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Exploring the Impact of covid COVID-19 Lockdown on Human Resource Management in the Gauteng Office of the Premier

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2024

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Masango, Bheki. (2024). Exploring the Impact of covid COVID-19 Lockdown on Human Resource Management in the Gauteng Office of the Premier [Masters dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg]. WIReDSpace. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/45197

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Exploring the Impact of covid COVID-19 Lockdown on Human Resource Management in the Gauteng Office of the Premier.

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, law and Management, University of Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management Degree in the field of Public Policy.

by

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February 2024

DECLARATION

I, Bheki Masango hereby declare that this research report is my unaided work that has been prepared by me and submitted to Wits University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Management in Public Policy.

ABSTRACT

The literature regarding the global pandemic of Covid-19 and its disruption to life in 2020 continues to grow and develop. This study investigated the impact of Covid-19 has had on Human Resource Practitioners, the human resource practices and the impacts of the decision making process for various the public sector. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of how the global pandemic has changed the roles of human resource practitioners and what future implications may result from the global pandemic. This investigation required a thorough analysis of their lived experiences regarding their roles as practitioners in the human resources field prior to the global pandemic and during the pandemic. This qualitative study employed a narrative research method, with a theoretical framework focusing institutional theories and theoretical approaches to HRM and Crisis research to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature. The purposeful sample consisted of 15 human resources practitioners who were presently employed in human resource departments in the Gauteng Office of the Premier. The participants all resided in Gauteng province. The researcher conducted a questionnaire with 5 of the participants, followed by followed by a 45- to 60-minute semi-structured one-on-one interview with the remaining 10 participants. Data analysis employed ATLAS ti. software analysis which led to a thematic analysis. After coding, five themes were identified describing the participants' five key influencers from the effects of Covid-19 on human resources systems and practitioners. Four conclusions emerged from this study. Human Resource Practitioners will have a more active role in if not lead in crisis management, Organisational Leadership will rely heavily on Human Resource Practitioners in the decision making process for all future crisis, disaster, and pandemic responses, Human Resource practitioners will develop new policies in regard to changes made due to Covid-19 disruptions.

Dedication

I dedicate this research report to my daughter Ntandokazi and my family. I extend my deepest gratitude to my parents, Monica and Sipho Masango, whose unwavering support and words of encouragement have been invaluable. I cannot express my appreciation enough for their unwavering tenacity. To my siblings, boGasoslo KaMwelase, have always been by my side and hold a special place in my heart.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my dear friend who has stood by me throughout this process. Their unwavering support has been crucial, and I am immensely grateful for their kindness and generosity. To my all the Masango generation that comes after me, I dedicate this project and hope that it will inspire you to reach even greater heights. And lastly to myself for being the 1st to reach this level and set the bar.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to have been supervised by Phd. Rekgotsofetse Chikane, who guided my research project from start to completion with precise and exceptional intellectual leadership and extensive experience that kept me motivated and focused throughout.

This project would not have been possible without the support of the Gauteng Office of the Premier. My gratitude goes to the Director in the DG's Office, Ms Minette Smit approved my application to study further, and HR director who granted permission for the study and facilitated access to participants and documents I needed for the research project. I am also grateful to all the participants that I have interviewed and held deep conversations with about my research questions. Your input and unique insight into the HRM sector have shaped my research project.

All my lecturers at the Wits School of Governance as well as my fellow classmates played an important role in shaping my thoughts, refined my outlook and sharpened my approach to this academic project. Thank you for all those intellectual conversations, debates, and arguments. I am a better person today because of you.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1 INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on exploring the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on Human Resource Management (HRM) in the Gauteng Office of the Premier (OOP). The site of the research is the City of Johannesburg, located in South Africa. Academics such as (Blahopoulou et al. 2022 and Nagel, 2020) stress the world's lack of preparedness for unexpected shocks concerning Human Resources, emphasising the potentially negative consequences for organisations, workers, and the general economy. The current study aims to investigate how the Covid-19 lockdown impacted the HR practices to be implemented during a pandemic and the prospects for HR professionals who are coping with these conditions. This is due to the present danger of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lack of conclusive results on how Human Resources departments (HR) and HR experts should respond to a worldwide pandemic. The study explores the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on HRM practices in the OOP, especially focusing on the impact on HRM practices, policies, services, and HR personnel. This study has not been conducted before, and its findings are expected to provide new insight into HRM and its practices during a crisis and the experiences of those expected to implement HRM practices.

1.1 Background

In early 2020, South Africa and the rest of the world were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, a transmittable viral disease caused by a drastic acute respiratory syndrome (Dhanpat, Makgamatha, Monageng, & Sigawuki, 2022). South Africa's government responded to the virus's rapid spread by implementing drastic lockdown measures and releasing mandatory guidelines (Nagel, 2020). The COVID-19 virus has been contained and proactively controlled by various countries that require mandatory use of face masks and adherence to social distancing and enact a variety of other measures (Scheid, Ford & West, 2020). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic required employees to distance themselves from one another, making remote work the "new normal" in many countries, especially during lockdown (Xu, Wang, Han, Huang & Huang, 2022). Aitken-Fox et al. (2020) report that employees' experience is largely determined by their interactions with others and the environment where they perform their work throughout the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic, also known as Covid-19, is an infection that causes serious and life-threatening respiratory problems. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020) declared the disease a global health disaster responsible for nearly 2.85 million deaths, making it one of history's most egregious pandemics and another global emergency. The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted organisational Human Resources Management, resulting in extraordinary alterations in the organisational landscape.

Digital transformation, remote working systems, and Covid-19 related measures have changed traditional HRM and introduced numerous new problems to Human Resources Management. It has created uncertainty, instability, and ambiguity in organisations (Nangia & Mohsin, 2020). Additionally, the pandemic presented other issues for organisations, such as a remote work culture, performance management, poor employee participation, and long-term viability of the organisation (Singh et al., 2021; Yoosefi-Lebni et al., 2021). Throughout the world, organisations are changing a lot in terms of staff management and work procedures. Ensuring successful performance and employee well-being is of the utmost importance in the current crisis, as Human Resource Management is essential for maintaining organisational operations (Risley, 2020; Davidescu et al., 2020). Reports on the definitions of HR practices are numerous. Human resources management (HRM) is described by AlShaikhly (2017) as organisational actions intended to manage a pool of human resources and guarantee that they are recruited to achieve organisational objectives. HRM practices include hiring, screening, developing and training employees, inspiring them and providing for their needs.

1.2 Problem Statement

The Covid-19 pandemic and the national lockdown in South Africa can be considered uncharted territory. Theoretically, there are sufficient data from the literature to link certain variables to the private sector and healthcare HR practices (Karanikas & Cauchi, 2020; Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020; Blahopoulou et al. 2022; Nagel, 2020). There is a lack of understanding regarding the theoretical and empirical relationship between the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on public sector perceptions of human resource practices.

In response to the pandemic, the South African government implemented several interventions to fulfil its obligations towards the safety and well-being of its citizens. Most nations, including South Africa, have put in place several nonpharmaceutical measures, like social distancing, in an effort

to slow the Covid-19 virus's rapid spread. People were placed under quarantine, lockdown procedures were implemented, schools, colleges, non-essential companies, and non-governmental organisations were temporarily closed, travel was restricted, flights were cancelled, and social gatherings and large public gatherings were outlawed (Brodeur, Gray, Islam, & Bhuiyan, 2020; Gourinchas, 2020). For this study, the focus is on public sector services as they relate to human resource management.

The Gauteng provincial government is part of the national public sector and was expected to implement the interventions of the national government. A centralised HR Management organisation has been established to oversee HR strategy and harmonise people management procedures across international borders (Horwitz & Ronnie, 2021). It implements a personnel policy modelled after the nation's civil service and provides standard criteria (Donga et al., 2021). Human resources departments operate within the boundaries of well-defined official protocols. Restriction is linked to the special capabilities of public sector departments and the fact that society pays close attention to what public sector employees do (Berman et al., 2016).

In addition to the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), numerous circulars have been issued to the Public Service, the latest being Circular No. 18 of 2020. In this circular, national and provincial departments must follow specific steps to contain and manage Covid-19. Departments have adopted an employee-first strategy by providing a seamless employee experience (Prajapati & Pandey, 2020), resulting in modifications to work structures to deal with the implications (Afshari et al., 2022). HRM experts have a critical role in assisting organisations navigate the unpredictable scenario induced by the Covid-19 pandemic (Gigauri, 2020).

1.2.1 The Knowledge Gap

South Africa’s academic literature in this area is still a work in progress, and in recent years the literature on HRM practices and the adaptation to Work From Home (WFH) has grown (Xu et al., 2022). As much as there remains to learn about the previous WFH adaptation in general, particularly during crisis periods, the effectiveness of HRM practices and WFH adaptation in the public sector remains unclear (Biron, Peretz & Turgeman-Lupo, 2020). In crises, when HRM practices are challenged and WFH is mandatory for employees, it poses specific adaptation encounters that are not common in ordinary times when remote work is usually voluntary and could complement conventional office-based arrangements (Battisti, Alfiero, & Leonidou, 2022).

Although numerous studies have been conducted on telework and working from home, this phenomenon has been extensively researched internationally, and the literature is abundant (Xu et al., 2022). Much of the impact of the pandemic on public sector HRM practices is an area of ongoing research; most of the research done in this area is on the health services aspect; this is because the pandemic was, first and foremost, a health crisis. Furthermore, the majority of research has focused on the public health system and policy Salvador-Carulla et al. (2020), Kraus et al. (2020), and Alves et al. (2020), although the Covid-19 pandemic has been thoroughly examined from a crisis perspective. Throughout the pandemic, general crisis management strategies have also been researched (Kraus et al., 2020; Rapaccini et al., 2020; Wenzel et al., 2020).

Against this backdrop, research on the impact of the pandemic on other aspects of the public sector is needed. This study is meant to contribute a body of knowledge on the impact of the pandemic on HRM practices in the South African public sector, with a specific focus on HRM in the Gauteng Office of the Premier.

1.3 Purpose Statement

This study aimed to explore the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on Human Resource Management (HRM) in the Gauteng Office of the Premier (OOP). The study also explored how HRM practices supported employees to adjust to changes in their work roles and how much the organisation that employed them had a role to play. Additionally, the research findings aimed to provide an understanding of the differences between HRM issues during the Covid-19 pandemic and those that arise during other emergencies, crises, and disasters. In this way, the study's findings will also contribute to developing a unique disaster and emergency research area.

1.4 Research Questions

The primary research question which the study aims to address is the following:

What is the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on HRM practices in the OOP, especially on policies, services, and HR personnel?

The secondary research questions for the study are the following:

- How did the covid 19 lockdown affect the HR services in the OOP? OR What has been the effect on HR services in the OOP?
- How did the Covid-19 lockdown affect the wellbeing of HR personnel to provide services in the OOP?
- Did the Covid-19 lockdown have an impact on HRM policies in the OOP?

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

This research report is divided into the following chapters: **Chapter One: Introduction:** Introduces the study and background details to the study. Additionally, the chapter describes the impact of Covid-19 as a global crisis and how SA, and specifically Human Resources Management in the Gauteng Office of the Premier, has responded to this crisis. The significance of the study and the knowledge gap are outlined in this chapter, as are the problem, purpose statement, research questions, and objectives.

Chapter Two: Literature review: The chapter provides the conceptual framework for the study through a literature review on the impacts of the Covid-19 lockdown on public sector HRM practices. This chapter discusses some of the theories that underpin HRM practices studies in the public sector as well as those relevant to this research.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology: This chapter delineates the research design and methodological approach employed in this study. It explicates the rationale for choosing OOP as a case study and elucidates the procedure followed to gather the data for the research. Additionally, it elucidates the process of data analysis and interpretation. Finally, it deliberates upon the credibility and validity of the data as well as ethical concerns.

Chapter Four: Results and Analysis: This chapter presents and analyses the study's results, which were obtained through the examination of in-depth semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and primary source documents. The data collected was organised into themes and compared with existing literature to provide insights into the study's research questions.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations: In the final chapter, the study's conclusions are drawn based on the analysis of the data collected. The researcher also provide recommendations for human resources management in OOP, focusing on critical aspects to consider when implementing new HRM practices. Finally, the researcher suggest areas for future research studies to further explore key topics that were not adequately addressed in this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was carried out to determine and apply helpful theoretical frameworks from the institutionalist literature to current issues, debates, and contemporary knowledge on the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on Human Resource Management (HRM) in the Gauteng Office of the Premier (OOP). A literature review is a written argument supporting a thesis using previously collected credible evidence (Machi & McEvoy, 2017). The study examines distinct institutional theories and theoretical approaches to HRM and crisis research to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature. The researcher selected three HR practices for the study: performance management, employee training, and recruiting and selection. In general, the study aimed to determine how Covid-19 lockdown affected HRM practices in the public sector. The study's specific objectives were to explore how Covid-19 could affect hiring and selection processes, employee training, and performance management, as well as changes in the working environment and beliefs about working from home. Work from home, technology, and the digital transition due to Covid-19 lockdown measures were the focus of several studies in the 2020s (Gigauri, Williamson, Colley & Hanna-Osborne, 2022; Fischer, Siegal, Proeller & Drathschmidt, 2022; Donati, Viola, Toscano, & Zappalà, 2021).

