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The Perceptions and Experiences of Management and Employees regarding Telecommuting work arrangements at the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission in Tshwane

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The Perceptions and Experiences of Management and Employees regarding Telecommuting work arrangements at the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission in Tshwane

A report on a research study presented to

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community development

Faculty of Humanities

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree Master of Arts in Social Work in the field of Occupational Social Work

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Abstract

Telecommuting work arrangements have become a universal norm since the advent of COVID-19 in 2020. Many research studies have made findings related to the benefits and challenges faced by employees during COVID-19 and after COVID-19. The purpose of the research study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of employees and management of a state entity in Tshwane, namely Companies and Intellectual Property Commission, regarding the implementation of telecommuting work arrangements during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative single case study design was implemented. Herzberg's two factor theory was the theory underpinning this study. Fifteen participants were purposively selected. Data were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews with participants via Microsoft Teams. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data collected. Findings reveal that employees and managers experienced many challenges during COVID-19. Although telecommuting work arrangements have improved, there are still challenges that need to be addressed, such as manager-employee work relationships, health and well-being of employees and telecommuting arrangements work arrangements. Based on research findings significant recommendations were made including, attention should be given to the health and well-being of employees, amendments should be made to the telecommuting work policy by providing clear guidelines and responsibilities for employees, the drawing up of a manager-employee work contract, provide updated telecommuting appliances and ensure that ongoing training is provided

Keywords*:* Perception, Experiences, Management, COVID-19, Employees, Telecommuting, Occupational Social Work and Work Arrangements.

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Declaration

I, Forget Masingi, declare that this research report is my own independent work which is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree Master of Arts in Social Work by course work and research report in Occupational Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. All the sources and quotes utilised have been acknowledged in adherence to referencing conventions.



Forget Masingi

20 March 2025

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List of Acronyms

CIPC-Companies and Intellectual Property Commission.

CISCO- World Wide Worx for CISCO Systems.

COTTI- Council of Trade and Industry Competition

COVID-19- Coronavirus diseases.

DPSA- Department of Public Service and Administration.

DTIC- Department of Trade, Industry and Competition.

EXCO- Executive Authority.

HCM- Human Resource Management.

IBM -International Business Machines Corporation.

ICT- Information Communication Technology.

ILO- International Labour Organisation.

MERS- Middle East Respiratory Syndrome.

NEHAWU- National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union.

PIS-Participant Information Sheet.

PSA- Public Servants Association.

PSC-Public Service Commission.

SARS- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

WHO- World Health Organisation.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, telecommuting has gained prominence in many business operations and represents a new structure of work for both employers and employees (Nagel, 2020). A nationwide lockdown was declared by the Government of South Africa on 23 March 2020 and its implementation commenced on the 27 March 2020. During the lockdown only essential services employees were permitted to report to work physically. On the 1 May 2020, phased lockdown restrictions were implemented by the South African government, encouraging employers to allow employees to work remotely from their homes. Consequently, most employees, if possible, started practising telecommuting.

Telecommuting can be defined as the working arrangements in which employees work outside the normal office environment based on their flexible work schedules (Bruggen, et al., 2017). Although personal contact restrictions in light of Covid-19 have been lifted by the government, the percentage of employees working from home remained high (Brook et al., 2020). This rise in telecommuting is an area of interest for both employers and employees because telecommuting represents a new work structure in the future world of work (Arvidsson & Fager, 2021).

Prior to the inception of Covid-19, organisations adopted work from home with the goal driven purpose of convenience and as means of promoting conducive workplace environment (De Klerk et al., 2021). Working from home was accelerated due to the pandemic and imposed lockdown restrictions in South Africa. In South Africa, only four percent of the workforce were working remotely as compared to more than 38% of the active qualifying workforce working from home during the pandemic (Winkler-Titus et al., 2025). On the basis of the above, CIPC also implemented telecommuting work arrangements as way

to comply with government regulations around Covid-19 and to ensure operational continuity.

Further, working from home trends was a fascinating phenomenon due to the following rationale: rapid acceleration of globalisation, as alternative work arrangements and evolution of fourth industrial revolution (Kokt & Chipunza, 2022).

Employees and employers are keen to have work from home as the new norm of the future world of work because this type of work arrangement provides flexible work schedules, improves employee engagement and performance.

Problem statement and rationale for the study

When lockdown restrictions were lifted slightly arrangements for telecommuting was based on the notion that employees must report to the office for two or three days a week to reduce the physical presence of employees in the work setting environment with the goal of reducing the possibilities of infections (Kaluza & Van Dick, 2022).

This was the same work arrangement that was adopted by the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) during COVID-19. The CIPC is a state-owned entity which forms part of Council of Trade and Industry Institutions (COTTI) in South Africa. COTTI works within the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) to support economic growth, development and employment in South Africa. The telecommuting work arrangements continued at CIPC post-the COVID-19.

Prior to COVID-19, the mode of work arrangement was fully based on traditional mode of working arrangements in which employees reported to the office every day to perform their duties. During the COVID-19 telecommuting was adopted by CIPC, and this was the first time the organisation adopted such mode of working. The telecommuting policy was approved in July 2020 for implementation within the entity, and the implementation of this policy resides within the Human Capital division (HCM). In June 2021, the CIPC was in

the process of formalising the virtual work policy which seeks to utilise platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zooms as a mode of working.

Research studies have established telecommuting arrangements have both positive and negative impacts on organisations (Brooks et al., 2022). Positive impacts include improved productivity, flexible work arrangements, improved work-life balance and employee satisfaction.

The negative impact includes reduced career progression, isolation, longer working hours and lack of support (Alainati, 2022; Baard & Thomas, 2010). Other challenges include lack of technology support and monitoring employee productivity and performance during telecommuting (Atiku et., al 2020). Due to a lack of strategy and resources, having to prioritise telecommuting also resulted in organisational instability, employee efficiency, and the engagement and wellbeing of employees were challenged (Hammargen & Hendriks, 2022).

Telecommuting work arrangements became the new normal within the CIPC. After the implementation of this new mode of working, the CIPC encountered several challenges which included connectivity issues due loadshedding, resources constraints for employees working from home such as lack of laptops, employees ill-discipline, mental health issues such as stress, isolation and anxiety, poor ergonomic factors from home office environment, blurred personal, professional and family life boundaries.

The impact of the challenges that emanates from the telecommuting work arrangement manifested in many facets of employees work life which includes decreased employee engagement, motivation, performance and productivity, increased in absenteeism and presenteeism cases and sudden increases in employees experiencing metal health issues such as burnout and reduction in teamwork and collaboration.

To address the impact of the challenges, CIPC was required to implement a holistic and strategically workplace model that will promotes a flexible work schedule to promotes productivity. The workplace model must includes implementing a culture of trust between employees and direct line managers, empowerment of employees through upskilling, proper communication channels and advocating for employee wellbeing e, g. through the provision of work life balance of employees (Shanker, 2022).

All of the above challenges and its impact on CIPC business operations demonstrate that the implementation of telecommuting within the organisation experienced some teething problems. Hence the study was conducted to explore the perceptions and experiences of management and employees concerning telecommuting work arrangements. The study was conducted to assist the organisation understand the significance of telecommuting on employees' productivity. Further, the study would be able to provide an overview of the factors that hinders and promotes employees wellbeing while working from home.

It is thus important that organisations, such as CIPC need to understand the impact of remote working when considering the working arrangements of their employees.

Given the above identified challenges and benefits of telecommuting, my study sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of managers and employees at CIPC regarding telecommuting work arrangements and to solicit recommendations from participants about the implementation of telecommuting work arrangements. At the time of conducting my study, no research regarding telecommuting work arrangements had focused on the CIPC and thus I hoped to fill this lack of knowledge in the interests the organisation's staff members and existing work arrangements.

As a social worker by profession within CIPC my roles include implementation and promotion of employee health and wellness programmes. I thus hoped to identify any challenges experienced by staff members using telecommuting that had a negative impact on

their health and wellness so I could adequately address this concern. Because social work adopts a strengths-based approach, I was also keen to know what strengths I could build on to improve the wellbeing of participants so that they could enjoy job satisfaction. To improve my capacity to meet the needs of employees and managers at the organisation I choose to do a post-graduate degree in Occupational Social Work.

Definition of key concepts

The following definitions are of key words and concepts used in my report.

Occupational Social Work

Can be defined as the specialised field of social work practice the set of policies, services and programmes which addresses the human and social needs of the workplace community through variety of interventions which aims at fostering optimal adaptation between individuals and their immediate environment (Mbuyisa,2019).

Occupational social worker

Refers to a highly specialised field of professional social work practice profession which targeted at enhanced optimal functioning and productivity in the entire workplace by improving psycho-social functioning through professional services based on policies, procedures and programmes the benefit of all levels of employees and their immediate family (Terblanche et al., 2021).

Telecommuting

Telecommuting can be defined as the type of working arrangements where employees work outside the traditional office environment and employees utilise emails, telephone, Microsoft Teams, Zoom and telegrams and social networks such as WhatsApp to communicate with the organisation (Atiku, 2020; Baard & Thomas, 2020; Messaoud & Gupta, 2021). This type of the work arrangement allows employees to execute their job duties from different locations using the variety of technologies. The word ‘telecommuting’

can be used interchangeably using the terms such as telecommuters, telework, virtual and remote working (Dahlstroom, 2013).

Work arrangements

The specific employment contract conditions which employees are expected to execute their job tasks which may include job duties and responsibilities, work schedules and define how and where the employees perform his or her duties (Mas & Pallais, 2020).

Manager

A manager can be defined as the person who has been appointed to a leading position in an organisation and who is responsible for specific responsibilities and tasks (Makondo & Van Biljon, 1999).

Employee

Employee refers to any person, excluding an independent contractor who perform works for another or for state, and who receives or is entitled to receive remuneration (Basic Condition of Employment Act, 75 of 1997).

Management

Management can be defined as the employee in position of power with added status and authority (North- West Provincial Government, Department of Public Works, Roads, and Transport).

Experiences

This can be described as an individual perspective on events and their meaning (Mphothi, 2020). It is created by something which one does, sees or feels which is (ideally) unique and certainly distinctive to a particular place.

Perception

Perception refers to the ways in which people think about something and their idea of what it is which includes the way they notice things with their senses and natural ability to comprehend things (Qu, 2017).

Research question and main aim and objectives

Main research question

The main research question of my study was: What are the perceptions and experiences of managers and employees of the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission in Tshwane regarding telecommuting work arrangements during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Main research aim and objectives

The main research aim of the study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of managers and employees of the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission in Tshwane regarding telecommuting work arrangements during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Objectives

To achieve the main of the study, the following objectives were set:

1. To explore the perceptions of managers and employees regarding the processes followed in implementing telecommuting work arrangements during and after COVID-19.
2. To investigate what challenges managers and employees experienced when telecommuting during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To explore what employers and managers regard as the benefits of practising telecommuting during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Investigate what factors managers and employees think might improve the telecommuting work policy in the organisation.

Overview of the Research Methodology

In my study, I adopted a qualitative approach because I focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of CIPC employees and managers in Tshwane regarding telecommuting work arrangements during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

I selected a single case study research design because it is a qualitative research design with which I could gain in-depth data regarding the phenomenon being researched. I refer to my research design as a single case study rather than a multiple case study, because although I interviewed two categories of participants, my focus was on one or single case or subject, namely participants experiences of practicing telecommuting while working at CIPC. I purposively selected a sample consisting of 15 participants (three managers and 12 employees) and gathered information from participants by conducting semi-structured interviews online. I also used two interview guides (one for managers and one for employees) to help me cover relevant issues directly related to the aim and objectives of my study. I analysed data gathered using thematic analysis and based on my findings to make recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

Summary and Structure of the Report

This research report is divided into five chapters, following the sequence below:
In **Chapter 1** I introduced the reader to the study by providing a brief overview of the telecommuting work arrangements during COVID-19 and emphasised that this mode of working arrangement is still popular post the COVID-19. I presented the problem situation and the rationale for conducting this research study. I also highlighted the challenges and benefits of telecommuting mode of working arrangement. I defined significant key words and

concepts for readers so they can clearly understand what they mean in this study. The aim and objectives of the study were specified, as well as my research methods.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework that underpinned my study, namely Hertzberg's Two Factor Theory of Motivation and Hygiene. A comprehensive literature review of information relevant to telecommuting is also provided in this chapter.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology comprehensively. Significant aspects that I cover in this chapter include the research paradigm underpinning my study, the research approach and design I adopted, my sample of participants, as well as the method of data collection and analysis. Trustworthiness of my research study, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are discussed and how it applied in my study. I also focus on the ethical principes I upheld when conducting research as well as the challenges I experienced. In **Chapter 4** I present and discuss the findings of my study based on thematic data analysis. **Chapter 5** is the final chapter of my research report. In this chapter, I summarise my research findings, the conclusions I reached, and the recommendations I made based on my research findings.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Introduction

Williams et al., (2021) explained that the theoretical framework serves as the blueprint or guidelines on how to contextualise the research findings and generate knowledge against existing theories and approaches to reach meaningful and scientific based findings and recommendations of the study. In this chapter, I discuss Hertzberg's Two Factor Theory of Motivation and Hygiene, which is the theoretical framework that underpinned this study.

I then cover relevant literature to bring about a good understanding of the topic, I researched and acknowledge and give credit to previous research (Baard & Thomas, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The theory underpinning my study is Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation-Hygiene. This theory is frequently referred to as the 'Two-Factor theory of Motivation'.

