to enhance productivity across all provinces in the country.

6.2.3 Proposition 3: Examine the feasibility of remote work in South Africa

South Africa, as a developing country (Bakari, 2017), understands the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals in helping the country grow and solve social and economic problems. The government has adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote sustainable development, reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life for its people (United Nations, 2015). These goals are essential for guiding the country toward a fairer and more sustainable future.

Remote work in South Africa was adopted as the results of the pandemic, and we have seen the rise since then with more companies opting for it (Matli, 2020). In this study, the feasibility of remote work in South Africa was carefully examined, focusing on a variety of factors such as infrastructure, technological access, and employee readiness. The research aimed to determine if remote work could be effectively adopted across different industries and regions within the country. Key challenges were identified, including inconsistent internet connectivity, which remains a major barrier in rural and township areas, and a lack of access to necessary technological tools such as high-speed internet and modern hardware. Furthermore, varying levels of access to internet connectivity and affordability to buy data among employees were noted as a significant hurdle, particularly for those in lower-middle employees or in township areas. Despite these challenges, the study also uncovered opportunities for growth. It highlighted how remote work improves productivity, work-life balance, and overall employee satisfaction, especially in urban areas with more reliable infrastructure. Overcoming these

barriers could make remote work a valuable asset for both employees and employers, offering increased flexibility and enhancing overall employee productivity.

The findings further highlight that the feasibility of remote work in South Africa is significantly impacted by the ongoing power crisis challenges. The frequent power outages pose a major barrier, especially in areas where the electricity supply is unstable. Load shedding disrupts the ability of employees to work consistently from home, as it affects internet connectivity, the use of electronic devices, and overall productivity. In areas where load shedding is more frequent or prolonged, employees may struggle to meet deadlines or maintain a consistent work schedule, leading to frustration and reduced efficiency. Furthermore, the findings show that lower-middle employees struggle with affordability to obtain power backup solutions such as generators or UPS systems to mitigate load shedding challenges.

In conclusion, the feasibility of remote work in South Africa presents both significant opportunities and challenges. While the country has the potential to benefit from remote work in terms of increased productivity and better employee well-being, key obstacles such as inconsistent internet connectivity and lack of access to essential tools of trade needs to be addressed. Urban areas with better infrastructure are more equipped to support remote work, but rural and townships still face considerable hurdles. For remote work to be successfully implemented across South Africa, there must be a concerted effort from both the government and private sector to improve digital infrastructure and ensure equal access to technologies. It is only through these efforts that the full potential of remote work can be unlocked, leading to a more inclusive and productive remote working environment in South Africa.

To solidify the conclusion, based on the interviews conducted with remote workers in South Africa, it can be confidently asserted that remote work leads to increased productivity, provided that the challenges outlined above are effectively addressed. The employees expressed that they would be dissatisfied with

returning to the office, which would negatively affect their productivity, as unhappy employees tend to be less efficient (Bellet et al., 2024).

6.3 Limitations

The limitations of this study stem from the fact that the chosen sample does not fully represent the broader population of remote workers. As a result, the findings may not be entirely generalizable to all remote workers, and conclusions drawn from this sample may not reflect the experiences or perspectives of the wider remote work employees. This limitation should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results, as the diversity of remote work experiences across different industries, regions, and job roles may vary significantly.

Time proved to be a significant limitation in this qualitative study, as both the data collection and analysis required a considerable amount of time. To gain a deep and thorough understanding of the data, a manual approach was chosen for interpreting and analysing the information. This process was iterative, meaning it involved multiple rounds of reviewing and refining the data, which lengthened the overall time required for analysis. Although it is assumed that the data was accurately interpreted and that the patterns and themes identified genuinely reflect the data's meaning, the time-consuming nature of this approach may have affected both the efficiency and scope of the analysis.

6.4 Recommendations

The following sections will cover recommendations for both employees and employers that can be considered.

6.4.1 Recommendations for Employers

The world is increasingly becoming more digital, and remote work has emerged as the new norm. This shift is not just happening in South Africa but has been successfully adopted by leading countries around the globe. There's no doubt that remote work is here to stay. While it's true that South Africa faces challenges

such as outdated infrastructure, load shedding, and limited or unreliable network connectivity in certain areas, remote work has still shown to deliver better results than traditional office work. Since organizations prioritize profitability, the fact that employees are more productive when working remotely ultimately leads to greater financial success for businesses. It is acknowledged that because remote work was imposed by the pandemic, no one was ready for it and there might not be proper policies in place to handle it.

