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Digitalisation and gender inclusion in financial services in South Africa

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Supervisor: Ms Ayanda Magida

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Digital Business

Johannesburg, 2023

ABSTRACT

Digital transformation and increased digitalisation have been identified as significant opportunities for women's participation and gender inclusion in the workforce to support substantial economic growth. This study explores the perceived role of gender inclusion during the rapid digitalisation of the world of work during the pandemic. This study further seeks to understand the experience of women leaders in the formal sector from 2019 to 2021 in South Africa (SA).

An interpretive phenomenological approach was adopted for this study, using semi-structured interviews. The snowballing sampling method was used to reach women leaders across the financial services industry. The data was analysed using thematic analysis and a hybrid analytical approach to developing the code book and subsequent themes. The research findings indicated a delicate and complex relationship between digitalisation and gender inclusion influenced by the internal gender inclusion strategy, the digital workplace design, digital enablers, social implications, culture and well-being of women leaders as they worked virtually. While women leaders experienced the rapid surge of digitalisation during the virtual working phenomenon as positive, there were pros and cons identified for women leaders working almost, ultimately impacting their ability to stay with organisations. While organisations offer world-class digital transformation strategies, invest in the best technologies, or leverage increased digitalisation to change how people work. The key takeaway is that with the complexities of human behaviour and the entrenched gender stereotypes in financial services, digitalisation may not be enough to keep women as active and contributing members of the future workforce.

KEYWORDS

Gender inclusion, digitalisation, financial services

DECLARATION

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

Name: Talicia Lucia Smith Signature: *Talicia Lucia Smith*

Signed at Johannesburg, Eikenhof

On the 24th day of February 2023

DEDICATION

Firstly, all gratitude and thanks to our Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ, His only son and our dearest Mother, Mary. Thank you for this opportunity and for granting me the wisdom and determination to see this to the end. May your Holy will always be done in my life.

To Yeshen and Ayaan, my precious boys, my gifts from heaven – Never fear the unknown, create your own destiny, and use your gifts and talents from God to inspire. Fail spectacularly because your mistakes make you stronger, brighter and tougher leaders.

To Riyaz, my husband and soulmate. Thank you for your love, support and your faith in me. For pushing me to challenge myself to see that I am more than capable and worthy of this qualification and so much more.

To my foundation - Mum, Dad, Mama, Dada and Dia – You have lifted me so many times, stood by me, put me back together again, pushed me to take the opportunities that present themselves and reminded me that I stand on the shoulders of giants.

Thank you to my entire family for your patience and understanding when I wasn't available to visit or missed functions because I was working on my research. Thank you for supporting my decision to undertake this life-changing journey.

To my beloved grandparents, how I wish you were all here with me. I know that you are watching over us from heaven and I thank you for your sacrifice and your hard work that paved the way for me to be here, completing this qualification.

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To the amazing women, I am privileged to call my colleagues, friends and family, thank you for your support and for always inspiring me to reach beyond the measure of my own limitations.

To all the women who work tirelessly to take care of their children, contribute successfully to work, collaborate with their husbands for stronger marriages and take care of their parents in their time of need - I salute you, I honour you and I stand with you as we continue to agitate for lasting social change in every aspect of our and our daughters lives. Aluta Continua!

TABLE OF CONTENT

TABLE OF CONTENT vi

LIST OF FIGURES x

LIST OF TABLES xi

LIST OF ACRONYMS xii

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE ..... **ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY 1
1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM 3
1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES 6
1.5 RATIONALE 6
1.6 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY 7
1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS 9
1.8 ASSUMPTIONS 9
1.9 CHAPTER OUTLINE 10

CHAPTER 2.LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 12

2.1 INTRODUCTION 12
2.2 DEFINITION OF TOPIC 12
2.3 DIGITALISATION IN THE WORKPLACE 13
2.3.1 EVOLUTION OF THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE 13
2.3.2 CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE 17
2.3.3 THE FINANCIAL SERVICES DIGITAL WORKPLACE 19
2.4 EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WORKING AND CONNECTING VIRTUALLY 21
2.4.1 THE JOURNEY OF WOMEN TOWARD DIGITALISATION 21
2.4.2 WOMEN WORKING VIRTUALLY 25
2.4.3 EMPOWERED OR CONSTRAINED-WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICAN FINANCIAL SERVICES 29
2.5 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK 32
2.5.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 32
2.6 CONCLUSION OF LITERATURE REVIEW 35

CHAPTER 3.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 36

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH 36
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN - PHENOMENOLOGY 37
3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS 38
3.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLE 39
3.4.1 POPULATION 39
3.4.2 SAMPLE & SAMPLING METHOD 40
3.5 THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS 41
3.6 PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION 42
3.7 DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES AND INTERPRETATION 43
3.8 QUALITY ASSURANCE 44
3.8.1 CREDIBILITY 44
3.8.2 DEPENDABILITY 45
3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS 45

CHAPTER 4.PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS 47

4.1 INTRODUCTION 47
4.1.1 GENDER INCLUSION 49
4.1.2 DIGITAL ENABLERS 52
4.1.3 DIGITAL WORKPLACE DESIGN 55
4.1.4 SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS 62
4.1.5 CULTURE 69
4.1.6 WELL-BEING 77
4.1.7 DIGITALISATION AND GENDER INCLUSION 85
4.2 LINKING THE THEMES RELATED TO THE PROPOSITIONS OF THIS STUDY . 87
4.2.1 PROPOSITION 1: UNDERSTANDING THE PERCEIVED EFFECT OF DIGITALISATION AS EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN LEADERS IN FINANCIAL SERVICES 87
4.2.2 PROPOSITION 2: EXPLORE THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES CONCERNING WOMEN WORKING VIRTUALLY IN THIS INDUSTRY 88
4.3 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS 90

CHAPTER 5.DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OR FINDINGS 92

5.1 INTRODUCTION 92
5.2 DISCUSSION PERTAINING TO PROPOSITION 1: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE OF DIGITALISATION AS EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN LEADERS IN FINANCIAL SERVICES 92
5.2.1 GENDER INCLUSION 92
5.2.2 DIGITAL ENABLERS 94
5.2.3 DIGITAL WORKPLACE DESIGN 96
5.2.4 SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS 98
5.3 DISCUSSION PERTAINING TO PROPOSITION 2: EXPLORE THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES CONCERNING WOMEN WORKING VIRTUALLY IN THIS INDUSTRY 101

5.3.1 CULTURE 101
5.3.2 WELL-BEING 104
5.3.3 DIGITALISATION AND GENDER INCLUSION 107
5.4 DISCUSSING FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 109
5.5 CONCLUSION 110

CHAPTER 6.CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS 111

6.1 INTRODUCTION 111
6.2 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE PERCEIVED EFFECT OF DIGITALISATION ON WOMEN LEADERS IN FINANCIAL SERVICES 112
6.3 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES CONCERNING WOMEN WORKING VIRTUALLY 115
6.4 POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY 116
6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS 117
6.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 119

CHAPTER 7.....References 121

APPENDIX A: The Participant Information Sheet 137

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form 139

APPENDIX C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide 140

APPENDIX D: Daily Diary Guide 142

APPENDIX E: Ethics approval notification 144

APPENDIX F: Consistency Table 145

APPENDIX G: Codebook Development 148

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1: Timeline of technology in the workplace (Kanell, 2022) 14

Figure 4-1: Visual synopsis of code analysis hierarchy 49

Figure 4-2: Themes related to propositions one and two 90

Figure 6-1: Visual depiction of the factors influencing digitalisation and gender inclusion (researchers diagram) 112

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1-1: The SA workforce profile occupational categories (Labour, 2020) 8

Table 2-2: The four waves of feminism (adapted from (Huws, 2019; Ferguson, 2017; Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021; Soken-Huberty, 2021) 22

Table 2-3: Workforce profile for Financial Services over 2019/2020 (Labour, 2020) 30

Table 4-1: Summary of participant demographics 48

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AI Artificial Intelligence

BBBEE Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment

BYOD Bring Your Own Device

DWD Digital Workplace Design

EAP Economically Active Population

GDP Gross Domestic Product

G20 Group of Twenty

ICT Information, Communications Technology

ILO International Labour Organisation

IPA Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

IoT Internet of Things

ISP Internet Service Provider

NDP National Development Plan

OECD The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PWC PricewaterhouseCoopers

SA South Africa

SARB South African Reserve Bank

StatsSA Statistics South Africa

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNWF United Nations Women's Forum

WHO World Health Organisation

WEF World Economic Forum

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of purpose

This qualitative study explores the perceived role of gender inclusion during the rapid digitalisation of the world of work during the pandemic. This study further seeks to understand the experiences of women leaders in the financial services industry from 2019 to 2021 in South Africa (SA).

1.2 Background of the study

The advent of the digital age has been both exciting and daunting worldwide. In 2012, under the direction of Minister Trevor Manuel, in collaboration with 26 other Commissioners, the National Planning Commission developed the National Development Plan (NDP) of 2030. The plan recognised the historical past of South Africa but also outlined the possibilities for the future of the country. (National Planning Commission, 2012). The plan emphasised the impact of technological change as a key driver over the next 18 years. The constant and rapid advances in technology and science, the adoption of technologies by youth across South Africa, and its' link to stimulating economic growth and technology are recognised as a "powerful means of fostering social inclusion" was highlighted as the key to South Africa's ability to "sharpen its innovative edge" (National Planning Commission, 2012). The plan identified expensive broadband costs, citizens' ability to acquire technology and effective use of Information Communications Technology (ICT) as potential barriers across SA. The plan also emphasised the benefits realisation of technological change, including the country's general ICT infrastructure that needed to be enhanced and matured to ensure that the country does not fall victim to the consequences of the Digital Divide (National Planning Commission, 2012).

The plan outlined three phases of implementation: the first phase (Short Term) between 2012 and 2015 with a critical focus on developing an e-strategy, promoting the distribution of ICTs while building fundamental skills and functional

capabilities. The second phase (Medium-term) between 2015 and 2020 focuses on extending broadband diffusion, re-farming spectrum and establishing itself as the continental leader in the cost and quality of ICT services. The third phase (long term) between 2020 to 2030 details the country's aspirations to reach integration of systems across government, corporates and learning institutions while playing a visible and critical role in the global ICT community (National Planning Commission, 2012). The NDP emphasised the need for women to play an active role in economic transformation and called on all sectors to support the growth and role of women leaders as well as address barriers to entry of women in the labour market.

The proliferation of digital technologies as part of the fourth industrial revolution has resulted in several technologies and applications becoming integral to daily life (Richter, Heinrich, Stocker, & Schwabe, 2018). As mentioned in the NDP, adopting and using ICT created faster, integrated ways of driving the economy, building businesses, and reaching customers in their homes (Makola & Kgosinyane, 2020). Over the last decade, the rapid increase in the adoption of ICTs has also resulted in the rise in the adoption of new and the growth in new technology areas such as Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Platform economies, as well as the Internet of Things (IoT). The dispersion of ICTs is evident across South Africa in the increasing adoption rates and internet use. By 2020 SA was reported as having 36.54 million internet users with an internet penetration of 62%. Mobile connections were at 103.5 million. (Data Reportal, 2020). It has since steadily increased to 39.19 million internet connections, a penetration rate of 64%, and 817 thousand mobile connections by January 2022 (Data Reportal, 2021). It may be assumed that the increased use of technology noted was a natural outcome of implementing the NDP. However, the acceleration of connections between 2019 and 2021 coincided with a global phenomenon, the rapid emergence of the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Business and Government plans to transform digitally, which would have taken years to implement, were now being implemented in a matter of weeks in response to the pandemic surge.