During 1959 in the United States of America, Frederick Herzberg developed the theory named Herzberg's Two-Factor theory of Motivation and Hygiene. Influenced by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Jones, 2011), Herzberg concluded that workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction could not be measured reliably on the same continuum and conducted a series of studies where he attempted to determine what factors in work environments cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

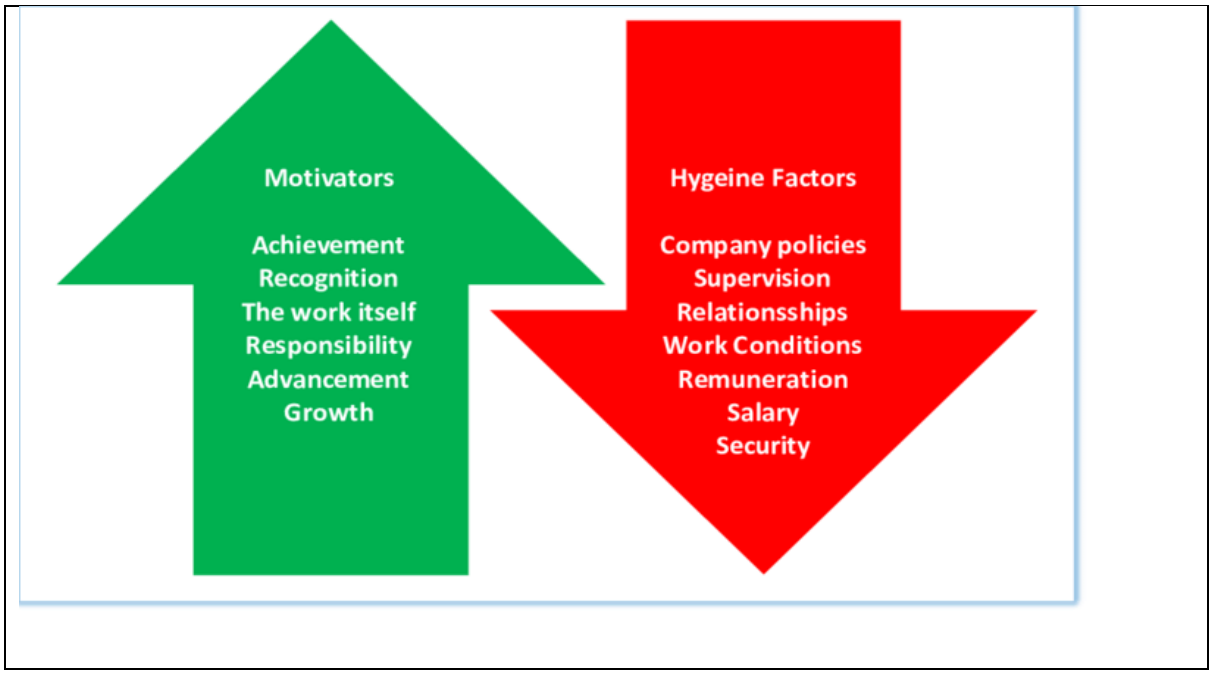
Herzberg and his colleagues explored the impact of fourteen factors related to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in terms of their frequency and duration of impact (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). Herzberg established that factors that contribute to employees' level of job satisfaction are satisfied through intrinsic factors related to the job, for example, responsibility, recognition and achievement. Intrinsic factors play a pivotal role to cultivate employee inner growth and development which will result in the outcome of higher

employees' productivity and performance in the workplace (Sabbagha, 2016, Yusoff, et al, 2013). This theory was developed on the principle that motivation emanates from the nature of job itself, not the job conditions (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022; Sabbagha, 2016). Factors such as salary, status, security and working conditions are factors that will contribute to employees less need of motivation and with the outcome being job dissatisfaction. Basically, poor hygiene factors lead to decreased job satisfaction and high motivating factors increase job satisfaction.

Figure 1 below summarises Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory.

Figure 1

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory



Resource: Blue Donkey Intelligent Telemarketing

Understanding the Two-Factor Theory

Hygiene / Extrinsic factors. As mentioned earlier in the report hygiene or extrinsic factors in telecommuting are factors which can result in decreased job satisfaction and includes factors such as organisational policies, work environment, benefits and payments,

job security and status (Tezel, 2023). Below I describe the different extrinsic factors that are relevant to telecommuting.

Reward system

The application of this factor to the telecommuting work arrangements is that it creates a situation in which employees feel invisible towards line managers. This could decrease employees' chances of any promotion, positive performance review and reward in telecommuting arrangement (Ngamkroectjoti et, al, 2022).

Job security

What constitutes predicament to job security was due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline in financial profit for the organisation resulted in reduction of employees' wages, whereas employees working from home faced higher household expenditure such as internet and electricity. Job insecurity is the serious concerns for telecommuting workers due to unattainable standard of living (Ngamkroectjoti et., al, 2022).

Time management

The authority is the management of employees' work schedule and deadlines are the most significant factors facing employees that are working from home (Ngamkroectjoti et al., 2022). The competing demands balancing work and personal life is a predicament for telecommuters.

Work environment and workload

There have been positive trends from employees working from home since they were able to customise their work environment at home. However, the negative impacts of work from home during COVID-19 included lack of self-discipline, employees failing to focus when the children are present and employees failing to meet job task deadlines, decrease in work performance since employees feels isolated from the organisations. Health issues, poor quality of work life and workplace stress are some of the negative impacts of employees

working from home which is the outcome of the work overload. As an alternative working environment, telecommuting paved a way for employees to create a balance between their personal and work lives ((Ngamkroectjoti et., al, 2022, Miller, 2016).

Organisational policies

In the context of the telecommuting employees, organisational policies, guidelines and procedures within the organisation should benefit the organisation in the following ways: facilitation of employee productivity, enable effective communication, and trust between employer and employees (Miller, 2016). Policies within the organisation must cover aspects such as proactive approaches on employees' health and wellbeing, paid leaves for parents and workplace schedules which includes flexibility.

Intrinsic / motivating factors in the context of the telecommuting work arrangements are factors which encourage employees to be productive and committed to their work which includes employees' sense of personal achievement, recognition, the nature of work itself, responsibility and promotional opportunities (Tezal, 2023).

Employee sense of personal achievement

Working at home or in the office, employees' sense of personal achievement is a strong motivator in telecommuting work arrangements. What impacts on employee personal achievement includes the following: rewards and recognition systems, connection with colleagues and teams, desire for power, policies within the organization and working environment (Miller, 2016). Green (2009) stated that avoiding procrastination is the significant concept which will assist teleworkers to stay motivated. Lack of personal and work boundaries, family distractions and personal tasks pose serious challenges for employees participating in telecommuting work arrangements to remain motivated.

Employee value recognition for achievement

In telecommuting work arrangements, employees require the line manager to monitor and reward them by the outcome accomplished, instead of process and time spent on a given task. To gain recognition, teleworkers often fear the perception of line managers that they are not actually working which results in them working more hours (Green, 2009). Home office employees are motivated by the challenging and stimulating work, which results in them developing a sense of empowerment and ownership of work. Organisations can recognise employees' achievements in teleworking environments through promotion, bonus and non-monetary rewards for a job well done (Miller, 2016).

The nature of work itself

The success for telecommuting employees depends on two significant factors which are employee discipline and internal motivation. The work environment in remote working does not facilitate constant supervision, resulting in employees that require constant supervision, or they fail to succeed (Green, 2009). Competencies, skills, and abilities is what employees must possess before teleworking arrangement commence.

Employee responsibility

A key pillar for the success of the telecommuting work arrangement is that it requires employees to have autonomy regarding their work which results in maintaining higher levels of productivity. This places a prerequisite criterion that remote working employees require to develop an innate desire to work independently and for personal accountability (Green, 2009).

Career advancement and promotion

Promotional opportunities are affected by employee participation in remote working arrangements as compared to the traditional office environment. To receive career

advancement, employees are required to demonstrate to their line managers that they are serious about their career (Green, 2009). The possibility of career advancement and promotion decreases drastically due to lack of personal attention of remote workers from their line managers. The responsibility for personal and professional needs of development for long-term development relies on remote working employees rather than line managers. Miller (2016) argued that the organisation can develop and implement programs that safeguard the promotion and growth for telecommuters.

Status of employment

Employees in telecommuting arrangements are of the view that pay progression is moving slowly, resulting in deficient performance reviews, job status limited, and promotional opportunities become scarce (Miller, 2016). There is a relationship between employment status and job satisfaction for employee in telecommuting work arrangements. It is worthwhile to note that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors have a significant role to play in employees participating in telecommuting work arrangements.

In the telecommuting working arrangements, extrinsic factors will only permit employees willing to work outside the office, whereas intrinsic factors will have significant contribution in the quality of work done (Wan Yusoff, et al, 2013).

Herzberg's two-factor theory has been well-researched in the context of assessing job satisfaction of employees. For example, Gangwar et al., (2022) explored the intrinsic factors affecting employees who were 'forced' to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gangwar et al., (2022) pointed out that during COVID-19 employees participating in telecommuting work arrangement resulted in employees feeling encouraged, because they could feel a balance in the quality of work life. On the other hand, telecommuting work arrangements also resulted in a decrease in interpersonal contact and feelings of isolation.

Lack of interpersonal contact between employees and managers leads to reduced motivation due to lack of face-to-face interaction.

Miller (2016) found that the application of Herzberg's two factor theory to the telecommuting work arrangements yielded the result of successful implementation of telecommuting work arrangements in the workplace. Hammargen and Hendriks (2022) were of the view that it would be of significance to examine this theory in relation to remote working as organisations and employers do not have the same control over the employees' work environment and may prove to be challenging to have control over to employees in a telecommuting work arrangement.

Herzberg's theory was of significant value to explore the experiences and perceptions of CIPC managers and employees around the implementation of telecommuting work arrangements because my assumptions were that both motivating, and hygiene factors were impacting on the practice of telecommuting within CIPC. The personal observation within the CIPC is that the success of telecommuting implementation relies on various factors such as employees' satisfaction and motivation, employees' job autonomy, flexible work arrangements and work conditions itself to mention few. All of the above factors are both motivating and hygiene factors that had impacted the practice and implementation of telecommuting. The observation necessitated the need to incorporate Herzberg's two factor theory as theoretical framework of the study. To understand the value of Herzberg's two factor theory in telecommuting work arrangement and practice at CIPC.

Herzberg's two factor theory specifically hygiene factors were significant to understand that the provision of resources such as laptops, internet connectivity, scanners and printers are critical to address dissatisfaction of telecommuters. Further, the theory emphasises the significant of hygiene factor in the new context of working. Traditional hygiene factors included the nature of nature and quality of supervision, organisational

policies and salary (Nagalakshini, 2024, Paramatzis & Galanakis, 2022). The new dimension which was introduced by working from home includes proper home office environment and employee interpersonal relations e.g. the quality of virtual communication between employees, subordinates and direct line of reporting. To avoid dissatisfaction of employees, CIPC must ensures that the above hygiene factors are met for telecommuting employees.

The Herzberg two factor theory stresses the significance of employees' intrinsic motivation for the successfully implementation of telecommuting (Nagalakshini, 2024, Paramatzis & Galanakis, 2022). Telecommuting work arrangement offered employees job autonomy which improves the work itself and employees responsibility which serve as intrinsic motivational aspect. CIPC will be required to empowering and focusing on employees output that yield results. Provision of managerial guidance and practices of telecommuters as intrinsic motivation. Managers must play a critical role in fostering intrinsic motivation for telecommuting work arrangements. Fostering of team motivations for remote working team achievement providing meaningful work and creating opportunities for personal and professional achievement (Ngalaskshini, 2024).

In summary, Herzberg two factor theory was crucial as a theoretical framework in this study. The theory provides a blueprint for designing, implementing and managing telecommuting work arrangements and encourages the employer to focus on the intrinsic employees motivation after the job and employee experience which led to motivation, satisfaction and improved productivity for the telecommuting employees. The personal observations are that prior and during the implementation of telecommuting within CIPC within the CIPC in the organisations failed to pay consideration to hygiene and motivation factors which are key to the success of telecommuting implementation and practices.

Examples, during the study, some employees participating in telecommuting work arrangement were still raising the issue of the lack of resources, poor home office

environment lack of job autonomy and trust issues between employees and their immediate line managers. All of the resulted in my curiosity to explore the perceptions and experiences of management and employees around the implementation of telecommuting work arrangements.

Literature review

In this section of the chapter, I present the outcomes of a rigorous literature review. I have categorised literature under headings and highlight the contributions previous researchers have made to the topic I explored. Although I highlight relevant research literature on an international and regional basis, my main focus is on South Africa.

Benefits and challenges of telecommuting

The challenges of telecommuting are contextualised in terms of the nature of jobs, culture of the organisation, staff selection and recruitment, provision of infrastructure, legal considerations, monitoring and performance of measurement, isolation, and communication of employees (Brooks et al, 2022).

Benefits of telecommuting work arrangements. In this section, the benefits of telecommuting work arrangements will be discussed in detail.

1. New opportunities and inclusive workforce.

Remote working provides an opportunity in which employees can develop new skills and business opportunities for remote working employees (Brooks et al., 2022). Introvert staff that struggled in the traditional office environment engagement such as face-to-face meetings are given an opportunity to participate and develop their confidence through virtual platforms engagements.

2. Improved work-life balance, family relationships and childcare.

Working from home provides a safe time for staff to connect with family and taking care of their children's wellbeing (Brooks et al., 2022). Remote working affords staff an opportunity to schedule day-to-day family tasks around their work more easily resulting in improved work-life balance. Reduction in commuting time to work allows staff to utilise the time for relaxing with family.

3. Organisation cost savings

In an organisation where employees are working remotely, there is a cost savings which emanates from reduced office space and parking space costs and decreased utility bills which results in increased organisational revenues (Venkatraman, 1994).

4. Remote working results in higher productivity and employee performance.

As compared to the traditional office environment staff working from home can work longer hours and be more productive due to less commuting time, resulting in this employee's ability to produce exceptional quality work. Employee job satisfaction is the results of happier workforce which allows employees to exercise their job autonomy e.g. work-life balance and independence (Simeli et al., 2023; Sonnenschein et al, 2022).

5. Staff working from home are healthier, happier workforce resulting in higher staff retention.

Poeker (2021) pointed out that staff working from home are highly satisfied, resulting in employees being more engaged. Reduction in stress and flexibility in terms of addressing staff health issues, results in remote staff to have improved holistic wellbeing as compared to the office-based staff. The significant factor in retaining valuable workforce is through workplace flexibility in which life circumstances facing employees such as life planning and location are accommodated by flexible working arrangement and hours. Flexible work arrangements provide an opportunity to employees to work from anywhere (Simeli et al., 2023).

In summary, telecommuting has many benefits, including reduced commuting times to work, cost savings, increased productivity, flexibility and autonomy. Reduction in employee stress and staff retention improves quality of life and enhanced career progression (Baard & Thomas, 2010; Kaluza & Van Dick, 2022). In telecommuting working arrangements both employer and employees enjoy the above benefits.

Challenges of telecommuting. This section focuses on the limitations of telecommuting mode of working in detail.

1. Telecommuters reported that work culture is the main problem. Concerns such as poor-quality relationships amongst peers and colleagues resulted in employees feeling frustrated and lonely (Dahlstrom, 2013). Telecommuting employees fear that being off site will limit opportunities for promotions and organisational rewards.

2. Closely related to the first limitation, problems for the telecommuters are the physical and cultural isolation which creates social, psychological, and organisational problems. Sonnenschein et al., (2022) mentioned that isolation due to remote working resulted in employees experiencing mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression.

3. Poor communications patterns.

Telecommuting results in changing communications patterns and complicates social and task dynamics for the employees. Remote working staff miss informal interactions that occurred in the physical workplace environment and potential problems of electronic communication which includes diminished information from non-verbal cues, ambiguity, and interpreting information from the line managers (Dahlstroom, 2013).

4. Poor management of employee's own schedule and times.

Employees participating in telecommuting work arrangements might procrastinate and postpone work to later which create personal, work and family conflict. Blurred line or

lack of family boundaries between personal and professional life is a serious challenge as there is no geographic division between work, personal and family space. Staff can easily forget the work and fail to meet deadlines, whereas some employees might find it easy to knock off and relax whereas other continue working beyond working hours (Alainati, 2022, Kokt & Chipunza, 2022).

5. Employee distractions and reduced or lack of proper supervision.

Employees can have a scheduled workspace, however being productive during working hours can be a severe challenge due to the unplanned distractions, reduced supervision, and lack of proper direction. Television, laundry, dishes and child minding are some of the distractions created by home surroundings environment (Kokt & Chipunza, 2022).