Several studies by these scholars Fischer et al. (2022), Gigauri (2020), and Williamson et al. (2020) examined Human Resources' role in the change to remote work and digital transformation. Furthermore, Donati et al. (2021) used case studies and surveys in countries such as Italy, Germany, and Bangladesh to examine beliefs related to working from home, acceptance of technology, and well-being, which employees experience differently. For example, using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which connects beliefs and behaviours (Salkind, 2012). According to Collings et al. (2021), Theories of Behaviour (TPB) claims that "intention toward attitude, subject norms, and perceived behavioural control, together shape an individual's behavioural intentions and behaviours". This idea contributes to understanding the beliefs and behavioural intentions that determine the acceptance of new technologies (Donati et al., 2021). The study divided the restrictions and problems of implementing the WFH mode of operations

into three categories: "Communication, Collaboration, and Conflict Resolution" (Donati et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Rahman and Arif (2020) examined changes in work culture during the Covid-19 outbreak, including employee satisfaction, telework challenges, and perceived telework productivity. For example, Rahman and Arif (2020) claim that by utilising the AMO Framework can be used to assess the ability of an employee to adopt an online work culture in the post-pandemic era, given that employees will find it more productive to be constantly engaged in new technologies according to researchers (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), remote work during lockdown can help people gain a better understanding of hygiene and health, appreciate their families more, enjoy life more, be more introspective, be less dependent, work remotely, and save money.

However, as this study's findings show, there is a gap in the research regarding understanding the impact the Covid-19 lockdown had on Human Resources Management in the public sector.

2.1 Human Resource Management contextualised.

Various scholars have proposed multiple definitions of Human Resource Management (HRM) have been proposed by various scholars; however, several of these definitions complement each other. According to Schermerhorn (2001), HRM is the process of augmenting and developing a competent workforce to assist the organisation in achieving its goals, including its mission, vision, and various objectives. According to Papalexandri and Bourantas (2002), human resources are recognised as the most precious asset in any industry. The performance of any organisation is defined by how well this resource is managed through Human Resource Management strategies (Mwaniki & Gathenya, 2015). Armstrong (2006) further elaborates that Human Resource Management is a systematic and unified approach to managing an organisation's most significant assets, and the people who work there contribute individually and collectively to achieving its goals. As a result, Human Resource Management is seen as a motivating factor in any organisation (Bose, 2015).

On the other hand, a study by Gigauri (2020) highlights the aspect of human resource management as a practice concerned with hiring, training, and retaining qualified workers. While in Human Resources practices as stated by Stone and Deadrick (2015), effective Human Resources practices include recruiting broadly, designing jobs that emphasise autonomy and decision-making, building teams to collaborate and innovate, emphasising training and skill development, and encouraging

employee identification, innovation, and retention through incentives. For the purposes of this study, human resource management will be defined as the process of acquiring and retaining new skills, experiences, and competencies within an organisation through its personnel who use diverse management methodologies.

2.2 Human Resource Management in the Public Sector

According to Berman et al. (2016), an employee's relationship with an organisation is the focus of Human Resource Management (HRM); it covers the day-to-day management of Human Resources and the practices and strategies that promote employee development, performance, and well-being. The objectives of the organisation are to meet and influence the needs of the organisation through a strategic perspective. In comparison, Gonçalves et al. (2021) believe that several standard HRM procedures intended to assist the organisation in dealing with crisis circumstances, such as the current economic downturn, including adjusting wages and workforces, rearranging work schedules, stabilising the workforce, improving communications, and changing collective labour agreements. In this context, Human Resource Management (HRM) refers to a purposeful and integrated approach to the hiring, growing, and well-being of an organisation's employees (Armstrong, 2012). According to Mwita (2020), managing Human Resources involves acquiring, developing, and retaining competent employees, which may include, but is not limited to, employee recruitment, training, performance management, and compensation.

However, in terms of HRM, the public sector differs from the private sector in that it emphasises public interest outcomes as opposed to revenue motivations in the private sector (Berman et al., 2016). On the contrary, the private sector, driven by profit, exhibits more agile decision making, focusing on financial performance and efficiency, allowing quicker adaptation to remote work and workforce management (Onyoin, 2020).

There are three primary COVID-19-specific effects relevant to the subtopic. These effects are public sector challenges, private sector organisations' experiences, and comparative analysis of responses. Similarities and Differences. These three effects are further elaborated below in the context of examining COVID-19's specific effects on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices as a consequence of the pandemic.

2.2.1 Examining Covi-19's Specific Effects:

Public Sector Challenges:

According to Sigma (2020), the lockdown posed significant HRM challenges for the public sector, including Service Interruptions: Government services faced major disruptions due to staff shortages and increased healthcare demands, requiring HRM to balance worker safety with service provision. Lewis (2020) added Administrative Hurdles: The rigid structure of public organisations slowed the implementation of work-from-home policies and other necessary adjustments.

2.2.2 Private sector organisations experienced:

According to Onyoin (2020), Rapid Shift to Remote Work: Many companies quickly adopted flexible work arrangements, using technology to maintain productivity. HRM facilitated this transition by introducing new policies and providing the necessary training. Another challenge added by Lewis (2020) is on the Economic Pressures: To maintain profitability, some organisations resorted to job cuts or temporary layoffs, highlighting the tension between workforce management and financial viability.

2.2.3 Comparing Responses: Similarities and Differences

According to Sigma (2020), both sectors faced remote work and employee well-being challenges, but their responses differed according to operational mandates. Public Sector Emphasis on Stability: Public HRM focused on maintaining service continuity and gradually adapting due to regulatory constraints. Onyoin (2020) highlighted that the Private Sector Focus on Flexibility: Private HRM responded more adaptively, with rapid policy changes aimed at preserving productivity and profitability. Therefore, against this backdrop, the most valuable resource in any organisation is believed to be Human Resources Management (Mwita, 2020). Supported by effective HRM practices.

As soon as a crisis emerges, HRM practices need to be sensitive to workers' needs so that they can continue to do their work in the best possible manner. HRM ensures that all employee operations and stakeholders are executed effectively (Elayan, 2021). In this situation, they must actively participate in choosing a strategy to implement when employees return to work, in developing flexible working arrangements, and in nurturing their workers' mental and physical well-being.

2.3 Public Sector HRM and Emergencies

According to a study by Sachs (2020), Covid-19 has given the government a new role as more of a planner than a regulator. When dealing with emergencies, HRM in the public sector differs from that in the private sector (Goodman et al., 2010). Meanwhile, Harel and Zafrir (2001) clarified that a crisis-driven HR strategy in the private sector is more effective, according to HR managers. However, Chen (2020) believes that managing personnel during a crisis is considerably easier than managing other resources.

On the other hand, Cashore and Bernstein (2020) contend that expert disagreements on Covid-19 management arise from four different problem conceptions. These conceptions shape varying strategies and recommendations, such as "herd immunity" versus "flattening the curve". The authors argue that different conceptualisations of the Covid-19 crisis lead to varied management strategies, with a central debate focusing on balancing economic impacts and health outcomes. They advocate for increased transparency regarding decision-making assumptions to improve communication and public engagement. The authors classify Covid-19 as a "super wicked problem," similar to climate change, that requires innovative policies addressing both immediate needs and long-term consequences. They suggest that insights from climate governance can inform better pandemic responses.

To this end, the development of crisis management systems requires a high level of strategic integration of job skills, stress alleviation, work-family balance, and company culture (Wang et al., 2009). Meanwhile, in the public sector, provincial and local governments are responsible for responding to disasters, protecting and serving their citizens, and providing services in an emergency (Dzigbede et al., 2020). As part of an emergency or disaster response plan, the provincial government can identify HR policies and procedures relevant to employee management during disasters and crises (Wang et al., 2009).

Furthermore, as part of the response plan, some HRM professionals have certain initiatives in place to assist their workers during an emergency (Hamouche, 2020). Hanaffi (2020) highlights transformative changes and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need for innovative solutions across sectors, shifting focus from pandemic management to socioeconomic recovery, and learning from the crisis for future preparedness. The author advocates for strategies to build resilience and mitigate inequalities and for societies to use these insights to strengthen

systems and responses. Pleyers (2020) advocates for a global sociological approach to comprehend the multifaceted impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. The author notes that Covid-19, while a health crisis, also reveals and intensifies existing social inequalities related to class, race, and gender. Whereas, Zizek (2020) examines the Covid-19 crisis, advocating for a reassessment of societal structures and ideologies. The author asserts that crises such as the pandemic expose the vulnerability of current systems and create opportunities for substantial political transformation, urging a rethinking and restructuring of societal norms.

Therefore, in this context for HRM in the OOP, the health emergency was foremost on the minds of the organisations, and they took steps to protect their staff and prevent viral infection and spread, implementing measures such as working from home and adhering to social distancing at work and wearing masks at all times.

However, it is challenging to fully understand the impact of human resources management during these unique circumstances without knowing the specifics of the experiences and difficulties that the public sector had as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This study aimed to examine the experiences of HRM practitioners at the provincial government level during lockdown as a result of the pandemic, including the challenges, obstacles, and experiences that have emerged as a result. To gather rich narratives and details, front-line HRM professionals described their experiences, difficulties, and hurdles due to the pandemic. The study assesses the impact of Covid-19 on HRM practices in the public sector and experiences encountered by HRM employees within the Gauteng Office of the Premier. HRM managers in the public sector can benefit from these experiences by understanding how to properly understand a disastrous incident that transforms work life for the better and how to anticipate and minimise the adverse consequences of the next pandemic or imminent crisis.

There are three main practices within Human Resources Management relevant to this study. They are employee recruitment, training and development, and performance management. These three practices are elaborated further below in the context of changes to current HRM practices as a result of Covid-19.

2.4 Changes to Current HRM Practices as a Result of Covid-19

As previously stated, Human Resource Management emphasises the link between employees and employers. Therefore, Berman et al. (2016) highlight that technical components include everyday people management, designing policies and practices to improve employee performance, contentment, and well-being, and fulfilling and shaping the organisation's strategic needs. Due to this, a study conducted by Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, and Zimmerman (2020) found that only a few academic studies have examined Covid-19 and Human Resources Management in the public sector, particularly in South Africa. Several recurring themes have emerged, such as the fact that the pandemic has forced many people to work remotely or from home, the use of ICT, and HRM practices (Hamouche, 2021).

Employees are now expected to accept working remotely without a choice of alternative work settings after previously being confined to working in the physical area of their employment (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Also, these new changes in the working environment have proven to bring challenges to the employees as well as managers (Dhanpat et al., 2022). For instance, a study by Risher and Abell (2020) concluded that WFH has posed monitoring, supervision, and management issues in the public sector as a result of the absence of strict, over-the-shoulder oversight. Although Covid-19 has presented significant obstacles for managers and HRM professionals, it has also created opportunities that are worth learning about and comprehending since they can guide organisations' future activities.

As Covid-19 has promoted the discussion of the future of work, it has challenged organisations' creativity and innovation and accelerated future-orientated HRM (Hite & McDonald, 2020). As a result, organisations are rethinking their HRM strategies and adapting current technologies to ensure their survival and longevity. The German government, for example, introduced new legislation to support remote working by allowing video conferencing in two domains (Sagan & Schüller, 2020).

In light of the above, this study focuses on three main practices in Human Resource Management: employee recruitment, training, and development, as well as performance management. As part of Covid-19 changes to current HRM practices, these three practices are elaborated further below.

2.4.1 Covid-19's Effects on HRM Practices

The Covid-19 pandemic has permanently changed the role of HR specialists in the workplace (Gigauri, 2020). The days when HR was limited to payroll, employee relations, hiring, and managing disciplinary actions are long gone, according to many experts (Goodman et al., 2010). The new wave of changes brought about by the recent pandemic is something that numerous organisations and managers are now trying to handle. However, HR managers and HR specialists are bearing a greater share of the burden of change (Lumen, 2020). Organisations often adopt various procedures to ensure that workers are not adversely impacted and simultaneously improve organisational performance. To allow employees to continue to produce and perform their jobs as effectively as possible, it is critical that the HR department be able to adapt to a volatile environment and that the HR procedures that emerge from a crisis do not injure workers (Galanti et al., 2021).