Within this rapid acceleration of digitalisation, the NDP highlighted that women in South Africa remain marginalised both in terms of education and opportunities in the labour market (National Planning Commission, 2012) while the Gender Gap report W20 highlighted the concerns relating to the growing digital gender divide (G20 Insights, 2020). The NDP outlined the importance of the journey that South Africa needs to undertake to realise its 2030 goals and has highlighted the importance of women playing a greater economically active role in the labour market, leveraging technology and digitalisation to drive sustainable economic growth. To drive this economic growth the role of the financial services industry both in terms of how the industry incorporated gender inclusion within the workplace and created access to financial services for women was a critical aspect to enable the NDP. Financial services have been known to be male-dominated as an industry and male-focused as a service throughout its genesis. The industry has been committed to driving gender inclusion over the last several years in an effort to change this perception and drive financial inclusion (African Institute of Financial Markets and Risk Management, 2019).

1.3 Research problem

The digital revolution is characterised as a fundamental change in how data is processed, communicated and stored using technology. The technical advances in the digital revolution have led to one of the fastest and most impactful ages for humankind, the digital age (Eurofound, 2018). While the onset of the digital revolution was expected to provide significant opportunities to drive business growth and social cohesion, the concern remained that the advances of the 4th Industrial Revolution have exacerbated the remnants of the gender divide across sectors, industries and societies from previous industrial revolutions.

According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), women make up 51.1% of the total population in SA (Statistics South Africa, 2022). According to the Gender Gap Report W20 on the digital gender divide, barriers to women's digital inclusion include; traditional gender restrictions which exist in laws or socio-cultural norms, poverty, reduced educational opportunities for girls, restricted access to labour markets and continuing gender stereotypes (G20 Insights, 2020; Kuroda, Lopez,

Sasaki & Settecase, 2010). Women, in general, continue to be excluded in terms of access and digital literacy, which prevents them from using ICTs to support social and financial growth.

The 20th Commission of Employment Equity (CEE) report of 2019/2020 reported on the constitution of the economically active population (EAP) in SA. This population comprised people between the ages of 15 and 64 years. Workforce trends from 2017 to 2019 reflect that male participation in the EAP was at 54.6%, with female involvement at 45.4% (Labour, 2020). At this time, top management female representation increased from 22.9% to 24.4%. In Senior management, female representation increased from 33,8% to 35.3%. Professionally qualified representation of females remained mostly the same over the three years, from 46.6% in 2017 to 46.9% in 2019. A similar trend was noted in the skilled category, where female representation was at 47.1% and 47.7%, respectively (Labour, 2020).

This inequality trend is also pronounced in specific industries such as ICT. According to the literature the underrepresentation of women in the ICT industry has been a key focus of many inclusion programmes over the last decade (Butani & Paliwal, 2019; Lagesen, Pettersen & Berg, 2021; Yeganehfar, Zarei, Isfandyari-Moghaddam, & Famil-Rouhani, 2018) Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) reported that women hold 19% of tech-related jobs and 28% of leadership roles in the top 10 global tech organisations (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2018b). Predictions from various studies indicate that sizeable global tech companies with significant gender gaps in their workforce profiles are making strides towards closing the gaps, potentially reaching 30% inclusion of women by the end of 2022 (Deloitte Insights, 2021; Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021; Lagesen, Pettersen & Berg, 2021).

This was echoed in the study by Makola & Kgosinyane (2020) who looked deeper into the context of South Africa noting that the supply of women into ICT in the country was severely impacted with women accounting for only 13% of undergraduates studying engineering, science and technology qualifications at tertiary level. (Makola & Kgosinyane, 2020) While there are signs of steady progress toward parity, organisations must continue to monitor gender inclusion

in all industries compared to the recent statistics and insights emerging from studies into the impact of the pandemic and the disproportionate impact on women in the workplace (Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2021).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, resulted in governments instituting lockdowns as a critical measure to create sufficient social distancing among individuals to reduce the spread of the virus (Augur, Peria & Rochon, 2020; Casale & Posel, 2020). Workforces worldwide moved from formal, physical workplaces into remote working spaces in days. Every human interaction was digitalised, from work meetings, school lessons, lectures, family dinners, birthday parties, weddings and funerals. At this time, people and technology fused to navigate the challenges of the pandemic (Velasco & Obrist, 2020). During this period, connectivity spiked by more than 23%, and increases in bandwidth surged from 10.4% to 38.3%. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) were recording new highs of peak traffic, including 120% increases in video streaming meetings and 30% increases in the online gaming (OECD, 2020).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) monitoring the health impact of the pandemic also indicated that although men and women were both affected by the pandemic, lack of access to health services placed women and girls in Africa at greater risk (World Health Organisation, 2020). Based on their societal roles in reproductive labour, women would be at greater risk due to physically caring for the sick during the pandemic (World Health Organisation, 2020) . The World Bank also reported that the pandemic had resulted in another global recession. The global economic impact has been severe and far-reaching, with rising income inequality and increased unemployment due to job losses, with women being more affected than men (World Bank, 2022). In 2020, more women globally had left the workforce and were reported to have worked over 512 billion hours of unpaid care work in the home during the pandemic (UN Women, 2022).

In South Africa, between February 2020 and April 2020, it was reported that women comprised two-thirds of all job losses at a staggering 22%, while their male counterparts simultaneously experienced only 10% of job losses (Casale & Posel, 2020). These stats highlight that within the current debate and concerns on gender inclusion across South Africa and the government’s focus to drive

digital transformation by 2030, the possibility of a widening gender gap within the formal workforce looms. While research has indicated that the effects of digitalisation on individuals, both personally and professionally, can potentially reorganise stereotypical gender patterns in the workplace (Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021) Against this background, it is important to understand how the rapid digitalisation during the unprecedented global pandemic has impacted women, who remain a minority group within the South African labour force. With most companies and organisations in South Africa being forced to accelerate the digital transformation from months to weeks and days during the pandemic, it is equally critical to understand this phenomenon and its' perceived impact in the workplace context. Therefore, the research problem addressed in the study is to understand digitalisation and gender inclusion from women leaders within the financial services industry in South Africa considering the focus of digital transformation in 2030 NDP, the link to economic growth based on the participation of women in the labour market and the importance of the financial services industry in the growth of the economy.

1.4 Research objectives

This study aimed to contribute to the debate on digital gender inclusion by understanding how the surge in digitalisation in the Financial Services industry in response to the pandemic impacted women leaders. This study sought to:

1. Understand the perceived effect of digitalisation as experienced by women leaders in the financial services workplace
2. Explore the challenges and opportunities concerning women leaders working virtually in this sector

1.5 Rationale

South Africa aspires to address poverty and inequality by 2030 through the NDP effectively. The rapid digitalisation during the pandemic and the impact of remote/virtual work should be reviewed and understood in relation to the debate around digital gender equality in a South African context. At the same time,

several global organisations were monitoring the impact of the pandemic, such as WEF, ILO, WHO, PWC, Deloitte and McKinsey. Understanding women's lived experiences in the formal sector would support a deeper understanding of digital gender inclusion at a time when digitalisation erupted across multiple sectors and industries simultaneously. The learnings from this study could benefit governments and organisations seeking to understand the impact on women working virtually during the pandemic and post covid recovery strategies as organisations wrestle with implementing hybrid work models. This study could also support customising retention and progression efforts for women by understanding the intricate challenges women face as participants in the formal working sector, including how rapid digitalisation impacts women in the working world. Including women in the labour force is critical to generating sustainable economic prosperity for the country. Women's use and development of new digital technologies as active economic participants are linked to the increased financial growth of companies, new businesses and sectors in emerging markets which is critical for developing the SA economy (OECD, 2019).

To understand the impact of rapid digitalisation and working virtually, this study will focus on women in the formal sector, specifically women leaders in the financial services industry of South Africa. The financial services industry in South Africa is internationally recognised and accepted as a mature sector within the country. The South African Reserve Bank (SARB) regulates the industry, which is responsible for monetary policy development, the exchange process between banks providing liquidity and oversight across the sector (Flanders Investment & Trade, 2021). Financial services is considered one of the critical sectors in the SA economy, contributing approximately one trillion rands to the gross domestic product (GDP) (Statista, 2022).

1.6 Delimitations of the study

While most of the existing research has studied trends across American and European countries, this study will focus on the South African workplace, specifically on women leaders' experiences in the formal employment sector. The study reflected on the phenomenon of virtual work as the financial services

industry in SA responded to the global pandemic. This context was understood as an unprecedented and exceptional occurrence that offers a specific view of digitalisation and gender inclusion. The formal Sector, also known as the private sector in SA, makes up 70% of the total economy and is defined by 16 sectors where the government regulates policy and where each industry is required to pay tax. Financial Services is one of the 16 private sectors of the country (Labour, 2020). The workforce profile in South Africa was defined into six occupational categories. These were:

Top Management/ Senior Executives
Senior Management/Executive
Professionally Qualified/ Experienced Specialists/ Mid-Management
Skilled Technical & Academically Qualified/ Junior Management/ Supervisors/ Foreman/ Superintendents
Semi-skilled & discretionary decision making
Unskilled & defined decision making

Table 1-1: The SA workforce profile occupational categories (Labour, 2020)

These six occupational levels defined the complexity of work expected and the hierarchical position of the organisation's roles. The financial services industry comprises the Finance and Insurance sector and four subsectors: banking, insurance, asset management and stock exchange. This study aimed to understand women leaders' experiences in the financial services industry within the Senior Management, Professionally Qualified and Skilled occupational levels. A delimitation was that there may not be a sufficient sample of women leaders within the semi-skilled and unskilled categories, hence these occupation categories were excluded from this study. This study focused on women in the formal employment sector, where roles leverage technology to support daily productivity. It includes, but was not limited to, collaborative and interactive technologies like zoom, Google Meets and Microsoft teams.

1.7 Definition of terms

Below is a list of commonly used terminology emerging as part of this study.

Digitisation: Process of taking analogue information and turning it into a digital artefact (Jenkin & Naude, 2018).

Digitalisation: Using digital technologies to change business processes, models and engagement as organisations become digital businesses (Zeranski & Sancak, 2020)

Upskilling: Enhancing existing knowledge, capabilities and competencies to increase productivity in the current role (Devan & Mansori, 2020).

Reskilling: Building new skill sets across knowledge, capabilities and competencies to perform in new roles entering the workplace (Devan & Mansori, 2020).

Productive Labour: A term distinguishing labour that is paid, often associated with words such as “logical”, “powerful”, “strong”, and “assertive”. Refers to labour within the public realm, considered to be men’s work (Huws, 2019, Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021).

Reproductive Labour: A term used to describe labour that is unpaid and associated with words such as “emotional”, “sensitive”, and “empathy”. Refers to labour in the private sphere and is considered women’s work (Huws, 2019, Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021).