De Klerk et al (2021) was of the opinion that flexible working arrangements relies heavily on the company culture. Unrealistic expectations and demands for remote workers are a practice that is not supporting employees which can lead to unhealthy practices and tensions in the workplace. Telework working arrangements from an employer perspective can be affected by the norms and practices, for instance what is the duration of working hours that should be considered acceptable and unacceptable that is expected from the employees during working hours.

From employees' perspectives, the implementation and practising of remote working in an organisation can be enhanced due to the benefits such as improved quality of work life, family and personal flexibility, whereas stability and bureaucracy within the organisation is likely to be opposite. The risk of the teleworkers from the employer point of view are poor coordination and loss of control.

Korkeakunnas et al., (2023) posited that depending on how telecommuting is implemented, it can affect individual employee behaviour. For example, some employees

may find it useful to withdraw from organisational matters and interactions with colleagues whereas others may feel obligated to continue with interactions to complete tasks and nature of interactions with other employees (Dahlstroom,2013).

Evolution of telecommuting

The telecommuting concept was developed in 1970s by Jack Niles and comprises a work arrangement in which employees execute their work duties at the place of their residence or other worksites geographically convenient to the residence of the employee (Dahlstroom, 2013, United States Office of Personnel, 2006). Kokt and Chipunza (2022) were of the view that remote working was practised for decades in the United States of America before COVID-19, around 3.9 million workforces were working remotely.

Erasmus (2020) argued that in the 1980s, telecommuting began to gain prominence as a way of cost saving and to reduce traffic congestion as opposed to the traditional office-based workforce. This type of working arrangement played a significant role in assisting employees to manage and balance work and family responsibilities (Kokt & Chipunza, 2022).

Pasini (2024) pointed out that global workplace analytics have indicated that remote working has grown by 216% since 2005. The evolution of telecommuting was influenced by the means of information transfer and development in technology. Throughout the decades, telecommuting working arrangement included the following development.

The early days of telecommuting: the 1800s. As many individuals lack resources such as money and transport to commute to a place of work, working from home was a necessity in those early days (Pasini, 2024). Employees in the sectors such as carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers, saddlers, farmers, and tradespeople viewed working from home as a normal way of life.

The period of workplace revolutions: 1800s – 1950s. This period was dominated by dramatic changes in the workplace models and arrangement due to the industrial revolution.

The emergence of construction sites and factories drew people from their home to work in manufacturing industries (Pasini, 2024). The modern-day computers were developed in the early 1950s through invented microprocessors circuits. The separation of residential areas from commercial and industrial sectors was enacted through zoning laws in the 20th century geographically separating home and work activities.

The period of 1960s: flexitime is born. To alleviate the workforce from commuting and enhancement of employee performance, in 1967 Germany's aerospace manufacturing company introduced flexible work schedule. This gave rise to corporate sectors beginning to experiment with different workplace models for the purpose of productivity and efficiency (Pasini, 2024). Cloud computing, virtual meetings and remote desktop capability was made possible using first working prototype of the internet (Pasini, 2024).

The period of 1970s: The father of telecommuting. The practising of telecommuting work models was influenced by Jack Niles which prompted the United States government to develop and implement a flexible work arrangement policy. Alternative work arrangements were sought by federal government and corporate sectors began to experiment with these modes of working. Jack Niles' workplace models were developed to curb traffic congestions and resource conservation for optimal performance of the business (Pasini,2024).

Entering the New Millennium: the period of 2000s. Remote working models were mainstreamed using third generation social media, mobile devices and streamlining technologies. This made communication seamless and integrated by 2000. In 2001 broadband service for mobile phones was introduced with the sole purpose of enhancing data transfer and connection of more devices through the internet (Pasini, 2024). Remote working locations was further enhanced through the use of software applications such as Skype, Asana, Hootsuite, and Slack.

Embracing the new normal: 2020s. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted multinational corporations to establish that many jobs could be executed entirely remotely without sacrificing productivity. In this era, what bridged the gap between operational efficiency and physical distance was the rapid adaptation to remote work technologies which involves video conferencing and collaborative online tools (Pasini, 2024). To support the workforce and adopting to the new standards and norms in the workplace, companies invested in cybersecurity and digital infrastructure to make remote work a conducive environment.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, telecommuting existed in many organisations, but it was targeted upon a segmented workforce where flexibility, technical and virtual characteristics are known (Arvidsson & Fager, 2021). However, because of COVID-19, the telecommuting working arrangement has become a new normal (Fuji, 2022). Even though not all corporate sectors have adopted this mode of working due to COVID-19, remote working gained prominence globally (Saurombe et al., 2022).

To mitigate the impact of the COVID-19, countries around the globe-imposed lockdown which gave rise to the majority of workforces receiving directives from their employers to stay at home and continue working depending on the nature of their job functions. This resulted in the extensive experimentation of the mass teleworking in history (International Labour Organisation, 2020).

Stages of telecommuting work arrangements

It is significant to note that telecommuting work arrangements need to be flexible; not one size fits all. Depending on the organisational goals and needs, there are various levels of remote work arrangement that organisations can follow (Rangel, 2023). In this section the stages which are applicable to the telecommuting work arrangements will be discussed in detail.

Stage One: Friendly remote working arrangement. The organisations that are in this stage make remote working a recognised option, rather than a norm and culture of the organisation. Occasionally, employees are enabled to work remotely, however most of their job duties and roles are executed within the office space environment. In this stage, the organisation has processes, policies and procedures in place that allow employees to work from home for some days or depending on the nature of employee circumstances (Rangel, 2023).

Stage Two: Enabled remote working. Business operations embraced remote working as the core integral part of the organisations. To support and enable the telecommuting work arrangement, the organisations have tools and infrastructure such as virtual private networks (Rangel, 2023). In this stage, employees enjoy flexibility of working remotely, however there are circumstances in which employees will be expected to report to the office.

Stage Three: Remote first working. At this stage, the organisation adopts remote work arrangement as the mode of operation. The priority of the organisation is to enable employees to perform their duties remotely, followed by designing the business operation (Rangel, 2023). Physical office space is used for corporate events such as business divisions meetings, rather than day-to-day business operations. The core aspects of employee job description are that employees are required to be comfortable with remote work. Tools such as collaboration and communication using technology such as Microsoft Teams, emails, WhatsApp are used extensively within the organisation (Rangel, 2023).

Stage Four: Fully distributed remote working. All employees within the organisation are working remotely, with collaboration and communication tools being an integral part of the business operations (Rangel, 2023). The organisation designed and implemented policies, procedures and processes to support remote working staff, and they

have strong organisational culture for remote working. In this stage, the organisation may face challenges such as lack of team cohesion amongst employees and management and fostering sense of belongingness among remote workers (Rangel, 2023).

Stage Five: Fully fledged remote working. All staff within the organisation are working remotely and there are no office premises for the organisation. This stage is applicable and practised by small businesses and startups which are founded with the remote embedded approach. Accessibility to the pool of talent and reduction in overhead costs implication are the priority of the organisation that are fully fledged in remote working. Lack of team cohesion and disintegrated communication are some of the challenges that the organisation needs to overcome. To mitigate such challenges, the organisation will be required to have a mechanism in place to build concrete company culture and build solid relationships with all staff in the organisation (Rangel, 2023).

Telecommuting around the globe, Africa and South Africa.

In 2020, countries such as Australia, France and the United Kingdom had 47 percent of employees teleworking during lockdowns and in Japan telework increased from 10-20 percent between 2019 and May 2020 (El Hajal, 2022; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021). Sixty percent of employees began to work from home in Finland. In countries such as Denmark, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Ireland, Italy and Australia over 40-50 percent of teleworking was carried out. Korkealunnas et al., (2023) believed that between 2019 and 2022, 50-60 percent of employees in Nordic countries teleworked as compared to European Union which accounts to 37 percent of employees that were telecommuting. Findings in Sweden suggested that two out three employees prefer remote working and one third of employees around the globe would like to adopt telework as a modern work of life.

Teleworking implementation requires well developed technological infrastructure such as emails, screen sharing, work reorganisation and this was the case in Europe in which 24 percent of employees that had never teleworked before began to work remotely (International Labour Organisation, 2020, Mathias & Kumar, 2020).

In Poland remote working arrangements are fairly new and being introduced on significant scale which might provide unique experiences. The findings are yet to be discovered about the ripple and direct impact that the widespread shift to remote working might impose on workers (Kowalski & Slebarska, 2022).

The findings of a study conducted by Durbarry (2020), indicated that the government of the Republic of Mauritius introduced and approved the working from home scheme in the public sector from 2020- 2022 as a pilot programme as the way to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 in the workplace. The study discovered that 68 percent of participants are favourable to adopt work from home as a new mode of working arrangement.

Atiku et al., (2020) argued that in the context of African countries they failed to provide support to employees in the form of information technology to ensure the implementation of flexible work arrangement during COVID-19. Most African countries are facing capacity constraints in the form of communication platforms such as websites, intranet, emails, noticeboards, and audio mechanisms to disseminate information for remote working staff.

Kokt and Chipunza (2022) were of the view that as the world enters a new era of high technology, hybrid and remote working African workforces are required to keep abreast of the latest developments. Unfortunately, due to poor infrastructure development and inequalities, African economies faced barriers of digital adoption and participation. Many African countries have capacity but require technological resources that are efficient, so this makes remote working difficult to be implemented.

In the context of South Africa an average 80 percent of employees reported working remotely which was higher than the United Kingdom and European Union, with average of 71 percent and 61 percent, respectively. The South African corporate world has 53 percent of employees who find it difficult to motivate themselves during telecommuting as compared with 46 percent (www.itweb.co.za, accessed 01/ 06/ 2023).

The study conducted by the Worldwide Worx, South Africa's leading independent technology market research organisation for remote working, indicated improved productivity for only 29 percent of companies (Worldwide Worx for Cisco Systems, 2020).

Summary

This chapter presented the theoretical framework underpinning the study, namely Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. It also covered a comprehensive literature review relevant to the study. The next chapter will discuss research methodology which was applicable to this study.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes study's methodological underpinnings. The matters covered include the aims and objectives of my study, the recruitment and sampling process, the tool used to gather data and why it was pre-tested. I also discuss the data analysis procedure. Further, I will describe the steps I took to enhance the trustworthiness of this study, and the ethical issues I took into consideration when conducting the research.

Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm as it aimed to explore the participants subjective experiences of realities. The assumption of this approach is that through human meaningful interactions, there are multiple realities which can be explored and constructed from the participants (Mbuyisa, 2019, Mphothi, 2020). Dhemba (2022) defined the interpretivist paradigm as the paradigm which holds the view that reality is socially constructed and comprises multiple realities of the subjective world of the researcher and participants. With this paradigm, the researcher seeks to understand and interpret the human experience and life through the eyes of the participants. The paradigm assists researchers to understand and interpret participants' experiences, circumstances and social phenomena they interact within their context (Dhemba, 2022).

As far as the phenomenon of telecommuting is concerned, employees would have different 'realities' due to the varying experiences, knowledge, views, interpretations, meanings and perceptions of participants relating to the telecommuting work arrangement within the entity.

I chose this paradigm, because I intended exploring the unique realities of the different participants', including employees and managers. It provided me with opportunity to obtain a deep insight into the experiences of participants regarding telecommuting.

Research approach

I adopted the qualitative research approach for this study. Fouche (2021) defined the qualitative research approach as the approach which aims to answer questions about the complex phenomena being studied. The primary goal of the qualitative approach is to explore and understand and describe a situation, phenomenon, event or problem through the information gathered from the participants (Fouche, 2021). The meaning individuals or group ascribe to a human or social problem is the focus of attention (Creswell, 2014). Further, Nkosi (2020) and Williams et al., (2021) highlighted that the qualitative approach is to understand and describe human behaviour rather explaining it.

The most distinctive features of qualitative research are as follows: qualitative research is conducted in the natural setting in which the researcher collects data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study. The key instrument in data collection is the researcher in which the researcher collects data themselves interviewing participants and observing their verbal and non-verbal behaviour during the interview (Creswell, 2018).

Rahman (2017) highlighted the following advantages of qualitative research: it produces the thick, detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions, perceptions, experiences and interprets the meanings of their actions and holistically understands the human experiences in specific settings.

Disadvantages of the qualitive research are as follows: it sometimes leaves out contextual sensitivities and focuses more on meanings and experiences. It leads to the complexity of data analysis and interpretation. It is time consuming in terms of data analysis

and the researcher can only generalise the results to the larger population in a limited way (Rahman, 2017

My rationale for selecting the qualitative research approach is that I as the researcher wanted to explore in depth the perceptions of CIPC management and employees about telecommuting work arrangements within the organisation. I wanted to interpret their own concrete, personal real world lived experiences regarding telecommuting before analysing those interpretations (Mphephu,2023).

Research design

I adopted a single case study research design for the purpose of this study. Although I conducted research with participants from two different divisions of CIPC namely Human Capital and Corporate Services divisions, I explored one case or subject (not multiple cases) namely the experiences and perceptions of telecommuting pre- and post- COVID-19.

Schurink et al., (2021) stated qualitative researchers opting for the case study research design want an understanding of the meanings participants give to their real-life experiences. Case study research scientifically investigates a real-life phenomenon in-depth and within its environmental context (Ridder, 2017, para. 1). The interpretivist case study aims to comprehend the larger phenomenon through the analysis of specific case, following an inductive approach focusing to understand the whole (Schurink et al., 2021).

Bolin et al., (2013, p. 2 citing Stake (1995, 2005) contended the case study approach allows for a holistic understanding of a phenomenon within real-life contexts from the perspective of those involved. The advantages of case study research design are that it enables the researcher to capture a slice of reality with concrete, practical and context dependent knowledge within a bounded system, (Schurink et al., 2021).

The bounded system of the “case” were two divisions of service providers in CIPC, namely management and staff members.

Study site

The study focused on the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) in Pretoria Head Office. The CIPC is the Commission which was established in terms of section 185 of the Companies Act 71 of 2008. It is a juristic entity to function as an organ within the public service and administration of national entity of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (Dtic, Companies Act, 71 of 2008). The CIPC had staff composition of 522 and the levels of employees are as follows: Commissioner, Executive Managers, Divisional Managers, Team Managers and Leaders and team members.

Population, sample and sampling procedures

Population can be described as the entire set people or events of concern to the research study from which a sample is drawn (Mitchell, 2014, Williams, 2018). The population of this research project were managers and staff/employees who work under managers of CIPC and had personal experience of telecommuting. The managers in the study are senior managers within the human capital division. These are managers that were key informants of the study as they pose knowledge and expertise in the development and implementation of telecommuting practices in the CIPC. The managers and employees are all participating in the telecommuting work arrangements. The study was only limited to CIPC employees working at CIPC head office in Pretoria (Sunnyside). Employees in service centres such as Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town were excluded from participating in the study since these employees were not participating in telecommuting work arrangements due to nature of their work.

