

THE IMPACT OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS ON ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN BANKING INDUSTRY

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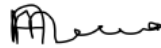
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Johannesburg, 2023

DECLARATION

I, ABIGAIL MANHUWA, declare that this research article 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 Business Administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

ABIGAIL MANHUWA



Signed at DOUGLASDALE, JOHANNESBURG

On the 20th day of February 2023

DEDICATION

To my husband and son,

BESENTI & SHAUN SAMSON,

my greatest inspiration.

To my parents,

to my mother – this is for you – and to my father in loving memory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Christoph Maier, my research supervisor, for his guidance and support throughout my research.

I am also deeply thankful to Bank X for granting me the chance to conduct research interviews within their banking organisation.

I also extend my appreciation to the participants who generously offered their time and insights, allowing me to gain valuable knowledge and perspectives. Thank you all for your valuable contributions to my research.

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant global disruption, which has accelerated various business trends, including the rise of working from home (WFH). The sudden implementation of stay-at-home regulations by governments has resulted in a significant shift from in-person work meetings to virtual meetings. However, existing studies on working from home do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of abrupt enforced WFH policies on organisational culture. As a result, this phenomenon presents an opportunity for researchers to explore further.

Purpose: *This study aims to investigate the impact of the transition from physical to virtual meetings on organisational culture. The study sought to determine the degree of adaptability or resistance of physical meetings to the virtual environment within a South African bank context. Schein's Model of Organisational Culture was employed as the theoretical framework to examine organisational culture, and the Process Virtualisation Theory was used to evaluate the feasibility of virtualising physical meetings.*

Design/Methodology/Approach: *This study employs a qualitative approach that focuses on a single case of a banking organisation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants selected from the Johannesburg head office of a major bank in South Africa.*

Originality/Value: *This study aims to provide insights into the impact of virtual meetings on organisational culture within the South African banking industry. The study aims to inform banking organisations of the implications of virtualising meetings, thereby facilitating the maintenance of "business as usual". Therefore, this study extends the existing literature on working from home, work meetings, and organisational culture, specifically within the context of the banking industry in South Africa.*

Findings: *Examining the data through the lenses of Process Virtualisation Theory, the findings of this study reveal a significant increase in the number of meetings, which has led to a high cognitive load on employees. The study also identifies new cultural behaviours such as multitasking during meetings and joining multiple meetings simultaneously. Furthermore, the study indicates that virtual meetings pose challenges in building interpersonal relationships and promoting effective collaboration within teams, particularly for new employees. The research suggests that banking organisations should strive to strike a balance between on-site and virtual meetings to avoid losing the essence of interpersonal relationships and team collaboration. The study concludes by recommending the creation of meeting guidelines/policies to foster the desired organisational culture.*

Key Terms: *Working from Home (WFH), Work Meetings, Process Virtualisation, Organisational Culture.*

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1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption worldwide, resulting in a majority of the workforce being abruptly forced to work from home (WFH) overnight (Kniffin, Narayanan, Anseel, Antonakis, Ashford, Bakker, & Van Vugt, 2021). The rapid transformation to enforced WFH was witnessed at an unprecedented scale (Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai, & Bendz, 2020). An early 2020 survey by Gartner reported that approximately 80% or more of employees from half of the surveyed organisations were working from home during the pandemic (Gartner, 2020). The need to respond to COVID-19 implications necessitated organisations to scale up virtual connectivity and communication technologies, such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

The large-scale social and economic disruption has forced organisations to shift their focus from underlying values and missions to focusing on safety and resilience (Spicer, 2020). Although WFH has previously been a matter of individual preference, the emergence of COVID-19 resulted in organisations enforcing WFH not out of desire but from necessity induced by the pandemic (Kniffin et al., 2020; Marzban, Durakovic, Candido, & Mackey, 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020).

The worldwide social and economic shutdown, mandated to curb the spread of the virus, has accelerated some of the emerging trends such as remote working. The abrupt social and industry lockdowns have transformed organisational cultures, where daily rituals in the office, such as coffee chats during team breaks, were replaced with home environment tasks (Spicer, 2020). The existing literature on working from home lacks a thorough explanation of the impacts of government-enforced WFH (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of meeting virtualisation on organisational culture after the radical shift to enforced work from home due to the

COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to the existing work from home and organisational culture literature.

This paper is structured as follows: first, the background of the research problem and objectives are presented, followed by a review of scholarly and theoretical frameworks literature. Thereafter, the research methodology is presented, followed by data analysis and interpretation of findings. Finally, the discussions and conclusion close the study.

1.2 Background to the Field of Study

1.2.1 Key Terms Definitions

Working from Home: refers to a trend where people can work off office-premises be it from home or anywhere (Behrens, Kichko, & Thisse, 2021). WFH has several terms such as remote working, enterprise mobility, teleworking, telecommuting where employees are able to work without the constraint of office location (Chung, Lee, & Kim 2014). In this study, the term WFH will be adopted for consistency.

Work Meeting: for the purpose of this study, definition of a work meeting by Rogelberg, (2018) is adopted in its entirety is – *“a work meeting is defined as a gathering of two or more employees for a purpose related to the functioning of an organisation or a group (e.g., to direct, to inform, to govern, to regulate). The gathering can occur in a single modality (e.g., a video conference) or in a mixed-modality format (e.g., mostly face-to-face with one participant connected via telephone). Typically, meetings are scheduled in advance (some notice is provided) and are informally or formally facilitated by one of the attendees. Meetings can be extremely brief (five minutes) to a full day in length”*

Process Virtualisation: refers to “the transitioning from a physical process to virtual process” (Overby, 2008), thus, moving away from physical human interaction while performing a set of identified steps to achieve a specific outcome or objective, for example, transitioning from instore shopping to online shopping (Overby, 2008). In this study, process virtualisation is in the context of moving from physical face-to-face meetings to virtual meetings by employees.

Organisational Culture: refers to the collection of fundamental values and belief systems which gives meaning to organisations (Wallace, Hunt, & Richards, 1999). Organisational cultures consist of shared practices, signs and symbols, and unwritten assumptions of business entities (Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Schein (2010) definition of organisational culture is adopted - *“a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems”*.

1.2.2 Study Context (Banking Environment)

The financial sector of South Africa is recognised as one of the largest, most sophisticated, and resilient sectors, with assets accounting for a significant percentage of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Specifically, the majority of these assets are held in the banking sector (Financial Sector Outlook Study 2022, 2022). The banking industry is an essential driver of the economy, playing an integral part in the country's financial system. Financial services contribute to 30% of all corporate tax in South Africa (Banking Association South Africa [BASA], 2021). The banking industry in South Africa is a significant employer, with approximately 154,000 employees working in the six major banks, as stated in the extract from BASA's 2021 Integrated Annual Report, as shown in Figure 1.

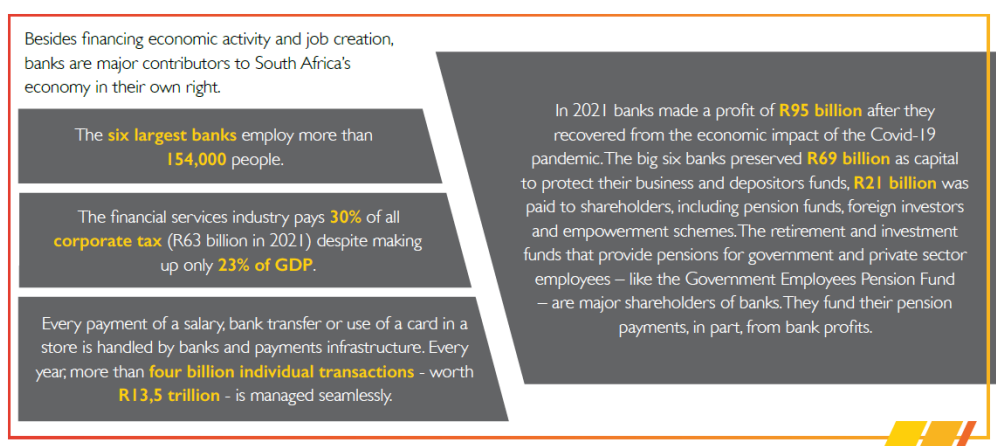


Figure 1: Bank stats in South Africa

Source: The Banking Association South Africa (BASA). (2021).

1.2.3 Location of Study and Observations (A South African Bank)

The study was conducted at the head office of one of the four largest banks in South Africa, located in Johannesburg. To ensure confidentiality, the bank is referred to as “Bank X” in this study. The bank, like other organisations, was forced to implement WFH as part of the COVID-19 pandemic regulations. Almost all bank employees were required to work from home, and the bank used MS Teams for virtual meetings and leadership townhall engagements.

Because of the transition from physical meetings to virtual meetings, changes have been observed in organisational cultural rituals or artefacts. For example, the number of meetings has significantly increased, which could be due to the conversion of some of the office chats to virtual team meetings calls. Another observation is the change in meeting punctuality, as meetings are now observed to start promptly since there is no need for employees to move between physical rooms as is the case with physical office settings.

1.3 Problem Statement

The government’s enforced WFH policy resulted in a rapid escalation of virtual teams on a large scale in a short period (Marzban et al., 2021). Research indicates that such upheavals often require business entities to readjust their culture to become resilient in the storm (Meyer, Brooks, & Goes, 1990). The current prediction of the “death of the office” highlights the practical need for organisations to come to grips with virtualisation and its impact or challenges of supporting fully virtual teams (Marzban et al., 2021).

Despite the importance of meetings in organisational success, the topic has often been neglected in organisational studies (Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, & Burnfield, 2006). Meetings are vehicles for many organisational activities; therefore, with the radical shift to virtual meetings, it is even more crucial for researchers today to focus on meetings topics. Literature suggests that meetings are sites for organisational phenomena such as leadership influence, sense-making, and shaping of employee attitudes (Lehmann-

Willenbrock, Rogelberg, Allen, & Kello, 2017). The impact of work meetings extends beyond the team meeting itself, as they also influence employees' organisational and work perceptions (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2017). Thus, there is a need for the banking industry to understand the implications of the sudden shift from on-site to virtual meetings. It is crucial to explore whether it is possible to transport a culture from physical space to virtual space, whether virtualisation sustains "business as usual" operations, and whether people can maintain their collective culture if physically separated.

After conducting a literature review, it was found that there is a dearth of research on the impact of virtualisation on organisational culture, as the widespread adoption of virtual working is a relatively new phenomenon brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the South African banking sector has a pressing need to comprehend the implications of virtualisation, as this would enable a review of organisational culture to support future strategic plans.

In summary, the lack of empirical research into the effects of the sudden transition to meeting virtualisation can result in flawed cultural change behaviours that adversely impact both employees and organisations (Spicer, 2020). As a consequence, the banking industry in South Africa is not immune to the sudden and abrupt consequences of working from home. As a result, there is a practical need to investigate the influence of meeting virtualisation, as banks are struggling with the challenges imposed by enforced remote working. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the effects of abrupt shifting from physical to virtual meetings on organisational culture in the South African banking industry. It is argued that the results of this research will inform managers in shaping organisational culture. By using the Process Virtualisation Theory framework, the researcher will investigate the appropriateness of virtualising work meetings. The understanding of organisational culture for this study is underpinned by Schein's Model of Organisational Culture.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of virtual meetings on organisational culture in the South African banking industry, as a result of the shift from physical meetings to virtual ones.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To assess the impact of transitioning from physical meetings to virtual meetings on organisational culture in a South African banking environment.
- To determine whether organisational culture can be effectively transferred from a physical office environment to the intangible virtual work environment.
- To explore the potential success of organisational teams operating in a virtual meeting environment.