A strong case has been made that remote work impacts productivity positively if the challenges mentioned in the study are addressed. Organizations must be careful and strategic in how they develop, implement, and refine their remote work programs.

It is therefore recommended that organisation consider the following:

- Review their existing policies and procedures and implement dedicated remote work policies to clearly define how employees should work remotely. These policies should ensure that a supportive work environment is provided, with employees being equipped with the necessary tools, including reliable network connectivity, backup power (such as UPS), and other essential resources to facilitate their productivity and success in a remote setting.
- Update the organizational culture to better support remote work, recognizing that while trust and teamwork are important in remote settings, the overall company culture is still key. Employees working from home should continue to represent and uphold the company culture at all times.
- Support employees by providing compensation for essential tools, such as backup power and high-speed internet connections. Since not all employees can afford these resources, organizations should invest in them, as they will ultimately benefit from increased productivity and efficiency.
- Prioritize mental health support for employees, especially since many are voluntarily working extra hours without expecting compensation. While their dedication is valuable, it can impact their personal lives and lead to burnout. Happy, well-supported employees are more likely to produce

better results, so offering mental health benefits will help ensure their well-being and sustained productivity.

- Partner with the South African government to advance the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and contribute to making South Africa a better place for everyone.
- When remote work poses challenges, consider adopting a hybrid model rather than requiring employees to return full-time to the office.
- Provide incentives for high performers to motivate and encourage commitment and accountability among employees.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Employees

It is widely recognized that many employees prefer working remotely, and the findings show that employees would be highly dissatisfied if they were required to return to the office. A strong case has been made that remote work does have a positive influence on productivity if there are no technology and power challenges. The following is recommended for employees:

- The study reveals that a small number of employees take advantage of the remote work setting, showing a lack of commitment, accountability, and productivity. The recommendation is for employees to maintain strong ethical standards and fulfil the work they are being paid to complete.
- To enhance focus and productivity while working remotely, it is essential to establish a dedicated workspace that is both comfortable and free from distractions. A well-designed workspace can also contribute to a more professional mindset, making it easier to stay motivated and work on task throughout the day.
- Mental health plays a vital role in overall well-being. Employees should focus on achieving a good work-life balance to prevent either work or personal life from being negatively affected. While remote work offers flexibility, which many employees value, it's important to remember that this flexibility should not mean sacrificing personal time. Striking a healthy balance is key.

- If you're feeling isolated or facing challenges, whether technical, personal, or professional, don't hesitate to reach out to your employer or colleagues for support. Staying connected and asking for help can help combat feelings of loneliness and keep you engaged.
- Recognize the challenges South Africa faces, such as the power crisis and network connectivity issues, and collaborate with employers on solutions that can improve productivity. If these challenges are affecting employee performance, it may be necessary to consider returning to the office for better efficiency as it will be temporary until solutions are in place.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

The study's results confirmed previous research showing that remote work positively affects employee productivity. However, the findings also highlighted that mental health has a significant impact on productivity. The study highlights that many employees are reluctant to return to the office, as they have found greater satisfaction in working remotely. This sense of happiness and comfort that comes with remote work plays a significant role in boosting their productivity. Employees are more motivated and engaged when working from home, which leads to increased productivity. Many employees also expressed that they would be very unhappy if they were required to return full-time to the office. It is clear that a balanced approach between employers and employees is necessary when it comes to remote work arrangements.

Further research is needed to explore how employers can effectively sustain remote work while ensuring that employee productivity remains high, and satisfaction is preserved. As remote work continues to evolve, understanding how to manage the challenges that come with it, such as communication barriers, work-life balance, and maintaining company culture, is crucial. Employers must explore how they can use change management strategies to not only support employees during transitions but also foster an environment where productivity thrives, and employees remain engaged. By exploring best practices in remote work management and employee well-being, future research can provide

actionable insights on how to create a sustainable, productive, and happy remote work environment for all.

Future research should include a wider range of employees in remote work to gain a more diverse perspective. By gathering insights from different teams, researchers can better understand the challenges, strategies, and impacts of remote work on productivity, satisfaction, and team dynamics, helping identify effective management practices and areas for improvement.