To select the participants of my study, purposive sampling was utilised. Verm et al., (2017, p.300) defined purposive sampling as "… the non-probability technique that involves the conscious selection of certain people by the researcher to include in the research study."

Fifteen participants were purposively selected which were categorised into two groups: Three CIPC Human Capital managers and 12 CIPC employees who worked under management employed in the corporate services based in Tshwane. The rationale for the selection of fifteen participants of this study was that this is relatively a small-scale research study, therefore it was not possible to include all 522 employees as participants of the study. Purposive sampling can be defined as the sampling procedures to select participants which possess certain traits and attributes of the population based on unique purposes (Zandi,2017). The recruited people have unique special knowledge and information to answer the research questions, because they have rich information regarding the phenomena under study (Zandi, 2017, Williams et al., 2021).

Purposive sampling was used in this study to select managers and employees who possess extensive knowledge, expertise and experience on the implementation of telecommuting work arrangements. This sampling allowed me to tap into the participants perceptions and experiences on the implementation of telecommuting in the organisation in the organisation. Human capital managers were purposively selected as they are key informants and have rich information around the development and implementation of telecommuting work arrangements.

The selection criteria which were used for selecting the human capital managers were as follows:

i. Based at CIPC Head Office in Tshwane
ii. Men and women
iii. 30-65 years of age.
iv. At least five years of work experience at CIPC
v. Involved in developing and/ or ensuring the implementation of telecommuting policy within the organisation.

vi. Can communicate in English.

The exclusion criteria were as follows:

i. All Senior Managers in various divisions within the organisation that is based in CIPC Head Office in Tshwane.

The criteria that were used to select the employee participants of the study are as follows:

i. Based at CIPC Head Office in Tshwane.
ii. Men and Women.
iii. Between 18-65 years of age.
iv. Employed in the Corporate Services divisions of CIPC (the rationale for focusing on the corporate services is because this divisions have the highest number of employees that are participating in the telecommuting working arrangement).
v. Can communicate in English

All employees from other divisions not participating in telecommuting work were excluded from the study and based in Tshwane.

Recruitment of potential participants

The Training and Development Unit within the organisation played a significant role in the recruitment of prospective participants by sending the invitation to potential participants. This unit comprises a learning development specialist and learning training coordinator. The unit plays a critical role in fostering employee growth through upskilling and reskilling initiatives with the goal of driving organisational performance. The unit was selected to assist in the recruitment of prospective participants of the study merely because it plays significant role in the aspects of research and development and fosters dynamic culture of learning. All potential participants were invited to participate after receiving a detailed description of the purpose of my research, including what the research procedures would

involve, and they were free to choose to participate in the study (See attached Participant Information Sheet A).

Research instrument and tool

In this study there two interviews guide namely one interview guide for human capital senior management and one interview guide for corporate service employees. The reason for utilising two interview guides as the research instruments was to grasp comprehensive understanding of work arrangement from multiple perspective that possess a unique and diverse experience and perceptions around the implementation of telecommuting work arrangements.

In qualitative research the researcher who gathers data is the instrument (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). The research tool which was used in this study was an interview guide which comprised open-ended questions (See Appendix C). These questions helped steer the semi-structured interviews to focus on information necessary to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. Williams et al., (2021) explained an interview guide as the list of written questions which are thoroughly prepared and pre-tested for use by an interviewer in a research study.

Pre-testing of the research tool

Strydom and Delport (2011) have explained that a pre-test should be carried out in the same way the main study would be conducted. The authors also advise that a pre-test is informal and involves a few participants possessing the same characteristics as the participants of the main investigation to ascertain whether data relevant to the study can be obtained from participants (Strydom & Delport, 2011).

I pre-tested the two interview guides by conducting an interview with a manager of CIPC and one employee of CIPC. Both met the selection criteria of participants in the main study. Prior to pre-testing the interview guides the participants were informed what the pre-

testing of the interview guide is all about, and if they expressed a willingness to participate, I invited them to sign a consent form. During the interviews with both participants, (interviewed separately) it became obvious that they didn't clearly understand some of the questions. For example, they muddled the words "telecommuting" and "telecommunication". I took note of the feedback and made changes where necessary.

Method of data gathering

In this study the method of data gathering was conducting semi-structured interviews with each participant through Microsoft Teams, an online platform. The rationale for conducting semi-structured interviews through Microsoft Team, an online platform was that participants were not available for face-to-face interviews due to telecommuting work arrangements in the organisation. Further, virtual platform interviews through Microsoft Teams are convenient, economical and easily facilitate communication between participants and the researcher (Geyer, 2021).

Data gathering

In order to improve the quality of the study and reduce potential conflict of interest and biases in this study. I undertook the following steps: I adhered to all ethical principles as outlined in this study. Data gathering was done using pseudonyms names of the participants. Through participants information sheet, I informed all participants about the purpose of the study, the benefits and risks for participating in the study and how data will be collected. All participants were informed prior to the commencement of my role as the researcher and that their participation in the study are voluntary and they can withdraw at any stage of the study. Through interview guide, I've avoided asking participants leading questions and withholding personal impressions and only asked the questions as per interview guide and probed if necessary.

I gathered data by conducting semi-structured interviews with each participant virtually through Microsoft Teams and the interviews lasted approximately 20-30 minutes each. According to Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021, para 2) semi-structured interviews are the preferred data collection method when the researcher's goal is to better understand the participant's unique perspective rather than a generalized understanding of a phenomenon. A primary benefit of the semi-structured interview is that it permits interviews to be focused while still giving the researcher the autonomy to explore pertinent ideas that may come up in the course of the interview, which can further enhance understanding of the phenomenon being researched. They also enable the researcher to facilitate the collection of thick and rich descriptions, they provide a detailed exploration of topics from a smaller sample, enable the participants to be actively involved and provide direction to the interview and the researcher can follow up on both non-verbal and verbal communication (Geyer, 2021). They also allow participants to respond freely to questions and provide the researcher flexibility to probe further (Williams et al., 2021).

The limitation of semi-structured interview is they are time consuming for both researcher and the participants (Geyer, 2021). Bless et al., (2006) pointed out participants may introduce biases, and discussing sensitive matters and recording participants' input can be complex.

The advantages of Microsoft teams virtual platform interviews are as follows: they facilitate communications between participants and researcher about sensitive topic, it is convenient and of economic value to conduct research using virtual platforms. The limitations of virtual platforms Microsoft teams are as follows: exclusion of participants that are without access to the internet, due to software packages used, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality may be compromised and due to technical issues, and there is a potential loss of connectivity to occur during the interviews (Geyer, 2021).

I used the interview skills or techniques of probing and active listening. Roller and Lavrakas (2015) described active listening in research as when the researcher express interest in what is being said by the participants and encouraging the participants to communicate freely. During the interview, through active listening I was able to probe the participants to seek greater clarity about the answers the interviewee has already given (Bhuda, 2019). Probing is the communication skill which encompasses a way in which a researcher aims to discover more information about on the initial given answer. The goal of using probing in my study was to encourage participants to express themselves by providing full details of their lived experiences (Mapheto, 2023). Further, probing emphasises the use of non-directive phases to encourage participants to elaborate in an answer already given (Babbie, 2013).

Method of data analysis

Data were collected during virtual platform interviews via Microsoft Teams. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be described as the method utilised to identify themes and patterns, and the researcher contextualises and describes the research findings of the study (Mashiane, 2017).

I conducted the six phases of thematic analysis as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87). The phases are summarised in Table 1 on the following page.

Table 1

Phases of data analysis

Phase	Process
Familiarising myself with my data.	Data collected were organised and prepared for analysis which involved typing of the interviews recordings and carefully reading through the transcriptions
Generating initial codes	I had used different highlighters to connect similar patterns of thought and highlighting key comments (Makhanya, 2021).
Searching for themes	In this phase, I read carefully and reviewed all the data from participants which included picking up ideas of participants and getting a general sense of what participants were saying and reflected on it (Makhanya,2021).
Reviewing themes	Once selecting themes, I reviewed them more than once to make sure that they were indeed pertinent themes.
Defining and naming themes	In this phase, I did plan how themes were going to be organised and presented narratively. I began to include and exclude certain contents and involved in depth discussion, sub-themes, quotations and tables to supplement discussions (Makhanya,2021).
Producing the report	I put pen to paper once I understood the findings of the study, identifying and pointing out lessons learned from data analysis (Makhanya, 2021).

The central role of the researcher in this method of data analysis is to find meaning within the data which are relevant to the research aims and objectives. It entailed organising and describing data in rich detail and interpreting various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the completion of this process, I interpreted data research finding themes and verifying the findings by using the existing literature (Williams,2021).

Trustworthiness of the research report

According to Ahmed (2024), ensuring trustworthiness is significant in establishing the credibility and reliability of qualitative findings, given their subjective nature. In this section the four criteria of the trustworthiness identified by Lincoln and Guba (namely, transferability, dependability, credibility and conformability) relevant to my research will be discussed.

Transferability

Schurink et al., (2017) defined transferability as the way study's findings can be applied to other situations or settings. In qualitative research the term 'transferability' is used instead of 'generalisation'. Due to the small sample size, I was not able to generalise the research finding to other satellites offices in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town. I had no intention to generalise the research findings, since this study used a qualitative research approach. However, by providing a detailed description of the research methods other researchers can perhaps use the same research method when researching the same topic in satellite offices of CIPC.

Dependability

Williams et al., (2021) was of the view that dependability is to determine if the findings would be consistent if the study would be repeated with the same participants or in a similar situation. To achieve dependability of the research report, the following strategies were utilised:

- When conducting my study, I kept an audit trail. An audit trail is a detailed record of the research process that documents the steps taken by the researcher from the initial research question to the final conclusions (Stahl et al., 2020).
- Description of data collection – in this study data were collected using virtual platform interviews via Microsoft Teams and
- Thematic analysis was used as a data analysis method

Dependability deals with stability and consistency of the research findings over the research period. To facilitate the dependability of my study, I did carefully document data gathering techniques and method of data analysis. Data received from the study were shared with my supervisor to verify the dependability of the research findings and interpretations.

Confirmability

Mapheto (2023) indicated that confirmability is the validation that the study findings are linked with the detailed responses of participants and not reflect an imposed the frame of reference of the researcher. In qualitative research, confirmability focuses on the data collected rather than on the researcher. According to Nieuwenhuis (2016, p.125), confirmability is the confirmation that the findings of the study are linked with the detailed responses of participants and not in any way reflect the frame of reference of the researcher. I refrained from using my own judgement and I was aware of my personal feelings and experiences. I focused on obtaining rich information from the participants and ensuring that all their voices are represented and reflected in this study. To enhance conformability, the following was done through reflexivity. Through reflexivity I kept reflexive journal to engage in critical self-reflection about my own experiences, personal background, biases and how they might influence the research outcome (Creswell, 2018).

When truth value and applicability are achieved, confirmability of the study is confirmed. I also used flexibility throughout the study, and I kept a field journal of my behaviour and experiences by writing down my observations during the interview as field notes (Mbovane et, al, 2007). Lorelli (2019) stated that the key aspect of confirmability is to focus on establishing researcher's interpretations and findings from data which requires details on how conclusions and interpretations had been reached and to ensure that the voices of the participants are represented (Lorelli et al., 2017, Williams, 2021). Finally, to achieve confirmability of the study, the theoretical framework, research methodology and method of data analysis are comprehensively discussed in this report.

Credibility

Credibility establishes how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings based on the research design, participants, key informants and context (Mbovane et, al 2007).

In qualitative research truth value is obtained from the discovery of human experiences as they live and experienced by the informants. Credibility was achieved in the following ways.

- Peer examination - I was assisted by my supervisor to ensure high standard of research is maintained throughout the research. My supervisor assisted by reviewing my research report, ask questions and make inputs to provide objective assessment of the entire research question.
- Reflexivity- to reflect on my own behaviour and experience, I used field journal. For example, I reflected that I needed to stop myself from interrupting participants during their communication in order to provide enriching information about the issue we were focusing on. I thought about how my experience as an occupational social worker was influencing my interpretation of data and also my limited knowledge regarding telecommuting work arrangements.
- Member checking - throughout the research study, I continuously checked the information gathered with the informants to confirm it and I conducted a literature review to link the findings with the previous research and used the audio recordings to capture the verbatim comments of the participants.

Credibility serves the sole purpose of ensuring that the study was conducted with the participants which were correctly verified and described (Schurink, et al., 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the commencement of my study, I had received a formal permission letter from CIPC Commissioner, Advocate Rory Voller, to conduct my study. I also received an ethical clearance from Social Work Department HREC (non-medical). The Protocol Number is SW23/07/04.

When conducting research I took into consideration various research ethical issues. Ethical considerations are explained as conforming to a standard of given profession. Anyone

involved in social research needs to be aware of the general agreements shared by the researcher about what is proper and improper in the conduct of scientific inquiry (Babbie, p, 64). The following ethical principles were adhered to during the research project.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Researchers are mandated by the Protection of Personal Information Act No. 4 of 2013 to promote and protect people's right to privacy (Republic of South Africa, 2013). In my study, only my research supervisor and I had access to the data collected.

Based on Laryeafio's and Ogbewe's guidelines to uphold participants' rights to privacy and confidentiality, I ensured that any information collected from the participants remained private and confidential; thus, ensuring that no third party had access to the raw data. Privacy and confidentiality were achieved in the following manner: each participant participated in the study through their own Microsoft team link and the interview was conducted at the time convenient for the participants. I never disclosed the identity of the participants to anyone. Further in this research report, there is no identifiable records and personal information which can be traced back to the participants by the reader of the report and finally, I've used pseudonym names instead of the real names of the participants. When conducting interviews online I ensured that no-one could hear my discussions. The completed transcripts were kept on my password protected computer. The signed Consent Forms were kept in a locked cabinet.

Anonymity

Although anonymity cannot be ensured during the data gathering process because I knew the identifying particulars of all of the participants, I was able to guarantee their anonymity when I submitted my final research report because I used pseudonyms that could not be traced to a specific participant. Anonymity could also be guaranteed during any conference presentations and publications of journal articles.

Protection of participants from harm

Babbie (2021) maintained that participants are susceptible to exposure to psychological harm when social research is undertaken, therefore, suggested that researchers should look for the most minimal risks and devise ways to mitigate them. In my study participants were exposed to minimal risk. However, I pointed out that if at any stage they felt a question was too sensitive they need not answer the question I asked them. They could also withdraw from participation in the study without any negative repercussions. If they expressed a need for counselling or psychosocial support, I explained that they could contact the Employee Wellness office through contracted employee assistance programme service provider Lyra Wellbeing: 0800 222 612. Of course, no fees would be charged. Fortunately, the need for wellness services did not arise during the research process.

Informed consent and voluntary participation

After obtaining written approval from the Commissioner of CIPC to conduct the research, and ethical clearance from the Social Work Department's HREC (non-medical), I obtained permission to use the training unit to share the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) with potential participants. Prior to the beginning of the interview, the participants were given details regarding the purpose of the research and what participating in the study entailed. Participants who were willing participate in the study, met selection criteria and were willing to have their interview audio-recorded were requested to contact me as specified on the PIS.