Virtual Team/s: A term for teams where members are physically and geographically dispersed but connected through collaborative technologies. This allows team members to work to achieve common goals, objectives, interact, share and connect through technology (Loughran, 2000).

1.8 Assumptions

This study assumed that participants understand digitalisation as a process within the workplace and gender inclusion as the intent to include women in the labour

force specifically. It also assumed that the participants will reflect on their lived experiences and offer standard responses based on occupational level, tenure, age and use of technology to fulfil role requirements. These experiences included reflecting on the impact of personal circumstances and the environment in which the participants experienced the pandemic. Three occupational levels in the financial services industry were targeted; Senior Management, Professionally Qualified and Skilled. This study assumed that leadership roles within these three occupational levels align with knowledge workers who influenced how work is coordinated and achieved by both individual contributors and managers of teams. It assumed that roles at these levels would have experienced a greater extent of rapid digitalisation to daily tasks during the pandemic, considering that most vital middle and back-office roles and teams would be clustered within these occupational levels.

1.9 Chapter Outline

This report is designed to explore and understand the impact, factors and characteristics defining women's experience during the rapid surge of digitalisation across the formal sector in response to the global pandemic. It is developed into six chapters:

Chapter 1: Provides a statement of purpose, background into the study, the research problem, research objectives, rationale, delimitations of the study, definition of terms, assumptions and chapter outline.

Chapter 2: Provides a literature review, reviewing pertinent literature, understanding key themes from theoretical and empirical studies conducted to understand digitalisation in the workplace and the experiences of women working and connecting virtually.

Chapter 3: Provides an overview of the methodology used in the study, the research approach, design and data collection methods used. It also

provides a detailed view of how the data was analysed and ethical considerations as part of conducting this research.

Chapter 4: Provides a detailed summary of the research findings. It contains an overview of the thematic analysis process followed, how the codebook was developed using a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive analysis and provides a high-level view visual overview of the analysis process. It also provides contextual evidence from the analysis using quotes from the semi-structured interview process to identify similarities and differences between the participant's lived experiences and the existing research.

Chapter 5: Provides a detailed description of the research findings and discusses these findings within the context of the existing literature and the theoretical framework. It discusses the contextual evidence from the analysis and identifies similarities and differences between the participant's lived experiences and the existing research.

Chapter 6: Provides an overview of the conclusions and recommendations from the research that organisations, governments and businesses can leverage to deepen their understanding of the relationship between digitalisation and gender inclusion as they navigate increased digitalisation and a new hybrid world of work. It also includes suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literature and scholarly articles related to this topic. The review used keywords to understand gender research and theory around the digitalisation of the workplace and the experiences of women using digital technologies to connect and work virtually.

2.2 Definition of topic

For this study, the term Gender inclusion will be defined as “acknowledging that everyone deserves to be treated with respect regardless of gender identity and expression and ensuring that systems and processes treat all genders equally” (pdac, 2019). This definition of gender inclusion encompasses systems and processes as workplace elements to guide our understanding of inclusion in this environment. Gender inclusion and the digital gender divide are similar in that both consider the treatment of men and women within the ecosystems in which they live and work (Bhutani & Paliwal, 2019) . The gender divide has been studied as a topic for many years. For this study, we will use the definition of the WEF, where the gender gap or divide is explained as “the difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes” (World Economic Forum, 2017) . The term “digital divide” became increasingly important to researchers and scholars in the 1990s to describe the growing inequalities in the access and use of ICTs (Bhutani & Paliwal, 2019; Kuroda et al., 2010; Mwim & Kritzinger, 2001; Yeganehfar et al., 2018).

The digital gender divide was first defined by the UN Women report of 2005, referring “to the differences in resources and capabilities to access and effectively utilise ICT for development that exist within and between countries, regions, sectors and socio-economic groups” (UN Women, 2005; pg. 2) . The 2005 report

also described characteristics of the digital gender divide as access, infrastructure, digital skills, and use of ICTs such as the internet and mobile technologies. For this study, this definition of the digital gender divide as it relates to the differences in resources and capabilities to access and effectively use ICTs within the Financial Services industry will be used. The research review focused on first understanding the digital workplace, how it started and evolved, and the challenges in the digital workplace including the experience of the digital workplace in financial services. The second part of the review focused on understanding the research around women's journey in the evolution of the workplace, how women work virtually and gender inclusion in the SA financial services industry.

2.3 Digitalisation in the workplace

2.3.1 Evolution of the digital workplace

Researchers do not know the exact moment that changes in the workplace started (Kanell, 2022). It can be argued that every industrial age has contributed to a specific change in the working world, from tools that enabled mass farming to factories where machinery was used in bulk processing and manufacturing. To understand how technology and digitisation have progressed in the working world, we begin our timeline in the 1970s when the first personal computer was created. The focus on enhancing computing power, collecting and storing data resulted in the fast-paced adoption of personal devices, faster internet, digitising data into the cloud, creation of Big Data and the use of AI to make sense of all this data as visualised below.

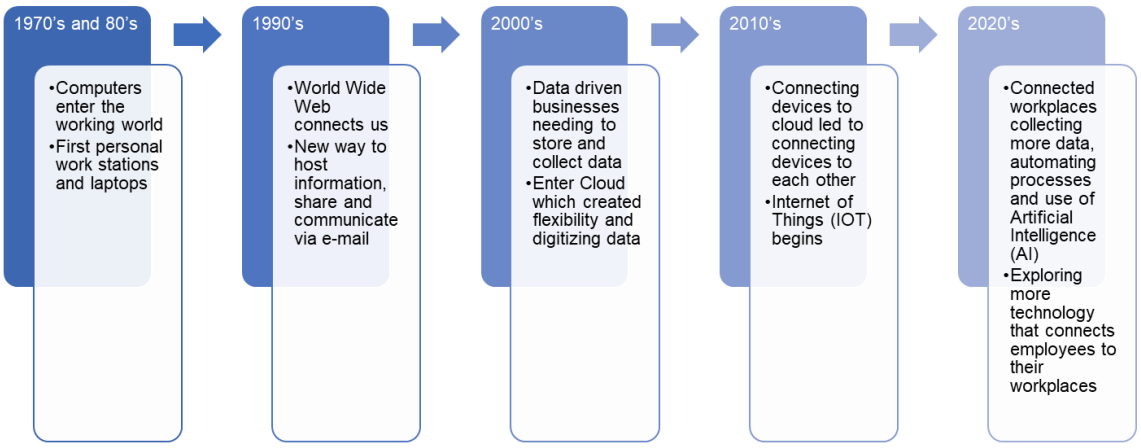


Figure 2-1: Timeline of technology in the workplace (Kanell, 2022)

As new technologies were introduced into the workplace, technology fundamentally changed how we worked over the last five decades. While the introduction of new technology meant that we could communicate, share, collect, store, analyse, interpret and make decisions using information differently, it also became a catalyst for change, transforming the physical brick-and-mortar workplace into a digital workplace (Mićić et al.,2022).

The advent of the digital workplace was in response to the introduction of the new technologies mentioned above and was first mentioned in the 1990s by Jeffrey Bier (William & Schubert, 2018). In 2014, Deloitte identified three trends accelerating change in the digital workplace: the application of the internet, new technologies influencing a new techno-savvy workforce and the rising growth of mobile technology. This technological growth increased access to information and accelerated change, a distinct characteristic of the 4th Industrial Revolution (Deloitte, 2014). Research suggests that no standard definition of the digital workplace exists (Mićić et al.,2022). However, definitions have varied from understanding the digital workplace as the "natural evolution" of the workplace focusing on technologies "people use to get work done in today's workplace. It ranged from core business applications to e-mail, instant messaging, enterprise social media and virtual meeting tools" Deloitte, 2014pg. 6). We will consider the digital workplace as "an integrated technology platform", providing tools and technologies, enabling team collaboration. This definition would also Include providing autonomous interaction wherever employees choose to work and

leveraging digital workplace design to bring the technology, business process and people ecosystem to life (William & Schubert, 2018).

Research suggests that investment in the digital workplace would help organisations respond to changes in rising market demands helping to increase employee productivity and overall satisfaction. It further indicates that investment in digital workspaces could assist in attracting critical talent, connecting employees in virtual spaces internally and externally, increasing engagement, knowledge sharing and reducing overall costs (Attaran et al.,2019; Cijan et al., 2019; Hoefling, 2017; Manda & Backhouse 2017; Mićić et al., 2022; Oeij et al., 2019; Selimović et al., 2021; William & Schubert, 2018) Similarly, this theme of enhancing working lives and experiences was also expressed by the ILO (International Labour Organisation, 2019) and improving job satisfaction was concluded in a study conducted by Cijan et al. (2019). The United Nations explained the benefits of the advancement of technologies to achieve what they termed “decent work” (United Nations, 2019).

Further to this, research by Attaran et al. (2019) amplified the reduction of costs. It increased productivity as crucial output from a digital workplace, highlighting that a typical worker in the United States spent approximately two hours every day duplicating work. This duplication of activity and sifting through large bodies of information could cost companies an average of $5000 per employee per year (Attaran, Attaran, & Kirkland, 2019).

William and Schubert (2018) helped identify six digital workplace designs that companies could review as they strategized on digital transformation (William & Schubert, 2018). The main elements identified in the research indicated that alignment between technology, people and business processes was critical in how work is done in organisations. Of the factors identified, the framing of the employee and their experiences as the centre of these designs remains critical, highlighting that the future of work is a “human-centred agenda” (Cijan, Jenič, Lamovsek, & Stemberger, 2019; Degryse, 2017; Deloitte, 2021; Eurofond, 2018; Haipeter, 2020; Loughran, 2000; Marsh, Vallejos & Spence, 2022; Merriman, 2007).

A survey by Deloitte in 2016 highlighted that most C-suite executives from organisations of various sizes and across geographies agreed that the changing workplace and the future of work were vital issues. Likewise, participants agreed that generational variation in the workplace would catalyse a deeper focus on decentralised collaboration where innovation and new business opportunities were benefits of increased collaboration (Deloitte, 2016a). Research by Oeji et al.(2019) into digital transformation and workplace innovation suggested that workplace innovation also catalyses employees to adopt new technologies because such innovation is considered easier and organic. The Deloitte report indicated that two-thirds of C-suite participants revealed that the two most important factors for achieving their vision and mission were transparent internal communications and culture (Deloitte, 2016a).

Culture has been identified in research as a critical theme because it influences the behaviour of employees, including their adoption of new technologies and their ability to collaborate, communicate and connect in a digital workplace (Cijan et al., 2019; Deloitte, 2016a; International Labour Organisation, 2019; Loughran, 2000; Oeiji et al., 2019; Marsh, Vallejos & Spence, 2022; Price Waterhouse Coopers 2018). In organisations where Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies were implemented, research on this new policy revealed the increasing concern of security issues across multiple private devices accessing internal organisational networks. The digital workplace was rapidly increasing internally and externally, with employees linking personal devices such as tablets, smart wearables and mobile phones to access their company data creating flexibility around how they accessed and consumed information required for work. (Deloitte, 2016b). The increased rate of new technological advancement and pace of change in the digital workplace means an ever-changing and dynamic environment with new critical factors like security and virtual culture emerging.