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited in the following:

- The study only includes participants who have been required to work from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic at Bank X, a South African bank.
- The research will focus solely on the impacts of virtualising meetings on organisational culture and not on the broader effects of virtual work from home on organisational culture, in order to manage the scope within the given research timeframe.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Literature Review

This part of the study focuses on a review of literature relevant to this study.

2.1.1 Working from Home (WFH)

Early researchers attributed WFH to the birth of mobile devices that enabled workers to work from anywhere at any time (Basole, 2007). Although WFH is not a new phenomenon, what is new is the ferocity by which it was abruptly mandated to employees worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hensher, Balbontin, Beck, & Wei, 2022). For the first time in modern history, employees worldwide were enforced to WFH, leading to unprecedented challenges and impacts (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Emerging research suggests that WFH is no longer a temporary phenomenon but a foreseeable new way of working (Hensher et al., 2022). However, regardless of non-face-to-face interaction, virtual teams are still expected to deliver the same outcome as physical face-to-face teams (Scholz, 2003; Waizenegger et al., 2020).

2.1.2 Work Meetings

Meetings have been a pervasive phenomenon, and their origins can be traced back to the seminal work by Helen Schwartzman nearly four decades ago in 1986 (Kauffeld, & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Leuzinger & Brannon, 2021; Scott & Allen, 2022). Scholars from multiple disciplines, such as organisational behaviour, organisational sociology, and management, have attempted to address meetings as a research topic to better understand their many facets (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2017). Meetings play a pivotal role in understanding organisational culture by providing a window into the social dynamics of an organisational workforce (Abramova, Gladkaya, & Krasnova, 2021).

It is suggested that between 7% and 15% of organisational budget resources, i.e., employee time and salaries, go into meetings. On the other hand, the majority (41.9% in cases) of these meetings are poor, resulting in a large amount of waste and poor

return on investment (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2017). Research has indicated that virtual teams are transforming organisational and work practices (Waizenegger et al., 2020). It is argued that meetings are not just an activity that happens in an organisation but a critical factor in the production and transformation of organisational cultures (Scott & Allen, 2022). Meetings are key activities that shape organisational culture over time, influencing what is valued, expected, and supported across the organisation (Scott & Allen, 2022).

2.1.3 Organisational Culture – Schein’s Model

Organisational culture has been a widely discussed topic in the literature since the 1980s, with best-selling management books highlighting the importance of “organisational culture” for organisational success (Davies, Nutley, & Mannion, 2000). Over time, the concept of organisational culture has evolved, with other similar but distinct concepts emerging, such as corporate identity and organisational climate (Baumgartner, 2009). Research suggests that organisational culture is enacted, maintained, and sustained through the meetings that take place within an organisation (Scott & Allen, 2022).

According to Spicer (2020), the significant social and economic changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a transformation of organisational culture. The physical symbols and rituals that were previously associated with organisational culture have been replaced with virtual symbols and rituals. This transformation poses a challenge for managers in terms of building and sustaining an organisational culture when employees are WFH. Although remote work was adopted by organisations as a safety and resilience measure, it has changed the ways of working that form part of organisational culture. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the impact of the shift from physical meetings to virtual meetings on organisational culture.

There are several theories that can guide our understanding of organisational culture. For this study, Schein’s Model of Organisational Culture will provide the framework for our exploration. The model, developed in 1980 by Edgar Schein, explains three levels that depict the degree to which a cultural phenomenon is visible. At the top level are the *artifacts*, which are easily visible characteristics, such as employee behaviour. The

second level is *espoused beliefs and values*, which represent the way of operating, such as company values, charters, mission, and vision statements. Lastly, *underlying beliefs*, which are held by employees, including assumptions that dictate the behaviour that leads to the success or failure of a company.

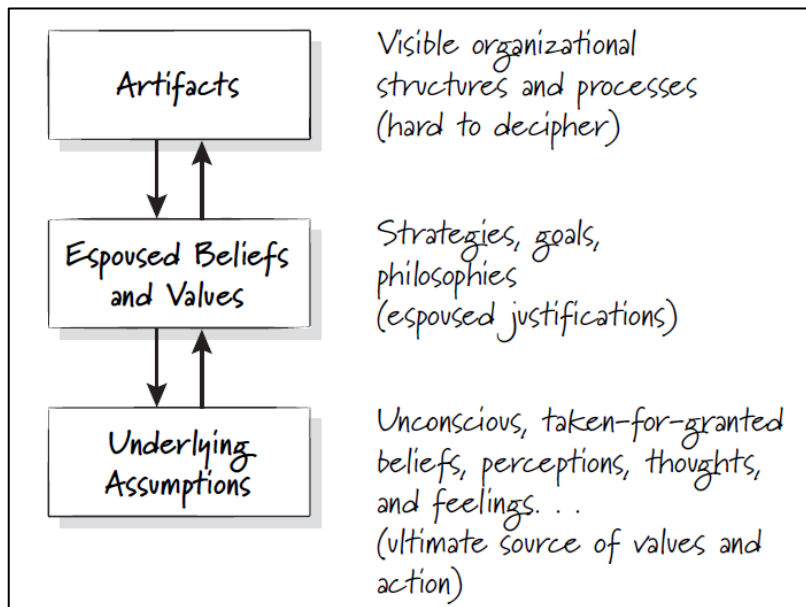


Figure 2: Schein's Model of Organisational Culture

Source: Schein (2010)

2.1.4 Process Virtualisation Theory

The Process Virtualisation Theory (PVT) is inspired by Overby (2008) and is aimed at predicting and explaining the degree of suitability of a process to be conducted in a virtual environment (Balci & Rosenkranz, 2014). PVT does not aim to determine which mode is better between physical and virtual but simply to predict the virtualisability of a process. This theory aims to guide researchers and managers in understanding the transition from physical to virtual environments. The premise of PVT is that some processes are more suited to be conducted virtually than others, and not all processes are equally virtualisable (Overby, 2008).

The dependent element of PVT is known as the *Process Virtualisability*, which describes the suitability of a process after physical human interaction has been removed (Overby,

2008). There are two ways of measuring Process Virtualisability. Firstly, it can be measured through adoption, for example, the widespread use of online book shopping reflects the virtualisability of book shopping. Secondly, it can be measured by the quality of outcome of the virtualised process, for example, if online learning students demonstrate mastery of the subject material, it provides evidence that the traditional face-to-face education process is suitable for virtualisation (Overby, 2008). This study focuses on the latter, specifically, the measurement of the quality of outcome of virtualised meetings. If the quality of virtual meetings is equal to that of on-site face-to-face groups, it would provide concrete evidence of the virtualisability of work meetings.

The independent elements of PVT are categorised into two parts: *i) process characteristics* and *ii) virtualisation characteristics*. These elements will be further explained in the subsequent section of the contextualised model.

Process Virtualisation Theory

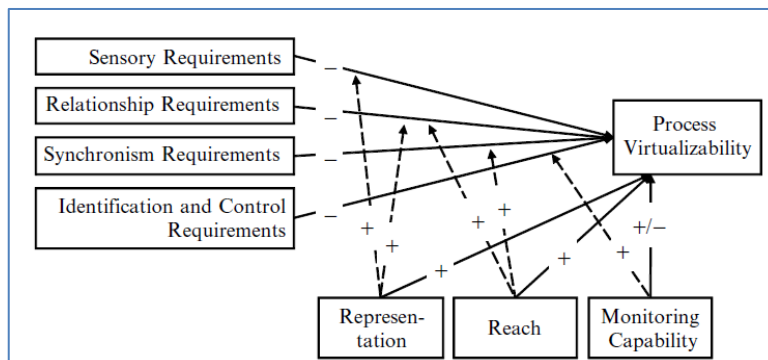


Figure 3: Process Virtualisation Theory

Source: Overby (2008)

2.1.5 Contextualisation of Research Framework Elements

The core elements of Process Virtualisation Theory are contextualised in relation to the virtual meetings phenomenon.

Characteristics of the Process in Context

Sensory Requirements: This element pertains to the full sensory experience required in a process, including sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste, as well as overall sensations such as excitement and vulnerability (Kambil & Van Heck, 1998). In virtual meetings, the

olfactory and tactile elements are absent. While physical face-to-face meetings allow for physical interactions such as handshakes and body gestures, the absence of physical interaction in virtual meetings can impact the enjoyment of the meetings. Sensory requirements are suggested to have a negative effect on virtualizability.

Relationship Requirements: This element refers to the need for virtual meeting participants to interact with each other in a social or professional context. Such interactions often lead to knowledge acquisition, trust development, and friendship development (Overby, 2008). This element seeks to understand if team relationships are impacted by the lack of social and professional context interaction. Literature posits that virtual relationships tend to be weaker and less developed than physical face-to-face relationships (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). Thus, in virtual meetings, a high relationship requirement will cause virtual meetings to be resistant to virtualisation.

Synchronism Requirements: In the context of virtual meetings, this refers to the need for virtual meeting interactions and collaborations to occur quickly with minimal delay. Synchronous participation is possible in virtual meetings, though it requires some effort, such as a good network connection to create and maintain real-time collaborative meetings.

Identification and Control Requirements: Overby (2008) defines this as “the degree to which process participants require: (a) identification of other process participants, and (b) the ability to exert control over their behaviour”. In the context of virtual work meetings, organisations apply some access and controls to manage the risk of vulnerability. Participants can identify others through their camera and login usernames. Low identification and control requirements are posited to have a negative relationship to process virtualizability.

Contextualised Characteristics of the Virtualisation Mechanism

Representation: According to Overby (2008), representation refers to the capacity of IT to present information that is relevant to a process, including simulations of actors and objects within the physical world, their properties, characteristics, and how we interact with them. In the context of virtual work meetings, it enables the representation of both

sight and sound, but the absence of the sense of touch negatively moderates the sensory requirement and virtualisation.

Reach: This element allows reach across time and space. In the context of virtual meetings, it enables teammates to connect from any location and at any time, provided they are available online. It is suggested that reach facilitates the virtualisation of processes with high relationships.

Monitoring capability: Monitoring capability refers to the IT's capacity to authenticate meeting participants and track their activity. An organisation's capability to authenticate participants and track activities creates a level of process accountability, thereby enhancing the virtualisability of virtual meetings.

2.1.6 Contextualised PVT Framework

From the contextualisation of the core elements discussed in the previous section, the study's conceptual research framework is presented Figure 4.