Human resource management refers to an organisation's ability to manage its employees and adapt to changing habits (Brown, Hirsh, and Reilly, 2019). According to Elayan (2021), during the Covid-19 pandemic, HRM demonstrated its value once again when employees failed to focus on their responsibilities and HRM took swift action to remedy the situation. Management and Human Resources professionals have faced a complex and challenging environment as a result of this pandemic because they needed to find innovative ways to keep their organisations operating and help employees cope with this unprecedented challenge (Hamouche, 2021). Employee motivation and confidence increase when workplace policies are clear during trying times (Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020). In this case, most organisations could not adequately inform their employees about their management plan or planned responses to the pandemic. As a result, a major impact of the pandemic on employee performance was the update of organisational policies, procedures, and practices by HRM to improve employee attitudes, behaviours, and performance (Collings, McMackin, Nyberg, & Wright, 2021). As a result, the literature and theory on employee recruitment, training and development, and performance management are reviewed.

2.4.2 Employee Recruitment

The private sector and public sector organisations had to adapt to new working practices during the adaption phase of the pandemic (Gigauri, 2020). As a result, organisations began to deploy new digital tools and platforms to focus on innovative approaches to strategy, leadership, and communication (Engen, 2023). It was necessary to quickly change to digital platforms to handle administrative tasks previously handled by people, such as hiring and on-boarding procedures. The Covid-19 outbreak significantly changed the lives of many people in the recruitment and induction professions. Rajabzadeh (2020) agrees that human resources have established methods in which candidates are frequently interviewed in person and then inducted. As a result of the forced move to digital platforms, HR professionals were tasked with analysing potential applications and making the best selection without meeting prospects in person.

Therefore, according to Stone et al. (2015), the solution was delivered through the use of technology in HR to innovate and improve the way HR operations are handled. E-recruiting, e-job analysis, electronic job applications, electronic testing, personality inventories, and electronic interviews are among the primary goals of HR using technology.

Based on the above, this is evident because, during the national lockdown, the government had to recruit more personnel on a contractual basis to help implement the mitigating measures of Covid-19 (IOL, 2022). Government agencies have been allowed to make temporary appointments to supplement their capacity to provide Covid-19 related services (DPSA, 2020). To reduce the danger of infection, job interviews were conducted over the phone or by video whenever possible.

In light of the above with regard to recruitment, Bersin (2017) outlines that many new technologies have already been used to recruit and train employees in large numbers. In light of the Covid-19 epidemic, digital training is becoming increasingly important for organisations. Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate further on this concept.

2.4.3 Training and Development

In a study by Dhanpat et al. (2022), training and development are required in the current era of change and disruption since there are risks that are essential to organisational growth and employee support. When an organisation experiences difficulties adopting new investments, HR managers should highlight the chances of process improvement and evaluate technological advancements, such as moving to remote work and implementing new policies for more efficient and effective human interaction (Chakraborty, Mishra, Ganguly, & Chatterjee, 2023).

Therefore, training is essential in emergencies, such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Devyania, Jewanc, Bansal, & Denge, 2020; Hamouche, 2021). It helps workers acquire the skills they need Akkermans, Richardson, & Kraimer (2020); it also raises awareness of Covid-19, lessens the risk of the virus spreading, and guards against mental health issues (Quaedackers et al., 2020). Supporting staff members as they transition to remote work is also beneficial. Since some employees lack the digital skills necessary to handle the changes caused by the use of information communication technology (ICT), training them in its use is necessary. This helps facilitate their work and allows them to communicate with their manager and peers while working remotely and not in traditional office space (Greer & Payne, 2014).

Notwithstanding the above, the literature seems to agree that employers can express their gratitude in a variety of ways, including workshops and development programmes. This not only makes employees feel valued, but also helps the organisation fill knowledge or communication gaps. To this end, human resource experts who implement training and development programmes will strengthen employees' beliefs and principles in this situation. Therefore, this leads to improvement in the performance of employees, which will be elaborated in the following section.

2.4.4 Performance Management

Aguinis (2019) defines performance management as an ongoing process of recognising, analysing, and developing the performance of individuals and workgroups, and aligning performance with the organisation's strategic goals. This is supported by a study by Ismail and Gali (2017), claiming that ensuring employee performance is linked with the organisation's strategic goals is critical. Performance is an important issue for any organisation, both individually and collectively. A study by Thandray (2020) supports the idea that organisations use performance management to create and implement systems that ensure employees focus on achieving personal and organisational goals.

This leads to implementation where, according to Kumar (2019), implementing a successful performance management system makes it easier to assess and improve individual and organisational performance with respect to predetermined organisational strategies and objectives. On the other hand, Armstrong (2009) argues that working from home makes it difficult to monitor employees' performance, and employees face cultural differences during online meetings. In addition to creating a communication gap between employees and management teams, remote work has its faults. For an organisation to survive a crisis like Covid-19, workers must continue to perform well (Sembiring, Fatihudin, Mochklas, & Holisin, 2020). However, it seems that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected organisational performance management. Organisational performance management appears to have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to some authors, Aguinis and Burgi-Tian (2020), most organisations were overwhelmed by Covid-19's complexity and novelty, which included assessing employee performance and upending performance-based pay and scaled back or even stopped using performance management as a result.

In summary, given changes in working conditions, determining how well employees perform during this crisis can be difficult. Furthermore, numerous factors related to Covid-19 could influence how well employees work. Prasad and Vaidya (2020) discovered that occupational stress factors (role ambiguity, role conflict, career, and job-control) that have emerged as a result of Covid-19, role overload, lack of communication in the workplace, and family distractions are significant predictors of employee performance in this context.

2.5 Working Remotely / Work From Home (WFH)

Covid-19 resulted in the rapid rise of the phrase "work from home" (Sweet & Scott, 2022). To several scholars Blahopoulou et al. (2022), Rahman and Arif (2020) Nayak and Pandit (2021) and Garg and Rijst (2015), the main characteristics of work from home arrangement are common regardless of the academic field, and they are (i) employees' carry out their job tasks outside the usual workplace, and (ii) employees utilise high-tech equipment to complete their tasks work. According to Dhanpat et al. (2022), employees outside the workplace are called teleworkers. They perform specific tasks outside the workplace as part of their employment with the organisation or as members of the organisation. They are also able to communicate with their employer via telecommunications.

However, Galanti et al. (2021) go one step further and claim that since the Covid-19 pandemic spread, a widespread procedure of working from home has developed. This motivated scholars to study its effects on employee performance, satisfaction, and well-being. In addition, the government had to implement forced remote work due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic to curb the viral spread of Covid-19 (Biron et al., 2020). This had to be done to ensure business continuity and service delivery in the public sector, and as a result, teleworking was introduced in organisations and the public sector during the Covid-19 lockdown as a temporary measure (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2020). Therefore, this study defines work from home/telework as a work arrangement in which office personnel complete a task normally accomplished in a central location elsewhere, such as at home. In addition to the strategies mentioned above, the provincial government may consider working from home as a way to help employees reduce unnecessary movements and physical contact, reducing the risk of contracting the disease (Gigauri, 2020).

However, Mwita (2020) argues that working from home may make it more difficult when it comes to managing Human Resources, particularly in terms of performance management. Before the pandemic, about 5% of workers were remotely employed, making it a luxury. Over the past five years, the number of people working from home has progressively increased worldwide (CIPD, 2020). However, the increase was insufficient to prepare the workforce for imminent difficulties. Findings from a study by Dhanpat et al. (2022) claim that more than half of HR managers encountered difficulties in 2019 and were unable to provide staff members with the advanced knowledge required to function in an increasingly digital workplace. Everyone thought that the

"future of work" was still a long way off, at least distant enough to have adequate time to prepare for it (Bingham, 2020).

There are three main aspects of working remotely relevant to this study. They are conventional telework, crisis-induced telework, and institutionalising remote work. These three aspects are elaborated below within the context.

2.5.1 Conventional Telework

The conventional teleworking model improves work-life balance by combining office and personal work (Blahopoulou et al., 2022). To allow organisations to effectively support employees' productivity and ensure a better balance between personal and work life, a flexible working model is generally a planned choice that requires preparation, design, and adaptation (Galanti et al., 2021). Additionally, Dhanpat et al. (2022) state that WFH was formerly a preferred choice for workers. When the pandemic hit, this arrangement was known as working from home and the office in a short hybrid (Blahopoulou et al., 2022). In 2020, when Covid-19 worsened, lockdown regulations were implemented globally, forcing businesses to implement remote work measures. This type of lockdown regulation requires employers and employees to have some flexibility with respect to work arrangements (Hong et al., 2022). Remote working provided them with this flexibility, which is one of the advantages of conventional telework.

2.5.1.1 Advantages of Conventional Telework/WFH.

The benefits of WFH seem greater when people are free to choose it rather than being forced to do so (Blahopoulou et al., 2022). There is an implicit assumption in conventional WFH that working outside the office will be part of well-planned work practice, including trial and training periods, digitalised information, and crucial IT equipment (intranet and internet connections, etc.) (Karanikas & Cauchi, 2020). Furthermore, studies by Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés (2020), Blahopoulou et al. (2022) and Nagel (2020) show that conventional WFM reduces operating costs and increases productivity, as well as improves worker attendance, attractiveness, and retention. In addition, Blahopoulou et al. (2022) emphasise that there are many benefits for employees; these include, but are not limited to, lower travel costs, reduced travel time, improved work-life balance, greater flexibility, and better job fulfilment. Concurrently, Galanti et al. (2021) support this by adding that to allow organisations to effectively support employee productivity and ensure better

balance in personal and work life, this flexible working model is usually presented as a planned choice, which requires preparation, design, and adaptation.

2.5.2 Crisis-induced Telework/WFH

As the name implies, crisis-induced WFH refers to WFH as a full-time and immediate solution to an emergency (Blahopoulou et al., 2022). A state of pandemic emergency or pandemic declared by Covid-19 allows employers to require their employees to work away from their permanent workplace to perform a specific task (telework) (Iwaniuk et al., 2021). This change consisted of working virtually from home rather than in the organisation's physical premises. However, a study by Chen (2020) reported that employees faced a multitude of challenges as a result of the pandemic, resulting in high levels of stress, mental breakdowns, depression, and other psychological effects. Moreover, Matli (2020) is of the view that whenever remote workers and their families have been infected with Covid-19, depression and anxiety are likely to increase. As a result of a crisis, this type of telework arrangement comes with disadvantages in addition to the above disadvantages, as mentioned by (Chen, 2020).

2.5.2.1 Disadvantages of Crisis-induced telework.

According to Iwaniuk et al. (2021), remote work affects employees' well-being due to the various stressors they face from the changes that Covid-19 brought. Workers need a realistic view of the demands of working from home (Chen, 2020). Studies by Fischer et al. (2022) and Chen (2020) found that the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic required public sector employees to work remotely and deal with associated difficulties, which are more demanding or significantly more than before for workers working remotely for the first time because of the need to adjust work routines. The home environment may not provide sufficient workspace (e.g., ergonomic design of the desk and chair, lighting, and ICT infrastructure) (Biron et al., 2020). A case study conducted in Spain found that most people had no experience with teleworking and did not find suitable conditions for working virtually while remote (e.g., an isolated workspace, accessibility of technical resources, access to files or information, etc.) (Blahopoulou et al., 2022).

The value of service delivery, infrastructure provision, and general development in South Africa is still quite unequal in many parts of the country (Quality of Life Survey, 2016). The result is that there are service gaps, as some communities are significantly worse off than others in the same region (Quality of Life Survey, 2018). In remote work settings, the coverage of the Internet

connection network imposes more peculiar challenges. As a result of poor network infrastructure, some workers are unable to access information systems and work in a virtual community due to a lack of access to their organisation's information systems (Matli, 2020).

In a recent study led by Ipsen et al. (2021), workers in 29 European countries in the public sector were assessed about the disadvantages of working remotely throughout the lockdown period. The literature identified that workers found that work-life spillover prevents them from simply stopping their work roles at the end of the day. In their study, Xu et al. (2022) add that the main disadvantages cited were stress from an 'always-on' culture, in which workplace availability is expected outside normal working hours, which leads to psychological isolation and increased conflicts between work and family situations. These also include constraints of the home office, job insecurities, and inadequate work resources (Filardi, de Castro & Zanini, 2020). The Covid-19 lockdown may have reduced some of the advantages of conventional teleworking (e.g., improved attention, fewer disruptions) while increasing some disadvantages (e.g., emotional isolation).

The pandemic may present opportunities and challenges for conventional teleworkers, as it forces a rapid transition in a way that has yet to be fully explored. Chen (2020) also adds that when it comes to the benefits of 'conventional telework' with regard to well-being and performance, it is a matter that is not yet clear and has an opportunity to be explored more. On the other hand, Ortiz-Lozano, Martinez-Morán, and Fernández-Muoz (2021) are of the view that among the most important benefits is a better work-life balance, as flexible working hours are becoming more common in women's employment and a greater awareness of work-life balance can be corrected by the fact that work-life conflicts can occur. (Blahopoulou et al., 2022) argue that the type of job can increase inequality within households, increase work efficiency, and give workers greater control over their work.