Unlike the working environments of previous industrial revolutions, where new machinery was implemented and enhanced over time, the digital workplace shifts and adjusts in near real-time as new technology is adopted and applied. Organisations and researchers need to remain vigilant in their observations and studies to understand the impact of such change, how this shapes the digital

workplace and how employees experience adapting to these new and continuous changes.

2.3.2 Challenges in the digital workplace

While the benefits and evolution of the digital workplace, as discussed above, were both enticing and somewhat forced onto organisations competing to stay relevant as new technologies were introduced into various organisations, leaders were uncertain about how to realise the expected benefits of this new workplace (Attaran et al.,2019). In attempting to find solutions and maximise benefits, organisations have faced various challenges, including cultural barriers, growing complexities, business misalignment and employee disengagement.

Cultural Barriers have emerged in several studies as a growing concern for organisations in the digital transformation process. The Deloitte 2014 survey of C-suite executives confirmed that most leaders saw culture as a barrier to achieving their vision and missions (Deloitte, 2016a). An organisation's culture influences and reinforces specific behaviours and actions of employees in a working context. The inter-relatedness of employees and the cultural context of organisations are determinant factors for how individuals and teams collaborate, connect or communicate (Deloitte, 2014). Culture also extends externally to include how organisations collaborate with governments, industry regulators, labour organisations such as works councils or unions and international forums. Collaboration on developing adequate policy and regulations, or the lack thereof, has been found to impact the digital workforce and employees (Deloitte, 2016b; Haipeter, 2020; Manda & Backhouse, 2017; OECD, 2019; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2018).

The growing complexities of the digital workplace relate directly to implementing tools within the workplace. Researchers have highlighted that increasing the number of devices or applications in organisations increases employees' complexity. This complexity needs to be understood as more than just the digitisation of the physical working world but also the shaping and influencing of the way people work and deliver through technology (Bhutani & Paliwal, 2019; (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020; Cijan et al., 2019; Deloitte, 2021; Graves &

Karabayeva, 2020; Manda & Backhouse, 2017; Mićić et al., 2022; William & Schubert, 2018). The introduction of new technologies is creating longer-term management concerns. This introduction includes the Cloud offering larger storage capabilities where applications are managed through third parties and not by organisations directly. The rise of platform economies has led to the creation of extended non-core workers who are available twenty-four hours a day and jobs are broken into smaller tasks (Degryse, 2017).

Business misalignment has been debated as one of the reasons why organisations have not seen the full benefit of their investment in their digital workplaces. A quote from Robert Solow, a Nobel laureate, articulated this dynamic between increased technology and questionable benefit realisation clearly, “You can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics” (Brynjolfsson et al.,2020, page1). Deloitte indicated that companies using traditional working methods such as conventional eight-to-five working hours and persistent expectations for employees to remain in physical offices, despite deploying new collaborative technology was creating hurdles for companies wanting to benefit from increased productivity, retention of employees and enhanced customer satisfaction as part of the digitalisation process (Deloitte, 2016b). This misalignment of business strategy, technology and employee enablement has left some organisations uncertain about benefits realisation through their digital transformation (William & Schubert, 2018).

Employee satisfaction, collaboration and engagement have been a standard benefit in most studies of digital workplaces. Another challenge, however, is the concern that employee disengagement could arise as employees try to navigate new collaborative technologies resulting in an information overload. Richter et al. (2018) situated the concern of “human work being disrupted” and replaced by technology. This study suggested a focus on digital workplace design (DWD) to centre on the work and experiences of employees first, then designing technology around this. The authors defined DWD “as an agile, participative, and interdisciplinary process of designing flexible workplaces by putting human work practices and their context in the centre when investigating the potential of digital technologies” (Richter et al.,2018; pg. 3).

DWD has proven to be complex for most organisations to achieve. The most concerning challenge noted thus far in the research is the need for more broadband and connections to address access inequalities (World Economic Forum, 2020). While more devices and connections seem beneficial, there is a growing concern about the effects of technology on physical health and mental well-being.

Marsh et al. (2022) worked on a review of literature studying information systems and human psychology to understand the “dark side” of technology. The study identified five “dark side” impacts: overload, technology-related stress, distraction and interruption, anxiety and addiction and excessive use (Marsh et al.,2022). A study by Graves and Karabayeva (2020) indicated that the employee-employer relationship, lack of social connectedness and lack of boundaries between work and home could be other factors impacting overall well-being and productivity (Graves & Karabayeva, 2020). This intense change in employees in the context of work has raised concerns about protecting employees in their working world and the need to understand how organisations enable a balanced work-life for employees (Attaran et al., 2019; Haipeter, 2020).

2.3.3 The financial services digital workplace

The financial services industry is one of the industries that have been at the forefront of digital transformation, rapidly changing to remain relevant, from the introduction of credit cards in the 1950s to debit cards in the 1980s to digital banking, e-commerce and mobile banking applications (World Economic Forum, 2015). The last ten years have seen the most digital change introduced in Financial Services from mobile money, peer-to-peer payments, digital wallets, Cloud, Big Data, AI, automated payments between machines and cryptocurrencies. As these innovations have entered the industry, researchers have questioned whether the higher levels of automation will result in job losses across the industry (Degryse, 2017; Eurofound, 2018; Jenkin & Naude, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2015). The financial services industry remains under extreme pressure to remain relevant in the face of new competitors like Alibaba and Ant Financial, who are creating a global platform that could support two billion

people (Marous, 2018). Although South Africa's financial services lag behind its competitors in the international arena, research suggests that it is still the leading industry across Africa, spending millions of rands on digitally transforming and digitalising their processes (Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Makola & Kgosinyane, 2020; Manda & Backhouse, 2017; McKinsey & Company, 2019; Uchenna et al., 2016).

Likewise, the south African digital workplace in financial services will continue to feel the compression of change as institutions strategize to retain and serve their customers as they adopt and use new technologies. In response, the financial services industry has invested vast amounts of money into infrastructure and digital technology over the last ten years (Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Manda & Backhouse, 2017, Geerdts, et al., 2021; unesco, 2019). The industry continues to invest in digital platforms and channels for customers. In 2022, it was reported that the banking sector in SA grew its combined headline earnings by 19% through increased digital transactional volumes across most product lines (Businesstech, 2022, Jenkin & Naude 2018; Louw & Nieuwenhuizen, 2020). Despite this growth in technology and digitalisation, the 2018 PWC survey "Tech at Work" revealed that less than 70% of employees surveyed were pleased with the tech in their organisations.

Financial service employees appeared to be losing patience with ongoing concerns around legacy systems and "bureaucratic ways of work". Employees were attracted to tech-savvy environments where teams could collaborate and innovate (Cijan et al., 2019; Graves & Karabayeva, 2020; Hoefling, 2017; Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2019). While the debate around increased digitalisation has focused on job losses, and although the four major banks in SA had closed 695 branches in total by the end of February 2019 (The Citizen, 2019), there was consensus in various studies suggesting that while jobs will change, digitisation will ultimately result in increased jobs at a higher level of skill by 2030 and the south African economy could see an increase in one million jobs (Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Makola & Kgosinyane, 2020; Manda & Backhouse, 2017; McKinsey & Company, 2019; Uchenna et al., 2016). The realisation of the NDP, the collaborative partnership between the government and the financial services industry and concerns around rising unemployment levels make

digitalisation and automation increasingly important for the growth of the SA economy. (Geerdts, et al., 2021; Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Manda & Backhouse, 2017; Makola & Kgosinyane, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2019; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2019).

Organisations have acknowledged a need for more digital skills across the world (Lagesen et al.,2021) and across South Africa (Makola & Kgosinyane, 2020). This shortage has prompted them to develop various academies and programmes to support the upskilling required to use new internal tools to support productivity effectively (Jenkin & Naude, 2018). While there is a need to work on developing better technical capabilities to utilise internal tools fully, there is also a view that indicates that companies who have succeeded in their digital journeys are those who ensure that they have user-friendly hardware and software that is not difficult to upgrade and intuitive enough to understand easily with little to no training required (Attaran, Attaran, & Kirkland, 2019). This balance between the time taken for reskilling versus adaptive behavioural change as new tools are deployed is a complex problem yet to be solved in all industries, including the financial services (Hoefling, 2017).

2.4 Experiences of women working and connecting virtually

2.4.1 The journey of women toward digitalisation

The progression of women socially, economically and politically has been a global marathon since the 1900s. The advancement of women's and girls' rights has been championed by the feminist movement that has advocated for change challenging the traditional notions of reproductive labour associated with care and domestic responsibilities in the home (Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021). There have been four waves of feminism, and each wave has progressed with specific outcomes in the struggle to attain gender equity. Each wave builds on the progress of the previous wave and continues to advocate for sustainable change for women in society. Table 2-1 provides an overview of the journey of feminism since the 1900s, the period, the focus of each wave, as well as the outcomes and criticisms noted in research:

	Period	Focus	Desired Outcomes	Criticism
First Wave	1900 to 1959	Emancipation	Suffrage movement Property, Political, education and reproductive rights	Seen as exclusionary as it focused on the rights of white, upper class woman
Second Wave	1960 to 1970	Post colonialism and birth of feminism subgroups: **Liberal** – Focused on creating access for women in traditionally male dominated spaces seeking gender reform **Radical** – System is inherently patriarchal , needs to be dismantled and rebuilt **Cultural** – Similar to radical but believed women were distinctly different to men	Founded on civil rights movements and principles Deeper look into the traditional roles women played in society Pushing for an end to gender inequalities in all aspects	Viewed as unable to explain deeper structural and societal issues that were recurring Appeared heavily weighted only on the negative experiences of women Concern that sub groups could dilute the impact of the movement
Third Wave	1990's to 2000's	Freedom of expression and identity Understanding gender fluidity more than just the binary understanding of male and female	Arrival of intersectionality and wider diversity in the movement Embracing growing transgender community and sexual rights	By this wave the dominant criticism was that women still remained oppressed despite advances in legislation and policy
Fourth Wave	2008 to present	Building a new, inclusive roadmap to accelerate equality powered by technology	Technology accepted as a new form of expression and means of communication Digital transformation and adoption as an untapped opportunity to realise gender parity	Proving to be complex and the outcomes of the evolution is unknown due to the pace of change Rise of social media and confusion about its positive and negative effects on women and girls

Table 2-1: The four waves of feminism (adapted from (Huws, 2019; Ferguson, 2017; Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021; Soken-Huberty, 2021)

Whilst it is widely accepted that feminist research considers the gender relations and the power structures built because of this, Benschop positioned a view that not all gender research conducted can be immediately assumed to be feminist research (Benschop, 2021) . The detailed systematic literature review conducted by Grau-Sarabia, and Fuster-Morrel (2021) argued that while the term “gender” is widely used and sometimes used interchangeably with the term “women”, the view positioned by the researchers was that there appeared to be no mutual agreement on what this means including amongst women scholars (Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021). While there has been extensive research into feminism and gender that is vast and too many to mention, the dominant theme emerging from this research is the intent to go beyond just the theory to tangibly and sustainably transform society (Benschop, 2021; Ferguson, 2017; Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morrel, 2021).