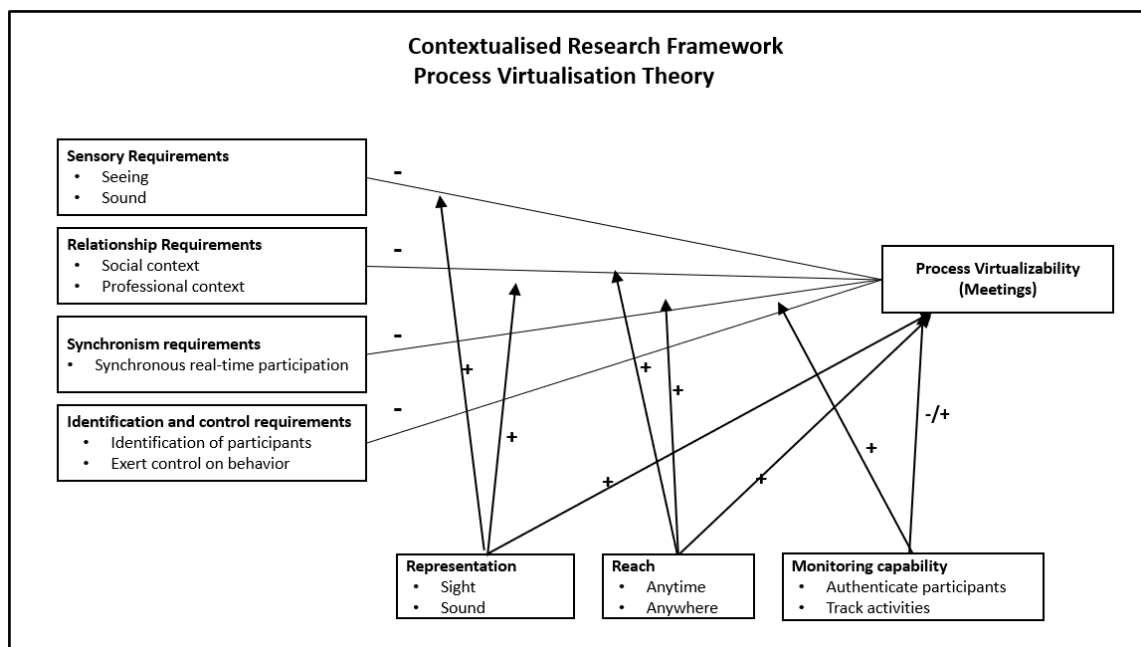


Figure 4: Conceptual Research Framework

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Method

The present research adopted the interpretivism paradigm, which assumes that a comprehensive understanding of context can only be attained by exploring the meanings that individuals attach to it (Oates, 2006). The choice of research philosophy was influenced by the objectives of the study and the phenomenon under investigation, which sought to examine the impact of virtual meetings on organisational culture. The research did not aim to falsify any theory but aimed to explore and understand the impact of the induced work-from-home (WFH) social reality.

Qualitative data collection was selected as the preferred mode of investigation, as it allows for a systematic exploration of the induced WFH and its impact on the complex social structure of organisational culture, as guided by Bhattacharjee (2012). The nature of the data further informed the chosen data collection method, and in this case, interviews were conducted to understand and describe the mandated WFH phenomenon in complex social organisations. The data collection method did not aim to test hypotheses, as is characteristic of the positivist and quantitative paradigms, but rather involved a subjective engagement in a “sense-making” process (Klein & Myers, 1999). Thus, the expression of participants’ points of view necessitated a qualitative data collection approach, as quantifying textual data may result in contextual loss (Klein & Myers, 1999).

For this study, the inductive approach, also known as theory-building, was adopted, as the aim of the research was not to test theories or establish causal relationships between elements. It is important to note that the study did not aim to develop a theory from scratch but rather aimed to use existing theories to inform the study and contribute to the body of knowledge.

3.2 Research Design

The research design that was used in this study is discussed in this section.

3.2.1 Study Population and Sample

The *unit of analysis* for this study was the individual employee, and the *target population* was the employees of the bank, as they fit the characteristics of the study objective. The appropriate *sampling frame* was all employees at senior levels who were mandated to work from home (WFH) and engage in virtual meetings due to COVID-19 restrictions. The researcher deliberately selected the study participants using a *Purposive Sampling Strategy*, assuming that the selected employees would provide useful information relative to the research objectives. The targeted *sample size* was not to exceed 15 participants for the semi-structured interviews. However, the actual number of participants was 10, as determined by the saturation of the collected data, where the researcher stopped data collection once saturation level was reached, as guided by Bhattacharjee (2012).

3.2.2 Participants' Demographics

Table 1 presents the employment and gender demographics of the study participants.

Table 1: Study Participants' Roles

#	Ref Code	Pseudonym	Role	Department	Female/ Male
1	INT1	Cliff	Head of Quality Assurance	Quality Assurance	Male
2	INT2	Linda	HR Talent Sourcing Manager	HR	Female
3	INT3	Mimie	Channel Operations Manager	Business Operations	Female
4	INT4	Andy	IT Quality Assurance Manager	IT Department	Female
5	INT5	Bertha	Business Analyst	Business	Female
6	INT6	Shane	Systems Architect	IT Department	Male
7	INT7	Dee	IT Programme Manager	IT Department	Male
8	INT8	Kamn	Project Manager	IT Department	Female
9	INT9	Tsee	Project Manager	Business	Female
10	INT10	Lee	Systems Analyst	IT Department	Male

3.2.3 Data Collection Methods (Interviews)

To obtain an in-depth understanding of virtual teams, semi-structured open-ended interview questions were conducted, given the nature of the study purpose. The researcher aimed to gather feelings and views that could not be expressed through other data collection methods, such as surveys. The social setting for the conducted semi-structured interviews was a one-on-one virtual meeting with cameras on, and the meetings took between half an hour to an hour. In advance of the interviews, an invitation letter was sent to the participants, indicating the interview scope and purpose. Once the participants accepted, a meeting was scheduled based on their availability. The meetings were recorded for data interpretation and transcription, and the anonymity of the research participants was ensured, as guided by the ethical principles of the university and the organisation. The research instrument is presented in Appendix A (see Appendix A).

3.3 Data Analysis Strategy

3.3.1 Qualitative Data Analysis (Thematic Analysis Method)

The literature has predominantly criticised qualitative research for arriving at conclusions magically, without giving a clear view of how the data was analysed, as is found in quantitative research (Oates, 2006). Unfortunately, the nature of qualitative data comes with complexity, as the collected data is in words, which have different meanings and contexts. Therefore, it is essential for qualitative researchers to clearly inform how they analysed the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The researcher followed the thematic analysis process method, as guided by Braun and Clarke (2006), presented in Table 2 extract.

Step 1: Data familiarisation: the researcher manually transcribed each interview by listening to the recording and searching for meanings or patterns arising from the recordings. This exercise was time consuming as it required re-reading and re-listening of all the recordings noting down important issues coming from the data.

Step 2: Generation of initial codes: the researcher then produced initial codes as the founding blocks for the analysis by labelling the potentially relevant data content.

Step 3: Searching for themes: The researcher then searched for candidate themes arising from the data guided by the research objectives as themes, thus, coding was ‘theory-driven’. Based on the research objectives the codes were sorted and outlined into candidate themes.

Step 4: Reviewing themes: at this stage the researcher reviewed the identified themes checking if there is enough meaning forming a coherent pattern in the data about the theme. This process involved reviewing the theme to see if they ‘work’ in relation to the set of data.

Step 5: Defining and naming theme: The researcher then defined and refined the themes checking if the collected data offers a coherent story. The main themes were defined as:

- Theme 1: Impact of Moving from Physical Meetings to Virtual Meetings
- Theme 2: Transportation of Organisational Culture into Virtual Setting
- Theme 3: Successful Teams Operation in a Virtual Meeting Environment

Step 6: Producing the report: The researcher then iteratively did a write up of the findings while continuously working through steps 1-5 recurrently.

Table 2: Six Phase of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006)

3.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure rigour and trustworthiness, the researcher iteratively applied verification strategies, as proposed by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002). Adherence to these verification strategies ensures that the research process is continuously verified, informing when the research process can be stopped or continued, thus self-correcting the analysis to achieve accuracy and trustworthiness (Morse et al., 2002). By applying these verification strategies during the research process, the research validity and reliability was incrementally and interactively built.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

According to Oates (2006), it is crucial to consider ethical issues and how each person involved in the research ought to be treated and act. For this research, the university's *code of ethics* and the organisation's *code of conduct* were adhered to. Specifically, (i) the research conformed to the university's ethics committee regulations and guidelines, (ii) in line with Bank X's organisational requirements, the researcher was granted permission and a consent letter from the organisation's representative and adhered to all conditions stipulated, such as confidentiality requirements, (iii) the *right to privacy* was ensured, and all research participants were informed through verbal and written communication of their right to privacy. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the organisation and participants, indicating the use of a false name in the event of the need to quote the organisation or participants, and (iv) all research participants were *informed of the right not to participate* in advance and during the start of the interviews. Additionally, the purpose and scope of the research were communicated in advance and again at the start of the interview.

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The preceding chapter discussed the research methodology employed in this study. The sections that follow analyse and discuss the data collected from 10 participants through semi-structured interviews within Bank X. The contextualised model guided the data collection, with theory elements being used as lenses to collect and analyse data rather than to falsify or modify any theory. The discussion focuses on the themes related to the research objective and presents responses from participants as data extracts. The data analysis involved examining the entire transcribed content and not solely the responses to the questions asked, as some themes emerged that were not solely in response to the questions.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Impact of Moving from Physical Meetings to Virtual Meetings

The data presented in this theme suggests that the shift from physical to virtual meetings had significant impacts on employees, including increased meetings, information overload, changes in ad-hoc conversations, and the impact of the self-view feature.

i. Evidence of an increase in number of meetings

Participants in the study reported that they were spending the majority of their working day, if not all of it, in virtual meetings, compared to when they were working in a physical office setting. For instance, when asked about the number of hours they spent in meetings during an eight-hour working day, the responses were as follows:

Kamn ~ “I would say 6-7 hours, almost most of my day, which means I need to do my work at night”. ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 30]

Shane ~ “You can say about 7 to 8 hours, right” ~ [INT7 - Transcript Page 62]

Dee ~ “for me about 9 hours on average, but it’s less now, I’m now declining meetings that I don’t think I need to be there.” ~ [INT8 - Transcript Page 77]

Andy ~ “Goodness. On my side, it’s a little bit more I would say. Abby, I’m spending a good six hours in a meeting ... and sometimes even 8 hours spending in meetings literally about 8 hours in meetings, yeah.” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 56]

Mimie explained that the number of meetings had increased significantly, making it difficult to accurately measure the extent of the increase. She further elaborated on the challenges posed by this increase. She narrates:

Mimie ~ “And now if I look at post COVID, I feel like and I say this all the time, 70% if not 80% of my diary is me in meetings. Umm, not solely for my area, but I think the culture has become that everybody feels that we can now get into a room virtually pretty much easily... So, 80% of my time is sitting in meetings and it’s not gone from what it was and doubled but I feel like it’s exponentially grown and I can’t even quantify. Before, I think I could strike a balance of about 30% of my day being in meetings and now it feels like 80% of my day I’m sitting in the meeting.... So definitely increased and I think the biggest challenge for us has been that they’ve increased to too much.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 18]

Cliff provided an explanation for the increase in the number of meetings, stating that in a physical office setting, one could simply walk up to a colleague and have a conversation, whereas in a virtual setting, a formal meeting needs to be scheduled for the same conversation. He elaborated on this by saying:

Cliff ~ “So, definitely now, more time is being spent in meetings, uh compared to pre COVID and I would think the reason why is when you were in the office you could just walk up to somebody and just chat to them quickly. Now you can’t really do that so I think the best way is just to book like even if it’s a 15 minute or half an hour, then just book the meeting. But that seems to be like the trend in in our area.” ~ [INT2 - Transcript Page 11]

ii. Evidence of impacts on cognitive load

Evidence from the data analysis indicates that the increased number of meetings and quick transitions between them contributes to cognitive load. Two participants reported experiencing difficulty in recalling which meeting they were in, leading to confusion and potential information loss and explained it this way:

Cliff ~ “Uh yes, definitely, so I would say yes it did increase the cognitive load. How I would say so, because sometimes you jump from one meeting to the next and you like, what meeting am I in? You know, you got to take a few minutes to, like, figure out and get your bearings right” ~ [INT2 - Transcript Page 12]

Dee~ “Absolutely. Absolutely impacting me or it impacted me. You know when I was just sitting in so many meetings because I forgot sometimes what meeting I was in, you know, because you weren’t context switching...there was just so much that you needed to keep in your brain. If I can call it that...yeah, so the virtual meetings made it very difficult to context switching. You didn’t have time to context switch. Because you were running over in one meeting and going into another meeting with a different context and be able to switch your brain quickly.” ~ [INT8 - Transcript Page 69,70]

Bertha expressed that at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, she perceived the number of meetings to have increased exponentially, to the point where she felt overwhelmed and unable to cope. She felt that it was taking a toll on her physical health.