2.5.3 Institutionalising Working Remotely / Work From Home (WFH)

The findings of a study by Mousa and Abdelgaffar (2021) suggest that the public sector needs to implement several fundamental institutional arrangements to transition to work from home (WFH). These include: (a) providing digital devices, software, and Internet connectivity to the workforce; (b) securing access to business-critical applications and networks; (c) establishing WFH guidelines; (d) modifying work processes and utilising remote communication and collaboration tools; and (e) modifying management practices to accommodate remote work and

supervision (Milasi et al., 2021). However, there are some impediments to institutionalising WFH, such as the reluctance of management, a lack of resources, the nature of work processes, and technology support, all barriers to implementing WFH arrangements in government organisations (Choi, 2018).

Despite the fact that public sector organisations are adopting supportive legislative policies to regulate and allow full to partial WFH, concerns about cybersecurity, privacy, the confidentiality of information, and legal recognition are plausible barriers to considering WFH as a fully operational mode in this sector (ILO, 2021). Furthermore, in many nations, WFH-supported infrastructure, technological literacy, and workforce preparation might pose a challenge to the government. The government may also face difficulties in various countries due to personnel preparation, technical literacy, and WFH-supportive infrastructure. For example, access to digital technology, Internet connectivity, and electrical supplies, all necessary for civil servants to perform their jobs efficiently, may be particularly problematic for those employed in underdeveloped countries (Schuster et al., 2020).

2.6 Beliefs about Working From Home

During the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers investigated remote workers' acceptance, beliefs, and well-being. According to various research such as Donati et al. 2021, those who worked from home on a regular basis, had prior experience (because they worked remotely prior to the national lockdown), and worked with teams were more likely to accept technology, cope better with remote work, and have a positive attitude toward remote work. A study by Xu et al. (2022) showed that remote work affects work-family harmony and well-being. They found that individuals' remote work has a moderating influence due to self-efficacy. A study published by Blahopoulou et al. (2022) found that Teleworker perceptions and well-being were affected by how organisations implemented remote work programmes, how they were implemented, how isolated they were, and how family life interfered with work when remote work was implemented. During the Covid-19 lockdown, schools were closed, which interfered with work primarily due to family responsibilities. Thus, under the theme of beliefs about WFH, the following subthemes will be discussed: employee well-being, work-life balance and organisational support. This is to emphasise that HRM professionals play a vital role in developing policies that allow employees to

work from home. The same applies to employees' emotional concerns about how the crisis will affect their work and family relationships, especially when using information technology.

There are three main beliefs related to working remotely that are relevant to this study. They are employees' well-being, family work conflict, and organisational support. These three aspects are elaborated further below within the context.

2.6.1 Employee's Well-being

As demonstrated by the pandemic, the public sector wants its employees to have the opportunity to work remotely safely during the lockdown period. This proactive initiative by both the private and public sectors improves work performance and employee satisfaction (Blahopoulou et al., 2022). Rahman and Arif (2020) add that for employees, the ability to work from home is an added benefit that indicates the organisation cares about their well-being. According to Biron et al. (2020), employee well-being includes a positive emotional and physical state of health. However, Xu et al. (2022) define workplace well-being as employees' job satisfaction and work-related satisfaction. While Sweet and Scott (2022) define a state of well being as a person who can cope with daily stresses and contributes to their community.

However, a study by Donati et al. (2021) argues that recent research has revealed that new technologies for WFH impose costly on employee well-being, such as a rise in technology-associated work demands and technostress, nevertheless also in terms of concern, quality of sleep, and depression. Although remote work has its advantages, managers must also constantly monitor its disadvantages, according to the literature. As an example, some workers working remotely are more likely to overwork themselves because they spend a lot of extra hours working than they would at the workplace during regular working hours (Matli, 2020). In light of this, HRM must consider not only productivity but also worker well-being to ensure maximum productivity.

2.6.2 Family-Work Conflict

Xu et al. (2022) explain that work-family conflict occurs when family activities interfere with work (FIW), while work activities interfere with work. A worker in WIF compromises family activities to perform work tasks, while a worker in FIW skips work tasks to fulfil family obligations. Furthermore, according to Medina, Aguirre, Coello-Montecel, Pacheco, and Paredes-Aguirre (2021), a conflict over work-family relations and conflict over family-work relations is a two-sided psychological phenomenon. Conflict in roles occurs when more than a single role (e.g., work role)

makes it extra challenging to fulfil others (e.g., family role) at the same time (Medina et al. 2021). In contrast to this, in a study by Galanti et al. (2021), the findings claim that work-family conflict arises once work obligations affect family commitments. While working from home, employees can also experience mental stress given the likelihood of family distractions and the multiple responsibilities they have to fulfil.

However, it has been found that WFH has benefits and shortcomings when it comes to various results. In the positive case, work-life balance, job satisfaction, and reduced stress can be improved by WFH on the undesirable side, it can affect social separation, occupation stagnation, and work-family conflict (Biron et al., 2020). According to Galanti et al. (2021), the difficulty of balancing personal and work obligations is frequently defined in the literature as family-work conflict, i.e., a condition in which the inclusion of family-associated activities complicates employees' participation in work. In their view, Medina et al. (2021) stated that work-family conflicts have negative consequences, including physical strain, job frustration, burnout, reduced job performance, and intent to quit. Thus, it can be found in the literature that family-supportive supervisor behaviours mediate work-family conflict by negatively related to the psychosocial safety environment.

2.6.3 Organisational Support

According to Elayan (2021), the study organisational support is defined as the importance of transformational leadership in enhancing the wellbeing of employees, the top management is responsible for assisting the HR department in setting the most suitable working arrangements during and after the pandemic. WFH has long been associated with organisational work-life balance initiatives (WLB) (Lee & Sirgy 2019). Work-from-home programmes to promote work-life balance are common in western countries, especially in large organisations Donga et al. (2021) with the policy objective of giving employees more flexibility and allowing them to balance their work and personal lives. Organisations need to adapt their policies to changes in the workplace to help men and women balance work and family (Medina et al., 2021). As a result, the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed that teleworkers require support structures to help them achieve work-life balance in addition to adapting to working from home.

Working from home is seen by employees as an added benefit that expresses that the organisation cares about their well-being (Rahman & Arif, 2020). This instance shows that the organisation

wants its employees to be able to work remotely safely during the ongoing crisis. Fischer et al. (2022) believe that practitioners should also consider the positive effects of shifting from office to telecommuting on job fulfilment to stay attractive as an employer in the public sector. For example, Rahman and Arif (2020) used this theory to examine how employees who work from home could accomplish their organisational objectives through supervisor backing and leadership. In contrast, Blahopoulou et al. (2022) argue that studies have shown that teleworkers are more productive due to fewer interruptions and higher concentration, whereas in other studies, supervisor support is cited as a reason for teleworkers' low productivity.

Furthermore, Ortiz-Lozano et al. (2021) warn of the additional costs associated with monitoring teleworkers in public organisations. It also points to the unanticipated difficulties of remote work that can reduce the fulfilment of teleworkers within the public sector. This state recommends that the level to which employees can successfully shift to WFH could be a critical part of the organisation's ability to weather a crisis (Biron et al., 2020). Thus, contrary to the views of the scholars mentioned above in the literature, organisational support for work-from-home has implications for employee performance and satisfaction. Furthermore, as technology advances, employees can expect to have continuous availability, which can result in a sense of perpetual urgency (Molino et al., 2020).

2.7 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Furthermore, increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) could contribute to an increased sense of perpetual urgency, which could result in employees being expected to be available 24/7 (Molino et al., 2020). Since employees frequently use their e-mails, working from home can increase the amount of information they handle (Hamouche, 2020). Incorporating international studies by various scholars (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Maurer, 2020), Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the use of digital technology (ICT) and remote work has increased. As a result of digital transformation, the public sector will be able to engage stakeholders in new ways, develop new service delivery frameworks, and forge new relationships (Mergel et al., 2019). As an outcome of the digital transformation, work formerly performed by individuals within an organisation will be transformed into digital work that uses new technologies and allows remote work.

In response to the changes brought about by Covid-19, employers and employees have been forced to use technology in new ways (Hodder, 2020). Since the outbreak of the pandemic, remote work has become an increasingly common form of work in South Africa and globally due to the advancement of ICT, particularly with increased Internet accessibility (Donga et al., 2021). According to the definition of the OECD (2020), telecommuting is a subcategory of remote work, a form of employment in which workers use ICT or landlines to perform their duties. The development of ICT has allowed workers to perform their work duties where they are and when they have time. However, to ensure that remote work is effective, it is important to note that external and internal influences can be made. Therefore, this study covers some of the challenges GPG employees faced when introducing digital transformation using ICT.

Matli (2020) is of the view that it is important to note that a nation's ICT infrastructure, government regulation, policies, and other helpful measures can all impact remote work. To access work-associated platforms and services remotely or on the road, workers require an enabling environment that allows them to gain information and access work-associated platforms (Filardi et al., 2020). Sweet and Scott (2022) emphasise that it is important to appreciate that there are also negative effects of ICT in the workplace, although the usage of ICT, such as smart cell phones, can serve as an important connection between those working remotely and their managers and colleagues, and can provide significant assistance in terms of productivity. Although employees reported difficulty adapting to new technologies and work arrangements, despite previous experience working from home, the speed and content of the change created pressures for them during the lockdown (Adisa, Antonacopoulous, Beauregard & Dickmann, 2022).

2.8 Legislative Framework

As an outcome of the Covid-19 virus outbreak, the South African government has implemented several parameters, laws, and programmes to prepare the healthcare system for several waves of cases predicted. The government implemented restriction of entry and movement to contain the spread of the disease. To lockdown and restrict movement, the South African government has implemented new laws and regulations (Regulations and Guidelines - Coronavirus Covid-19, South African Government, 2020). Various severity levels are used to determine which measures are to be implemented, ranging from alert level 5 to alert level 1. With the primary goal of containing the virus, levels 5 through 2 each have their own rules and regulations.

As an immediate response, the Gauteng Province was to save as many lives as possible and ensure that it minimised the rate of infections and prevented the spread of the virus (GGT2030). The focus was slightly shifted by focusing all human and financial resources toward the common goal of minimising the loss of lives and livelihoods. The overarching focus of Gauteng province was surveillance, containment and control. Gauteng province faced the challenge of saving lives, improving community resilience, and strengthening the health care system. The adaptive 'centre of gravity' needed to evolve from top-down leadership and direction towards increasingly localised decision making and responsiveness; therefore, all spheres had to work together to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic (GPGwebsite, 2023). The Gauteng province identified and convened structures for leadership and expertise in epidemiology and infectious disease control to ensure that available knowledge is used and existing disaster management capacity capacities are built. The structures established were the Provincial Coronavirus Command Council, the Provincial Disaster Management Command Centre (PDMCC), also known as the War Room, and the Premier's Coronavirus Advisory Committee. The members of these committees worked tirelessly to ensure that Gauteng could provide an integrated response for better virus management.

2.8.1 Revisions in Human Resource Management (HRM) policies within South Africa's public sector to address pandemic challenges while maintaining service continuity.

The COVID-19 pandemic required substantial revisions in Human Resource Management (HRM) policies within South Africa's public sector to address pandemic challenges while maintaining service continuity.

One of the main adjustments was the rapid development of remote work policies, which facilitated the transition to telecommuting. These guidelines included telecommuting protocols, communication strategies, and remote performance management (PSC, 2024). In addition, new health and safety regulations were implemented, mandating protocols for sanitization, social distancing, and employee wellness for those returning to physical workplaces. These measures were established by the Department of Employment and Labour to ensure a safe working environment (DPSA, 2023).

The pandemic also highlighted the importance of employee wellness, prompting HR departments to introduce comprehensive wellness programmes that address mental health, stress management, grief counseling, and overall well-being. This shift reflects a more holistic approach to HRM

(Morrison, Chigona & Malanga, 2019). Moreover, Covid-19 expedited the digitization of HR processes, compelling the adoption of digital solutions for recruitment, performance management, and employee engagement. This included the implementation of e-recruitment platforms and digital communication tools (PSC, 2024). HRM practices became increasingly flexible during this period, incorporating special provisions for Covid-19 leave and flexible working hours to support work-life balance and ensure operational continuity during lockdowns (Morrison et al., 2019). Finally, there was a strong emphasis on training and development initiatives aimed at enhancing employees' digital competencies to adapt to remote work technologies. Training programmes were offered to improve the digital skills necessary for effective virtual work environments (PSC, 2024).

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted significant changes in Human Resource Management (HRM) policies within South Africa's public sector, with the aim of addressing the challenges posed by the crisis while ensuring service continuity.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical foundation of this research paper is the Emergency Management Framework (EMF), which will help the researcher determine how much the Covid-19 global pandemic has altered and disrupted HR practices in different organisations. By examining how local government HRM initiatives assist a specific crisis phase, researchers have established a connection between emergency management and local public sector HRM (Leon, 2020). Goodman et al. (2010) argued that by analysing these activities using the Emergency Management Framework (EMF), practitioners and scholars should apply the EMF to HRM. This will give stakeholders a more comprehensive understanding of how to manage human resources and lessen the impact of future emergencies.