Before each interview I asked each participant if they fully understood the PIS and what they could be consenting to. If they were still willing to participate in my research, I reminded them that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

Summary

In summation, this study employed a qualitative research approach, and an intrinsic

case study research design was applied to understand the intricacies of the phenomenon. Non-probability, purposive sampling was applied to this study during the recruitment stage. The sample consisted of 15 participants, namely three managers and 12 employees who met selection criteria. Data were collected online via Microsoft Teams using interview guides designed for each category of participants. The interview guides were pre-tested. I outlined ethical principles I took into consideration when conducting the research and what I did to improve the trustworthiness of the study. Furthermore, the data collected was thematically analysed. The following chapter will focus on the presentation and discussion of the research findings.

Chapter 4

Presentation and Discussion of Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of the research study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of employees and management of a state entity in Tshwane namely Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC), regarding the implementation of telecommuting work arrangements during and after the COVID-19.

In this chapter, I present my empirical findings based on a thematic analysis of data gathered. They align with my study's objectives. I also engage in a critical discussion related to research findings.

In the first section of this chapter, I present and discuss my findings regarding the first category of participants, namely 12 CIPC employees working in the corporate division. Thereafter, I present and discuss findings related to the second category of participants, namely three managers of CIPC.

The profile of employee research participants

The participants of this study were 12 participants from corporate services division within CIPC who met the criteria for inclusion were interviewed. The profile of the participants are presented in Table 2 on the following page.

Table 2

Profile of Corporate Services employees (N=12)

Demographic profile	Sub-category	No of participants
Number of years in telecommuting	2-3 years	8
	4 years	4
Gender	Men	7
	Women	5
Age:	18-40 years	6
	41- 60 years	6
Position:	Divisional Assistant	2
	Call Centre Agent	2
	Facility Management Officer	1
	Employee Relations	2
	E-Communication Manager	1
	Team Leader	2
	Team Manager	1
	Internal Auditor	1

As per table above, of the 12 corporate service employees who participated in the study seven were men and six were women. In terms of CIPC population, women are the majority employees with the total of 303 and men stand at 193 in the current financial year 2024/2024 (CIPC Annual Reports, 2023/ 2024). It was good to get an almost even number of both sexes participate in the study.

Eight participants possessed three-four years telecommuting experience, whereas four participants had four years telecommuting experience. Most of the participants held various position within the organisation which included Divisional Assistant, Call Centre Agent, Employee Relations Practitioner and Team Leaders.

Presentation of themes

The following themes emerged based on thematic data analysis. In total seven themes were identified, each with their own set of sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes related to the research objectives regarding employee participants are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes and sub-themes based on data analysis of employee participants

Themes	**Sub-themes.**
Theme 1. Employees require more training.	1.1. No telecommuting experience prior to the introduction of telecommuting 1.2. Most employees did not receive the necessary training.
Theme 2. CIPC had valid reasons for implementing telecommuting work	2.1. CIPC was legally bound to introduce telecommuting 2.2. Safeguarding the lives of employees was the main reason 2.3. Telecommuting was introduced to ensure continuity and operational efficiency. 2.4. Practising telecommuting depends on the nature of the work 2.5 Telecommuting was formalised through a policy framework and considered a new mode of working
Theme 3 The manner in which telecommuting was introduced at the organisation	3.1.e-Communication platforms 3.2. Consultation with stakeholders 3.3. Human Resources Management formalised the practice 3.4. Divisional Team Meetings
Theme 4 Challenges experienced when practicing telecommuting during COVID-19	4.1. ICT Challenges. 4.2. Poor productivity 4.3. Blurred family and work boundaries 4.4. Feelings of isolation. 4.5. Lack of trust between staff and line managers 4.6. Employees lacked training regarding Information Communication Technology
Theme 5: Challenges being experienced after COVID-19	5.1. Resource constraints at home 5.2. Lack of self-discipline 5.3. Micromanagement 5.4. Cybersecurity 5.5. Lack of team collaboration and cohesion
Theme 6: Telecommuting should be continued because it holds many benefits	6.1. Telecommuting working arrangements can lead to better productivity 6.2. Capable ICT systems 6.3. Flexible working hours leads to improved work-life balance.
Theme 7: Matters needing to be addressed to improve the implementation and practise of telecommuting	7.1. Upskill staff 7.2. Upgrade telecommuting resources 7.3. Continuous engagement of staff through extramural activities 7.4. Compliance and uniform application of telecommuting work arrangements 7.5 Focus on staff well-being

Theme 1: Employees require more training

One of the matters I explored when interviewing the participants was whether they had received training regarding telecommuting before, during and/or after the Covid-19 pandemic. Data analysis indicated that most participants were of the opinion that they require more training. This theme can be divided into two sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: No telecommuting experience prior to the introduction of telecommuting

Since the introduction of telecommuting work arrangements in the CIPC in July 2020, the majority of the participants highlighted that they had never had any training experience around telecommuting mode of working. For example, Hlamalani stated: "It was my first time to work from home in July 2020. I never had any experience about this mode of work arrangements." It is doubtful that many employees in any company received training before COVID-19 because the pandemic 'hit' the world so quickly that many companies didn't have time to do proper training.

Sub-theme 2: Most employees still have not received training regarding telecommuting

Since the inception of telecommuting working arrangements in the CIPC, four participants indicated that they receive training through a workshop about this mode of working. However, eight participants indicated that they never received any training around this mode of work. The responses from the participants indicated that employees still require proper training around this mode of work.

Due to the lack of training around how telecommuting work arrangement works, employees at the organisation felt frustrated and less empowered to function optimally in telecommuting work environments. Howard: I never received training for proper navigation of information technology, which is the key for telecommuting environment, we were just left alone to deal with technical glitches and expected to perform our normal business operations.

Since some employees struggled to utilise e-signature, schedule online meetings and proper time management. Corporate organisation such as National Institute of Health conducted various training to telecommuting employees. These training included technical and soft skills such as communication skills (both verbal and non-verbal), time management, cybersecurity, data management and Microsoft training skills to ensure that their workforce are well equipped (Munyeka, 2023, National Institute of Health, 2024). In order to ensure operational efficiency and business continuity, telecommuters rely on their information technology equipment to maintain communication with the organisation. These employees received minimal or no training to management information technology equipment. Employees in a telecommuting environment are expected to deal with minor technical glitches and troubleshooting with information technology equipment which decrease their productivity and operational efficiency. To enhance productivity and operational efficiency, a technical and soft skill around information technology for telecommuting it is a prerequisite training (Okoli, 2016).

Theme 2 CIPC had valid reasons for introducing telecommuting work

Most employee participants were of the opinion that CIPC had cogent reasons for introducing telecommuting. Their perspectives are captured in the following two sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: CIPC was legally bound to introduce telecommuting

Participants were of the view that telecommuting mode of working within CIPC was introduced as the results of international and government regulations and proactive measures against the COVID-19 pandemic.

> There was government and international regulations about social distance restricting the travelling of people inside and outside of the country. Therefore, CIPC have limited office space which becomes so difficult to adhere to this regulation especially socially distancing. (Tiyani)

The views of the participants are consistent with Zoellner's and Sulikova's (2021) findings because participants in their study also understood why companies had telecommuting because of and enforced governmental corona regulations to mitigate the spread of the virus.

Sub-theme 2 Safeguarding the lives of employees was the main reason

This sub-theme is closely related to the above sub-theme in the sense that participants realised that the sole purpose of government legislation was to protect the lives of human beings. For instance, Hilda emphasised: "The sole purpose of introducing telecommuting within the organisation was to save life". Simeli (2023) reinforced the fact that telecommuting was introduced to save lives of employees and cost reduction to office expenditures by the employer.

Sub-theme 3: Telecommuting was introduced to ensure business continuity and operational efficiency

From some participants' perspective, the introduction of telecommuting was valid to ensure business continuity and operational efficiency. This point of view was well-expressed be Tiyani:

> Yes, it was valid as the work have to continue within the organisation and other things. We are the regulator of a business industries which relies on us in terms of their operations and the organizations was mandated to issue compliance certificate to the business which permit them to operate during the different levels of lockdown. Also, to ensure business continuity and prioritizing the health, safety and wellbeing of employees.

The participants views are supported by the research conducted Fujii (2020) which argued that the resurgence of COVID-19 from September to May 2024 resulted in many employers adopting new mode of working to ensure business continuity.

Sub-theme 4 Practising telecommuting depends on the nature of the work

Some participants pointed out that telecommuting is only valid for some types of jobs. Howard expressed this point of view well:

> It is a valid method of working, but it depends on what one does because some other people have their work which are strictly bound in the physical space, however for those employees, I don't think it would make sense to work, but for others it makes a perfect sense.

Mavukani (2017) pointed out that frontline occupation in sectors such as banking and retailers, could not participate in telecommuting work arrangement. Whereas in the same sector, employees working in Call Centre within banking and retailing sectors could easily participate in telecommuting work arrangement. Jaafar and Rahim (2022) found that employees in public service such as law enforcement personnel could participate in telecommuting, whereas other segments of employees in public sectors such as information technology, call centre, virtual assistant agent, policy makers and other occupations that are administrative in nature could participate in telecommuting work arrangements.

Sub-theme 5 Telecommuting was formalised through a policy framework and considered a new mode of working.

Concerning the validity of CIPC introducing telecommuting, most participants were of the opinion that inception of telecommuting at CIPC was valid because it was formalised by the policy framework which was developed by the organisation. The policy provided business continuity and operational efficiency, and it was regarded as the new mode of working.

> Yes, it is valid, because it was formalized through the policy framework in which employers participating in telecommuting work arrangement were expected to sign the agreement. Also, with the access of the resources such as internet and laptop telecommuting are the new mode of working (Richard).

Due to the impact of COVID-19 in all spheres of life, the corporate sector was also affected and resulted in impact on organisational work arrangements such as developing policy framework which will allow employees to telecommute (Iwu et, al,2022). Arvidsson and Fager (2021) pointed out that telecommuting gained prominence among organisations with several organisations adopting this type of working as a new mode of working for the future.

In a study conducted by Bjursell et al., (2021) it is pointed out that corporate sector around the globe began to normalise this new mode of working through the development of policy frameworks in line with an existing policy. In United Kingdom, majority of employees started to work from home in April 2020, in order to comply with international regulations of social distancing and restricted travel (Brooks, 2022).

COVID-19 resulted in travel restrictions as the proactive measures to saves lives, therefore employers were compelled to adjust and comply with these restrictions to allow employees to work from home to ensure business continuity and operational efficiency (Jafaar & Rahim,2022).

Theme 3 The manner in which telecommuting was introduced at the organisation

This theme reflects the responses of participants when I probed how the telecommuting mode of working was introduced at the organisation. This theme is broken into four sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: e-communication platform

Three participants explained that telecommuting was introduced through an e-communication platform, namely emails were sent to all employees in the organisation. Below are the participants responses: For example, Jemina pointed out “This mode of working arrangement was introduced through e-communication platforms e.g. email detailing the steps which were required for people to work from home”.

This finding is in line with a study conducted by Simeli et al., (2023). These researchers also established that during the year 2020, employers were faced with difficult milestone in which digital transformation was used as the tool to disseminate the information in the organisation to ensure business continuity.

Sub-theme 2 Consultation with stakeholders

One participant commented telecommuting was introduced through consultation with stakeholders, for example, unions. According to Donald, "There was a lot of communication in that regard. It was a new way of working and it must go through consultation with stakeholders, which includes unions."

In a study conducted by Rammila (2023), he attested that organisation needed to consult with key stakeholders such as unions for the purpose of introducing telecommuting. This is because unions play a pivotal role in ensuring that the voice of employees are heard in the workplace.

Sub-theme 3: Human resources management formalised the practice

Tiyani pointed out how telecommuting became formalised through the Human Resource Management section of CIPC.

> Initially working from home was started as an arrangement based on the division on a rotation basis. Around August 2020, the organisation conducted a survey to check on how employees feel about telecommuting and the organisation receive positive feedback about employee working from home rather than working in the office. By the end of 2020, CIPC, through HR formalises the telecommuting policy which all employees were mandated to choose whether coming to the office for some days or working from home every day" (Tiyani).

Sub-theme 4: Divisional Team Meetings

Some participants mentioned that regular divisional meetings were held to introduce the telecommuting mode of working. The divisional meetings are usually held weekly or monthly. According to Mikateko:

> After lockdown, we had meeting and, in those meetings, telecommuting work arrangement was introduced and frequently Teams meetings providing guidance on how the process should unfold. So, the preparation was done well in advance, we were ready and understood what was expected of us.

Multiple channels were significant to ensure that information about telecommuting work arrangement reach all levels of staff.

Participants mentioned that the challenges included e-communication platforms (e.g. internal communique), through consultation with stakeholders (e.g. unions and staff), human resources management division and divisional meetings.

Theme 4 Challenges experienced employees practicing telecommuting during COVID-19.

The theme reflects patterns emerging regarding employees' experiences of telecommuting during COVID-19. It is divided into five sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: ICT challenges

Jita and Munje (2022) attested that ICT is the prerequisite tools of trade in the telecommuting work environment. The lack of ICT infrastructure associated with loadshedding and lack of adequate resources negatively hinder employee performance and productivity. The ongoing recurrence of loadshedding across South Africa extends beyond other factors such as impact on unstable internet connectivity and network.

ICT challenges was one of the experiences which was faced by majority of employees doing telecommuting. The system challenges emanated from the fact that employees struggled to login and connect virtual impacting business operations and stakeholders, such as customers. In Jemina's opinion: "Participating in the telecommuting during COVID-19 was exciting and frustrating at the same time due to poor connectivity and network issues. When you are tired of contacting ICT for technical support, they take time to respond to the queries"

Similarly, Richard pointed out: In the inception of this type of working arrangement, challenges include migrating from face-to-face meeting to virtual platforms which was problematic. Further connectivity was the serious issues during that time.

The nature of Donald's work responsibilities exacerbated the challenges he experienced:

> Given the nature of my work, I would say that it very challenging conducting disciplinary hearing via virtual, it becomes problematic as the cases take time to finalise. Loadshedding also poses a serious threat on my work during COVID-19. Meetings had to be postponed because people that forms part of the meeting cannot login online to attend meeting which also include delay in starting with meetings"

In a study conducted by Miller (2016) it was established that Herzberg's two factor theory was applicable in the implementation of telecommuting work arrangements. ICT predicament faced by telecommuters had a direct impact on employee reward system and job security in the organisation. Inadequate resources e.g. laptops and loadshedding hinder employee productivity and performance. In terms of reward system loadshedding and lack of resources meant employees had negative performance reviews, resulting in lack of employee reward. Negative employee performance reviews meant employees had a higher chance of diminishing the chances of promotion.

Job security is another phenomenon faced by the telecommuting employees. A decrease in employee productivity affects company profit or earnings resulting in job losses for the employees (Ngamkroectjoti et al., 2021).