Bertha~ “I think in the beginning of COVID, to be honest, you know, I felt like it was information overload we just had meetings after meetings, after meetings and it just became so much as to, you know, you cannot take this anymore. I for one felt that it became to such a point that your body actually starts failing because you’re sitting in one position the whole day just attending meetings.” ~ [INT1 - Transcript Page 2]

Mimie, an operational manager, provided detailed observations on the impact of increased meetings on operational teams. She highlighted that the teams are experiencing information overload due to the demand to participate in multiple meetings in a day, leading to mental burnout and impacting staff turnover and general health. Despite the increased number of meetings, she noted that team or individual productivity has not increased. Mimie lamented:

Mimie~ “If we look at in my space, it’s not that productivity has marginally increased, no, it’s more that people are bombarded with too much cognitive dissonance if you want to call it, because it’s not structured. In a day, you could have three different trainings scheduled and that kind of disrupts your cognition, in my view. And I feel like a lot of people are suffering from burnout, but it’s actually more from a mental capacity than it is physical. It is emanating in, you know, people staying off sick, a lot of people have got migraines now, a lot of people are just naturally sick. But I feel like it’s because we’re overloading the ability for the brain to focus on multiple things in very short spans of time.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 20]

To describe the individual impact of virtual meetings, Mimie explained that the nature of her meetings requires her full attention, yet the virtual format does not encourage breaks to allow for readjustment, realignment, or reflection. As a result, being fully present in meetings has become burdensome, prompting her to take notes of discussion points ahead of time. When asked about her personal experience of cognitive load and how she feels, Mimie stated:

Mimie~ “You don’t feel it? I know it to be true. So, what I’ve started to realise is that the nature of virtual meetings is that they don’t allow for a space in between. I think people can see your calendar when they set up time, but no one takes the effrontery to say I’m going to not schedule her from 11:00 because I see she’s got a 10:00 to 11:00 meeting, so I’ll schedule it from 11:10. There isn’t that the quorum, that culture doesn’t exist. ...And because in the nature of what I do, you need to be fully, fully present in each and every session because there I can’t say one is more important than the other, right? I can tell you that I struggle now with keeping my focus. So, one thing I try to do is try and kind of for my day is make notes of what it is I would need to raise in each session. Otherwise, Abby to be honest it’s the load of umm ...in no break you go from one into another there’s no room to readjust, realign and just remember where you’re going.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 18]

Kamn observed that the sheer number of meetings leads to a feeling of numbness, causing individuals to lose interest and tune out. As a result, she noted that some individuals may even resort to browsing social media on their phones to take a mental break during meetings. She explained:

Kamn~ “Yeah, and you dive right into the next thing, you know, it’s not like you cut off from a meeting call and you reset and start again. ...So I think what happens to us, we tend to tune out you, you lose interest...I think it’s because people are busy doing something else because the meetings becomes laborious and it’s so energy intense, that sometimes you just pick up your phone and you scroll quickly and check your Facebook while someone’s talking. And I think that’s what people do just to disconnect for a bit because you so in the screen the whole time and you just listening to people and it’s like it’s a droning sound in your ears. That’s what I think. You know, you get to a point where it’s just like it’s numbing you,” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 31]

Andy highlighted that her daily routine of attending virtual meetings affects her productivity negatively. She explained that her brain is constantly engaged in meetings throughout the day, leaving little time for her to do other tasks. Consequently, she has to work extra hours after work or early in the morning just to catch up on her actual work as her whole day is centred around attending meetings.

Andy~ “I’m tired all the time. When we done at the end of the day, I’m exhausted and I can’t. ... it’s like my brain is constantly just *active, active, active*. I have to be present in like 3-6 meetings and so that impacts some of the work that is required. It’s like you either have to wake up very early to try and get your admin or the actual work that you need to do, and then from there on it’s like your entire day is just dedicated to *meetings* and *meetings* and *meetings*.” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 57]

Linda, an HR manager, has highlighted the difficulties that arise from the high number of back-to-back interview meetings, such as struggling to recall or establish a personal connection with the candidates she interviews. She explained that the virtual format has impacted her ability to conduct interviews effectively, as it is harder to read non-verbal cues and build rapport with the candidate. She explained:

Linda~ “... we had like three or four or five people, you know interviewed back-to-back in four hours. Now that is mentally exhausting, physically exhausting not for the candidate but for the panel. Whereas maybe if we were in the office that person would have been walked to the reception and say thank you very much for coming and adios & goodbye and then the new person would have been received and so the panel would have three minutes to process. ... I don’t think we’re forming long term memory

because we are so overwhelmed by information all of the time where work as concerned. So by the end of the day, I'm thinking who the hell is who again whereas if it's face-to-face I can guarantee you a face-to-face memory would have been different and recollection of the candidates.” ~ [INT5 - Transcript Page 43]

One participant highlighted the positive aspect of recording meetings in virtual meetings as a way to help with information overload. However, this advantage is negated by the increased number of recordings, which is mostly not feasible to go through, especially when one is always triple-booked.

Kamn ~ “So, I think in in terms of that its a positive for me in the fact that we can now record things and you can go back and you can just refresh or recap if you need to. However, what people now do because of that is they think they can book you for three meetings at a time because you can go back and go listen to it. And that's where the information overload takes place for me.” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 30]

iii. Evidence of impacts on ad-hoc conversations

The shift from physical office setting to virtualisation has resulted in impacts on ad-hoc meeting conversations. The data extracts suggest that virtual meetings limit the opportunity for informal, ad-hoc chats, which can result in a loss of personal connection and hinder the ability to build relationships, particularly with new team members. When participants were asked about their perceptions of the affordance of ad-hoc conversations through virtualisation, several highlighted that virtual meetings are more purpose-driven and outcome-focused, which often does not allow for ad-hoc chats. This highlights the importance of finding alternative ways to build relationships and establish connections in a virtual environment.

Linda, an HR manager, emphasised that the culture of an organisation is often expressed more visibly in ad-hoc conversations, such as those that occur in common areas like coffee breaks, where people have the freedom to express themselves. She suggested that such idle conversations play a significant role in building an organisation's culture, and that it is through ad-hoc chats that people connect with each other. She explained:

Linda ~ “So definitely, definitely face-to-face allowed for conversations outside of the business meeting. So, if you are getting a cup of coffee prior to the meeting or maybe having a smoke in between the meeting or even running to the bathroom for that matter. Yes, that idle chit chat makes conversation so valuable, and I think that builds the culture. I’ve always said that if you want to see the true culture of any organisation, go to the smoking room or go to the canteen, that is where you will see or hear the true culture of an organisation, because no one’s gonna go in a MS Team’s meeting and say *“these bloody people are driving me insane”*. They will only do that to a colleague or a friend... So yes, I think the true culture of camaraderie and understanding is built more in a face-to-face environment that allows for free freelance communication if you want to call it that then, and as opposed to you know, very structured meetings.” ~ [INT5 - Transcript Page 47]

Mimie elaborated on the negative impact of the lack of informal conversations and chance meetings in virtual settings on team interpersonal connection. She stated that the culture of such ad-hoc conversations is now absent, which has caused a significant loss in the building of relationships and connecting with colleagues. She detailed:

Mimie ~ “So the interactions we used to have you know the casual bumping into each other and being able to have a conversation where more personal in the physical setting. So, it wasn’t purpose driven because it was by chance that we met at the water drinking hole, right or in the kitchen making a cup of coffee. So, it made those engagements more connected for me. There is nothing like that anymore, virtually that thing has gone. You can’t even set up a coffee chat because the coffee chat becomes what are we discussing? It’s not like Abby, by the way can we catch up? It doesn’t, for me, it is non-existent since we’ve gone virtual.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 21]

Cliff commented that virtual meetings tend to be very focused and efficient, which is good for getting things done quickly. However, this can limit personal connections, especially for new joiners who haven’t had the opportunity to meet the team in person. He commented:

Cliff ~ “You know, at work you can just like turn to your colleague and just start talking stories, you can’t really do this here with virtual meetings it’s a bit more focused, it’s straight to the meeting, it’s straight to business. You know, there’s no time to really talk about the weekend and what you’re getting up to, and all of these things.....Umm,

I think for new joiners it's, you'll find it's hard to connect with them at personal level, it's just all about work.” ~ [INT2 - Transcript Page 15]

Kamn highlighted that virtual meetings present even greater challenges for new joiners to build relationships within the team. She further emphasised that people have lost valuable relationship-building skills as the meetings have become more impersonal. She explained:

Kamn ~ “I think that's where we're getting impacted, is that when you don't meet people, especially new employees coming in, just going on MS Teams and not having that interaction, we lose valuable relationship building skills.” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 35]

Shane expressed that virtual meetings are more formal and task-oriented, and highlighted the negative impact on interpersonal connections, particularly for new joiners.

Shane ~ “You know, I think virtual has formalised the meetings because you only focused on the work ...So, I guess that's a downside, because to your point, you connect, but you don't really connect especially with the new joiners, because, yeah, to your point, I mean, if you at the office, you can actually take the new guy or you take your colleague for a coffee...then that's when you connect and build relationship.” ~ [INT7 - Transcript Page 65]

Bertha, a business analyst, observed that virtual meetings are characterised by excessive formalities that impede the free flow of expression. Unlike physical office settings, virtualisation limits the capacity for ad-hoc conversations, particularly in coffee areas, where people interact more casually and share ideas in a relaxed environment. According to Bertha, this form of conversation allows for the exchange of ideas on projects without the constraints of strict formalities that virtual meetings impose.

Bertha ~ “previously when we used to go to the office, we used to go for coffee, you know ...will talk about what we need to about the project and not necessarily have a serious conversation while having a coffee chat...whereas now it's like you.. you almost feel like you're not having that ...that freedom of communication. You know, it's almost like.. you forced to have a formalised communication at all times...and there's

no jokes in between... no it's almost telling the person this is the project, here is the references of the project and what are our next steps, this and that, it just pose into a structural, conversation instead of an informal conversation" ~ [INT1 - Transcript Page 5]

Dee explained that ad-hoc conversations were crucial in the workplace as they allowed for the free-flowing of discussions, which helped to build connections and improve teamwork. In his opinion, virtual meetings tend to be more formal and task-oriented, making it difficult to have those natural, unplanned conversations that can be so beneficial. He explained:

Dee ~ "You know what I found in the face-to-face environment, those ad-hoc meetings like you're saying, you know, let's just go quickly, grab a coffee or sit at the guy's desk, you know, and draw something was very, very helpful." ~ [INT8 - Transcript Page 72]

He indicated that although he can have informal chats virtually, more results were obtained during the physical office ad-hoc chats. In these chats, issues that would take two hours in formal meetings would get resolved in just a few minutes.

Dee ~ "when we engage in informal chats virtually... we do get quite a lot of stuff done in those informal chats on Teams. But we get a hell of a lot more when I have the informal sort of conversations in the office, you know.... and we talk about things and what we do in half an hour it will take us 2 hours in a meeting" ~ [INT8 - Transcript Page 73]

Andy highlighted that while virtual meetings allow for professional boundaries to be met, the personal connection is inevitably lost. She further emphasised how this impacts new joiners more.