The Emergency Management Framework (EMF) discussed in Goodman et al. (2010) offers a structured method to adapt and improve HRM practices during emergencies, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. This framework is particularly relevant for public sector organisations facing complex challenges in these situations.

2.9.1 Phases of Emergency Management

According to the SA Emergency Management Framework (2023), the EMF delineates several crucial phases for effective HRM during emergencies.

Table 1: Phases of Emergency Management (SA Emergency Management Framework, 2023)

Phase/Challenge	**Description**
Mitigation	HRM should anticipate staffing needs and training requirements, improving organisational resilience through comprehensive training programmes and simulations.
Preparedness	This phase involves updating organisational plans and establishing effective communication channels. HRM prepares employees for crisis roles by developing evacuation protocols and maintaining accurate contact information.
Response	HRM activities in this phase include designating essential and non-essential personnel, managing payroll, and ensuring that staff comprehend their roles. The EMF emphasises the prompt implementation of policies to effectively adapt to changing circumstances.
Recovery	Post-crisis, HRM manages compensation, recruitment, retention, and employee assistance programmes. The EMF underscores the need for counseling and debriefing to support employees' psychological well-being during recovery.
Communication Barriers	Effective communication is critical during crises. The EMF advocates for the establishment of clear protocols to ensure that all employees receive timely information about policy or procedural changes.

Phase/Challenge	Description
Mental Health Support	Recognising the psychological stress that emergencies can induce, the framework suggests implementing wellness programmes and providing access to mental health resources to support employee well-being.

Table 1 above examines how HR practices during the pandemic align with various phases of crisis management. The shift to remote work required proactive HR measures for staffing and training. The EMF recommends comprehensive training and simulations to enhance organisational resilience (SA Emergency Management Framework, 2023). HR's implementation of wellness programmes during the pandemic illustrates a commitment to resilience, aligning with the EMF's emphasis on preparedness.

During lockdown, HR was crucial in preparing employees for crisis roles, developing evacuation protocols, and maintaining accurate contact information. Emphasis on virtual training and timely communication ensured that employees were informed and adaptable (Pleyers, 2020). Effective communication and training are key components of preparedness, as highlighted by the EMF.

In the response phase, HR designated essential personnel, managed payroll, and clarified the roles of the staff. The EMF stresses prompt policy implementation for adaptability. HR's adjustments in performance management, emphasising flexibility and empathy, align with EMF guidance. This adaptability supports the findings that HR navigated new health and safety requirements while maintaining employee engagement (Butterick & Charlwood, 2021). A flexible HR response addresses operational needs and fosters a supportive environment during crises.

Post-crisis recovery efforts involved managing compensation, recruitment, retention, and employee assistance programmes. The EMF underscores the need for counseling and debriefing to support psychological well-being during recovery. HR's introduction of employee assistance programmes for mental health and stress management aligns with these principles (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Recovery prioritises employee well-being as part of organisational strategies.

The EMF identifies challenges such as communication barriers and mental health support needs during emergencies. Effective communication during lockdown aligned with the EMF's advocacy for clear protocols. Recognising psychological stress led HR to implement wellness programmes, echoing the EMF recommendations for mental health resources (Zacher & Rudolph, 2022). Addressing operational challenges and employee well-being are integral to effective HR management during crises.

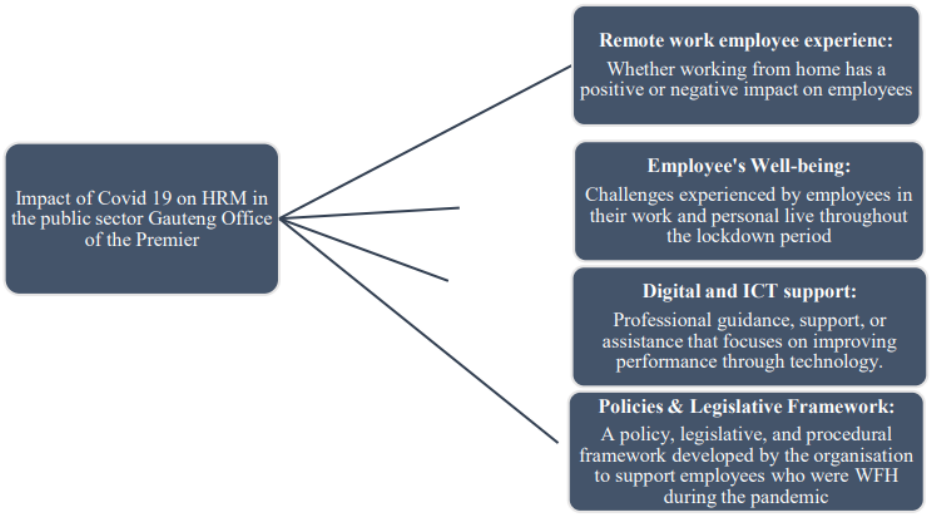
Many bodies of information from various disciplines are needed to understand the nature of natural and human-related disasters (Makua, 2021). To ensure an effective reaction, a multidisciplinary strategy is necessary in response to such events, which require the resources and capacities of individuals, groups, and communities. The disaster management framework has gained international recognition as a vital tool for preventing or lessening the effects of disasters (Coetzee & Van Niekerk, 2012).

2.10 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework supports the study. Adom, Hussein, and Adu-Agyem (2018) define a conceptual framework as a "structure that the researcher believes best explains the natural progression of the phenomenon to be studied." The current study is being conducted in the Gauteng Office of the Premier of South Africa during a country-wide lockdown due to the threat of the spread of coronavirus. Given the limitations of conducting an empirical investigation into the issue, the study's goal is achieved through semi-structured interviews, a review of existing literature, and information available in other media. The following is how the paper is organised. First, it examines the role of HRM in a pandemic, with emphasis on the broad theoretical underpinnings of HRM practices. The study examines post-pandemic HR practices in light of previous research on the effects of covid 19 on HRM practice and working from home, as well as beliefs about working from home and ICT. After presenting the prospects for HR professionals based on current findings, the study concludes with implications for the field of HRM in the face of a pandemic and directions for future research.

More research is required to determine how Covid-19 has affected HR from the points of view of HR practitioners and employees, as mentioned in the chapter before. Therefore, this inquiry is guided by the conceptual framework design shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**
The study's main subjects are the OOP Public Sector and HRM's response to the pandemic.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



The results are expected to provide unsuccessful HRM strategies or successful ones; these results can be corrected, modified, or replicated as necessary. In this way, the study's findings will also contribute to developing a unique area of disaster and emergency research.

2.11 Literature Review Summary

This chapter on the literature review was conducted that incorporates the following subtopics. Covid-19's impact on HRM practices, changes to current HRM practices, such as changing the working environment and attitudes toward working from home, work-life balance, and challenges. Several support initiatives were also discussed in the chapter, including those related to organisational support, well-being and safety, human resources support, line manager support and operational support. Reviewing the literature, it has been revealed that Covid-19 has accelerated disruptions in traditional HRM methods and created considerable challenges for HRM practitioners and managers who were ill equipped to handle the complexity and novelty of the pandemic in terms of ICT infrastructure, resources, and competencies. Furthermore, the literature provides information on the future direction of HRM that will assist the public sector and employees in developing intervention plans that meet their needs. The next chapter will discuss how this study was conducted, what resources were used, and what processes were used.

3 CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the research approach, methodology, data gathering, and data analysis. The analysis tool, the sample population, and the limitations of the study are discussed.

The research methodology chapter of this study provides a detailed account of the theoretical frameworks and techniques used to conduct the research project. This chapter outlines the systematic way in which the research problem is addressed, taking into account the logic underpinning the methods employed in the context of the research. The research methodology is designed to deliver data and findings that answer the research question and are suitable for research purposes (Williams et al., 2018).

The research design employed in this study is grounded in interpretivism, which posits that individuals' cognitive processes and understanding of their social reality can influence their behavior when they are aware that they are being studied (Ryan, 2018). This paradigm is well-suited to the research question, which aims to explore the effects of COVID-19 on OOP's HRM employees. The research approach used in this study is qualitative, which seeks to develop a rich and complex understanding of each individual's interpretation of the world. This is achieved by using qualitative techniques, such as interviews, observations, and open questions, to gain insight into the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Saunders et al., 2015).

Table 2: Research Philosophies (Cloonan, 2022)

	Research	Approach	Ontology Axiology	Research Strategy
Positivism	Deductive	Objective	Value-Free	Quantitative
Interpretivism	Inductive	Subjective	Biased	Qualitative
Pragmatism	Deductive/Inductive	Objective Or Subjective	Value-Free/Biased	Qualitative And/Or Quantitative

More information about the research methodology, including the data collection and analysis procedures, are provided in the research methodology chapter of this study.

3.1 Research Approach

The methodology of this study was guided by the broader purpose and objectives of the study, which was aimed at exploring the experiences and adjustment of OOP's HRM employees during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, with the objective of focusing on the impact of Covid-19 on public sector HRM practices and experiences encountered by employees.

Therefore, a scientific analysis of the circumstance is the first step in research to understand human behaviour in order to address the questions that follow from it (Salkind, 2012). The researcher took into account the differences between quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies to determine the best investigational methodology to develop reliable information. In qualitative research, data fulfilment and achievement are correlated with data refinement (Thandray, 2020), while Chalhoub-Deville and Deville (2008) note that embracing a qualitative approach can allow researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of design and accumulate experience with it. Whereas the construction of quantitative data is the main focus of the quantitative research approach, which uses quantifiable measurement (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Quantitative data is a systematic record made up of numbers constructed by researchers using the process of measurement and imposing structure (Taguchi, 2018).

A method of data collection and a corresponding qualitative analytical process can be used in a qualitative research design (Gigauri, 2020). Additionally, mixed methods (a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods) or multiple qualitative data collection methods (a multimethod qualitative study) can be used in qualitative research (Saunders et al. 2015). Providing material for empirical research on a phenomenon under study is the main objective of qualitative research (Flick, 2018). Using a series of preplanned open-ended questions, semistructured interviews are intended to generate qualitative data (Saunders et al. 2015). "Qualitative research is particularly relevant when prior insights about a phenomenon under scrutiny are modest," according to (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 4). This suggests that qualitative research tends to be exploratory and flexible because of "unstructured" problems (due to modest insights)."

Due to the recent emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, there are still some limited historical perspectives from HR experts regarding how the crisis has affected HR practices as well as

practitioners. Therefore, in this context, the rationale for selecting qualitative research methods for this study is to consider.

3.2 Research Design

For this study, a phenomenological research methodology was chosen. The research design employed in this study is grounded in interpretivism, which posits that people's cognitive processes and understanding of their social reality can influence their behaviour when they are aware that they are being studied (Ryan, 2018). Frauenberger, Good, Keay-Bright and Pain (2012) contend that by emphasising the collection of data from the user's knowledge, experiences, physical environment, and interactions, phenomenological studies provide the researcher with a contextual picture of what is being studied. It focusses on the respondent's surroundings by learning about past experiences to comprehend how they think. Writing about the data acquired to demonstrate the researcher's comprehension of the phenomenon comes next (Jordaan, Wiese, Amade, & De Clercq, 2013).

The researcher was able to achieve the goal by interpreting how employees perceive the kind and level of organisational support offered during the role of remote working in behaviours acquired from the physical work environment by using a phenomenological study design. By using this procedure, the researcher relied on the opinions of the participants and avoided influencing the research environment.

Through phenomenological analysis (PA), participants in this study could make sense of their social and personal environments. In the real world, participants engage in meaningful experiences that are included in PA. This gives the researcher the opportunity to speak directly with the participants and get their insider perspective (Thandray, 2020).

The best research design for this topic was determined to be qualitative research. According to Gigauri (2020), qualitative research is a social or behavioural science study that examines human behaviour processes through exploratory technologies, including interviews, surveys, case studies, and other more intimate methods. Qualitative research aims to explore more in-depth, inductive, exploratory, subjective, and naturalistic themes in the social or behavioural sciences without necessarily including statistics or statistical procedures. With the aid of methodologies, such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, content analyses, visual methods, life histories, or biographies, qualitative research is a method that enables the researcher to thoroughly

examine people's experiences. It enables the researcher to understand the consequences and interpretations of behavioural occurrences or objects and to detect difficulties from the point of view of their study participants (Hennink et al., 2020). By adopting a qualitative approach, it was possible to gain an understanding of the issue of studying different realities from the perspective of "social actors" (e.g., expatriate experiences) (Nguyen et al., 2016). In that regard, individuals' behaviours, values, value systems, concerns, motives, expectations, communities, or lifestyles provide insights into phenomena that are otherwise difficult to quantify mathematically (Joubish, Khurram, Ahmed, Fatima & Haider, 2011).