The magnitude of the change encompassing 4th industrial revolution has been hailed as a golden opportunity to address several gender inequalities that have existed, from access to infrastructure to creating opportunities for countries of all sizes and capital positions to adopt and use technology to stimulate growth in economies, to being a catalyst to resolve the digital gender inequalities noted by

global organisations and forums (G20 Insights, 2020; Hilbert 2011; Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Kuroda et al., 2010; UN Women 2005). In this period of change where digital transformation has pushed organisations to review their business and economic models, it has created the opportunity for organisations to review their digital workplace design, including “gendered work patterns”, where previous workplaces have been built on gender roles (Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021).

A study by McKinsey suggested that women could take up most of the new job opportunities created by digitalisation. The contribution of women remains undervalued, often clustered in high administrative, non-technical, back-office functions considered support work (Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021). The report forecasted that women could make up 45% of the total workforce in SA by 2030 – which amounts to 1.6 million new, higher-skilled job opportunities for women supporting the view in other studies suggesting that digitalisation will create multiple opportunities for women to actively participate in the workforce (Makola & Kgosinyane, 2020; Manda & Backhouse, 2017; McKinsey & Company, 2019; OECD, 2017).

While research points to many opportunities to address digital gender inclusion, increase women’s economic participation in the economy and empower women using ICTs. Some authors have debated if this can be realised considering current levels of inclusion considering the use of the internet (UN Women, 2005). The United Nations reported that women’s internet use was 12% less than men's. Although research indicated that the gap had narrowed since 2013, in developing countries, the gap had increased. The report also drew attention to the growing gender gap in the technology industry (UN Women, 2005).

A study by Hilbert questioned the rationale used to explain the digital gender divide aligned to internet usage and examined the differences in usage between men and women as well as whether developing countries were falling behind due to the widely substantiated factors resulting in inequalities seen in adoption and usage (Hilbert, 2011) The study challenged the view of women being “techno-phobic” demonstrating that while men and women do tend to make use of the internet for completely different things – women engaged more in online training

and development making greater use of online opportunities than men and women were reported to enjoy communicating digitally. Hilbert also confirmed that using criteria in a controlled sample to conduct the study revealed that the gaps noted between the controlled and uncontrolled samples reduced significantly if samples were placed on “equal footing”, challenging pre-determined views of women’s technology usage.

Likewise, Herbert (2017) further challenged this notion of technophobia adding that even when women have access to technology such as mobile phones, the deeply rooted inequalities in society prevented women from using technology freely. Herbert noted that women had to battle social norms such as ownership, security and harassment in their environments that were barriers to their usage of technology (Herbert, 2017) These studies stood in opposition to the commonly assumed understanding that the gender digital divide was a factor of women being “techno-phobic”, not adopting or using technology and showed that pre-existing inequalities and stereotypes were still creating barriers for women in the 4th industrial revolution (Hillbert,2011; Herbert, 2017).

In SA, where women make up 51.1% of the total population, women continue to be excluded both in terms of access and digital literacy, which prevents them from making use of ICT in a manner that supports social and financial growth (G20 Insights, 2020; Herbert, 2017). According to Statistics South Africa, although the total number of women in the economically active population between the ages of 15 to 64 years of age equated to 19 977 000 in June 2021, only 22% were employed in the formal sector confirming the low representation of women in the workplace (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Barriers to women’s digital inclusion aligned with Hilbert's (2011) and Herbert's (2017) findings where traditional gender restrictions exist in laws or socio-cultural norms, poverty, reduced educational opportunities for girls, restricted access to labour markets and continuing gender stereotypes. Research into the rise in female leaders in the workplace delved into the gender stereotypes around Think Manager-Think Male preconceived notions. It examined the trend of female leaders being placed in leadership roles in companies with declining performance resulting in the Think Crisis-Think Female association (Ryan, Haslam, & Hersby, 2011). While the

study highlighted the challenges women leaders were facing in the workplace and questioned if women leaders are set up to fail in crises, it did highlight that female leadership characteristics are indeed suitable for crises situations leveraging female-associated leadership behaviours such as empathy and compassion to navigate crises. The study emphasised that the context of the crisis was an important factor to understand how men and women in leadership showed up in highly pressurised situations (Ryan, Haslam, & Hersby, 2011).

In South Africa, the inclusion and advancement of women within the workplace, including within leadership, remains a concern where women remain a minority in the country's workforce.

2.4.2 Women working virtually

One of the earliest mentions of "virtual work" was in the 1900s when Lamon et al. (1997) undertook a study of a growing phenomenon called "telework". This work was defined as working in a location distant from the physical office for a set period during the week. The growing trend occurred mainly in sales and service environments where plans were constructed around employees completing work obligations at home or elsewhere (Lamond et al.,1997). While working virtually and virtual work as terms seem to be used interchanging – it has evolved to define how work is done using technology and in any environment outside of the physical brick and mortar structure of a physical working environment.

Lamond et al. (1997). suggested that this way of working in the context of their study was regarded as "the most radical departure(s) from standard working conditions". The study suggested that this way of work would be desirable for employees looking to balance work and non-work related activities such as holiday time, family commitments, reducing travel to work or requiring no travel at all. Employee benefits included increased autonomy, flexibility and overall job satisfaction resulting in healthier and more productive employees. The study proposed a five-point framework that organisations could use to understand the implications of telework across national characteristics, structures of organisations and their culture, human capital processes and practices, and organisational group and individual context (Lamond et al.,1997). This was

similar to the findings of Attaran et al. (2019) concluding that organisations should be encouraging greater collaboration and Degryse (2017) who questioned how organisations would approach working time and the health of the workforce as new technology changes the way people work (Attaran et al., 2019; Degryse, 2017). These studies concluded that a new way of working with increased technological advances could only be further understood as organisations embraced this evolution of work. The findings of this research were particularly interesting because these studies included many factors organisations are still struggling to understand and solve 25 years later.

Within the digital workplace, the introduction of collaborative technologies that allow individuals to work away from the physical office has paved the way for both virtual and remote work, allowing individuals to connect and share knowledge and ideas to get necessary work done (Attaran et al., 2019; Degryse, 2017; Hoefling, 2017). Leveraging the work from Lamond et al.(1997) the concept of remote work was familiar, and the pre-pandemic majority of work was still conducted in physical offices. Employees in digital workspaces were leveraging new technology to store, produce, calculate, share, collate, design, sign off, collaborate and execute pieces of work using their internal tools. Women, active participants in the labour market, were exposed to these technologies in and outside the workplace (Deloitte, 2016a).

Throughout the exponential growth in technologies from the 1990s, research by the WEF noted an unexpected decline in this growth in 2017 (World Economic Forum, 2017). According to the WEF, based on the Global Gender Gap Report, the progress toward digital equality declined across health, economics, politics and education, effectively widening the digital gender gap. At the rate of the progression noted, the WEF predicted that gender equality in the workplace would not be realised for another 217 years (World Economic Forum, 2017). A similar sentiment was expressed by Huws, who argued that despite technological advancement, women remained in the majority of unpaid reproductive labour (Huws, 2019). Twenty-five years after the first global gender equality conference in Beijing, the UN Women's reported that they " have seen powerful pushback, with damaging reversals of hard-won advances". The report supported findings

by Huws, noting that, on average, women were still doing three times more domestic and care work than their male counterparts, confirming that women remain disproportionately burdened by reproductive work. It also highlighted that women's active participation in the global labour force "stagnated" for the last two decades at 31%, with women being paid up to 16% less than their male counterparts (UN Women, 2020).

While the dominant assumption in the majority of the research reiterates that the digitalisation of the workplace should lead to job satisfaction, greater flexibility, autonomy and productivity benefits for employees and organisations (Attaran et al., 2019; Deloitte, 2014; Deloitte 2016a; Deloitte, 2016b; ILO, 2019; OECD, 2017; UN Women, 2020), there are challenges which include the health of virtual workers (Selimović et al.,2021), difficulties in the way teams connect and interact virtually (Merriman et al.,2007), how virtual work is regulated (Degryse, 2017), the behaviour of workers as they interact with new technologies (Loughran, 2000), the developmental needs of teams in virtual environments (Rajahonka & Villman, 2019) and the needs for new mental models and methods in organisations (Hoefling, 2017).

Lamon et al.(1997) suggested that the success of at-home or remote telework practices would depend on an organisation's ability to establish trust, openness and flexibility with employees. They cited that this change in working practices would fundamentally change the culture of organisations (Lamond, Kevin, & Peter, 1997). Merriman et al.(2007) studied profiling virtual employees to support management and leadership approaches. The findings highlighted issues such as the need for more trust, team connection and identity in virtual environments (Merriman et al.,2007). The need for cultural change was supported by Hoefling, as she positioned the need for "new mental models" where organisations and leaders shift to support employees as opposed to employees needing to "fit" their organisations and leaders. She opined the need to shift toward team-based performance, open collaboration and knowledge sharing (Hoefling, 2017).

Another challenge Loughran (2000) noted concerning globally dispersed teams working virtually was the difficulty in navigating cultural differences and an inability to correctly interpret visual and auditory signals through technical

channels, which are much stronger during face-to-face interaction, thus resulting in a lack of trust. She concluded that most challenges faced in virtual environments are predominantly caused by people opposed to the technology (Loughran, 2000). A study by Selimović et al.(2021) discussed “technostress” resulting from the user’s observations of the technical complexity and their abilities or lack thereof. The authors also suggested that “technostress” occurred when new technologies were introduced without necessary work design or environment changes. The findings highlighted a need to look beyond the technology and usage to consider the behavioural intentions and expectations of the employees expected to live alongside the technology (Selimović et al.,2021).

Rajahonka and Villman undertook the first study into the relationship between digitalisation, career development and well-being in women managers and entrepreneurs to understand how women use digital technologies in their personal and professional lives. Their findings revealed that while women remain prudent in using technology, their reactions to using technology were very positive. Women were also keen to network with other women to develop their careers, find solutions to balance well-being and enhance their digital skills to support career development and progression (Rajahonka & Villman, 2019). This need to connect was also reflected in research by Banks-Weston, highlighting that women turned to mentorship relationships during the pandemic to progress their careers and proactively sought greater collaboration while working virtually (Banks-Weston, 2020).

While most of the research focused on the benefits of working virtually, there are also concerns that virtual work could negatively impact women’s participation in the global labour market. The report indicated that while women had been the primary beneficiaries of the growth in “high-skilled” jobs and women-owned digital businesses were increasing in reach and exposure; women remained underrepresented in emerging digital spaces such as the platform economy (OECD, 2017). The OECD recognised the inequality that virtual working could result in arguing that while men and women’s skill sets differed mainly in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) quantitative skills, women would not benefit from the increased digitalisation. In the search for greater flexibility,

digitalisation could result in complex work being broken into tasks where individuals take up work assignments that could result in lower-quality jobs, longer working hours and higher unemployment due to employee dissatisfaction (OECD, 2017).