Andy - " So in terms of connection, it has certainly impacted the connection. So yeah virtual meetings allows professional boundaries, to be honest there's more professional boundaries, but connection definitely, I think, especially for the new people, new joiners, I feel more sorry for them that they don't actually get to connect with us at that level." ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 60]

Kamn highlighted another dimension to the impact of ad-hoc meetings in virtual workspaces. While ad-hoc meetings are crucial for building interpersonal relationships, they could also impact productivity, as people sometimes spent a considerable amount of time chit-chatting. She explained that ad-hoc meetings have the major drawback of affecting production and can be big time-wasters. She commented:

Kamn ~ “But also on the other hand, sometimes those chats went a bit overtime, people would talk like for 20 minutes not go back to their desks. So, I think we lost a bit of efficiency even though that that time is important I don’t think people always check themselves you know, so they will have a coffee and a chat and another coffee. So yeah, I think we’ve eliminated that.” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 35]

Andy also recognised the potential drawback of non-productivity with face-to-face ad-hoc chats.

Andy ~ “But I do feel like maybe the guys are a little bit more productive you know, because there’s less coffee time, but it was a nice way to take a break and to take a breather.” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 59]

iv. Evidence of impacts of self-view

Participants’ extracts below sought to understand the impacts of the self-view feature in MS Teams, which displays a mirror view when the camera is on. The extracts suggested that the self-view feature can be distracting and impacts women more than men. For example, most of the women explained:

Kamn ~ “it’s quite human, people tend to look at themselves, right. And I think we all do it, I think especially in the beginning ... I think there’s a lot of people, if you look at them, you can see they actually like touching their hair and their face and they’re busy with themselves. So, I think it’s more of a distraction.” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 33]

Bertha expressed how the self-view strongly distracts her:

Bertha ~ “So for me, this is actually very disturbing, at times I actually try and switch off like put another screen in front of the camera, just so that I don’t have to see myself.

I personally do not like looking at myself in the camera... and it bothers me a lot.” ~
[INT1 - Transcript Page 3,4]

Mimie indicated that the self-view feature is distracting for her as she becomes self-conscious, always trying to gauge whether her appearance matches what she is trying to say.

Mimie ~ “Yes, it actually does, though my knowledge is not based on what I look like as it stands today, but because the first thing I see is myself, I’m very conscious about how my representation of how I look matches perhaps what it is that I want to give input to. So, for me, it’s a problem because I focus more on am I Camera ready than do I have the information in whatever is required for this meeting.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 20]

Mimie added that the self-view feature also makes her nervous before meetings, not because of what she is going to contribute, but because of the need to be camera-ready. She also expressed that this seems to impact women more than men.

Mimie ~ “I get a nervousness when I’m roped into meetings, not because I’m uncertain about what I can give in terms of information and my IP no, but more so the way I look, how will the person who I’m giving this information perceive me? Because the focus is on me looking at myself, so it actually doesn’t matter whether the person on the other end who’s looking at me on the camera would mind whether my hair is tied up or not... And I feel like it’s more for the women, umm, a lot of us women literally, I go into meetings with people saying give me 5 minutes I just wanna get camera ready, and I’m like you don’t see that with the men their cameras are on immediately.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 20]

Linda expressed that the self-view feature in virtual meetings makes her very self-conscious, as she is always conscious of her appearance and would like to maintain a professional image.

Linda ~ “And so yes, I think there’s most certainly a level of self-awareness, but I think it also speaks to how comfortable you are in yourself? Umm, you know if you are 110% confident. I will say yes you are aware of yourself you are self-conscious; I think I am self-aware because I would like to look professional. I’m thinking why am

I not looking pretty? Why these glasses make my eyes look and my nose look so big.”
~ [INT5 - Transcript Page 56]

Andy, the only participant who identifies as female, indicated that the self-view feature does not impact her at all, as she is always ready for the camera.

Andy ~ “No, no. I’ve never been that person. So, I’m I’ve never, I don’t have, no, no, I think I’ve learned to be always prepared for camera? And I don’t know. It’s because also I think obviously in your senior position you can anticipate that you might need to connect with individuals on a face-to-face. So, I’m always prepared ... I don’t analyse myself within the meeting, especially when the camera is on. I actually prefer when the camera is on because I find that I focus better when the cameras on because I’m suddenly conscious that other people could be observing what’s going on in the background, is she attentive?” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 59]

Cliff, a male participant, indicated that the self-view feature only impacts him in scenarios where he is suddenly required to attend a meeting and is not camera-ready.

Cliff ~ “I would say yes, because sometimes you go into a meeting and somebody will say let’s put cameras on and it wasn’t planned. And you know, you got no time. Now you’re in the meeting. You got no time to go, you know comb your hair or change. So in meetings like that you then become self-aware because you asking what are lot of people thinking, you know, why you so untidy or why you still in your PJS it’s like 11 o’clock during the day”. ~ [INT2 - Transcript Page 14]

Shane, a male participant, indicated that the self-view does not impact him at all.

Shane ~ “No it doesn’t impact me in any way, it’s fine. Yeah, I guess you see a smaller version of yourself as opposed to the next person who sees a bigger version of yourself.” ~ [INT7 - Transcript Page 64]

4.1.2 Theme 2: Transportation of Organisational Culture into Virtual Setting

In this theme, the study focuses to understand transportation of organisational culture onto virtual meetings setting. The evidence presented highlights various cultural behaviours that are emerging during virtual meetings, including attending multiple meetings, multitasking during meetings, seeking instant gratification, and loss of interpersonal connection. The perceptions that emerged on the transportation of culture in virtual settings are as follows:

i. Evidence of multitasking in virtual meetings

Evidence gathered indicates that virtual meetings are associated with an increase in multitasking, particularly when the cameras are off. This new cultural behaviour, which is not present in physical meetings, has been identified as one of the impacts of virtualisation on organisational culture. For instance, Andy reported that she had to multitask during virtual meetings due to the higher number of meetings and workload demands. She highlighted that this would not be possible during face-to-face meetings. She narrated:

Andy ~ “I think people do multitask when the cameras are off. I think they do. I think they do and I’m very guilty of multitasking when the cameras are off ... I find that if I’m in a meeting that there’s certain points that are not necessarily like I can give input ...if we discuss in certain things that I just feel like I could have been left out of their agenda and I would have been fine. So that’s when I will start maybe pushing some of the admin and stuff like that and responding to other queries. So yes, we do multitask, ..it’s like a natural instinct, it’s also because it’s a lot of meetings, so you’re trying to squeeze in as much as you can from a work point of view within the working hours within the boundaries of working hours.” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 60]

Dee echoed the same sentiment, noting that having the camera off allows him to catch up on emails, especially when the meeting’s agenda is not progressing.

Dee ~ “Yeah, so absolutely. Look, absolutely when cameras are off most times, I find myself also doing it. I have to discipline myself not to. But when camera is off, I am, in some cases doing other things, you know playing catch up on e-mail like you say,

tidying up something, you know, walking around with the laptop in the hand and making a cup of tea or whatever it is...if I get into the meeting and I see it's going somewhere else, then I, you know, I'll do something else" ~ [INT8 - Transcript Page 75]

Linda concurs with Dee's comments and indicates that she tends to engage in cooking during virtual meetings, especially when the cameras are off.

Linda ~ "I have found myself cooking food in camera off moments." ~ [INT5 - Transcript Page 49]

Mimie suggests that in virtual meetings, the setting provides an environment where multitasking is possible, especially when the camera is turned off. She emphasises that people tend to be more open to distractions and multitasking when their cameras are off, as no one can see them.

Mimie ~ "So you're more open to someone distracting, you're more open to picking up your phone and actually taking a whole conversation while you're in a meeting. You're more open to getting up and saying, OK, I'll just be back I'm going to go and do a cup of coffee." ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 23]

Bertha reported that she engages in multitasking during meetings where she perceives that she is not contributing or gaining any value.

Bertha ~ "if they're not showing anything that's gonna add value, actually I go on to my phone to try and search for other things, or I'm either searching on Google for something. So, it's very distracting ... because it distracts your whole mind and shifts into something else. Like you're not even thinking about the actual meeting that's happening." ~ [INT1 - Transcript Page 7]

Cliff explained that he had observed some people attending meetings while at the gym or shopping mall.

Cliff ~ "I think with cameras off you can definitely multitask and do other distracting things not necessarily work. You find that you know, people will be making breakfast, I've seen for example, at the gym some people bring their laptops and have meetings at the gym while they're busy. I've seen people take their laptops to Pick & Pay. So

definitely, not having your cameras on can be a big destruction.” ~ [INT2 - Transcript Page 15]

Mimie concurs with Cliff’s observation that people attend virtual meetings in public places, such as the gym or shopping mall. She describes this as a new cultural phenomenon where people use multiple devices to attend virtual meetings, even in the office.

Mimie ~ “Another one is where people because now MS Teams can be on your phone, it allows me to be in meetings but could be out a happy me, could be in an area where they’ve got too many distractions that are not actually helping me to focus. It’s become a culture, I walk into the office and I kid you not, people are walking from one place to the other carrying their phones, chit chatting to someone and they are in a meeting, they’re sitting in pause areas and you can hear people are in a meeting so begs the question that are we really engaged in our meetings... So that’s another culture that’s becoming almost becoming like a norm.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 24]

Shane concurs that multitasking has become the norm in virtual meetings.

Shane – “I guess it’s the new norm, but it shouldn’t be a norm” ~ [INT7 - Transcript Page 66]

ii. Evidence of new birth of culture – joining multiple meetings

In virtual meetings, participants have developed a new cultural behaviour of joining multiple meetings simultaneously, where they switch between different meetings. This phenomenon was not observed in physical face-to-face meetings and is thus considered a new culture that has emerged in the virtual setting. This issue can disrupt the flow and productivity of meetings and can be particularly frustrating when it is unclear who is responsible for resolving the issue.

Participants expressed their frustrations with the new culture of people joining multiple meetings at the same time. They explained that this behaviour is not desirable and should not be encouraged by organisations. 2 participants explained:

Mimie ~ “There is this thing where people literally can join two meetings at the same time, that’s becoming a culture. But that’s also a tell that.. we need to get better at setting up etiquette for virtual meetings...that’s not a culture we want to be embed, but it’s becoming one.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 24]

Kamn ~ “be respectful to everybody else in that meeting, you don’t join in a different session while you on another session. You know how frustrating I find it like when people are in a meeting, and you see them on hold. Then why did you join the meeting in the 1st place? So, what is the purpose of this? I mean we in the meeting to talk to each other, not for you to talk to someone else” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 38]

Andy also echoes the observation that it is not common for one to be called to join another meeting in a physical setting, whereas in virtual meetings, joining multiple meetings is now becoming a cultural norm.

Andy ~ “I think uh, for me it’s, the biggest frustration with the virtual meetings is that like in my case with my role being in multiple teams. If you are on site in a meeting, people wouldn’t come and pull you out of the office to come and talk to you. But with a virtual meeting even when they see that you in meeting, they will still dial you to try and get across a point or to try and ask you to join another meeting that was not scheduled in your diary. So, for me, that’s my biggest frustration that there’s no respect, to be honest. There’s no respect for meetings that are already scheduled or that you currently in. So that’s the disadvantage that you are expected to split yourself.” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 57]

She further laments that people should be intentional about whether these meetings are contributing anything significant. If people can join multiple meetings, organisations should enforce guidelines to prevent these new bad habits from forming.

Andy ~ “It’s the new norms. But again, that’s happening because then my question becomes, how important is that meeting if a person can be on hold and come back and go back and come back. So, I think again it’s also because at times it’s even the person who’s organising that meeting that does that... I feel like some of these meetings are completely unnecessary and that we just don’t seem to understand the objectives of why we are meeting, and this is why you can switch from two or three meetings....