Using qualitative methods to gather rich narratives and details from frontline HRM practitioners, this study adopted a qualitative research design instead of a quantitative one. The qualities of qualitative research led to the selection of this approach for this study, which will allow its objectives to be achieved. Despite the fact that there hasn't been much written about public sector HRM and the Covid-19 pandemic, using interviews with a small, nonrandom sample of OOP HRM personnel is suggested as part of a qualitative design. The interviews are anticipated to provide specifics and data that can be gained from a survey with a narrow variety of responses.

3.3 Research Design Approach

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the study analysed the research question through a qualitative case study approach. The Premier's Office plays a crucial role in managing provincial crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, by making high-level decisions that impact HRM policies and practices across various departments. This office significantly influences HR policies governing public sector organisations, such as remote work, health protocols, and employee support systems. The pandemic has led to changes in HRM policies, such as remote work and health protocols, which are vital for effective crisis governance. The Premier's Office HRM faces unique challenges, such as balancing employee safety with service delivery demands, which can be used to inform future practices and improve HRM practices across various governmental bodies.

The study used a qualitative case study approach to examine the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on Human Resource Management and its implications for HR professionals. According to Kumar (2019), qualitative research methods help researchers better understand attitudes, behaviour, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, and culture. The use of OOP as a case study allowed

researchers to better understand the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on human resource management and the implications for HR professionals. The goal of the research is not to generalise, but rather to compile a body of knowledge in the field of Human Resource Management.

Exploring the challenges faced and the solutions used by Human Resource Management (HRM) in the Gauteng Office of the Premier (OOP) was the goal, without making any generalisations. In-depth semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were used to delve into participants' opinions and experiences to ensure the study's objective and unbiased. Bolderston (2012) lists phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography as common approaches in qualitative research. However, given the OOP's limited number of disaster managers, the latter (phenomenology) is preferred. Phenomenology is based on analysing people's experiences (communities, organisations, and teams) in order to comprehend their lived experiences (Bolderston, 2012). Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio (2019) define phenomenology as the study of an event or phenomenon from the perspective of the people involved. To put it briefly, phenomenology is based on participants' subjective experiences and how they understand and interpret them. Any expertise outside the targeted group was excluded based on this technique, as it was not valuable or helpful in creating recommendations or solutions.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

3.4.1 Semi-Structured One-On-One Interviews

This qualitative study aims to investigate the impact of Covid-19 lockdown on Human Resource Management and its implications for HR professionals. The study used semi-structured one-on-one interviews with HR specialists and an in-depth questionnaire for participants who could not meet but agreed to participate in the study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), semi-structured interviews fall somewhere between structured and unstructured interviews. The researcher becomes more intimate with the interview subjects through qualitative interviews, which also give the researcher additional opportunities to delve deeply into the questions and responses (Saunders et al. 2015). In addition, compared to other research methods, this approach can offer a more accurate understanding of the perspectives of the participants and provide the opportunity to examine the interactions and feelings of those being interviewed.

Data collection from the interview involves the recording and transcript in English. Face-to-face interviews were conducted from September 2023 to January 2024 through the online video platform MS Teams and in-depth questionnaires. Each interview is pre-scheduled, conducted in English, and transcripts are available. In-depth interview with an individual took between 23 and 46 minutes. Participants are asked to allow video recording in MS Teams that were subsequently transcribed. They are ensured that their data will be protected. The semi-structured interview followed similar guidelines that enabled data comparison and kept the interview within the topic boundaries. At the end of the interview, the last question is about their additional comments or viewpoints that they thought could be important to this study.

3.5 Study Area

The mission of the Gauteng Office of the Premier is to serve as a political nerve centre to ensure that the government excels in fulfilling its mandate. The Office of the Premier's strategic objectives are: to provide strategic support to the Premier and the Executive Council (EXCO) to ensure effective strategic leadership; facilitating the setting of clear priorities, enabling legislation and improved governance to realise desired policy outcomes; building a developmental state with the capacity to drive change and transformation to improve people's lives; forging social contracts with stakeholders to strengthen social partnerships to improve service delivery; ensuring that the Premier is provided with appropriate support to effectively execute his/her role and responsibilities; fostering strong intergovernmental and international relationships to advance the development agenda; driving the human resource policy and strategy to attract, develop and retain the best possible skills and to harness the productive energies of all Gauteng provincial government employees; driving integrated and effective government communication to ensure that people are well informed and have access to credible information about government services and programmes; and promoting participatory democracy to ensure ongoing interaction between government and civil society.

3.5.1.1 Gauteng Office of the Premier as Case Study

According to constitutional guidelines, the Office of the Premier is responsible for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the government's mandate (Office of the Premier Annual Report 2020/2021). As the head of the provincial government, the Office of the Premier oversees the effective operation of the entire provincial government. This department employs more than 500

public servants. As the number of employees who telework in Gauteng's premier's office differs from the rest of the working population of the Gauteng provincial government, the opportunity to examine the perception of the decisions made regarding the provision of resources available to workers and identify primary challenges encountered is made possible. In South Africa and elsewhere, lockdown regulations were used to keep public departments afloat in 2020 due to the deteriorating Covid-19 situation, which forced public departments to adopt remote working arrangements. A remote working arrangement provided the employer and employee with the flexibility required by such lockdown regulations in terms of working agreements. The study employs a qualitative case study approach using the theoretical lens of the institutionalism school of thought to examine the impact of Covid 19 lockdown on Human Resource Management (HRM) in the Gauteng Office of the Premier (OOP).

3.6 Sampling

A method called "purposeful sampling" was used to select and sample expatriate employees, which involved identifying and choosing individuals or groups of individuals who met the following criteria: a) have considerable knowledge or experience of a phenomenon of interest; b) be available to participate in the study; and c) have the ability to express their experiences and opinions clearly, expressively, and reflectively (Valk, 2021). To gather 15 respondents, a purposive sampling strategy (a nonprobability technique) was employed. The selection criteria that complemented the research objectives were chosen on the basis of theoretical justifications supplied by the researcher. To gather the most relevant data for this study, the researcher could choose participants based on their interests because the study was exploratory (Edwards et al., 2006). Therefore, using purposeful sampling enables the researcher to select study participants who will enhance the study by adding information about their difficulties and experiences.

As part of this study, participants were required to have worked as (1) Human Resources employees and (2) HR managers responsible for personnel management support to identify people who are particularly knowledgeable about personnel in the organisation. In this study, 15 HRM professionals in the OOP were selected to be interviewed; this is due to the fact that these employees are the daily HRM contacts for departments and employees, and so have been more heavily involved in answering questions directly from them.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews and an in-depth questionnaire to identify several critical themes, which were then further discussed during the sessions. The sample chosen for semi-structured interviews for this research project is depicted in the table below. An explanation is given to selected participants, mostly based on their roles in the OOP.

Table 3: Semi Structured interviews

Category	Number interviewed
Hrm	5
Employee Health And Wellness	4
Hrd	3
Hr Labour	3

Semi-structured in-depth interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to hear the participants speak about their knowledge, experience, and thoughts on the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown.

3.7 Procedure for Collecting Data

The researcher wrote and mailed a letter to the department's Head of Human Resources to acquire permission to conduct the interviews. The purpose of the study, the advantages of the study, and the sampling population for the interviews were all included in the letter.

Once the researcher received the consent of the Head of Human Resources to proceed with the interview process, a letter was sent outlining the goal of the study and requesting participation in the interview process. To each participant. After receiving feedback from the participants, the researcher set an appointment with each participant and invited them to participate in the study by email. The researcher then conducted individual interviews using MS Teams.

The researcher directly interacted with the subjects during data collection, obtaining data through interviews. Following each interview, the researcher transcribed the interview and emailed each

transcript to the appropriate participant to acknowledge the interview and validate what was written. The data were imported into the ATLAS.ti system after validation.

3.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data preparation was before the data analysis and interpretation process. This involved immersing oneself in the facts and reading the transcribed interviews again. Thandray (2020) defines immersion as "repeated reading of the data, searching for meaning and patterns in the data." The procedure provided the researcher with a mental snapshot or overview of the topics raised by the participants. The ATLAS.ti software package allowed the researcher to go between several transcripts, take notes using the MEMO function, and group transcripts into their category groups.

Following the data preparation and immersion stages, the data analysis phase analysed all the themes that were to be discussed during the planned in-person interviews. As Braun and Clarke (2006) note, a theme represents some level of patterned response or meaning within a dataset that represents something important about the data relative to the research question.

3.8.1 Data Coding

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, and Delport (2011), the primary goal of coding is to be able to recognise text and label important groups of data in the pursuit of themes. The researcher began by reading the text and understanding the context of each sentence. Once a text was detected, the code/word was applied to the data segment to give meaning to the highlighted text. This is known as coding, and it involves assigning a code name to the section of text by breaking down the text domain into meaningful names. Using ATLAS.ti, this was accomplished by highlighting text and assigning a name to the code using the open coding feature.

3.8.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to reduce the number of texts collected. According to Caulfied (2019), this method is used to detect common themes, subjects, concepts, and patterns, in a series of texts, such as interview transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that thematic analysis is appropriate for qualitative studies exploring complex issues, aligning with your research objectives. It entails examining and reviewing all acquired data in order to code, group, and relate various ideas (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). Data were analysed using an inductive approach to investigate the impact of Covid-19 lockdown on human resource management and its implications for HR professionals. The inductive approach, according to Wagner, Kawulich, and Garner (2012), is

useful in single case studies where the researcher wants to identify factors and trace causal links to explain a specific phenomenon.

According to Kumar (2019), data analysis involves researchers looking at what is in a text or image and coding (categorising or grouping into themes). Thematic analysis was used in this research project to examine the relationships between key concepts and variables derived from the collected data. In other words, based on the research questions, the researcher identified keywords, phrases, and concepts that emerged during interviews and the literature review and then grouped them into emerging themes.

3.9 Limitations to the Study

The only South African Department that is studied here is the Gauteng Office of the Premier. There are 13 departments in the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) in total. This makes it impossible for the researcher to learn information from HRM organisations other than the Office of the Premier. As a result, rather than applying to the entire GPG, the current study's findings can only be broadly extrapolated to the Gauteng Office of the Premier. Another drawback is that all interviews were performed online using Microsoft Teams, which prevents the researcher from interacting with and seeing the interviewee's body language.

Furthermore, the study's drawback is that it only included a small, nongeneralisable sample of individuals who were all chosen through nonrandom selection and worked for the same department. Naturally, this means that it has very limited applicability. The study only consults HRM experts; if workers, unions, and other management are not consulted, this will provide a crucial but incomplete account of HMR difficulties. The study also depends on participants' memories, which might be problematic because people sometimes forget specifics and exaggerate or understate the severity of a problem or issue.

3.10 Reliability

During the study, credibility is ensured by determining whether the study is credible, transferable, reliable, and confirmable (Patton, 2015). Likewise, Dhanpat et al. (2022) agree that detailed data descriptions ensure the transferability of the information obtained from the participants, thus gaining credibility for the researcher. Using the same analysis methods and data collection instruments will produce consistent results, which is called dependability (Chilisa, 2012). Confirmability is known as the degree to which findings in a study are traceable back to informant

and research setting data and not to researcher bias (Hong et al., 2022). In credibility, we discuss strategies for enhancing confirmability, such as reflexivity and triangulation.

3.11 Validity

For data collection, the researcher took the following steps:

The researcher wrote and sent a letter to the department's Head of Human Resources to obtain permission to conduct the interviews. The purpose of the study, the benefits of the study and the sampling population for the interviews were included in the letter.

Following the approval of the Human Resources head to proceed with the interview process, each participant received a letter outlining the study's goal and asking them to participate in the interview process.

Following the feedback from the participants, the researcher set up an appointment with each of them and extended an email invitation to participate in the study. After that, the researcher used Microsoft Teams to conduct one-on-one interviews. In addition to conducting interviews with the participants, the researcher also conducted in-depth questionnaires when a participant was unable to meet in person.

3.12 Ethical Standards

The research project described here was carried out in accordance with the University of the Witwatersrand ethics policy, which provides guidelines for the conduct of research from the design stages to the implementation and reporting stages. Following the university's procedure, the researcher applied for ethics clearance. According to Chilisa (2012), ethics require that the community be acknowledged (through consultation with its chiefs or other appropriate authority structures) and permission is obtained to conduct the research. Therefore, for this research, I am an employee of the OOP in the policy unit there are certain ethical standards and considerations I must follow as a researcher, which is drafting a submission to the Director General of the Gauteng province for approval to conduct this study, and during the research process, good practices will be maintained to guarantee that integrity, adherence to regulations, and validity will be maintained throughout.

- Data were only gathered when the University granted its ethical approval.
- Private information from participants has not been made public.

- Before starting the interviews, consent was sought from the participants. The data will only be used for academic reasons.

In this research, the identified themes are teleworking and working from home, beliefs about working from home, digital transformation, and acceptance of technology.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This chapter aims to share the findings and results of a qualitative study on the impact of Covid-19 lockdown on human resource management (HRM) in the Gauteng Office of the Premier (OOP). The study investigates HRM employees' experiences of organisational support during accelerated digitalisation and remote working within OOP. This chapter will feature participant profiles as well as a discussion of the primary themes and subthemes uncovered during the data analysis process.