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Appendix A – Consistency Table

Remote work employee productivity in South Africa					
RQ #	Research Question	Prop	Proposition	Data collection detail	Data analysis method
1	How does remote work influence employee productivity?	1	Explore whether remote work influences employee productivity.	Online Interviews	Thematic Analysis
2	What technological challenges do remote work employees face, and how does it impact productivity?	2	Explore the effect of technology on remote work productivity.	Online Interviews	Thematic Analysis
3	What factors contribute to the feasibility of remote work in South Africa, and how would this impact productivity?	3	Examine the feasibility of remote work in South Africa.	Online Interviews	Thematic Analysis

Appendix B – Research Instrument

1. Introduction

- The participant was greeted warmly and thanked for their time and for agreeing to participate in the study and for signing the consent form.
- A permission to record the session was requested for the purpose of data collection and thematic analysis. Emphasise on confidentiality and anonymity for the study was given.
- A brief introduction about the researcher was done and proceeded to the research questions, starting with general questions for demographic purposes.

2. Research Overview

- A description and purpose of the study and its objectives was given.

3. Research Rationale

- The reasons for conducting the study were explained.

4. Consent

- A permission to proceed with the interview was requested.

5. Interview Questions

Once permission was granted, the below questions were asked to proceed with the interview:

5.1 General Questions for demographic purposes:

- i) Tell me a little about yourself, industry you work in and your role in your organization.
- ii) Do you live in the urban, rural or township?
- iii) How long have you been working away from the office?

5.2 Research Question 1 – How does remote work influence employee productivity?

- i) Describe your personal experience with remote work and how it has impacted your well-being.
- ii) Has anything changed in terms of your role, workload and working hours since you started working remotely.

- iii) In your opinion, describe personal experience with remote work and how it has impacted your productivity.

5.3 Research Question 2 - What technological challenges do remote work employees face, and how does it impact productivity?

- i) What technology challenges have you experienced specifically in relation to internet connectivity, software, power connectivity.
- ii) How would you describe the psychological effects that technological challenges have on you?
- iii) Tell me how you would describe the effect of technology on your productivity?

5.4 Research Question 3 - What factors contribute to the feasibility of remote work in South Africa, and how do they impact productivity?

- i) Elaborate more on your thoughts about the feasibility of remote work in your South Africa and what do you think about the future of remote work in South Africa?
- ii) In your own opinion, what do you think are the primary factors that influence the feasibility of remote work and with all these factors would you say South Africa is ready and why?
- iii) How would you feel about going back to the office?

6. Closing

Thanked the participant and explain that the copy of the recording will be shared if they require it. Additionally, an explanation was also provided that the outcome of the interview will be documented in the research report which will be shared with the participant if they require it.

Appendix C – Participant Information Sheet



Dear fellow participant,

My name is Thembi Khobane, and I am a student at Wits Business School, studying a Master's in Management in the field of Digital Business (MMDB). My research aims to investigate the productivity of employees in the South Africa who are working remotely, and the factors that influence this productivity. The goal is to gain insights into the effectiveness of remote work which can guide future workplace policies, practices and potentially improve business performance.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview for the remote work employee productivity research. The purpose of this interview is to gather your feedback on your experience with remote work and your perspective on how it affects productivity. During the interview, I will ask you a series of questions, and I expect you to provide your genuine, lived experiences in your answers. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience and will be conducted online using Microsoft Teams application and it will last for a maximum of one hour. As part of the research, I would like to record the interviews to refer to your responses during the analysis phase of the study. Rest assured; your confidentiality and identity will be safeguarded.

Your participation is voluntary, and you will not receive any incentive for taking part in the study. If at any point you decide you no longer wish to continue, you are welcome to withdraw from the process, and I will respect your decision without taking it personally. This research will be documented in the form of a written report which will be submitted to the Wits Graduate School of Business. Should you wish to receive a summary of the report, I will make one available to you.

Yours sincerely,

Student: Ms Thembi Khobane

Contact Number: 078 434 2292; E-mail: thembik82@gmail.com

Supervisor: DR Jenika Gobind

Contact Number: 011 717 3761; E-mail: jenika.gobind@wits.ac.za

Appendix D – Consent Form



Remote work employee productivity in South Africa

Researcher Name: Thembi Khobane

Concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study can be directed to the Wits Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Contact Number: 011 717 1408 / 011 717 1788

Email: Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za.

Email: mmatshepo.taunyane@wits.ac.za

Declaration and Consent

I give consent to participate in this research. I have read and understand the information contained in this document. I understand that the interviews will be online and recorded. I hereby give consent to participate in this research voluntarily.

Participant :.....

Researcher.....

Signature:

Date:

Signature:

Date:

____/____/____

____/____/____

____/____/____