Yeah, I think then we need to set those boundaries, I feel like we do need to set some boundaries and yes, some of us to take advantage of.” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 61]

Shane explains that virtual meetings have given rise to a new cultural phenomenon, where overlapping meetings are now possible due to the affordance of being dialled in from any location. This is not a practice that would have been feasible in physical face-to-face meetings.

Shane ~ “Yeah because maybe to explain it is, if you were in the meeting in the office, you wouldn’t get somebody bugging me in and saying come out I need you to be in my session. So that’s maybe to answer your question, so that’s a difference Abby in physical in a work environment they won’t be any overlapping meetings as in virtual setting.” ~ [INT7 - Transcript Page 68]

Shane further explained that the practice of joining multiple meetings is not constructively busy. He emphasised that it results in mere organised chaos, and that it often leads to people repeating meetings because they would not have absorbed any information while being in triple meetings.

Shane ~ “where is the time to exhale if you split and sharing between three sessions you’re not really learning, yes, you’re busy but you’re not constructively busy, its simply organised chaos, right? To your point, then you forget and most of the time you forget everything that you did in those 3 meetings you simply back to square one. So, I think you might just give 100% of your undivided attention to one session so that it doesn’t become a repetitive session.” ~ [INT7 - Transcript Page 66]

Bertha has explained that the practice of joining multiple meetings is a newly emerging norm in virtual meetings, and not a behaviour that has been carried over from the culture of physical meetings.

Bertha ~ “I feel now people just say be right back, I’ll be joining late, I’m joining another meeting, it’s like almost like it’s become a norm that it’s fine to just leave a meeting and go on to another meeting ... I find that you know if you are engaged in a meeting, if you been invited for meeting, be fully present should be fully there, just like how you would have been had you been prior to COVID, you know where we used to

go into a meeting room we used to sit there and wait there up until you know the meeting is over.” ~ [INT1 - Transcript Page 8]

iii. Evidence of loss of interpersonal connection

In the pursuit of evaluating whether organisational culture can be transplanted from the physical office setting to virtual work settings, data extracts indicate that the interpersonal connection in physical settings is not fully replicated in virtual work environments. The evidence suggests that people draw energy from one another, which cannot be effortlessly transferred from physical to virtual work settings.

Bertha indicated that the bonding that is present in physical settings is not present in virtual meetings. She stated:

Bertha ~ “I do feel that when we were working, you know, prior to COVID we still could build that sense of belonging to a group whereas now having these MS Team meeting it almost feels like we kind of lost trust within teams. We not bonding with each other. We cannot make a team feel like they’re part of something special.” ~ [INT1 - Transcript Page 7]

Shane highlights that the experience of body language, which is an important aspect of communication and building relationships in physical meetings, is not fully carried over into virtual meetings.

Shane ~ “You can’t actually read the person’s body language, like the hand movement and all and see their face, so I guess it’s only difficulty, right? You don’t have that body language experience” ~ [INT7 - Transcript Page 64]

According to Andy, a manager, while personal connections cannot be replicated in virtual settings, this limitation can actually work to an advantage. Specifically, people can engage in discussions about work expectations objectively without the emotional bias that can come from personal relationships.

Andy ~ “I think at the same time there’s an advantage that when you’re not so personal with people you kind of little bit more relaxed when it comes to work expectation. Because if I’m hanging around with Piet and I’ve got other people reporting to me and

they always see me with one person, it can sort of be deemed as favouritism... And in terms of objectivity, and if I know that that person is having a bad day today then it kinda influences how you make decisions during the day.” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 59]

iv. Evidence of new birth of culture – instant gratification

The data presented revealed that the birth of a new culture of instant gratification has been observed among the participants, where people expect others to be available at all times and provide inputs immediately.

Kamn has articulated the necessity for employees to be punctual and readily available during standard working hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) in contemporary organisational culture. In contrast to past practices, where allowances were made for bodily breaks, the current expectation is for workers to adhere strictly to established schedules.

Kamn ~ “Yes, I think I said it before. I think people have lost a bit of their empathy. The human side of it has gone by the wayside, you know, we expect people to be available from 8 to 5 every minute of every hour. I think if people can be reasonable and you think about yourself, everybody needs to eat, everybody needs to take a drink, everybody needs to use the bathroom” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 37]

Kamn provides further insight into the phenomenon of impatience in virtual meetings, where participants exhibit a reduced tolerance for delays compared to physical meetings. In the past, individuals would often allow for a few minutes of grace period before a meeting’s start time, but in virtual meetings, such patience seems to be dwindling.

Kamn ~ “...we used to walk in between buildings and people were courteous. Yeah, it was courtesy in terms of will wait for somebody before we start the meeting. Now, if you one minute late, they try and dial you in. You know, so it’s almost like they more aggressive like where’s this person they get irritated if they log on before you do... Then the virtual meetings people expect you to be on top of everything because you’re in front of your computer... whereas previously in physical setting when we went to meeting rooms, you would say to the guy, you know what I’m gonna come back to you and that would not been a problem at all” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 31 &37]

Linda observed that people have increasingly embraced a culture of instant gratification in their communication patterns. There is a growing expectation that responses should be prompt and almost immediate, primarily because individuals assume that others are readily available and within reach of their devices.

Linda ~ “Exactly and that is why I’ve become a super user with changing my dots(status). So, if I don’t want you to disturb me, I will put on a ‘do not disturb’ because then you can’t call me. But also, I think you know we are unfortunately moving into an instant gratification culture. Because it’s like I send you a message and now I’m like respond, respond, respond, what the hell are you not responding? Why are you not responding? ... I might have just not been at my desk at that very moment in time despite the fact that my status was available.” ~ [INT5 - Transcript Page 53]

According to Andy, the contemporary culture of urgent feedback has become so pervasive that individuals are resorting to alternative means of communication when traditional channels fail to deliver prompt responses. For instance, if someone is unable to reach an individual through MS Teams, they may attempt to contact them directly on their personal mobile phones.

Andy ~ “Yeah, I think that has to stop that. I feel that that, that communication needs to come even on all the way from the top from HR to say that if a person is in a meeting, you cannot interrupt them it can wait.... And it’s getting so bad these days, I’ve realised is when people try to dial you on Teams and you don’t answer, they then start calling you on your cell phone.” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 61]

4.1.3 Theme 3: Successful Teams Operation in a Virtual Meeting Environment

The investigation into the research objective reveals a range of cultural behaviours that can impede successful team operations in a virtual meeting environment. The analysis highlights several common issues that emerged, including challenges associated with team collaboration, difficulties in managing individual schedules, and concerns over virtual attendance and participation.

i. Challenges of team collaboration

Several data extracts revealed that virtual team collaboration may be limited compared to face-to-face interactions, with potential implications for the success of team virtualisation.

According to Cliff, team collaboration can suffer in virtual team settings, as the energy and focus of the team can be diminished. To address this issue and improve team collaboration on projects, he recommended commencing projects with a face-to-face planning session in the office. He explained:

Cliff ~ “Umm, in terms of collaboration, I think it’s lost via virtual meetings? Umm, I just feel that essence or energy and focus is lost, versus meeting in the office and that’s why I think as an IT department especially with the new projects, you know, we need to collaborate and kick it off. We have found that it’s far more effective to do it at the office face-to-face, then follow up sessions virtually on Teams”. ~ [INT2 - Transcript Page 15]

Mimie highlighted the difficulties that can arise when attempting to collaborate in scenarios that require full engagement in virtual environments. Specifically, the lack of body language cues can make it challenging for individuals to fully participate in virtual collaborations. She stated:

Mimie ~ “I think one of the challenges we really faced, Abby was doing training virtually because our training team could not gauge whether the audience was understanding or not. You can’t read body language, you just see a face, right? Umm and we found that we started getting more complaints from our staff, each time we

asked them that we sent you for training and they like, yeah, but we didn't have a chance to actually ask a question. It just doesn't allow for engagement.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 22]

She further highlights the challenges associated with turn-taking and reading non-verbal cues in virtual communication. In particular, it can be difficult to determine when to speak and who is about to speak in a virtual environment. This is due to the absence of visual cues that are available in face-to-face communication.

Mimie ~ “there's disengagement when you virtually don't know who's turn it is to speak, virtually its disconnected and people can interject quickly, while with conversation in person you can see that Piet is leaning into saying something ... there's a very big difference in having a body of people sitting together in a room and hashing out something, writing on the board and, you know, looking to each other, getting the energy in the room and also being able to see physical cues of who's withdrawn, who is engaged and so forth.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 21&22]

According to Bertha, virtual team collaboration can be adversely affected by a lack of focus and engagement among team members. In some cases, individuals may not be fully present during virtual meetings, leading to reduced teamwork and productivity. Bertha notes that some team members may go completely quiet, while others may be multitasking or engaging in other activities during virtual meetings.

Bertha ~ “So for instance, you know you'll get someone who says I'm going to grab a coffee quickly. In the meantime, the other person is busy on their phone, and you do find that collaboration is lost. Umm ...face-to-face we could work on something all-together on an agenda and we are thinking together, we collaborating together whereas now on a Teams meeting we don't find that collaboration anymore because either someone is completely quiet and doesn't talk at all and they just continue to stay quiet throughout the meeting, expecting others to give their views all the time. So yeah, definitely that collaborative-ness has moved or shifted away it's completely lost.” ~ [INT1 - Transcript Page 6]

Bertha expands on the impact of turning off cameras during virtual meetings, noting that it can contribute to reduced engagement and focus among team members. She points

to instances where she found herself dozing off during meetings when cameras are turned off.

Bertha ~ “I mean, not having your camera on, I can tell you personally I do not engage at all because I tend to fall off to sleep in most meetings...I know we’ve moved into this era of ...where things are done virtually, uh. But personally, if we want to collaborate, we want to be a more of a collaborative team, if we want to be more engaged in a meeting, you know, to understand how the company actually works. Sometimes it’s always just better to have a face-to-face meeting than having virtual meetings.” ~ [INT1 - Transcript Page 7 & 10]

Dee similarly emphasised the challenges associated with virtual team collaboration, noting that communication can be disrupted when team members choose to respond using chat messages instead of engaging directly with the team.

Dee ~ “So if I can say to you, it actually created a disconnected view of collaboration, in that you, you know, not everybody would talk in a virtual meeting and we also don’t give opportunity to collaborate, like in asking questions and challenging any feedback you get. We don’t have too much of that because some guy will put something on the chat and we’ll miss it, and we’ll only catch it at the end of the meeting” ~ [INT8 - Transcript Page 73]

Kamn suggests that virtual team collaboration may not be impacted significantly if team members have worked together before. However, new team members may experience difficulties fitting in and collaborating effectively in a virtual setting.

Kamn ~ “So once again for me if it was a team that previously worked together and they know each other well, I think that transition was fine, they will still be collaborative, they could talk to each other and relate. But when you’re in a new team or where there’s a new joiner in your team, those people will fall by the wayside.” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 36]

Shane notes that he has not observed significant negative impacts on virtual collaboration. In fact, he suggests that virtual collaboration can lead to quicker decision-making. However, he also acknowledges that face-to-face interactions may be more

beneficial for complex discussions that require detailed communication and in-depth analysis.

Shane ~ “No, I don’t really think it does impact, I think we much quicker now to reach decision making because we don’t waste much time in traffic and all that stuff. But I think to your point you can’t only do virtual meetings those big and complex discussions needs to be in the room where you are face-to-face and you actually keep your 100% attention and also it’s nice to draw on the board, you know, like jot things down.” ~ [INT7 - Transcript Page 65]

Andy highlights the improvements in team collaboration facilitated by virtual communication. One key benefit is the ability to attend multiple meetings without the need to commute, which can save valuable time and resources. Although virtual communication may lack the personal connections of face-to-face interactions, Andy notes that collaboration has actually improved, and there is no need for physical office meetings for brief discussions.