In the study, the researcher analysed interviews, identified emerging themes, compared and contrasted each interview with notes from all the interviews of the participants, and identified critical points for each of them. Using thematic analysis, six core themes and the corresponding subthemes were identified. These key themes are as follows: workplace changes, technical assistance, implementing remote work practices, employee remote work experience, organisational support initiatives, and professional and personal issues.

Table 4: Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Changes to HRM Practices as a result of the Pandemic	Recruitment
	Training and development
	Performance management
Remote work / WFH	Institutionalising remote work
ICT and Technical assistance	Delivery of work
	Efficiency
Employee beliefs about remote work experience	Positive experience
	Work-life balance
	Challenging
Organisational support	Tools of trade
	Well-being and safety
	HR support
	Operational support

Thematic analysis was used because the data that was gathered was qualitative. To create this research report, this involves recognising themes that emerge from the large data set. The aim of thematic analysis was to find patterns of significance in a dataset. The procedure developed gradually. Coding and arranging comparable data together were the first steps. The second step required categorising the groups again and comparing them. To support the study and the views taken, some of the facts were used in their unprocessed form as direct quotations and cases.

4.1 Changes to HRM Practices as a result of the Pandemic

In the literature review, Section 2.2 of this research report, various scholars warned that managers and HRM practitioners face the issues of how to employ, manage, and develop employees in organisations. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2020), Covid-19 has significantly affected it. Through the data analysis procedure, this research project identified several HRM practices, including employee recruitment, performance management, training and development, and compensation management. Each HRM function is explained separately, yet they are all interconnected.

4.1.1 Recruitment

The Covid-19 outbreak significantly changed many people's lives in the recruitment and induction professions. Human resources have established methods in which candidates are frequently interviewed in person and then onboarded. As a result of the forced move to digital platforms, HR professionals were asked if they could analyse potential applications and make the best selection without meeting prospects in person.

This finding can be related to the aspect of Stone et al. (2015), where the solution was delivered through the use of technology in HR to innovate and improve the way HR operations are handled. E-recruiting, e-job analysis, electronic job applications, electronic testing, personality inventories, and electronic interviews are among the primary goals of HR using technology.

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 4 stated that:

> *"The pandemic led to a shift toward virtual recruitment processes, including virtual interviews and assessments. HRM have adopted new strategies for sourcing and assessing candidates in a remote environment".*

Participant 6:

> *"Induction processes have been adapted to accommodate remote work, with virtual orientations, digital induction materials, and online training sessions".*

Participant 7 also commented on the above-mentioned development by stating:

> *"Increased reliance on digital tools for HR processes, including recruitment, induction, performance management, and employee engagement. The use of digital platforms and applications have become more prevalent".*

Well, based on the literature, the literature says that with virtual recruitment, organisations can access talent from across the country, eradicating traditional barriers and enabling the integration of under-represented groups (Mwita 2020). In addition, this approach enhances problem-solving and adaptability. It also helps to nurture a culture of inclusion, which is imperative to attracting top talent and flourishing in today's globalised, interconnected business environment.

The assertions made above by the participants, which are consistent with the scholarly analysis, suggest that remote recruiting processes can be conducted using virtual interviews, assessments, and other tools. ICT organisations can implement virtual induction processes to welcome and integrate new hires into their organisations.

4.1.2 Training and Development

According to Wamundila et al. (2022), training and development are part of Human Resources Management, which encompasses activities related to both long-term as well as short-term employee learning and development, management capacity development, coaching and mentoring of staff, as well as ensuring the implementation of organisational learning and learning organisation activities. Participants were asked to describe how Covid-19 had affected the Training and Development function in their organisations.

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 6 stated that:

> *"With the changing nature of work and the increased reliance on technology, HRM prioritised training and skill development programs. This included reskilling or upskilling employees to adapt to new technologies and work processes".*

Participant 8 also commented on the above-mentioned development by stating:

> *"There has been a focus on upskilling employees to adapt to digital tools and platforms. HRM initiated training programs to ensure employees are proficient in using new technologies effectively".*

Participant 4:

> *"With the changing work landscape, HRM provided training and development opportunities to help me acquire new skills needed for remote work or to adapt to evolving job requirements".*

Furthermore, Participant 3 added that:

> *"HRM focused on providing training and development opportunities to help employees adapt to the changing work environment. This involved online training sessions, resources for acquiring new skills, and support for professional development".*

The assertions made above by the literature state that by offering adaptable learning opportunities, remote work has transformed training and development by enabling individuals to learn at their own pace, to enhance their digital proficiency, and to collaborate virtually (Akkermans et al., 2020). Despite these advantages, it still poses challenges to conventional training methods, which demands the development of innovative strategies that ensure the engagement of remote employees and the development of efficient skills.

From the above, it can thus be concluded that HRM in the department has focused on identifying and addressing skill gaps by incorporating virtual training programs into virtual work environments. Upskilling and Reskilling: HRM has developed targeted training programmes to address the skills gaps of employees.

4.1.3 Performance Management

According to Schuster et al. (2020), WFH arrangements require the reorganisation of bureaucratic control, funding, responsibility, and oversight systems. In a flatter organisational structure, where flexibility, deregulation, and autonomy are more available, WFH may be more effective than in a bureaucratic organisation with hierarchical structures. According to empirical research by Taskin

and Edwards (2007), government organisations can successfully implement WFH under certain conditions.

For WFH to succeed in the public sector, clear and consistent rules, policies, and expectations must be established, work processes must be strategically aligned, and staff must be supported and engaged. Remote worker productivity can also be measured using objective indicators, which should be simpler than assessing his or her physical presence or the time spent working.

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 4 stated that:

> *"As a result of Covid-19, there was workplace isolation, lack of communication, family distractions, role overload, and occupational stress factors (role ambiguity, role conflict, career, and job-control) as significant predictors of performance, especially during the period of working from home".*

Participant 8 expressed their views:

> *"Managers must also understand what it takes to manage employees remotely if remote working is to be successful".*

Based on the literature, it states that as a result of remote work, performance management has become more and more outcome driven, with data-driven tools used to measure progress toward goals and outcomes (Kumar, 2019). Regular virtual check-ins are crucial to providing continuous feedback, aligning expectations, and cultivating accountability within dispersed teams by providing continuous feedback and aligning expectations.

From the above and looking at my participants' viewpoints, they seem to agree with what the literature says. Thus, it can be concluded that measuring performance based on outcome rather than time, focusing on employees' contributions and achievements rather than strictly tracking hours worked, and aligning remote employees with organisational goals by clearly communicating performance expectations and key result areas. Feedback and check-ins, managers and remote team members should regularly discuss performance, and check-ins should be implemented to provide guidance and recognition for remote work accomplishments.

4.2 Remote Work / WFH

According to Thandray (2020), the primary subtheme, "Remote Working," speaks to the capacity of employers to permit their staff members to operate away from conventional office settings. This theme evolved into a subtheme: institutionalising remote work. This subtheme is discussed below.

4.2.1 Institutionalising Remote Work / WFH

The second most important theme that emerged from the data analysis is that of institutionalising remote work in OOP. According to Hernández et al. (2021), human resources management is motivated by organisational goals. As a result, while dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, emerging HRM regulations enforce biosecurity and physical separation between workers (Hernández et al., 2021). The task of implementing remote work practices fell to human resources management. According to Gómez et al. (2020), remote work plays a vital role both during and after a pandemic to maintain business continuity by preventing any negative impact on employee productivity and performance. According to Dhanpat et al. (2022), many organisations are creating a new hybrid virtual model, which combines on-site and remote work. This concept aims to lower costs, increase employee satisfaction, give greater flexibility, and boost individual productivity (Dhanpat et al., 2022). Against this backdrop, measures were implemented to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in remote work. The changes to remote work are discussed below, as explained by the participants.

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 3 stated that:

> *"HRM developed and implemented remote work policies to facilitate continuity in operations while ensuring the safety and well-being of employees. This includes guidelines on remote work expectations, communication protocols, and technology support".*

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 5 stated that:

> *"HRM facilitated the transition to remote work for us whose roles allowed for it. This involved the development of remote work policies, provision of necessary technology, and support for us to maintain productivity from home".*

Participant 8 stated that:

> *"I embrace and institutionalize flexibility in my work arrangements, recognizing the benefits of remote work and alternative work schedules. HRM can continue to develop policies that support an agile and adaptable workforce".*

Therefore, based on the literature, there has been a significant change in HR practices due to the shift toward remote working, including recruitment, performance management, and employee engagement (Dhanpat et al., 2022). In addition to overcoming the challenges related to the coordination of virtual teams, there are also opportunities to access global talent and be flexible, which requires the development of innovative human resources strategies.

The assertions made above by the participants is that there has been development and updating of the remote work policies in the department to provide clear guidelines regarding expectations, working hours, and communication norms. An increase in flexibility in work schedules has been made to accommodate diverse employee needs and challenges that come with remote work.

4.3 Employee Beliefs About Remote Work Experience

Three subthemes represent employee beliefs about remote work: positive experiences, work-life balance, and challenges.

4.3.1 Positive Experiences

This subtheme focuses on how satisfied employees were with their remote work experience. Xu et al. (2022) argue in their study that people with a strong sense of self-efficacy tend to initiate proactive activities in times of conflict because they believe they can perform certain activities. When it comes to remote work during a pandemic, people with high levels of self-efficacy tend to adjust their boundaries between their work and family domains so that they can meet new demands from those domains.

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 2 stated that:

> *"I appreciate the flexibility that remote work offers. It allows me to tailor my work schedules to better suit my personal life and needs".*

Participant 3 stated that:

> *"I experience cost savings related to commuting expenses, work attire, and meals".*

Participant 5 stated that:

> *"Implementing programs that focused on employee well-being, mental health, and work-life balance has been a supportive measure".*

Based off the literature, it indicates that both positive and negative effects are found in remote work. In one sense, it promotes flexibility, reduced commute stress, and greater autonomy, improving mental health (Donati et al. 2021). On the contrary, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, social isolation, and potential overwork can lead to burnout and strained relationships. In remote jobs, self-care and clear boundaries are crucial.

From the above, it can thus be concluded that a positive perception is that eliminating commute time and reducing stress, both of which contribute to a higher quality of life. Some employees find that working remotely is more productive, with fewer workplace distractions, and is therefore more productive. Using remote work as a means of saving money on commuting, work clothes, and meals contributes to a positive perception of it.

4.3.2 Work-life Balance

This subtheme explores how employees balance their professional and personal lives. As individuals engaged in remote work during pandemics, they have to cope with both their job responsibilities and family activities both during the day and night, blurring the line between work and home life. As a result of such a scenario, geographic and temporal barriers may be less significant, thus weakening the boundaries between work and home (Xu et al., 2022).

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 8 stated that:

> *"Remote work contributes to an improved work-life balance for me. The elimination of commuting time allows for more time with family and personal activities".*

And Participant 9 stated that:

> *"With the ability to create a more personalised work environment, I find it easier to set boundaries and avoid burnout."*

Participant 12 stated that:

> *"The pandemic underscored the importance of employee well-being and work-life balance. HRM implemented initiatives to support mental health, such as virtual wellness programs, counselling services, and flexible working hours".*

Participant 13 stated that:

> *"HRM have introduced well-being programs to address the mental health challenges faced by us as employees during the pandemic. This included access to counselling services, stress management initiatives, and mental health resources".*

Therefore, based on the literature, it indicates that as employees' quality of work is greatly affected by the balance they have between their professional and personal lives, they are entitled to a harmonious balance between these two elements (Blahopoulou et al., 2022). In spite of this, organisational ethics require finding a way to balance protecting the right of employees and their welfare while achieving organisational goals. Studies by Ortiz-Lozano et al. (2021) have shown that telecommuting can improve work-life balance without negatively affecting productivity; however, it may also perpetuate practices that do not promote gender equality, as a result.

From the above, it can thus be concluded that employees value the freedom to set up their own schedules, which makes it easier for them to balance work and life. Working in a quiet and personalised home environment can help increase one's focus and concentration. It is great to feel like you have a sense of autonomy and independence, as employees have more control over their work environment.