2.4.3 Empowered or Constrained-Women in South African Financial Services

The Financial Services industry in South Africa has faced rapid change over the past two decades, some might argue that the industry was not ready for (Marous, 2018). They have turned to new technology to tailor customer experiences, increase productivity and lower costs to stay relevant. With the use of AI, digital wallets, cloud, contactless payments, cryptocurrencies, internet banking, mobile banking, robovisors, automated weather alerts, and real-time claims capturing using mobile photos and chatbots, to name a few – financial services have invested substantial amounts of money into new technology which has transformed the way services are delivered (Flanders Investment & Trade, 2021, Jenkin & Naude, 2021, Marous,2018, Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2019). The industry's size across SA is massive, with a total headcount of 436 987 full-time employees in 2019/2020. The representation of women reported in the workplace profile of financial services indicated that women accounted for 244 801 of the workforce, exceeding parity at 56%. The profile also indicated that most women were in the industry's skilled, semi-skilled, professionally qualified and senior management categories, with underrepresentation noted in the top management category (Labour, 2020).

WORKFORCE PROFILE FOR ALL EMPLOYEES	Male				Female				Foreign National		Total
	A	C	I	W	A	C	I	W	Male	Female	
Top Management	541	160	346	2489	323	116	174	639	163	37	4988
	10,8%	3,2%	6,9%	49,9%	6,5%	2,3%	3,5%	12,8%	3,3%	0,7%	100,0%
Senior Management	2407	889	1955	7335	1889	799	1390	4330	752	331	22077
	10,9%	4,0%	8,9%	33,2%	8,6%	3,6%	6,3%	19,6%	3,4%	1,5%	100,0%
Professionally qualified	14332	4702	6328	16020	14384	5832	6464	15198	1430	894	85584
	16,7%	5,5%	7,4%	18,7%	16,8%	6,8%	7,6%	17,8%	1,7%	1,0%	100,0%
Skilled	35881	9982	5839	11601	52560	19076	9219	20930	1103	1013	167204
	21,5%	6,0%	3,5%	6,9%	31,4%	11,4%	5,5%	12,5%	0,7%	0,6%	100,0%
Semi-skilled	46326	6028	2352	2808	58101	12808	4111	7235	632	565	140966
	32,9%	4,3%	1,7%	2,0%	41,2%	9,1%	2,9%	5,1%	0,4%	0,4%	100,0%
Unskilled	8595	761	52	124	5672	505	36	88	253	82	16168
	53,2%	4,7%	0,3%	0,8%	35,1%	3,1%	0,2%	0,5%	1,6%	0,5%	100,0%
TOTAL PERMANENT	**108082**	**22522**	**16872**	**40377**	**132929**	**39136**	**21394**	**48420**	**4333**	**2922**	**436987**
	24,7%	**5,2%**	**3,9%**	**9,2%**	**30,4%**	**9,0%**	**4,9%**	**11,1%**	**1,0%**	**0,7%**	**100,0%**
Temporary employees	6055	630	289	622	5823	848	303	625	149	65	15409
	39,3%	4,1%	1,9%	4,0%	37,8%	5,5%	2,0%	4,1%	1,0%	0,4%	100,0%
GRAND TOTAL	**114137**	**23152**	**17161**	**40999**	**138752**	**39984**	**21697**	**49045**	**4482**	**2987**	**452396**

Table 2-2: Workforce profile for Financial Services over 2019/2020 (Labour, 2020)

Looking at the strength of representation of women in the industry and the extensive technologies entering the financial services industry, one could assume that financial services were the industry to be in, to upskill and reskill across a vast digital landscape that was keeping pace with technological change. At this same time and without warning the world, SA as a country and this industry were about to participate in the world's largest “work from home project” ever seen (Casale & Posel, 2020).

The onset of the global coronavirus pandemic forced a surge in digitalisation that the world had never seen or anticipated, with research indicating that the journey of digitalisation before this was progressing at different paces and different maturities depending on regional maturity and capital position of organisations (Degryse, 2017; Deloitte 2014; Deloitte, 2016a; Deloitte 2016b; Eurofound, 2018; Mckinsey & Company 2019). The pandemic pushed the global workforce out of the physical workplace into the home, leveraging technology as the only channel to the outside world. Across financial services, the digital payment, credit, services and claims channels that organisations were adopting exploded with transactions as official lockdowns forced the closing of physical branches (World Economic Forum, 2015).

Growth in digital banking services grew exponentially; international bank Wells Fargo for example, noted an increase of 35% in remote cheque deposits and 50% growth in online transfers (Valenti & Alderman, 2021); across the globe, digital commerce payments increased by 15% and point of sale payments by 50% (Agur et al.,2020). A largely unknown reality confronted technical teams across the globe, and with the saturation of new technologies across organisations, teams did not know which technologies needed to be prioritised, leading to confusion in the inner workings of companies (Cheh, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the inequalities across the formal economy, clearly highlighting the extent to which women and girls remain weighed down by unpaid labour in the home, which could derail existing gender inclusion progress (Mahajan et al., 2020; Parry and Gordon, 2021; UN Women, 2020). Across SA, the economy was forecasted to decrease by 8% in 2020. The pandemic forced a stop on unemployed individuals who were actively looking for employment due to extensive lockdown restrictions and initial studies into the effects of the pandemic revealed that job losses were severe with a negative disproportionate impact on women, black Africans, youth and uneducated people in the country (Ranchod & Daniels, 2021).

A study by van Esch et al.(2021) indicated that individuals who self-identified as women and were more concerned about the effects of the pandemic reached out to networks to find a mentor to guide them through this difficult time (van Esch, Luse, & Robert, 2021). These findings were similar to the findings from Bank-Weston (2020) on social connectedness in diverse women while working virtually. Well-being concerns increased drastically, and it became evident that the pandemic impacted women more than men across all aspects, from employment to access to health care.

Aldosarri and Chaudhry (2021) looked at the effects of burnout. Although research classified burnout as “gender-neutral”, authors argued that burnout was disproportionately affecting more women than men (Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2021). This finding was also reinforced in the action study conducted by Boncori (2020), where she documented her personal experiences through the pandemic of the “never-ending shift” and the impact on her overall health and well-being

(Boncori, 2020). Mahajan et al.(2020) reflected on the gender impact of the pandemic, raising the concern that women remained at a higher risk of job losses, having endured more of the negative impact of the pandemic compared to men (Mahajan et al.,2020).

The initial research into the pandemic highlighted that while digitalisation offered many opportunities to use new technology and keep teams and families connected during the pandemic – it didn't appear to contribute positively to gender inclusion and overall experiences of women. Furthermore, little to no research explored the lived experiences of women engaging with technology in a virtual workspace (Lee, 2006) or if technology would make it easier for women to remain in financial services, maintaining the gains of gender inclusion achieved at the onset of the pandemic.

2.5 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the review of the literature conducted, it is evident that while digitalisation has been positioned as a key enabler of gender inclusion, there are challenges that women still face. There is limited research that investigates women's lived experiences as they interact and experience the phenomenon of increasing workplace digitalisation. This research will focus on the dominant themes emerging from the literature review around digital enablers, digital workplace design, well-being and culture.

2.5.1 Theoretical Framework

For this study and to understand how women work virtually, four sub-theories emerged from feminist theory that touches the workplace. A brief overview includes capitalism, focused on change in global labour market participation and divisions between paid and unpaid work (Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021). The feminist organisational theory concentrates on power dynamics and inequalities between genders across structures, hierarchies and all other dimensions within organisations, including policies (Benschop, 2021). Feminist technology theory builds on gender inequalities as inherent features of existing structures which are

also built into everyday uses of technology (Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021). Lastly, the theory of technology domestication centres on the user's context and how the user adjusts the technology to fit their everyday requirements (Rajahonka & Villman, 2019).

Previous research indicated that digitalisation is a major opportunity to drive increased gender inclusion and, doing so, supports growth socially, politically, economically and technologically. The actual relationship between digitalisation and gender inclusion is not clear, and there are several challenges that organisations continue to struggle to solve. In comparison, each of the theories above has been studied in the context of different organisations, and the findings are related to the broader understanding of digitalisation, women, and the workplace. The domestication of technology theory resonated in line with this study as it seeks to enhance "our understanding of technology in everyday life" (Hynes & Richardson, 2009; 2). While there have been many methodological studies, domestication of technology theory appears to be a neglected area of interest.

Interestingly, Hynes and Richardson (2009) fully rejected the "one size fits all" notion of technology adoption, finding that every experience differs because users design their individual domestication process. They also observed that this approach could be used to understand the under-researched context within the home, which has been a specific area of interest for feminist researchers. The literature review also highlighted four themes related to digitalisation and gender inclusion. These developing themes are:

> **Digital Enablers:** These are the tools and technologies that workplaces select to support how work gets done. The tools incorporated into the workplace focus on how employees work, be productive, remain connected and achieve business objectives (Cijan et al.,2019). The literature review indicated that organisations would choose their tools based on their current needs, business drivers, historical contexts and customer needs.

Digital Workplace Design: This refers to the framework and strategies organisations, and senior leaders create when designing how technologies, business processes and people should be integrated into a seamless digital ecosystem that enables employees to be productive and organisations to realise their business goals (Richter et al.,2018). The review also suggested that where business alignment and integration were not successfully achieved, it could result in organisations realising little to no benefit of digitalisation in the workplace.

Well-being: Refers to the (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual) overall well-being of employees defined by work and influenced by workplace conditions and interventions (Juniper, 2011) . According to existing research, while digitalisation offers both positive and negative effects on the workforce, research is divided; some research points to technology enabling employees to increase productivity, collaborate effectively, increase satisfaction, drive better engagement, offer greater flexibility and balance home and work requirements. Other research indicates it is also related to low job satisfaction, low-quality work, higher unemployment rates, longer working hours, ineffective team connection, stress and burnout (Aldosarri & Chaudhry, 2021; Boncori, 2020; Cijan et al., 2019; Marsh et al., 2022; Merriman et al., 2007; Rajahonka & Villman, 2019).

Culture: Corporate culture refers to the beliefs, behaviours, implicit rules, identities, traditions, knowledge, and shared meaning that guide how employees and managers interact as they work together to achieve business goals/objectives (Gorton et al.,2021). Here digitalisation again exists in contradiction with research suggesting that digitalisation in the workplace leads to increased social connection, positive collaboration, increased innovation, ongoing learning and opportunity for career progression. The converse suggested that digitalisation could result in an inability to correctly interpret behavioural signals through virtual channels, resulting in conflict, longer-term management concerns due to the lack of quality employee-employer connection, and difficulties in building trust between teams exacerbating silos and employee fatigue (Boncori, 2020;

Cijan et al., 2019; Marsh et al., 2022; Merriman et al., 2007; Rajahonka & Villman, 2019).

2.6 Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature review focused on understanding digitalisation in the workplace and how women connect and work virtually. Several studies focused on adopting and using technology, and researchers highlighted a need to understand the experiences of individuals undergoing the digitalisation process. Findings reiterated that the evolution of the workplace would continue as new technologies continue to be introduced. Within this continuous evolution lies the concern that gender inclusion progress attained over the last twenty-five years remains precarious and current gains might be lost if not sustainably addressed. The surge of digitalisation during the pandemic revealed pervasive inequalities, where the majority of the burden was placed on women resulting in increased well-being, productivity and disengagement concerns. This study sought to understand the perceived effect of digitalisation on gender inclusion experienced by women leaders in financial services and explore the opportunities and challenges concerning women leaders working virtually.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is key to exploring the nature of phenomena and is, therefore, the optimal method for capturing social responses as it allows the researcher to explore and describe how individuals make meaning and sense of their working experiences during this time. This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology used to understand the effect of digitalisation on gender inclusion by studying the experiences of women leaders. This chapter includes the approach, design, how data will be collected, stored, analysed and how quality assurance and ethical considerations will be upheld.