Andy – “No, I think, team collaboration hasn’t changed much. As a matter of fact, I feel like we’re collaborating more ...I feel like the collaboration is a little bit better and people feel a little bit more you can actually meet people more whereas with physical meetings you will have to drive for a one liner or two things. I think the collaboration have improved a lot through virtual meetings, yeah. To be honest, connection personal connection is missing, but collaboration from a team, it’s there.” ~ [INT6 - Transcript Page 60]

ii. Challenges of observing diaries

This section discusses the difficulties associated with checking individual diaries for meeting availability. When asked if colleagues consistently checked the diaries of potential attendees before scheduling meetings, the majority of participants noted that this was not always the case. Several participants expressed their frustration with this issue and shared their experiences. For instance, some participants noted that certain individuals would frequently book meetings without checking their colleagues’ availability, leading to scheduling conflicts and reduced productivity. These challenges highlight the importance of ensuring that all team members are aware of the need to

check individual diaries before scheduling meetings to ensure maximum participation and productivity. For example, a few have explained:

Cliff observes that individuals are increasingly booking meetings without checking individual diaries beforehand. This practice is becoming more common, with some individuals assuming that others will accept and attend meetings without first confirming their availability.

Cliff ~ “No, absolutely not, I think because we are having so much of meetings... you find yourself you not having any free time...because umm, you know, so many meetings are happening, so people just blindly now booking meetings, you know, especially if it’s more than two or three people, it’s very hard to get that free slot. So, people just, you know, hit send and hope you attend.” ~ [INT2 - Transcript Page 16]

Mimie emphasises the importance of establishing clear guidelines for virtual meetings to improve overall meeting etiquette. She recommends that leaders establish a quorum that can guide meeting behaviours and expectations, including guidelines on engagement and participation. Mimie also highlights the need to enforce these guidelines, as this can help to promote accountability and encourage team members to actively engage in virtual meetings.

Mimie ~ “We need to be structuring almost like a virtual meeting sitting quorum, or even a process because people they apply the principle of processes. There’s nothing that’s from a procedural perspective actually guides what etiquette is in virtual meetings. We talk about it in general, but there is no process ... I mean a practical example I’ll give you is there was Wednesday we were supposed to no meeting time. It’s in our Diaries, but nobody ever has ever in my experience considered to that these still set you up at that time, that Yellow time zone, so not so much that people don’t know, but I think it’s not enforced.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 26]

iii. Challenges of understanding individual virtual presence status

The objective of the study was to explore whether observing individual presence status can help teams operate more effectively in a virtual team environment. However, the data extracts suggest that individuals do not consistently observe the virtual presence status of their team members.

Kamn indicated that people do not check your availability status, saying:

Kamn ~ “But I think you know the other thing is people aren’t checking your availability So, I think if people actually just took the time and really, you know, had a look, are you busy or you’re not but also just phone once and then stop.” ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 38]

Linda explains that even when the virtual presence status indicates availability, it does not mean that the person is waiting for calls 24/7. She explains:

Linda ~ “I think that we need to also understand, ... just because maybe my dot(status) is green it doesn’t mean I’m sitting around doing nothing, waiting for your phone call.” ~ [INT5 - Transcript Page 53]

Mimie emphasises the need for team members to interpret virtual presence indicators accurately in virtual team environments. Specifically, she notes that a team member’s status may be indicated as “green”, but this does not necessarily mean that they are available for communication or collaboration.

Mimie ~ “I could be green; it does not mean I’m available for you to call. So, I feel like now the perception, digitally my presence that says green means free for all, but green could mean that I’m not in a meeting ...so it’s creating a very a wrong perception of being available ...I also know there’s a perception that if you’re always green, you’re not working. So, I feel like there’s a culture that is reading into our digital presence very differently to what could actually be happening, and it’s causing misconceptions of what our staff and certainly what I am doing.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 24]

Mimie highlights the issue of team members misusing the “Do Not Disturb” status in virtual team environments.

Mimie ~ “The other one that creates a wrong perception is the do-not-disturb, umm, a lot of people use that. I certainly use it to block out time so I can actually get to do work, but some people use that so that they’re actually unreachable. So, it’s being abused in another way.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 24]

iv. Recommendations or guideline to virtualisation

The recommendations and guidelines for virtualisation that emerged during the interviews were obtained indirectly during the interviews and at the end when the participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to add.

Kamn suggested that the development and implementation of internal policies could facilitate successful virtual team operations by providing clear guidelines for workers.

Kamn ~ “And the other thing for me there is as well, I think there should be like an internal policy that’s guides if you dial somebody on Teams, let it ring for three times and if they don’t answer put it down, don’t then keep on dialling like for 5 minutes. ...There’s no courtesy, you know, years ago we had telephone etiquette, we don’t have it for MS Teams, and I think we’re lacking there, we should actually have very fixed.”
~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 38]

Linda recommended that organisational leaders should strive to understand the remote working environment for their employees to support virtualisation.

Linda ~ “I find people exceptionally desperate for guidance and at the moment I think our world has been turned upside down and people are looking for leadership guidance outside of the workday today. I think soft skills are lacking and people are looking for guidance, and I’m not just saying that junior candidates, I’m talking everybody. So, looking at the working environment, does every person have a decent remote work environment? Do they have a decent seat? Do they have a decent light that shines a light on their computer? ...So, research concerned about behaviour outside and inside the working environment is key” ~ [INT5 - Transcript Page 55]

Kamn recommended that organisations and researchers examine the impact of the increased number of meetings in virtual team environments. Many individuals have begun to work extended hours due to the increasing focus on meetings, which can have significant implications for employee workloads and well-being.

Kamn ~ “With all the meetings that we in, I think more people have started working extended hours just to try and catch up with all of this. I talked to a lot of people that I know from my previous team, and they suffer, they suffer a lot. Because they try and

do everything during the day by being in every meeting and then do their work at night. I think yeah. If you look at it like that from physical and emotional impact, things are really not good for us and I think it's terrible for people." ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 39]

Kamn recommends that work teams should prioritise accommodating body breaks to support employee well-being in virtual team environments. She emphasises that tools such as MS Teams should not control or dictate team operations, but rather, teams should utilise and manage these tools to best support their needs.

Kamn ~ "It's almost like just that expectation that you have to be available 8 to 5 regardless there is no time for lunch there's no time for just taking a quick break. Yeah, but it's also, I think people feel so pressured to be present ... I think that's also might set that needs to that shift, that needs to come where MS Teams shouldn't be running us, we need to run MS Teams." ~ [INT4 - Transcript Page 37]

Mimie recommends that organisations and researchers should strive to understand the impacts of digitalisation on employees in virtual team environments. This understanding can enable organisations to develop policies and guidelines that guide virtual team operations and promote employee well-being. By implementing clear guidelines and policies, organisations can promote successful virtual team collaboration while also prioritising employee well-being.

Mimie ~ "...organisations have taken on the 'we are going digital' without understanding what digital presence means and how it actually impacts people. I don't think today certainly in my space, there isn't a policy that says I cannot book you for more than 8 hours in a day for meetings. There's nothing like that, that exists, but it is essential because outside of that we are not going to ever get to strike a balance. We're talking digitisation, but we're not actually understanding what these tools that we use now actually mean and how do we control for the well-being of our stuff and indeed ourselves, how we better balance this because I feel like everybody understands that virtual meetings have taken away time for real work, but no one saying why are we not strategising and putting together process and guidelines. We have processes, we've got guidelines for every little thing, Abby, but we don't have one that actually helps us understand how to virtually manage the way we work. It doesn't exist. Why doesn't it

exist? I always worry that as leaders we are not actually understanding the impact we have on people when we're taking them off tasks for meetings and the expectation is they should catch up at the end of the business day, which is what we do... that's why I'm passionate about the topic to say we are leaving it to staff to understand how to manage their digital presence which is not OK.” ~ [INT3 - Transcript Page 26]

4.2 Research Findings

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of transitioning from physical meetings to virtual meetings on organisational culture. Specifically, the study sought to determine the feasibility and effectiveness of virtual meetings in a work setting. The sections that follow provide a summary of the research findings in relation to the study objectives.

4.2.1 Findings on Research Objective 1

Research objective: *To assess the impact of transitioning from physical meetings to virtual meetings on organisational culture in a South African banking environment.*

The theme of the study aimed to present individual perceptions of the impact of moving from physical meetings to virtual meetings on organisational culture. Literature suggest that organisations were ill-prepared for the sudden enforced WFH transforming from physical meetings to virtual meetings (Waizenegger et al., 2020). The findings indicate a significant increase in the number of meetings employees attend per day, with some employees spending up to 6-8 hours in meetings within an 8-hour working day. The increased number of meetings has led to a cognitive and information overload, making it challenging to context switch between meetings and take a break. Furthermore, the rise in meetings has resulted in a lack of time for other work tasks, causing employees to work after or before hours and leaving them mentally exhausted. Thus, high meeting demand has been suggested to link to decreased well-being related to fatigue and subjective workload (Kauffeld, & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Participants reported a negative impact on ad-hoc conversations, which are limited in virtual meetings that

focus primarily on specific purposes and outcomes, limiting the ability to build relationships. The study also found that the “self-view” functionality similar to seeing oneself in the mirror in virtual meetings may distract individuals from focusing on their contributions to the meeting, similarly, suggested by Abramova et al., 2021 that self-view may act as a trigger for self-awareness.

4.2.2 Findings on Research Objective 2

Research objective: *To determine whether organisational culture can be effectively transferred from a physical office environment to the intangible virtual work environment.*

This section aims to present individual perceptions on the possibility of maintaining organisational culture in the virtual working environment. Research suggests that despite the transformation from physical meeting, virtual meetings are still expected to deliver the same outcome as physical meetings in organisations (Waizenegger et al., 2020). The study findings revealed the emergence of a new culture where people attend multiple meetings simultaneously, utilising the on-hold capability to switch between meetings. Multitasking has also become prevalent, whether related to work or personal tasks. However, these new behaviours were found to negatively affect team collaboration and engagement, leading to repetitive meetings. The study also uncovered a demand for instant gratification due to the easy accessibility of meetings on computers, which has resulted in an expectation for immediate availability during working hours, perpetuating an “always-on culture” suggested by recent literature (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Existing literature on Process Virtualisation Theory posits that virtual relationships tend to be weaker and less developed than physical face-to-face relationships (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999), thus, suggested by the findings indicating loss of interpersonal connection in virtual meetings. The study findings suggest that it is impossible to carry interpersonal connections from physical to virtual settings since the latter does not provide a sense of touch (physical connection) and limits the ability to build relationships in social or professional contexts.

4.2.3 Findings on Research Objective 3

Research Objective: *To explore the potential success of organisational teams operating in a virtual meeting environment.*

The aim of this theme was to present individual perceptions of team operations in a virtual meeting environment. The findings suggest that certain cultural behaviours such as joining multiple meetings can hinder the success of team operations in a virtual setting. To improve virtual team collaboration, the findings recommend adopting a hybrid model where some meetings are conducted face-to-face to build team collaboration and interpersonal connections, especially when the team has new members. Additionally, accommodating body breaks and observing individual presence were suggested as methods to enhance virtual team collaboration. It was also recommended that organisational leaders make an effort to create virtual meeting guidelines as part of policymaking and to understand the implications of digitalisation on the workforce. These guidelines would help ensure that the supporting tools, such as MS Teams, do not control the team, but rather the team controls the supporting tools.