Sub-theme 2: Poor productivity.

Employees poor productivity during telecommuting can be attributed to various factors such as loadshedding, connectivity issues and employees facing distractions in the home office environment (Karle, 2023, Suchen & Olanrewaju, 2021).

Participants mentioned that their experience of telecommuting during COVID -19 was poor productivity. Queen stated: "… it was not working smoothly because the type of work that I do requires me to be in the office since I work with physical files which is the paper-based environment. Tiyani clearly voiced her opinion:

> During COVID-19 it was difficult to conduct webinars as part of my duties, I must arrange information sessions. However, most stakeholders, including our customers, were not used to online webinars, they only had physical contact which was taking place at the hotel or community hall. Mostly employees were not used to conducting information session via ZOOM and Microsoft Teams. One of the challenges is that we experienced poor attendance in our webinars and customers citing poor connectivity and lack of data.

The findings above are supported by Thorstensson (2020) who was of the view employee productivity during telecommuting mode of working was affected by technical glitches which many organisations were unable to resolve remotely, resulting in loss time, thereby affecting productivity.

Sub-theme 3: Blurred family and work boundaries.

There are several factors which contribute to blurred family and work boundaries for telecommuting employees. These factors include the family distractions, regular employees' connectivity, poor workspace ergonomics and workload (Kent & Delbosc, 2024).

One employee offered a different perspective in the sense that she indicated that blurred family and work boundaries was one of the experiences of practicing telecommuting during COVID-19. Mahlori explained her sentiment:

> I would say that I was one of the fortunate people that I was not infected by COVID-19. However, I was indirectly affected, because my parents were ill, and I have to take care of them. Telecommuting allows me to take care of my sick parents; while continuing with my work, I was able to do more work at home as compared to the office work arrangement, because in the office we have an open plan space which results in

> us having to spend much time interacting with colleagues. The experience is that it is difficult to draw boundaries between work and family arrangements.

A study conducted by Alainati (2022) supported the views expressed by Mahlori in which teleworking employees experienced crises such as family responsibility which included childcare and household chores which disrupted work life balance which could have affected productivity in an organisational level.

Sub-theme 4 Feelings of isolation

Telecommuting posits its own challenges for telecommuters. Employees working from home have sense of feelings of isolation in various ways. Telecommuting perceives themselves as being excluded from regular communication, due to reduced face to face interaction. Home office environment results in the lack of sense of belongingness and company culture resulting in employees feeling of isolation (Spilker and Breaugh, 2021). Hlamalani highlighted that isolation was one of her experiences while telecommuting during COVID-19: “COVID-19 it was very tough times as I didn’t have the experience of working from home which resulted with being isolated which resulted in the lack of interaction and the only interaction was computer” He also shared that he experienced depression, stress and anxiety as a result. Livingstone also expressed concerns about “Mental health of employees due to staff feeling isolated and disengaged.” Similarly, Vongani mentioned: “Staff struggling with loneliness and mental issues e.g. stress and anxiety.”

Kaluza and Van Dick (2022) attested to the explanation expressed by Hlamalani and Livingstone about isolation as the result of telecommuting. Kaluza and Van Dick (2022) found that employees working from home experienced isolation due to lack of face-to-face interaction with line managers, colleagues and the organisation.

Sub-theme 5 Lack of trust between staff and line managers.

Telecommuters faced several challenges which included lack of trust between employees and their line managers. There are several factors that can be attributed to the lack

of trust between staff and line managers. It includes factors such poor management style which includes micromanagement, lack of openness and transparency, technology issues, lack of defined expectations and boundaries (Schail, 2019).

A negative issue that Mikateko raised about telecommuting was it resulted in a lack of trust between herself and the line manager. She mentioned that her line manager failed to believe her which resulted in her manager view that she was reluctant to work.

> It was a tense moment, because it was the first time I do telecommute and there are a lot of issues which trust between employee and line manager, system glitches in which all manager is not fully aware of what was happening which led to the manager believes that the employees are reluctant to work. So, it was the process where we needed to build a lot of trust and from me as an employee, it was the process we needed to prove to myself that I am honest, and I can work with integrity even without my manager supervision.

Similarly, Iwu et, al (2022) argued that one of the operational challenges which emanated from teleworking arrangements is the lack of trust between managers and staff.

Sub-theme 6 Employees lacked training regarding Information Communication Technology (ICT)

The number of telecommuting increased exponentially in the early 2020s of the pandemics. Due to such increase telecommuting were faced with upheaval due to the lack of technical expertise and proper training in the use of ICT systems and collaborative tools which were a prerequisite for telecommuting (Wahl et, al 2023).

Although one employee, Donald, experienced ICT as a simple, effective modus operandi, it became obvious that a few employees did not feel competent managing new technology. For example, according to Elvis: “The use of new technology can also be challenging to adopt and receiving training for new technology can be challenging and prove to be difficult.” Similarly, Tiyani mentioned: “Reliance on new technology, lack of knowledge and skills utilising technology such as Microsoft Teams.” Also, Mahlori pointed

out: “Softphone which was recently adopted in the organisation is not user-friendly, I usually make consultation with my own phone Microsoft Teams”

It became apparent to me that the telecommuting challenges faced by employees during COVID-19 were mainly hygiene factors that contributed dissatisfaction to telecommuting employees. For example, the ICT factors, the blurred family-work conditions and lack of trust between managers and employees, and feelings of isolation negatively impacted on job satisfaction. There was also a lack of a motivating factor, namely personal growth because training on telecommuting was not implemented.

Theme 5: Telecommuting challenges experienced after COVID-19

Although employees generally felt that telecommuting should continue to form part of work policy, they expressed that they still face challenges. Four sub-themes underpin this theme.

Sub-theme 1: Resource constraints at home

Pensar & Rousi (2023) argued that employees working from home are faced with resource constraints. In a traditional office environment not, all employees had access to laptop and mobile devices. Employees were allowed to participate in telecommuting without laptop, printing facilities and mobile devices at home. Further, network connectivity in the home office environment was problematic to the telecommuting.

Employees reported a challenge experienced when telecommuting from home is the lack of adequate resources such as poor ergonomics at home, scanners, printers, poor computer hardware and softphone issues which is not functioning properly. For example, “The current computer we are using is very slow” (Mikateko). “Resources are limited at home and lack of proper ergonomics at home” (Mahlori).

Sub-theme 2: Lack of self-discipline.

Poor relationships between employees and line managers, lack of clear guidelines and expectation, and inadequate communication in the form of performance feedback, contributes to the lack of employee self-discipline (Larson et al., 2020).

Some employees reasoned that if one lacks self-discipline, one fails to meet their daily target or deliverables. In this regard Livingstone noted: “Lack of discipline from staff resulting in staff not meeting or achieving their deliverables.” Along this line of thought Mahlori stated: *“*People absconding from their work responsibility.”

Lack of staff discipline have potential impact on both organisational and employee performance. Lack of staff discipline results in decreased employee productivity, compromised poor quality of work and deliverables and procrastination leading to missed opportunities for professional growth (Olanyika,2024).

Sub-theme 3 Micromanagement.

Micromanagement entails the style of management characterised by excessive employee monitoring and supervision and lack of trust and autonomy over employee’s work, hindering employee autonomy and poor productivity (Caise & Tucker, 2024).

Donald felt that micromanagement is a serious challenge during telecommuting because line managers fail to comprehend that employees are mature adults.
*“*Micromanagement is the problem during telecommuting, line managers failing to understand that we are adults”

In telecommuting work arrangements, the micromanagement of employees contributes to a negative workplace environment. This negative workplace consequences include poor employee morale and wellbeing, less productivity, higher staff turnover rates, less creativity and poor job satisfaction (Caise & Tucker, 2024).

Sub-theme 4 Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity can be described as ways in organisations protect information technology infrastructure, systems, hardware, network and corporate data from digital attacks. In the telecommuting environment, employees face various threats from cybersecurity attacks which included identity theft, phishing, malware and ransomware (CISCO, 2025). Donald explained "Cybersecurity risks which may result in compromising the entire systems of the organisation"

Sub-theme 5 Lack of team collaboration and cohesion.

Lack of team collaboration and cohesion are also challenges telecommuting employees face, which results in poor teamwork and culture.

Quotes from some participants highlight this matter:

"Poor teamwork and collaboration" (Hilda).

*"*Teamwork and cooperation usually take time" (Queen).

"Isolation and disengagement from colleagues, business / divisions and organisation" (Hlamalani).

Challenges cited by the participants for telecommuting employees are supported by various authors. For example, Gary and Van Der Rijst (2015) confirmed that telecommuting employees experience professional isolation due to lack of interaction with colleagues, teams and entire organisation. Durbarry (2022) indicated that lack of equipment such as desktops, laptops or internet connectivity have serious consequences. El Hajal (2022) highlighted those challenges experienced by telecommuters includes higher ergonomics risk due extended availability, increased workload resulting in poor work life, family conflict and pose serious mental health issues such as stress, depression and isolation.

Once again, the challenges being experienced by employees at the time I gathered research data (post-COVID 19) were hygiene factors. Employees expressed that they lacked

some good technical resources for telecommuting. Interestingly, they recognised if employees did not exercise self-mastery, they would fail to meet their work responsibilities. Also, it appeared that there is still a lack of trust between their supervisors (online managers) and themselves. This could be recognised as a poor motivator because it did not provide an opportunity for employees to be recognised as being experienced enough to work independently.

Theme 6 Telecommuting should be continued because it holds many benefits

As indicated above, during COVID-19 employees experienced challenges when telecommuting. On the other hand, evidence suggests that post-COVID-19 experiences of telecommuting is viewed in a positive light and participants are of the point of view that it should be continued. Four sub-themes are relevant.

Sub-theme 1. Telecommuting can lead to better productivity

One of the benefits identified is telecommuting saves a lot of time. For example, Mikateko expressed: "I'm very happy and it is the good experience, and it comes with a lot of benefits such as time savings as I don't have to travel to the office. Likewise, Sonnenschein, et al., (2022) established that less travelling leads to increased productivity.

Tiyani stressed telecommuting enables her to execute her duties through virtual platforms*:* "Telecommuting work arrangement is fine, because I am currently doing my work engagement with the internal and external stakeholders, using email, for the meeting I can utilize Microsoft Teams using my phone." Further, Elvis expressed: *"*Yes, it must be continued as the new way of working, further it gives more flexibility in terms of the working environment."

Queen mentioned that telecommuting must continue in the organisation, because of little disruption when working from home as compared to office environment: *"*Yes, it should

"I am able to do more work while working at home than in the office, because when working from home, there is little interaction or disruption."

Mikateko held the same view: *"*Yes, 100% I think it should be continued, because productivity has reached higher levels as compared to the office environment." Jemina stressed: "It allows me to multitask, I am more productive when I am working at home my view it must be continued, and the performance and productivity have increased**."**

Richard reiterated this sentiment: *"*... it must be continued, since it is convenient and we travel less time, information is being shared through digital platforms, and one is able to work extended hours."

From the employees' perspectives results in less commuting time from their home to the office environment. Hlamalani drew attention to this fact: "I am saving in travelling time and expenditure, whereas employer saves in rental of office space and utilities such as water and electricity (Hlamalani). The reduced commuting time from home to the office environment, leads to the higher productivity of employees.

Participants also mentioned that telecommuting work arrangements results in the reduction in the office expenditure. This type of expenditure includes leasing of the office premises such as accommodation, parking space and other office utilities and consumables such as computer, printing and internet bills, office furniture.

Herzberg's two factor theory reduction in commuting time from the employee's perspective, results in job satisfaction and higher productivity of the employees which serve as the intrinsic motivation for the employees to do more (Shaanika, 2023). Knight and Wesbrook (1999) were of the view that organisational policy which allows staff to work from home provides some sense of accomplishment from the employer's perspective. At the same time organisational policy contributes to both intrinsic and extrinsic factor, therefore as the result of telecommuting policy within the organisation. Approximately 17 years ago, Green (2009)

identified that as the result of telecommuting policy in the organisation, employees working condition are improved leading to increased performance and productivity by the employees.

My findings basically reinforce other research findings. Poetker (2021) argued that multiple recent studies that remote workers work longer and are more productive as opposed to employee in traditional office settings. Saurombe et al., (2022) established that employees working remotely reported job satisfaction and good employee morale, since employees feel free to their work, thus contributing to increased productivity. The study conducted by Curtis et al., (2024) also established telecommuting saves times. The study also concluded that for certain employees flexible work arrangements alleviates structural barriers contributing to increased productivity.

In terms of Hertzberg's two factor theory, increased productivity could be classified as a motivator factor because the employees probably received a sense of achievement by meeting their work responsibilities.

Sub-theme 2: Capable ICT systems

Donald stated that telecommuting must be continued because the organisation has a capable ICT system to provide support for employees participating in this mode of working arrangement.

> The experience of telecommuting is exceptionally good, and I believe that it must be continued, because in my experience I believe we have very good and capable IT system and very dynamics team that are able to help us and the organisation recently given us ups as the proactive ways to mitigate the impact of loadshedding*"*.

Sub-theme 3: Flexible working hours leads to an improved work-life balance

Participants were of the opinion that another benefit of telecommuting is flexible working schedule. The flexible work arrangement allows employees to attend to both professional and family matters at the same without a need to take sick and annual leave.

They can perform work responsibilities, while at the same time attending to personal matters such as taking children to school, clinics or do house chores. For example, Mahlori stated: “I am able to take my children to school every day in the morning, this resulted in my ability to manage my work and family responsibilities, it must continue as for myself I am able to do more work.”

In contextualising the above benefits to Herzberg two factor theory to the benefits of telecommuting. Flexible work schedules results in the balance between employees working hours and personal time, thus leading to enhanced employee organisational commitment and reduction in employee turnover. Flexible working schedule for telecommuting serve to deter employee’s dissatisfaction as the extrinsic factors (Yusoff et al, 2013).

Tustin (2014) found that flexible work schedules enable telecommuting employees to get to work at home office environment resulting in the overall quality of life and employee wellbeing. Employees have autonomy in their job due to flexible work schedules which allow them to plan for work and family commitment such as attending personal needs (Thorstensson et, al 2020). Spilker (2014) argued that job autonomy due to flexible work schedules improved employee morale leading to enhance employee satisfaction and performance. Further it leads to employee’s commitment and retention within the organisation.

Findings align to Erasmus (2022) study findings in which the benefit of telecommuting included flexible work schedules which creates an opportunity to work remotely and to accommodate the needs of all family members who may be well established in terms of employment, schooling and other responsibilities. Poetker (2021) argued that multiple recent studies that remote workers work longer and are more productive as opposed to employee in traditional office settings. Findings in Saurombe et al., (2022) study related to telecommuting is that people working remotely reported much job satisfaction and good

employee morale, since employees feel free to their work, thus contributing to increased productivity.

Theme 7: Matters that need to be addressed to improve the implementation and practicing of telecommuting

When analysing data concerning how telecommuting work arrangements could be improved, many participants shared interesting points. Five sub-themes capture this theme.