3.1 Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative approach to enable me to closely explore the lived experiences of women working in South African financial services during a period of rapid digitalisation in their workplaces to understand the impact of virtual work and the relationship between digitalisation and gender inclusion. Qualitative approaches recognise that meaning, understanding and information are constructs of our world (Davidsen, 2013) . It allows the researcher to understand the world's context through the participants' perspective, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was used to guide the study to get closer to women leaders in financial services who experienced rapid digitalisation and virtual working during the pandemic. This approach was selected to understand how participants created meaning as they interpreted their lived experiences. IPA focuses on how the participants interpret their experience but also gives the researcher agency to interpret the participant's interpretation. IPA is considered useful when studying lived experiences and creates the opportunity for the researcher to get closer to the individual experiences of participants to understand how individuals make meaning of the same experience (Creswell, 2007; Finlay, 2009). Due to the multiple layers of interpretation that could take place, it can be challenging for researchers to aggregate the findings and correlate trends in the data. IPA accepts that each person interprets their experiences based on their world views which are unique and different, making it

difficult to cluster feedback into common themes (Finlay, 2009). The majority of the research that contributes to feminist theoretical approaches has also relied on qualitative research methods and phenomenology to understand women's perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2007).

3.2 Research design - phenomenology

In terms of identifying unifying design features of the qualitative approach, Kahlke (2014) says that, like all qualitative research, studies focus on how the participants interpret their lived experiences, construct their environments, and attribute meaning to their experiences (Kahlke, 2014). This approach supported understanding how each individual women leader experienced the phenomena and reflected and interpreted it to create meaning for themselves, relying on the new information they had learned and their personal and professional pre-existing knowledge in the world around them. According to Creswell the defining feature of the phenomenological study approach is to study individuals who share experiences of a specific phenomenon to gain a deeper understanding of these experiences (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology has since developed and branched into different directions and approaches but has ultimately focused on being able to "describe a phenomenon in its fullest depth and breadth" (Davidsen, 2013). There are three branches of phenomenology namely;

> **Transcendental Phenomenology:** The study of the appearance of things as they are seen through one's consciousness
>
> **Hermeneutic Phenomenology:** Studying how meaning is made through lived experiences as they take place
>
> **Existential Phenomenology:** Studying an experience through the consciousness of the person/people having the experience

For this study, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was adopted to study how women leaders made meaning of their experiences of digitalisation while they had to work virtually during the pandemic (Finlay, 2009). While phenomenology offers an opportunity to gather rich data and compliments the

semi-structured interview process, this research design can equally result in too much data being collected, making the analysis difficult. This research design also allows researchers to get very close to the phenomena being studied and although the researcher is studying how the participants are making meaning of their lived experiences, the researcher is challenged to ensure that their personal bias is not interpreted into the findings. The researcher must remain objective but depending on how meaning is created and interpreted, this design may include a level of subjectivity which could make it difficult to inform policy changes and further interventions (Creswell, 2007; Finlay, 2009).

3.3 Data collection methods

The phenomenological approach included semi-structured interviews selected as the method to collect the relevant data and understand the experiences of women in financial services – *Appendix C.* This method was identified as appropriate to this study to help identify participants and uncover new variables and characteristics of the phenomenon being studied. This method allowed for a deeper analysis of social network connections, where participants leveraged their networks to identify or recruit new participants for the study. This method also contributed to the non-probability of the research, which could be useful as the population of interest may be difficult to reach.

Data was collected through in-depth virtual engagement with participants, using a semi-structured interview guide. Virtual interviews at a time convenient for participants were conducted between October to December 2022. The participants were allowed to record a voluntary daily written diary for two weeks to get closer to the participants' deeper unguided experiences, feelings and thoughts that might not be attainable during the hour-long semi-structured interview. Participants provided consent to record all interviews using MS teams or Google Meets using the participant consent form – *Appendix B*. Personal information was collected. The data descriptors were anonymised using a pseudonym to maintain and protect the confidentiality of participants' demographic data, including age, race, education, relational status, occupation, tenure and role. The snowballing sampling method was selected for this research.

The initial participants were sufficiently varied to avoid skewing data in a particular direction throughout the study. Participants who had concerns about providing information regarding their networks or sharing additional personal details were supported with a detailed discussion around the necessary ethical considerations to ensure that they fully understood the purpose, objectives, informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality of the study.

3.4 Population and sample

3.4.1 Population

The participants who volunteered to participate in the study identified racially as black. This term needs to be understood in how black is defined within the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) act, number 53 of 2003. This act defines black as a generic term that describes communities targeted under the laws of apartheid in SA, also known as previously disadvantaged and includes African, Coloured and Indian communities. (Republic of South Africa, 2004). Under the laws of apartheid, Asian and Malaysian communities such as Chinese, Japanese and Cape Malaysians were classified as either Coloured or Indian. This understanding is a critical consideration within this study because while women as a gender category remain underrepresented within the SA workforce and in leadership positions, black women as a subcategory within the category of women, remain specifically marginalised within leadership positions across the financial services industry.

The snowballing method was used to reach participants and even though it was not a direct intent at the start of the study, the use of the snowballing sampling method resulted in participants being more women leaders within the black community. The population for this study, therefore, resulted in a homogenous group of black women leaders across financial services. According to the 2019/2020 Labour Report in SA, black women constituted 62% of women within the Professionally Qualified category and only 10% of women in the Senior Management category (Labour, 2020). The homogenous sample of black female leaders included five senior managers and created the opportunity to amplify the

voices, views and perspectives of black women leaders as a subset of women leaders in the financial services industry.

3.4.2 Sample & Sampling Method

To reach women leaders in financial services working within senior management, professionally qualified and skilled occupational levels, snowballing as a sampling method was used. The nature of snowballing allowed identifying women leaders within targeted categories and accessing their networks to reach additional participants who met the criteria to participate in the research. The snowballing method was broken up into various stages. Each stage relied on the participants from each stage supporting and enlisting the next phase participants by referring them to participate. Although research into sample sizes for qualitative phenomenological research has been debated by several authors, the researcher considered the sample population of women leaders and the guidance from Creswell(2008) of a number between 5 to 25 interviews to get to an aspirational target of 16 interviews (Bekele & Ago, 2022). Although the initial sample size of 16 was proposed, the sampling method was expected to cascade as follows until saturation had been reached:

- First Phase: The first five participants were targeted using existing networks and invited to participate
- Second Phase: Phase 1 participants identify the next five participants
- Third Phase: Phase 2 participants identify the next five participants
- Fourth Phase: Phase 3 participants identify the next five participants until sample size or saturation has been reached, whichever was achieved first.

According to Braun and Clarke (2019), saturation in qualitative research has been understood as the moment in the research process where no new themes, concepts, or information emerges from the semi-structured interviews. While there have been several studies on how to conduct thematic analysis and “how” saturation is achieved, Braun and Clarke (2019) have argued that by concentrating on thematic analysis as a process where themes emerge from the data through the process of reflexive analysis, researchers should embrace the “uncertainty” within sampling and allow the point of saturation to organically

emerge through the research as it unfolds instead of attempting to identify this in advance.

Using Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis and identifying the point of "information redundancy", nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with women leaders in the target occupation levels senior management professionally qualified. Although women in the skilled category were targeted, networks led to more women in the professionally qualified and senior management categories. Although the initial intent was to recruit and approach five participants per stage, the first three participants recruited participants over three phases resulting in nine interviews. As each interview was conducted, the recordings were immediately transcribed and the feedback was analysed. The interview and analysis processes were run in parallel as the codebook was built and refined throughout the process. Each interview and its themes were recorded and by the seventh interview, no new themes were emerging from the analysis of the interviews. Two additional interviews were conducted to test if the point of saturation or "information redundancy was reached.". Having reached "information redundancy", no further interviews were conducted.

3.5 The research instruments

The research instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide – *Appendix C.* This instrument was selected to support the phenomenology approach allowing the researcher to set the guidelines in advance. At the same time, the rest of the interview creates flexibility to explore the discussion further, supporting the non-probability approach. The semi-structured interview contained ten questions formulated on the themes emerging from the literature review, with additional questions to participants exploring the phenomenon in further detail based on their responses. While disadvantages of this technique included losing sight of the main research topic and objectives due to the open nature of the interview structure and the participants might discuss aspects outside of and unrelated to the research topic, the time frame of the interview was managed well to ensure that all relevant questions were adequately covered. To get closer to

the phenomenon and understand the participants' narratives, a volunteer daily diary was created however, participants did not take up this opportunity.

3.6 Procedure for data collection

The data was collected by approaching the participants, inviting them to participate in the study, and ensuring that a briefing call was conducted to explain any aspects of the research. The invitation included a welcome note with a brief overview of the study's objective as outlined in the participant information sheet - *Appendix A*. Interviews were scheduled for the first phase of participants who responded to the invitation and who were willing to participate in a formal 60-minute interview using the technology of their choice to connect with. These participants were asked to refer additional participants who met the criteria to participate in the study, gain their consent to supply their details to the researcher who then made contact to schedule interviews. In each phase, the participants recruited the next phase participants and gained their consent to share their details and be contacted. Although COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing requirements had been reduced, all participants opted to meet via virtual meetings citing convenience for their choice; all participants also opted to use Microsoft teams as their channel of choice for these interactions. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were thanked for their willingness to participate; they were allowed to keep their webcam on; however, all participants opted to keep their cameras off and consented to have the audio recorded. The audio recording of the interviews was particularly useful and allowed me to focus on the interview and listen to the recordings after the interviews. Participants also submitted signed consent forms that outlined the use of their data for this study – *Appendix B*. Participants were invited to complete a daily diary – *Appendix D. W*hile this diary was offered as a means to get a deeper understanding of the daily lives of women leaders experiencing digitalisation, only one participant had volunteered to complete this. The rest of the participants were severely time constrained to complete this exercise.

3.7 Data analysis strategies and interpretation

The thematic analysis offered a method to analyse qualitative data that explained the mechanics of coding and analysing the data systematically, which could then be linked to broader theoretical or conceptual issues discussed in the study (Braun & Clarke, Thematic analysis, 2009). Thematic analysis is considered only a method of data exploration rather than an approach to conducting qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, Using thematic analysis in psychology, 2006) and complements the phenomenological approach. Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore emerging themes emanating during the interviews. While some approaches to phenomenology expect the researcher to suspend any preconceived views or opinions about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007), for this study, the researcher focused on adhering to the thematic analysis process outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). While thematic analysis follows three main scales along which qualitative research approaches can be located, namely, inductive versus theory-driven data coding and analysis, an experiential versus critical orientation to data, as well as an essentialist versus constructionist theoretical perspective (Braun & Clarke, Thematic analysis, 2009), for this research, a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive analysis was used. The themes that emerged from the literature review through an inductive analysis were used to develop the conceptual framework and were incorporated into the design of the semi-structured interview. The data analysis process included additional codes and themes represented in the data as part of the coding process.