4.2.4 Findings Summary

The previous sections presented data patterns or themes, and their substantive significance was analysed in relation to the research objective. According to research, the consistency of a theme across participants indicates its substantive significance or importance (Floersch, Longhofer, Kranke, & Townsend, 2010). Therefore, in this study, the strength and consistency of the responses from participants determined the importance of the identified patterns in relation to the research objective. The findings summary and their significance are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Findings Summary and Their Significance in Influencing Meeting Virtualisation

Theme Element	Significance Extent
Objective 1: Impacts of moving from physical meetings to virtual meetings	
▪ Increased meetings	Highly substantial significant and negatively impacts meeting virtualisation
▪ Increased cognitive and information overload	Highly substantial significant and negatively impacts meeting virtualisation
▪ Non-affordance to ad-hoc conversations	Highly substantial significant and negatively impacts meeting virtualisation
▪ Impacts of self-view feature	Minimally substantial significant and negatively impacts meeting virtualisation
Objective 2: Transportation of organisational culture into virtual setting	
▪ Multitasking	Highly substantial significant and negatively impacts meeting virtualisation
▪ Joining multiple meetings	Highly substantial significant and negatively impacts meeting virtualisation
▪ Loss of interpersonal connection	Moderately substantial significant and negatively impacts meeting virtualisation
▪ Instant gratification cultural behaviour	Moderately substantial significant and negatively impacts meeting virtualisation
Objective 3: Successful Teams operation in a virtual meeting environment	
▪ Team Collaboration	Moderately substantial significant, high team collaboration is influential to success of meeting virtualisation
▪ Observing diaries	Minimally substantial significant and influential to success of meeting virtualisation
▪ Meeting policy/guideline	Moderately Substantial significant and influential to success of meeting virtualisation

5 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Contributions to Theory

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact worldwide, and the academic community has been called upon to respond to the implications of the sudden shift to enforced work from home (WFH) which has resulted in a rise in virtual meetings. Recent research has indicated that the existing WFH literature does not provide a comprehensive explanation of the unprecedented implications of the government enforced WFH (Waizenegger et al., 2020). The banking sector was not immune to the sudden and abrupt WFH phenomenon, with a significant transformation from on-site to virtual meetings in order to maintain “business as usual”. Unfortunately, despite meetings playing a crucial role in the success of an organisation, existing literature has neglected this topic relative to sudden rise of meeting virtualisation (Leuzinger & Brannon, 2021). Therefore, the research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the following ways:

- Fill the gap in the WFH body of knowledge as the literature is relatively sparse on the impacts of sudden government-enforced working from home.
- Fill the gap in “meeting science” literature on the phenomenon of meetings virtualisation that has suddenly accelerated on a large scale never seen before due to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns.
- The conceptual framework, in the context of virtual meetings in a banking environment, will enlighten the Process Virtualisation Theory.

5.2 Contributions to Practice

Existing literature suggests that organisational meetings play a crucial role as a vehicle for communication and coordination across business units. Meetings are vital for

understanding organisational culture and studies have shown that they represent the largest human resources costs in terms of employee time and salaries (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2017). Therefore, with the radical shift from on-site meetings collaboration to virtual meeting collaboration, it is crucial for banks to come to grips with virtuality and its impacts. This study aims to contribute to practice in the following ways:

- Enabling banking practitioners to comprehend the impacts of meetings virtualisation, as meetings play an essential role as a primary means of communication and task coordination within and across work units.
- Expanding the knowledge on the virtualisation of organisational culture in the banking sector.
- Informing practitioners to review organisational culture in the context of new virtualisation behaviours.
- Informing organisations if the organisational culture can be transported from a physical on-site space setting into the immaterial world of virtual working.
- The research aims to inform practitioners on elements that may influence the success or failure of meeting virtualisation.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Despite the contributions of the study to theory and practice, it had the following limitations:

- The study was limited in terms of the research period due to the course requirements.
- Because of the limited research period, the theoretical framework was not extended, which might have resulted in insufficient contextualised data.
- Given the recent nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the existing literature has not yet fully matured, especially in the context of its impacts on the banking sector, and specifically within South Africa.

- Generalisations of the findings may be limited due to the single-site nature of the case study (Bank X).

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The study highlights potential avenues for future research. First, it is recommended that future research concentrates on the development of virtual meeting guidelines to guarantee the success of virtual meetings. Secondly, it is suggested that future studies investigate the health-related impacts of virtual meetings on employee wellness. Thirdly, future research should aim to comprehend the costing and return on investment of virtual meetings as considerable time is now spent in meetings. Lastly, it is recommended that future research investigate ways for teams to effectively operate in virtual environment.

5.5 Conclusion

This study utilised semi-structured interviews at a single case, Bank X, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of meeting virtualisation on organisational culture. The research highlighted that the sudden shift from on-site to virtual meetings due to government-enforced WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in several impacts on organisational culture in a banking environment. The findings showed a significant increase in the number of meetings, with employees now spending at least 70% or more of their daily time in meetings. From the increased meetings, employees are finding it difficult to cope with the cognitive load and challenges in context switching. Further, the non-affordance of ad-hoc conversations in virtual meetings has resulted in the loss of personal connections and the ability to build relationships, particularly with new team members.

The study revealed the difficulty in transporting organisational culture from physical settings to virtual settings, as new cultural behaviours are emerging virtually. These behaviours include joining multiple meetings, multitasking, and building a culture of

instant gratification with an expectation of “always-on culture. Team collaboration has been identified as a challenge to transport from physical meetings due to the affordance of disturbances in virtual settings aided by the ability to turn off cameras.

The study presented recommendations that can lead to successful team operation virtually. The hybrid model was suggested as a solution where organisations can utilise both on-site and virtual meetings. Further, the study suggested for organisations to create meetings guidelines or policies to contribute to employee satisfaction and the successes of the organisation.

This study aimed to fill the gaps in WFH literature in the context of “meeting science” body of knowledge. The research has advanced the understanding of the impact of virtualisation on organisational culture in the banking sector, specifically in South Africa. It furthered the Process Virtualisation Theory by providing a conceptual framework in the context of meeting virtualisation in a banking environment.

In conclusion, this study presented an understanding of how amenable meetings are to being conducted through a virtual environment and its impacts on organisational culture. It seeks to inform researchers and practitioners on impacts of transitioning from physical to virtual environments.

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7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix A: Research Instrument Guide (Interview Schedule)

Objective 1: To assess the impact of transitioning from physical meetings to virtual meetings on organisational culture in a South African banking environment.
Sub-objective 1. 1: To determine the current nature of virtual meetings use in a South African banking environment.
▪ What is the current nature of virtual meetings use? ▪ Probe status of use of virtual meetings: – With your line of work are you engaging in virtual meetings? – Was your WFH and engaging in virtual meeting mandated by the COVID-19 regulations? – On average how many hours do you spent in virtual meetings per day Mon-Friday? – What are your perceptions of virtual meetings, any positive or negative perceptions? – Do you prefer virtual meetings compared to physical meetings and why?
Sub-objective 1.2: Analyse the nature of increased cognitive load due to growing number of videoconferencing meetings.
▪ Is there growing number of meetings compared from the physical setting in the office leading to cognitive load? ▪ Probe cognitive load/ “virtual meetings-fatigue”: – In your view, is there an increase to the number of meetings now required, due to WFH? – In your opinion is the number of meetings manageable or have it turned into never-ending chain of meetings?

- If yes, does the number of meetings gives room to breaks or time to recover for context switching? (Previously moving between meeting rooms gave employees time to recover from cognitive load /context switching).
- In your view is the number of meetings leading to increased cognitive load.
- If yes, in what ways are you managing cognitive load due to the increased meetings?
- Do you have meeting free timeslots enforced by yourself or the organisations, if yes are you or your workmates adhering to these timeslots?
- In your view should companies be enforcing such free time slots and how?
- In your view are virtual meetings far more attention-taxing than face-to-face meetings.

▪

Sub-objective 1.3: Determine the impact of engagement with the self-view on online meeting outcomes.

- What are the effects of engagement with the self-view functionality on online meeting?
- **Probe Self-view habit:** When you engage in online meetings with your camera on.
 - Do you tend to be self-aware and check yourself when engaging with camera on during meetings?
 - Is there a change on self-awareness from physical meeting to virtual meeting due to the self-mirror-view?
 - Does viewing yourself impacts your contribution in the meeting, if yes how?
 - Does viewing yourself impacts your individual consciousness.
 - Does viewing yourself leads you to self-evaluation comparing the real self to an ideal self

- Does viewing yourself cause self-criticism, if yes does it positively impact or negatively draining you?
- Would you prefer the online meeting application to have a functionality to turn on/off the self-view functionality (not able mirror view yourself?)

Sub-objective 1.4: To analyse the change in ad-hoc meeting conversations and the impact on team communication and knowledge sharing

Did the withdrawal from the environmental affordances of the office space reduced the frequency of ad-hoc meetings due to the lack of spontaneity?

Probe ad-hoc meetings/conversations rituals:

- In your view, is there a change in ad-hoc meetings conversations rituals, e.g. chat meetings in corridors
- Do ad-hoc team meetings still happen? Is there a possibility that the ad-hoc conversations that used to happen in corridors now are happening in virtual meetings, if so, how different are these to corridor meetings, are they now more formal?
- Are the virtual team meetings giving you affordance to engage ad-hoc conversations about your current projects, tasks, discussing ideas, or your daily life?
- In your view does WFH led to a more planned and orchestrated collaboration meetings from chit chats?
- What's your perceptions in bouncing ideas off each, did WFH now requiring formal meetings and making it less frequent and difficult?
- Are the chats/meetings now formalised and make them more purpose-driven and focused?

Objective 2: To determine whether organisational culture can be effectively transferred from a physical office environment to the intangible virtual work environment.

Sub-objective 2.1: To determine if virtual meetings impact team collaboration.

How do you find virtual meetings impact on team collaboration culture?

Probe collaboration culture:

- In your view do virtual meetings impacts collaboration compared to physical meetings.
- Do people engage collaboratively in virtual meeting during task execution?
- How does virtual meetings positively impact team collaboration?
- How does virtual meetings negatively impact team collaboration?
- In your opinion are people (yourself/teammates) actively engaging and collaborative during virtual meetings

Sub-objective 2.2: To determine the impact of Camera off and on virtual meetings rituals.

What is the impact of turning camera off or on during virtual meetings?

Probe camera off or on rituals:

- What is your perception of turning camera off or on? Do you find it beneficial or not beneficial?
- Do you prefer to engage with camera on or off during team meetings, if yes/no please explain why?
- Do you fully engage or multitask when your camera is on?
- Do you think the meeting is more productive if team members have their camera off?
- Do you trust that your teammates will be fully engaged/or selectively engaged?
- In your opinion do you think organisations should make it mandatory to turn cameras on?

Objective 3: To explore the potential success of organisational teams operating in a virtual meeting environment.

Objective 3.1: To analyse the impact of virtualisation on meetings culture rituals.

What is the impact of virtualisation on meetings culture rituals?

Probe physical meetings rituals:

- In your opinion can organisational teams operate successfully in a virtual meeting environment the same way as in physical office environment.

- In your view does virtualisation positively or negatively impact adherence to time keeping rituals such as start/end of meeting timelines.
- Is there difference in meeting scheduling rituals from physical meeting to virtual meetings, do people still maintain the office rituals such as checking someone's diary before calling, or scheduling a meeting, setting the agenda?
- How do you find the habit of people going on hold, joining other meetings and joining back in meetings, is this different from working in the office, is this the birth of new meeting ritual culture?
- How is the decision-making process now different from the physical meetings (is it quicker as you can pull relevant decision makers)?