Sub-theme 1 Upskill staff

A number of participants emphasised that employees should be provided with training and development opportunities to enhance their existing skills and knowledge. This would enable them to better perform their current roles and responsibilities at CIPC. The following participants emphasised this point:

- "Upskilling of the current workforce to meet the future needs of the organisation, to use and adapt to the use of new technology" (Elvis).
- "Provide regular training to staff about new methods of working" (Richard).
- "Regular training must be conducted on how employees use evolving technology such as Microsoft Teams and how to sign documents electronically" (Queen).
- "The employer needs to conduct workshop or training in all the issues that have negative impact of telecommuting work arrangement such as employees failing to meet their target or deliverables."
- "… the organisation can use various initiatives to ensure that they are implementing the human resources policies such as upskilling managers around managing staff around telecommuting." (Donald)

Building capacity or upskilling of staff in the use of technology such as how to conduct online meetings webinars and video conferencing is critical for telecommuting employees (Nkate, 2020). Telecommuting requires that staff be upskilled in order to adapt to

new ways of working through innovative technologies. The upskilling of employees can cover wide range of areas such as cybersecurity protection and also soft and technical skills that are critical in telecommuting (Bjursell, 2021).

Sub-theme 2 Upgrade telecommuting resource allocation

Employee participants stressed that there is a need for the proper resource allocation in the form of laptops because this would greatly assist the implementation and practising of telecommuting in the organisation for telecommuting employees. For instance, Jemina made the point that: "The organisation must consider purchasing laptops for all staff, because staff at the operational levels are executing the work instead of management." Elvis stated: "Providing employees with adequate resources which will allow them to perform their duties." Bjursell (2021) research results indicated that in order to maximise productivity in the telecommuting environment, effective resource allocations means that employees have adequate resources such as laptops, mobile devices and internet connection to do their work.

Sub-theme 3: Continuous engagement of staff can build teamwork and group cohesion

Participants expressed the view that another way of improving the implementation and practising of telecommuting in the organisation could be through frequent engagement of staff. Mahlori held the view: "Managers must have constant engagement with their respective teams … this can be done on a quarterly basis*."* At this stage, CIPC only has these meetings on an annual basis. They also implied that face-to-face meetings, staff connect sessions, and meetings with leadership in the organisation would also improve engagement.

Erasmus (2020) was also of the view that face-to-face engagement with employees and organisational leadership must be encouraged through various initiatives such as scheduled office environment meetings. Freedman (2025) added that face-to-face meetings focusing on organisational issues and performance reviews can improve employee satisfaction and reduction of employee turnover (Freedman, 2025). Employee engagement can be through

communication with the line managers and colleagues such as assessing employee progress of the task assigned (Durbarry, 2021). Kokt and Chipunza (2022) were of the view that employee engagement through positive work relationship, supportive networks and regular social events amongst employee boosts their health and teamwork.

Sub-theme 4: Compliance and uniform application of telecommuting policy

Compliance with policies that regulate and govern the implementation and practicing telecommuting is another recommendation provided by employees. They were of the view that the organisation requires uniformity and compliance of telecommuting policy in the organisation. All processes and procedures around the implementation of telecommuting must be adhered by all levels of staff in the organisation. Edward commented that "Telecommuting policy clearly stipulates that new employees must work in the office for 12 months in the organisation prior to them working in telecommuting." He emphasised that this component of the telecommuting policy is not being followed because: "new staff join the organisation and within the week they are participating in telecommuting work arrangement".

Hlamalani highlighted that: "… back-office staff are not readily available during office hours, whereas frontline services are readily available." This type of inconsistency created a perception that certain segment of employees is treated unfairly in the organisation.

In Herzberg's two factor theory telecommuting policy can serve as motivation to employees, whereas inconsistent application of the policy creates working condition which are not conducive to employees (Knight &Westbrook, 2015). Erasmus (2022) attested that inconsistent application of telecommuting policy can result in the perception of inequality amongst employees. Messaoud and Gupta (2021) also highlighted that inconsistent application of the policy results poor in interpersonal relations amongst co-workers, thereby threatening team spirit and work. As the result of inconsistency application and lack of

uniformity of the policy, results in other employees failing to be enjoying flexible work schedules which hinder employee's motivation (Green, 2009).

Sub-theme 5: Focus on employees' health and wellbeing

Data analysis revealed that there is a need for the organisation to focus on employee mental health and wellbeing. Since the inception of telecommuting work arrangement many employees working from home have experienced mental health issues such as stress, feelings of isolation, depression, confusion and uncertainty about this type of work arrangement. The rise in mental health issues was supported by Hilda who pointed that some employees feel lonely and isolated when practising telecommuting. Mahlori, was of the view that staff wellbeing is a critical way to improve the implementation and practicing of telecommuting.

Mental health issues in the workplace is a serious predicament as it affects the productivity and quality of work life. Mental health issues affect job security and the status of the employees, as the employees affected by the mental health issues are likely to be absent in the workplace (Sabbagha, 2016).

Profile of the second category of participants

The findings discussed above focused on the 11 CIPC employee participants. In this section on the report, I focus on the three CIPC Human Capital managers who met the selection criteria. Prior to the commencement of the interview, the participants were given brief background and purpose of interview. Consent was obtained from participants and all interviews were recorded. The profile of the participants is presented in Table 4 on the following page.

Table 4

Profile of Corporate Services Management (N=3)

Demographic profile	Sub-category	No of participants
Number of years in telecommuting	4 years	03
Gender	Men	2
	Women	1
Age:		
	41- 60 years	3
Position:	Senior Managers	2
	Executive Management	1

All three participants had four years of experience in telecommuting mode of working. Two participants are senior managers, and one participant is the executive manager within the corporate services division.

Presentation of Findings

Thematic data analysis of the information gathered when interviewing these three participants resulted in six themes. These are summarised in Table 5 on the following page.

Table 5

Themes and sub-themes which emanated from thematic data analysis of manager participants' responses

Themes	**Sub-themes.**
Theme 1. Telecommuting policy framework based on research outcomes and negotiation with stakeholders	1.Development of policy framework 2. Consultation with organised labour
Theme 2: Challenges managers experienced when telecommuting employees during COVID-19	1. Staff complained about working from home. 2. Employees regarded telecommuting as their right 3. Line managers struggled with staff discipline.
Theme 3: Challenges experienced by managers after COVID-19	1.There was no signed telecommuting agreement between line managers and employees 2. Some employees still feel lonely, and telecommuting brings stress into the family setting.
Theme 4: Telecommuting holds benefits for employees and the organisation	1. Personal and financial benefits 2. The organisation's operating costs are reduced
Theme 5**:** Recommendations regarding the way forward	1.Give attention to employees' health and well-being 2. Implement the culture of continuous learning 3. Review the policy to include an performance agreement between employees and line managers

Theme 3. Telecommuting Policy Framework was based on research outcomes and negotiation with stakeholders

The theme accentuates the manner in which telecommuting was introduced at the CIPC. Further, it describes the steps CIPC took to introduce telecommuting and what challenges management experienced in this regard.

Sub-theme: 1: Development of policy framework

Telecommuting policy was introduced through the development of telecommuting policy by the Human Capital Management (HCM). In developing the policy HCM conducted an internal feasibility study by means of a survey around the telecommuting mode of working. Results of the survey was incorporated into telecommuting policy.

Jeffery summarised this process: “Management (HCM) conducted a survey to determine the employee readiness or feasibility of this mode of work arrangement. The results of the survey were in favour of this type of working arrangement”.

Tustin (2014) confirmed exploring participants’ opinion of telecommuting is the best way to develop a telecommuting policy framework. Tustin (2014) also emphasised the policy framework highlights what the organisation needs to achieve and what role the employees will be required to play in the implementation of the policy.

Sub-theme 2: Consultation with organised labour

This sub-theme reflects the steps that management took to introduce the telecommuting mode of working within the organisation.

Step 1: Consultation with organised labour.

All three participants mentioned that steps taken to introduce the telecommuting mode of working was through consultation with the organised labour namely: The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and The Public Servants Association of South Africa (PSA). For example, Violet explained “The policy had to be supported by all stakeholders, including organized labour and management committee.” She added that CIPC also consulted with the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union and Public Service Association Similarly, Jeffery pointed out: “A telecommuting policy was developed which was then consulted with the organised labour namely: NEHAWU and PSA, MANCO and EXCO as part of the approval process.”

Step 2: The Management Committee (MANCO) and Executive Authority (EXCO) also had to approve the policy framework.

Step 3: Approval by the Accounting Authority.

The third step in the introduction of the telecommuting policy was through the approval by the accounting authority of the organisation, which is the Commissioner. Voilet

stated: “The policy was officially signed by the Commissioner who is the accounting authority in the organisation”

Step 4. Signing of telecommuting policy agreement.

The signing of the telecommuting policy agreement form entailed the final step that the management took to implement the telecommuting. This included the line manager and employee signing the telecommuting policy agreement which enabled the employees to participate in this mode of working arrangement. Herewith is the direct quotation from Jeffrey clarifying the issue:

> The policy detailed three modes of working which are as follows: Some staff will work from home in full time basis; some staff will work from home and office which is called hybrid working arrangement and some staff will work from the office depending on the nature of the function. In order to participate, in this mode of working arrangement staff was expected to sign telecommuting policy agreement. All needs of employees were taken into cognisance in the implementation of the policy.

Theme 4: Challenges experienced by managers when practicing telecommuting during COVID-19

Managers were responsible for managing telecommuting employees during COVID-19. These managers felt that they struggled with staff discipline. Further, line managers and employees had not signed a telecommuting policy agreement.

Sub-theme 1: Staff complained about working from home.

Given the abrupt implementation of telecommuting in the corporate world around the globe, some serious issues pertaining to this type of working arrangement were highlighted. Amongst their concerns were employees inability to focus on work in the home environment. This was due to distractions, leading to decrease productivity levels, feelings of isolation as the result of lack or minimal face-to-face interaction with colleagues. Other concerns include poor home office ergonomics, technical glitches which includes limited access to internet,

power outage and connectivity issues, blurred professional and personal life leading to mental issues (Shirmonhamodi et al., 2022, Public Service Commission, 2023).

The managerial participants stressed some of the challenges they experienced in the introduction of the telecommuting. Jeffery described this challenge:

> … some employees returned to the office after few weeks after telecommuting was introduced citing challenges such as fighting with the landlords about high water consumption and electricity bills. Also, there an increase with couple or partner fighting. Some staff were demanding coffee to be provided for them while working from home.

The work environment is a hygiene factor in terms of Hertzberg's two factor theory. The fact that employees felt uncomfortable working at home placed managers under pressure to have them do so it was accepted policy of CIPC. This factor is critical that can de-motivate employee in the telecommuting environment Poor working conditions is likely to affect employee productivity and performance, threatening job security of the employees (Shaanika & Bhebhe, 2023).

Sub-theme 2: Employees regarded telecommuting as their right.

Another challenge experienced by the management was that employees regarded the telecommuting work arrangement as their right. This type of an approach resulted in employees failing to meet their deliverables and performance decreased drastically. Vongani stated: "Employees viewed working from home as the right rather than as a privilege."

This perception created a situation in which employees lacked work discipline due to the culture of entitlement. Lack of discipline accompanied by culture of entitlement created a situation in which employees' productivity and performance were severely affected.

Other research findings confirm that employee productivity and performance were affected in the sense that employees failed to meet their daily norms and target (Farnsworth et al., 2020). Thompson (2020) argued that this type of entitlement manifested itself in which employees develop negative attitudes towards their job. Under-performance is a disciplinary

issue in the workplace, and disciplinary matters in the workplace can threaten employee job security and status, leading to employee job dissatisfaction.

In my study employees didn't develop negative attitudes towards the job. Rather they blamed the issue on managers showing a lack of trust in their competency.

Sub-theme 3: Line managers struggled with staff discipline.

Staff discipline was another challenge that management faced. The issues of the poor discipline due to new modes of working resulted in some staff absconding from their workstation during normal or official working hours, and some employees failed to report to work without submitting annual and sick leave. Vongani pointed out:

> Some of the employees abused this type of working arrangement as they disappeared during their normal working hours even without taking annual or sick leave… A few employees are not performing or meeting their deliverables, and the management is of the view that they are taking advantage of this type of working arrangement.

These comments reiterate Erasmus' (2020) findings. The researcher pointed out that not all employees are equally suited to work remotely as some staff are struggling with self-discipline with struggle with poor staff discipline and this negatively affects their productivity. Participants also reported that lack of staff discipline resulted in poor work productivity because employees failed to meet their deliverables. Participants highlighted that lack of staff discipline included situations in which employees cannot work independently without proper supervision and poor performance of employees in certain key performance areas. Jeffrey pointed out that "Employees need to be managed since some of the employees cannot work independently without proper supervision. Poor performance by some employees on their key performance areas.*"*

Upholding work requirements is another hygiene factor. It stands to reason that if employees fail to fulfil their work responsibilities efficiently and present with poor performance ratings, this places stress on the managers supervising them.

Sub-theme 4 Loadshedding and lack of computer equipment

When initially implementing telecommuting, it became apparent that some staff did not have essential resources, such as laptops. Some employees were short of data or didn't have alternative sources of electricity when they experienced loadshedding their homes. To address the problem, CIPC made provision of resources to all staff in the form of laptops. They were also provided with uninterruptible power supply (UPS). This is a device that maintains power in the event of loadshedding. Routers, and data allowance were also provided to all staff members to ensure operational efficiency and business continuity.

This issue was pointed out by Jeffrey:

> To curb the impact of loadshedding, the organisation issued UPS to all staff in the organisation. To deal with connectivity issues the organisation provided routers and data allowance to all staff to ensure operational efficiency and business continuity. Provision of adequate resources to staff such as laptops and desktops to allow staff to work from home.

Sonnenschein et al., (2022), and Matli (2020) support my findings. These researchers concluded that employees in various sectors working from home were allocated tools of trade to continue to work from home.

This point of view differs from the findings of a South African government survey in 2023. In 2023, the Public Service Commission (PSC) conducted a study and research findings indicated that government departments lacked adequate resources for employees to telecommute in a satisfactory manner. The lack of adequate resources included access to laptops, mobiles devices, printers, routers and scanners. Adequate resources were allocated to senior officials only instead of junior staff that were primarily responsible for daily operations.

Theme 5 Challenges experienced by managers after COVID-19

When I was gathering data from the three managers, they explained that they still experienced challenges with employees' conduct.

Sub-theme 1: There was no signed telecommuting agreement between line managers and employees.

The participants emphasised that they think that challenges regarding lack of meeting work expectations probably relates to the fact that there has not been a signed telecommuting policy agreement between line managers and employees. This had resulted in employees failing to meet their key performance areas or meet their deliverables. Vongani pointed out "The manager and employee struggled to enter into the telecommuting work arrangement clearly stipulating the deliverables, and time frames. Employees failed to deliver or meet their deliverables as expected."

Carraini et al (2022) study findings correlate with the challenges experienced by seniors managers when introducing telecommuting which includes staff ill -discipline in which staff absconding from their workstation during normal working hours and staff unreachable for work related matters. Staff discipline may be attributed to the participants' view that they regard telecommuting as right and not as privilege.