4.4 ICT and Technical Assistance

According to Hamouche (2021), as a result of information and communication technology (ICT), organisations have been able to remain resilient and have reduced the distances between their employees and their employers while ensuring their safety. As a result, managers and HRM practitioners have been more creative and the transition from traditional face-to-face socialisation to virtual ones has been facilitated (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Human resources provided training and awareness initiatives for ICT when working remotely. The participants had the following views:

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 6 stated that:

> *"I think the reliance on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) increased significantly. HRM departments had to invest in or enhance digital tools and platforms for recruitment, induction, training, and performance management. This digital transformation was crucial for maintaining operations during lockdowns and social distancing measures".*

Participant 1 stated that:

> *"I would agree that HRM invested in upgrading information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure to support remote work, virtual collaboration, and online communication".*

Participant 10 stated that:

> *"HRM in the OOP have invested in upgrading information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure to support remote work, virtual collaboration, and online communication."*

Therefore, based on the literature, it indicates that the development of virtual teams with geographically dispersed members who communicate widely with each other through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) has emerged as a practical working model for innovation initiatives involving one or more organisations, in the field of innovation, it is frequently noted that it is imperative to build collective knowledge and understanding among team members to ensure that the innovation process succeeds (Donga et al., 2021).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the department has upgraded and expanded the ICT infrastructure to support a remote workforce, including secure networks, virtual private networks, and remote access solutions. As part of the adoption of digital collaboration tools, project management software, and communication platforms, virtual teamwork was needed to facilitate and maintain productivity. As part of the integration of tools, such as video conferencing, messaging apps, and collaborative document editing, communication, and collaboration among remote teams was enhanced.

4.5 Organisational Support

There were two subthemes associated with support initiatives: Tools of trade, well-being, and operational support. The organisational support initiatives are discussed below as explained by the participants.

4.5.1 Tools of Trade

This subtheme describes the level of help employees receive from their organisation. According to Richter and Richter (2020), in order for employees to be comfortable with digital tools (i.e. digital work practices), they would have to get used to the concept of connecting with them). Due to lack of visibility and absence from being in the office, employees are now required to work longer hours and check their emails more often to compensate for this lack of visibility. (Hafermalz, 2020)

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 2 stated that:

> *"Providing adequate technology support and infrastructure for remote work, such as access to secure networks, collaboration tools, and technical assistance, enhanced their' beliefs about organisational support".*

Participant 1 stated that:

> *"I appreciate the robust technological support provided by the organisation, including access to necessary tools, software, and technical assistance for remote work".*

The literature indicates that virtual collaboration tools enable global real-time interactions, foster diverse collaboration and knowledge sharing, and offer transformative opportunities and

innovations (Molino et al., 2020). In modern work environments, video conferencing, document collaboration, and project management platforms increase productivity, streamline communication, and empower remote work, increasing efficiency and creativity.

From the above it can thus be concluded that it was important to ensure that employees were provided with the technical assistance they needed to work remotely, which included laptops, secure connections, and virtual private networks, to support their work from home. As part of the expansion, technical support services were expanded to address issues related to remote work setups, software usage, and connectivity problems. In addition, training programmes were developed to help employees adapt to new technologies and tools, ensuring that they were able to use resources to the fullest extent possible.

4.5.2 Well-being

The subtheme describes the extent to which employees felt their well-being and safety were not compromised, but the participants expressed anxiety and adjustment problems. There is no denying that the Covid-19 outbreak has brought health concerns to the forefront. As a result of the world's high level of anxiety in the last few years (Dennerlein et al., 2020), employees' overall health and mental well-being have been adversely affected by the pandemic. According to Hasteer (2020), the shift in work culture, the fear of job security, the health issues of employees, the concern for relatives, and isolation negatively affect their psychological well-being.

When asked to comment on the above-mentioned developments, Participant 5 stated that:

> *"Remote work can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, as they miss the social interactions and camaraderie that come with working in a shared physical space".*

Participant 12 stated that:

> *"The pandemic underscored the importance of employee well-being and work-life balance. HRM implemented initiatives to support mental health, such as virtual wellness programs, counselling services, and flexible working hours".*

Participant 7 stated that:

> *"I had to face challenges in effective communication and collaboration when working remotely. Virtual communication tools do not fully replicate face-to-face interactions".*

The literature indicates that although remote working increases organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and well-being at work, it also increases work intensity and makes it difficult to disconnect (Felstead, 2017). Employees must balance work and family duties to maintain the quality of work life (Blahopoulou et al., 2022). However, organisational ethics requires striking a balance between maintaining employee rights and well-being and reaching corporate objectives.

The assertions made above by the participants are that they feel disconnected from the departmental culture, mission, and colleagues, since they are physically distant from where you are, while missing the sense of camaraderie and team spirit that comes with working alongside colleagues in a physical office.

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarises the study findings on the research question, research objectives, and themes that emerged from the literature review and data analysis. In the next chapter, the main findings are summarised, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations are made regarding how the Covid-19 lockdown impacts the public sector's human resource management practices and future research questions.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, MAIN FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Study

The study aimed to explore the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on Human Resource Management in the Gauteng Office of the Premier; this was done by exploring how HRM practices supported employees in adjusting to changes in their work roles and how much the organisation that employed them had a role to play. The main research question focused on the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on HRM practices in the OOP, especially on policies, services and HR personnel. In conducting the study, an extensive literature review explored concepts of HRM practices studies, remote work, organisational support, as well as digital transformation using ICT.

Furthermore, the study intended to conduct 10 semi-structured interviews, 5 questionnaires, and review of documents to unpack the concepts mentioned above. The themes of the literature review and interviews were used to analyse the acquired data to answer this problem statement.

To do that, this study followed a qualitative research approach using the convenience sampling method, and the total number of participants in the study was 15. Data collection for the study was conducted through semi-structured interviews and an in-depth questionnaire conducted on Microsoft teams virtually.

By conducting qualitative research and collecting data by semi-structured interviews, as well as in-depth questionnaire, the researcher poses the following questions to answer the problem, and this is how the researcher answered these questions.

The following research sub-questions assisted in this process.

- How did the covid 19 lockdown affect the HR services in the OOP? OR What has been the effect on HR services in the OOP?
- How did the Covid-19 lockdown affect the wellbeing of HR personnel to provide services in the OOP?
- Did the Covid-19 lockdown have an impact on HRM policies in the OOP?

Main Findings

5.1 How did the covid 19 lockdown affect the HR services in the OOP? OR What has been the effect on HR services in the OOP?

The transition to remote work for HR professionals was rapid and required the adoption of digital tools and technology to manage HR processes, communication, and employee engagement. Given the challenges posed by the pandemic, HR services may have focused on implementing wellness programmes and support mechanisms to address the mental and physical health of employees. HR departments have facilitated virtual training sessions and development programmes to help employees adapt to remote work, acquire new skills, and stay productive during lockdown. Effective communication has been crucial during lockdown, and HR services have played a key role in keeping employees informed about changes, updates, and support available during challenging times. The lockdown has prompted adjustments in performance management practices, focusing on outcomes, flexibility, and empathy, considering the unique circumstances employees face. HR services improved and introduced employee assistance programmes to provide resources and support for mental health, stress management, and coping strategies.

5.2 How did the Covid-19 lockdown affect the well-being of HR personnel to provide services in the OOP?

5.2.1 Positive Implications:

Flexible Remote Work: The pandemic required remote work arrangements, providing HR personnel with the flexibility to perform their duties from the safety and comfort of their homes.

Adaptability and Innovation: HR professionals demonstrated adaptability and innovation by devising creative solutions to manage HR processes, conduct virtual meetings, and provide employee support.

Enhanced Employee Well-being: Employers likely extended their focus on employee well-being to HR professionals themselves, implementing well-being programmes and support measures for HR staff.

Skill Development: HR personnel were forced to develop and enhance skills related to remote work technology, crisis management, and employee support to navigate new challenges.

5.2.2 Negative Ramifications:

Increased Workload: Managing HR services during a crisis resulted in increased workloads for HR personnel, leading to stress and potential burnout.

Navigating Uncertainty: The uncertainty and rapidly changing circumstances of the pandemic added stress as HR professionals navigated evolving policies, government regulations, and organisational responses.

Emotional Toll: Dealing with employee concerns, layoffs, and other challenging situations took an emotional toll on HR personnel, who often play a crucial role in the management of workforce-related issues.

Balancing Professional and Personal Life: The blurring of the boundary between professional and personal life for HR professionals working remotely led to challenges in maintaining work-life balance.

Health Concerns: HR personnel faced health concerns for themselves and their families, adding an additional layer of stress during the pandemic.

Isolation and Limited Social Interaction: Remote working resulted in feelings of isolation and a lack of social interaction, affecting the mental well-being of HR professionals.

5.2.3 Coping Mechanisms:

Peer Support and Collaboration: Promoting peer support and collaboration within the HR team to share experiences, resources, and coping strategies.

Employee Assistance Programmes: Using employee assistance programmes or mental health resources provided by the organisation to seek professional support when needed.

Flexible Work Arrangements: Advocating for and implementing flexible work arrangements to accommodate the unique needs and challenges faced by HR personnel.

Leadership Support: Supportive leadership and communication from higher management can positively impact the well-being of HR professionals, ensuring that they feel valued and understood.

Training and Development Opportunities: Providing training and development opportunities for HR personnel to improve their skills, adaptability, and resilience in the face of ongoing challenges.

Recognition and Appreciation: Recognising the efforts and contributions of HR professionals during difficult times can boost morale and contribute to a positive work environment.

5.3 Did the Covid-19 lockdown have an impact on HRM policies in the OOP?

In response to the pandemic, HR services had to adapt and communicate policies related to remote work, leave, and other HR processes. During the lockdown, HR services adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic by implementing remote recruitment processes, including online interviews, assessments, and virtual induction for new hires. To ensure business continuity, HR departments turned to technology solutions to remotely manage employee records, payroll, and other HR functions. Furthermore, HR policies were revised to comply with government regulations and guidelines related to COVID-19 safety measures, workplace protocols, and employee protections.

5.4 Conclusion and Recommendations

This report highlights the importance of implementing effective business continuity strategies by both employers and employees. In addition to improving employee well-being, flexible work practices may also be included in these strategies. To successfully navigate this transition in the workplace, senior management needs to play an active role in ensuring that human resource management implements measures. In addition to highlighting the importance of developing a new training protocol for employees so they can acquire the necessary skills to ensure smooth operations, the report also suggests that integrating technology into the workplace for remote work and online services and prioritising employee health and well-being is a successful approach.

Human resource management (HRM) continues to play an important role in helping organisations cope and thrive as Covid-19 continues to bring about dramatic changes in the workplace. As

organisations face crisis situations, HRM should be given the power to develop policies and strategies that aim to improve communication, facilitate interactive decision making and facilitate strategic planning in a flexible and open environment to allow them to survive in crisis situations. The benefits of this approach are that it will not only enhance employee competence, but it will also foster a feeling of belonging and connection among employees.

Despite the fact that previous research has explored the impact of Covid-19 on the environment of HRM in the private sector, there is a lack of extensive research on this topic in the public sector. This can be attributed to the fact that the pandemic is a relatively new phenomenon. Therefore, scholars should prioritise gaining relevant knowledge to support relevant management practices and promote best HRM practices. Additionally, there is a need for further research on the experiences and adjustments of employees during the Covid-19 pandemic to provide critical support to employees and improve their performance. In summary, the need for research on the impact of Covid-19 on the HRM environment in the public sector is critical. Scholars should focus on gaining relevant knowledge to support management practices and promote best HRM practices. Furthermore, more research is needed on the experiences and adjustments of employees during the pandemic to provide support and improve performance.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Interview Questions
1. General inquiry regarding expert experience and specific field of expertise?
2. A discussion of how COVID-19 impacted the OOP and the challenges HRM has faced as a result.
3 Questions about transformations caused by the crisis (i.e. Work-life balance, ICT & Digital transformations)?
4. From an HRM perspective, what has the department done to respond to the pandemic crisis?
5. What infrastructural assistance is required to facilitate the transition to working from home?
6. What perspectives and recommendations from HRM practitioners on the future of HRM?
7. Is there a qualified and representative crisis management team on call, and does everyone on it know what are they supposed to do?
8. What is your opinion on how / what HRM is implemented to assure Organisational resilience?
9. If applicable, additional thoughts/opinions?

Appendix 2: Ethics Certificate

CERTIFICATE OF COMPETENCE IN RESEARCH ETHICS

Name: Bheki Masango

Student/Staff No: 1850845

Date of Certification: 15 February 2023 - 14 February 2026 (This certificate is valid for a period of three years)

TRAINED BY:

PROFESSOR JASPER KNIGHT
(RESEARCH ETHICS)

SIGNATURE

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

ISSUED BY:

DR ROBIN DRENNAN
(DIRECTOR: RESEARCH
OFFICE)

SIGNATURE

This certificate is confirmation of successful completion of a training course in Research Ethics for Non-Medical human research, based upon achieving a minimum level of competence in different assessment tasks.

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Explore the experiences of Gauteng provincial government (GPG) Human Resource Management (HRM) employees within the Office of the Premier (OOP) during the lock lockdown period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Name of researcher: Bheki Masango [1850845] Masters in Management Research Proposal (PADM7248A)

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview/focus group/other activity may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview/focus group/other activity may be used by the researcher in their research report/ manuscript/book chapter	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report/manuscript/book chapter)	YES	NO
I agree to disclose my designations or gender to the researcher	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview/focus group/other activity (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
…… (date)