Sub-theme 2: Some employees still feel lonely, and telecommuting brings stress into the family setting

Participants pointed out that some employees are facing challenges telecommuting. Working from home means staff are working without the presence of their team members or colleagues. Participants mentioned that loneliness is one of the major predicaments for telecommuting employees. Vongani implied this stating. "Some employees reported loneliness due to this type of working arrangement." Violet elaborated on the issue "A survey in 2023 showed that more than 80% of staff were happy with the policy. About 6% however felt that they were lonely away from the office and wanted more time at the office."

Two studies that were conducted around challenges of telecommuting highlight that isolation from the work culture and poor-quality relationships with peers results in employees

feeling lonely and frustrated (Dahlstroom, 2013). De Vincenzi (2022) argued that telecommuters tend to spend more time working from home with their families, spouses, and partners resulting in an increase family conflict because of no sense of privacy.

Theme 6 Telecommuting holds benefits for employees and the organisation

Participants highlighted that telecommuting holds benefits for both CIPC staff as well as the organisation itself. Two sub-themes emphasise this point.

Sub-theme 1 Personal and financial benefits

Management participants mentioned that employees appreciated and valued this type of working arrangement which was introduced at the organisation. According to Vongani, the "…majority of employees appreciated this type of working arrangement as they were able to attend to personal issues, for example, family matters while working from home. Similarly, Violet mentioned: "A survey in 2023 showed that more than 80% of staff were happy with the policy" (Violet).

The participants emphasised that employees enjoyed being able to attend to their family needs as well as work responsibilities. Jeffrey mentioned: "Some employees cited improved quality of work life as the benefits.*"* Violet also drew attention to the fact "Those with school going children found that they had more flexibility to care for their children while working from home." She added: "In general, employees enjoy working from home or remotely or the fact that they did not have to go to office save them time in traffic and the stress of traffic. Cost of transport to work was also a major saving."

Violet went on to explain that employees' health and wellness of staff had improved considerably. This was obvious because less sick leave was applied for by staff members. Simeli et al. (2023) found that working from home reduces stress and anxiety, thus contributing to improved mental health and well-being. Improved health and staff well-being is closely related to increased staff productivity and staff performance

Sub-theme 2: The organisation has reduced operating costs

Participants expressed reduction in office expenditure as one the benefit of telecommuting from the management point of view. For example, Jeffrey noted: "Reduction in employer expenditure in utilities such as telephone, water and electricity bills"

Poetker (2021) had similar findings. The researcher highlighted that telecommuting has reduced organisations operating costs which include office space, office furniture, perks, utilities bill such as water, electricity and office rentals.

Theme 6 Recommendations regarding the way forward.

When investigating the managers' views on how telecommuting work arrangements implemented by CIPC can be improved, three main sub-themes emerged based on data analysis.

Sub-theme 1: Employees' health and wellbeing must be given regular attention.

From the participants point of view, focusing on health and wellness of staff is what can be done to improve the practice of telecommuting in the organisation. Health and wellness programs can include online webinars on various topic issues of staff which include stress management, dealing with loneliness by organising social activities for staff such as hiking, running and playing at a soccer club. Also, management must play a pivotal role to ensure the health and wellness of staff. Violet stressed:

> There could be more online programs and webinars on how to keep healthy and how to have a good work-life balance while working from home. For those who are lonely, there should be more social activities outside office hours, organized by the CIPC. The introduction of hiking club and soccer club will address loneliness issues. Plus, there should be more communication amongst the teams and their managers so that the manager is aware at all times of the condition of his/her staff member.

Vongani emphasised that CIPC has a Wellness Office which provides psychological services for employees.

Sub-theme 2 Implement the culture of continuous learning

Management suggested that the culture of continuous learning regarding telecommuting is required as way or manner of improving the implementation of telecommuting.

Sub-theme 3: Review the policy to include a performance agreement between employees and line managers

The most important recommendation made by these participants is that the policy framework needs to be reviewed so a performance agreement can align with employees telecommuting work arrangement. The review of the policy should clearly stipulate that staff that are failing to meet their goals, or key performance, employees should be called to come and work in the office. Further, the telecommuting policy must clearly state that if employees do not fulfil their work responsibilities that are required to meet the organisation's outcome goals for service delivery, employees have to face returning to the office environment to work. According to Jeffrey: *"*Line managers must draft a performance agreement in line with telecommuting mode of working. Performance development agreement must allow for the flexibility of the telecommuting mode of working." Vongani reinforced Jeffrey's comments by adding:

> The need to review the policy and clearly state that this type of working arrangement is not their right. We should clearly state in the policy that if the employee is not performing as expected, such employee must be called back to work in the office.*"*

Summary

This chapter presented and discussed my research findings. Although the main themes and sub-themes are captured in Tables 3 and 5. The mechanisms of introducing telecommuting within the organisation was through e-communication platforms e.g. through internal communication email, through consultation with organised labour namely NEHAWU

and PSA, human resources management as the custodian of the policy development and divisional meetings. During COVID-19, participants generally had negative experiences which includes ICT challenges, difficulties in executing job duties, lack of family boundaries, and trust issues between line managers and employees and flexible work arrangements. Although participants still face some challenges regarding telecommuting, circumstances have definitely improved.

In the following chapter, which is the final chapter, I briefly summarise my research findings, report on my conclusions based on the research findings and then make recommendations based on my research findings.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter I summarize the main findings of my study in terms of the objectives I set. When I summarise these findings, I also focus on how finding relate to Occupational Social Work. I then discuss the conclusions I reached and make recommendations related to the main findings of the research.

Summary of findings based on my research objectives:

The following were the objectives for my study:

1. To explore the perceptions of managers and employees regarding the processes followed CIPC when implementing telecommuting work arrangements during and after COVID-19.
2. To investigate what challenges managers and employees experienced when practising telecommuting during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To explore what employers and managers regard as the benefits of practising telecommuting during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Investigate what factors managers and employees think might improve the telecommuting work policy in the organisation.

Summary of main research findings

The following discussion summarises findings related to the objectives of the study.

Objective 1: To explore the perceptions of managers and employees regarding the processes followed CIPC when implementing telecommuting work arrangements during and after COVID-19.

Both the managers and employees understood the reasons why CIPC introduced telecommuting work arrangements. Both categories of participants regarded the reasons for

doing so were valid. The managers were able to explain which stakeholders were consulted when the process began. Employees also recognised that professional procedures were followed.

The managers and employees also confirmed that staff members where informed of the new work arrangements in terms of the telecommuting policy that was drawn up and formalised.

Objective 2: To investigate what challenges managers and employees experienced when practising telecommuting during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings indicate that both employees and managers experienced many challenges during COVID-19. Employees found it difficult to practice telecommuting because they lacked training and experience disruption in the home environment when trying to fulfil their work commitments. From the perspective of managerial participants, they recognised these challenges employees faced. However, their responsibilities were also disrupted. From their perspective many employees lack self-discipline to fulfil work commitments. Even employees who required supervision to reach research goals did not cooperate with them.

After COVID-19 (when data was gathered) it became apparent that although telecommuting circumstances had improved, both manager and employees still faced challenges. Employees highlighted that they still have not received adequate training. Also, there is a lack of trust between managers and employees. Further the telecommunicating policy was not being implemented across the board in the same manner.

Managers on the other hand, voiced that they find micromanagement difficult because it is challenging to monitor employees' progress and if they are achieving their work commitments and goals.

The lack of trust between managers and employees needs to be addressed by an occupational social workers and other employees involved in employee assistance programmes.

The fact that some employees still feel stressed, a sense of isolation, an occupational social worker can play a meaningful role in this regard because apart from focusing only on the work environment, they also take a holistic approach and work try to improve family functioning that could enhance job satisfaction for employees. This field of social work can also make managers aware of how these circumstances can disrupt work conditions and in turn affect quality work performance.

Another main finding is that there is still poor team cohesion. Occupational social workers can also play a meaningful role in this regard.

Objective 3: To explore what employers and managers regard as the benefits of practising telecommuting during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the perspectives of managers and employees telecommuting work arrangements holds many benefits and should be continued. For example, flexible working hours enable employees to enjoy an improved work-life balance and reduced commuting costs. Both categories of participants also recognised that telecommuting also results in CIPC saving financial costs.

It was also confirmed by managers and employees that telecommuting has brought about improved productivity.

Objective 4 Investigate what factors managers and employees think might improve the telecommuting work policy in the organisation

Both managers and employees provided recommendations regarding the way forward with telecommuting work arrangements. For example, managers and employees recognised the need for ongoing training so they employees can perform better.

Employees called for upgraded telecommuting resource allocation because they experience a lack necessary resources in the home environment, such as scanners, printers, poor computer hardware and softphone issues which are not functioning properly.

Managers recommended that the work policy on telecommuting needs to be amended by specifying the expected roles and responsibilities of both managers and employees. This could build a trusting work relationship between managers and employees. Occupational social workers can be important role players in this regard because they can identify for CIPC management where there is room for improvement.

Another important issue that both managers and employees recommended is the improvement of employees' health and well-being through various extra-mural activities. Once again, the occupational social worker can play a meaningful role in facilitating this process.

Conclusion

Although work challenges were pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, telecommuting circumstances have improved. However, some challenges do still exist and can meaningfully be addressed by occupational social workers.

Basically, my research findings align with Hertzberg's two factor theory and other research findings focusing on telecommuting.

Recommendations

Based on my research findings I wish to make the following recommendations to CIPC:

- Focus on employee mental health and well-being by fostering a supportive telecommuting environment for employees. Staff members responsible for addressing employees health and well-being (especially social workers working in the occupational context must take primary responsibility for addressing this challenge).

Senior staff members must also be made aware that if employees enjoy good health and well-being their will be increased productivity, better teamwork, and employee job-satisfaction can be enhanced.

- Make management and employees aware that intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors can enhance their work performance. A reward system can include various flexible work schedules, encourage peer to peer work schedules and offer virtual wellness programmes.
- Amend the telecommuting work policy by providing clear work guidelines and expectations for all employees. This will enhance managers fulfil their work responsibilities can lead to better work relationships and improved employee engagement. This amendment could close the gap or discrepancies that emanates from telecommuting implementation. There must be an insertion of the clause that telecommuting is not a right but a privilege. Further, the policy should clearly state that should employees fail to meet the key performance areas or deliverables, the telecommuting policy agreement can be revoked, and employees might be expected to report to the office frequently or work in the office environment.
- Upskill employees on a regular basis in the telecommuting era. Upskilling employees can assist the employee to build more adaptable teamwork, attract and retain the best pool of talent which can boost productivity and employee turnover and retention.
- Allow for flexible in work arrangements so that employees can enjoy better work-life balance.

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Appendices

Appendix A Participant Information Sheet

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Forget Masingi. I am a post-graduate student currently doing an MA degree in Occupational Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Priscilla Gerrand. The main purpose of my study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of staff members of the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission in Gauteng regarding telecommuting work arrangements during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. As a staff member who is familiar with telecommuting, I think that you can share some important information with me about how you think and feel about telecommuting during and after Covid-19. I am thus inviting you to take part in an interview. The interview will take place in an office that can offer privacy at your work. If this would not be suitable for you, we can make arrangements that suit you best. Appointments will be made, and the suitable time and date will be discussed and confirmed prior to making personal contact with you. The interviews will take between 40- 50 minutes.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record the interview. This data will be stored in a digital in a password protected format for a period of 2 years if I present research findings at a conference or in an accredited journal. If this does not take place the information gathered will be deleted after 6 years. Only me and my supervisor will have access to the information I gather during the research study.

The interview will be confidential. When I share the findings of the research study, your name or anything else that could identify you will not be included, thereby ensuring anonymity. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained), but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part should you feel not interested. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything, except your time which I really appreciate because I am sure that you will be able to share meaningful information with me. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

You are welcome to withdraw your participation at any time. The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. If you need support or counselling services following the completion of the interview, I have made necessary arrangements with Employee Wellness Office for the participants to contact CIPC Employee Assistance Service Provider : Lyra Wellbeing at 0800 222 612

This research study will be written up as a research report. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, or email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Forget Masingi

Cell number: 083 883 6128 / 076 015 5596

Email Address: 1571781@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor’s name: Dr Priscilla Gerrand

Email address:Priscilla.Gerrand@wits.ac.za

Appendix B Consent Form

Title of project: The perceptions and experiences of managers and employees of the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission in Tshwane regarding telecommuting work arrangements during and after the COVID-19.

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

I agree the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

1. The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about YES / NO
2. I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study YES /NO
3. I agree that the interview may be audio recorded YES / NO
4. I agree that direct quotations from my interviews may be used by researcher in their research report YES / NO
5. I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report) YES / NO
6. I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics and clearance) but my name and any personal information will not be used YES / NO

…….(Signature)

…….(Name of participant)

……..(Date)

……..(Signature)

……(Name of researcher / person seeking consent)

…….(Date)

Appendix C Semi-structured Interview Guide for Corporate Service Employees

The following demographic particulars were obtained from the participant before we started the interview focusing on the research topic:

1. Number of years' telecommuting experience within the organisation
2. Gender
3. Age
5. Designation within the organisation

Questions

1. Please share with me what you understand about the concept of telecommuting?
2. **When** was telecommuting introduced at this organisation? (Probe: did you have any experience doing telecommuting before it was introduced to your organisation? If not, did you receive any training in this regard?
3. **Why** was telecommuting introduced at this organisation? (Probe: did you think introducing this method of working valid?)
4. **How** was telecommuting introduced in this organisation?
5. Please share with me your experiences of practising telecommuting during Covid-19.
6. If you are currently doing telecommuting, how are you experiencing this work arrangement and do you think it should be continued? Please explain.
7. What are challenges and benefits of doing telecommuting within this organisation
8. In your view what can be done to improve the implementation and practising of telecommuting within the organisation?
9. Do you have any recommendations that would improve the implementation of telecommuting?

Thank your taking your valuable time to participate. I do appreciate this.

Appendix D: Semi-structured Interview Guide for CIPC Senior Management

The following demographic particulars were obtained from the participant before we started the interview focusing on the research topic:

1. Number of years' telecommuting experience within the organisation

2. Gender

3. Age

5. Designation within the organisation

Questions

1. Please share with me what you understand about the concept of telecommuting?

2. **When** was telecommuting introduced at this organisation?

3. **Why** was telecommuting introduced at this organisation?

4. **How** was telecommuting introduced in this organisation? (Probe: what steps did you take and what challenges did you experience)

5. **What** were the general responses of employees (Probe: what did they express to management regarding the benefits and challenges of telecommuting).

6. From a management point of view, what challenges and benefits do you think telecommuting brings to your organisation.

7. In your view what can be done to improve the implementation of telecommuting within the organisation? (Probe: what support do employees need? How are the challenges they are experiencing being met?)

8. Do you have any recommendations that would improve telecommuting policy?

Thank your taking your valuable time to participate. I do appreciate this.