All audio recordings were transcribed using Amberscript software, and each audio file and transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy and prepared for importing into Nvivo, qualitative analysis software. The transcripts were imported and analysed using the six-phase approach by Braun & Clarke outlined below (Braun & Clarke, Using thematic analysis in psychology, 2006). Phases 1 to 5 below were completed in Nvivo:

Phase 1: Familiarizing with the data – Each interview was recorded and listened to. The audio was developed into transcripts and each transcript was read twice for accuracy

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes – The transcripts were read a third time and the initial priori codes from the literature while noting posteriori codes which were deduced from the participant's views

Phase 3: Searching for Themes – Once the initial codes were listed and the codebook was created. The codes were grouped into potential themes and sub-themes. Quotes from transcripts were reviewed against these potential themes

Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes – Each theme, sub-theme and corresponding quotes were reviewed to understand grouping and alignment. Where needed themes, sub-themes and quotes were re-grouped

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes – Once themes and quotes were set into specific groups each grouping was given a “headline”. These headlines were reviewed into names which adequately described and captured the essence of each theme

Phase 6: Producing the Report – The findings from the analysis were recorded and supported with quotes from the transcripts. These findings were discussed as part of the final report checking the alignment from the creation of the transcripts to the development of the codebook and themes to ensure that the views of the participants were represented adequately

3.8 Quality Assurance

This qualitative study ensured quality assurance of the research process and reporting of the findings focusing on credibility and dependability.

3.8.1 Credibility

The credibility of this research is focused on ensuring that the study is conducted in a way that ensures that the findings are presented in a true manner and ensures the researcher ensures that the data is believable to the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Involving participants in the research process and having them as active participants is also key to establishing credibility by concentrating on participants' views of findings and testing whether this resonates with them using

member reflections or peer debriefing to support credibility (Morse, 2015; Tracy, 2010). Multivocality is another means of supporting credibility. Participants will be allowed to express their views freely. The researcher must understand these views even if they differ from expectations as part of increasing knowledge and understanding (Morse, 2015). Throughout the interview process, there was a continuous process of checking between the researcher and the participants to ensure that the context of the participant's experiences being shared was fully and correctly understood. The researcher ensured that there was sufficient time allocated for the participants to share their views and opinions freely.

3.8.2 Dependability

Working through the research approach and thematic analysis ensured that the researcher maintained a strong alignment with Braun and Clarke's (2019) six steps which outlined and guided how the data was collated, analysed and presented which would confirm transferability. To support additional alignment between the literature review, data collection and analysis a consistency matrix – *Appendix G* was used. Dependability refers to the consistency of the findings and the reliability of the data over time. If repeated by another researcher, the findings should correspond to the presentation of the findings in the research report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse,2015; Tracy,2010). It is difficult to be certain that the findings will be consistent should this study be repeated; however, looking at the pace of change related to gender inclusion, there is a high probability that findings could be confirmed (Morse, 2015; Tracy, 2010). Using Nvivo qualitative software, the prescribed approach was used, keeping digital memos and notes working through the coding and transcription analysis. To ensure that the phenomenological methodology, thematic and hybrid analysis approach was utilised correctly in this study, the researcher was guided by her supervisor, Ms Ayanda Magida.

3.9 Ethical considerations

The principle of beneficence was upheld as a key component of this study, ensuring that the results were captured, analysed and communicated with

integrity and focused on benefiting women in the financial services industry. This study only commenced after approval was received from the Wits Business School Ethics Committee and receipt of the ethics clearance certificate with a legitimate ethics protocol number- *Appendix E*. Participants were informed that this study was founded based on voluntary participation, where participants were able to opt out of the study at any point in time. Signed informed consent was received from each participant. Participants' personal details, such as names, surnames and organisational details, were anonymised using pseudonyms. A separate codebook was used to link participants and details; this was stored separately with a secure password. This research was assessed as being a minimal risk ensuring that there is no harm to participants.

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a view of the findings around the propositions situated in chapter 2. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from a series of semi-structured conducted with nine women leaders across the financial services industry in SA. This phenomenological study used a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive analysis to delve deeper into the themes and perspectives shared to understand the relationship between digitalisation and gender inclusion. This study sought to:

1. Understand the perceived effect of digitalisation as experienced by women leaders in financial services
2. Explore the challenges and opportunities concerning women leaders working virtually in this industry

The participants emanated from the banking and insurance sectors, were aged between 35 and 50 years of age, were accomplished in terms of formal qualifications, the majority are employed in senior executive roles and hold a total of ninety-three years of work experience within the financial services industry between them. Most participants are married, and despite relational status, all participants were involved in reproductive labour roles in the home that involved the care of the children or ageing parents. A breakdown of demographics is included below in table 4-1.

Participant	Age	Race	Educational Level	Relational Status	Organisational Level	Tenure	Industry	Role
A	46	Black	Degreed	Single	Professionally Qualified	22	Banking	Risk Specialist
B	54	Black	Masters	Married	Professionally Qualified	15	Banking	Business Analyst
C	45	Black	Post Grad	Married	Senior Management	6	Insurance	Chief Marketing Officer
D	40	Black	Post Grad	Married	Professionally Qualified	4	Banking	Property Investment Specialist
E	50	Black	Masters	Divorced	Senior Management	12	Banking	Chief Business Change and Integration Managing Executive
F	43	Black	Doctorate	Married	Senior Management	3	Insurance	IT Executive
G	29	Black	Post Grad	Co Habiting	Professionally Qualified	3	Insurance	Market Conduct Supervisor
H	35	Black	Degreed	Married	Senior Management	8	Insurance	Head Corporate Actuarial
I	46	Black	Matric	Married	Senior Management	20	Insurance	Key Account Manager

Table 4-1: Summary of participant demographics

To ensure alignment between the literature review, data analysis and findings a consistency matrix was used. Incorporating the six-step thematic analysis approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and leveraging Nvivo from QSR as a digital qualitative analysis tool nine primary and twenty-nine a priori codes were induced from the literature review. The analysis also indicated one primary and four secondary posteriori codes which were deduced during the reflexive analysis process – *Appendix G.*

A visual overview of the aggregation and hierarchy of the codes is included in figure 4-1 below. It emphasises the most significant codes using the number of coded references and depth of colour to reflect the order of priority.

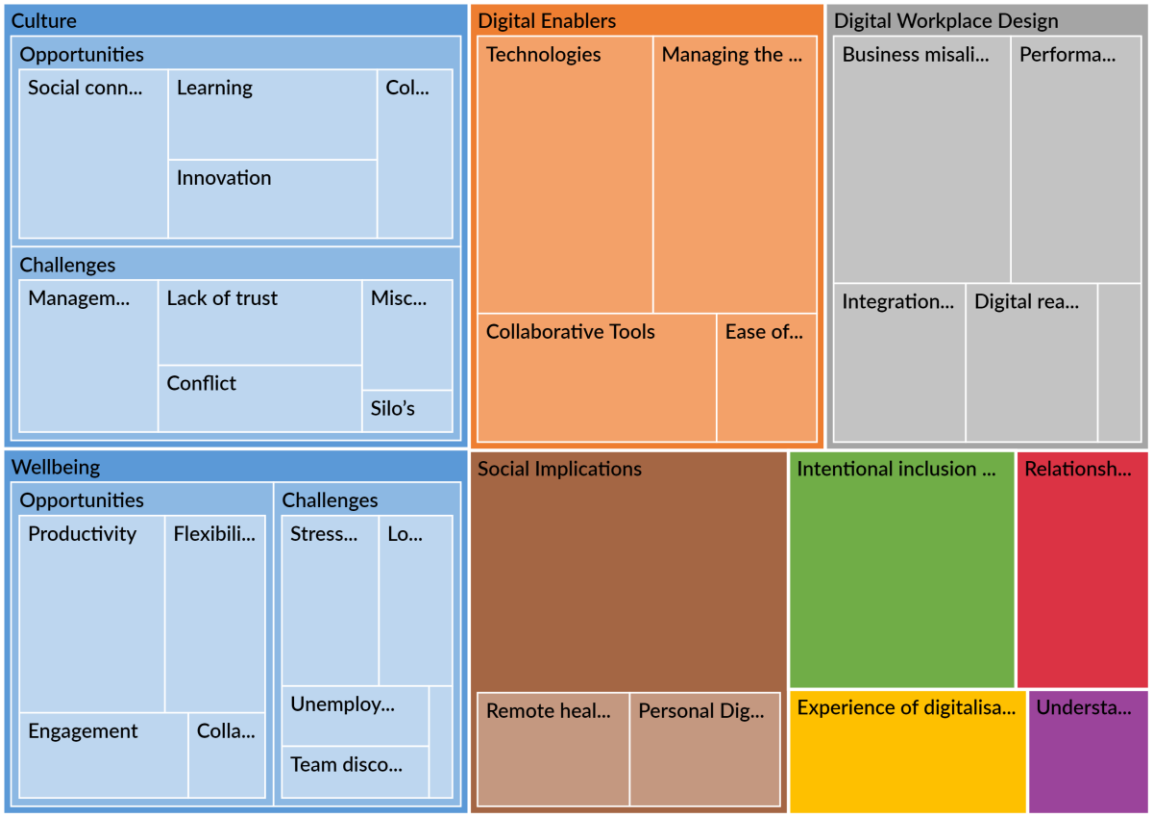


Figure 4-1: Visual synopsis of code analysis hierarchy

The following themes emerged as findings from the study;

- Existing gender Inclusion within organisations
- Digital Enablers
- Digital Workplace Design
- Social Implications
- Well-being
- Culture
- The role of digitalisation and gender inclusion

4.1.1 Gender Inclusion

Participants shared that they have been using various technologies extensively. The views shared indicated that mobile technology and digitalisation were being experienced in every aspect of their lives and also pointed to the ease and convenience of use.

> *"I'm loving it. I think we've really grown as a country. You know, digitally, I mean, there is nothing that we cannot do on our phones and our computers. We don't need to be at the office. We don't have to be at the bank. Just use your phone"* ***Participant B***

> *"So, you got to stay connected with close family and friends as well via digitalisation. Banks? Digitalisation. There's a lot, I mean, studies - digitalisation as well. And we're able to do home schooling as well, digitalisation. So, we could basically run our whole lives digitally, and through technology, you know, you can go into your car dealerships and book a car service there digitally. You can shop - you could do everything with technology."* ***Participant D***

The majority of the participants indicated that they have noted a difference in the inclusion of women within the workplace. Their views highlighted that women were being included across financial services in the hierarchy, roles and leading business areas. There was an acknowledgement of greater diversity across

women as a gender category. Participant H also indicated that her view of gender inclusion had changed over time.

> *“I must say it's improved vastly, especially at X. When I started; it was according to our company levels because females still haven't had those higher positions. But now, I mean, we [women] hold all the positions and are equal to men. Yes. I think maybe in other companies, it's not so equal at the moment, but I think at X, there's a lot of equality in terms of women”* ***Participant B***

> *“So, my current understanding of that has definitely changed over time, and it now looks at a balanced workplace in terms of management and junior staff. There is a nice balance with black women and women of colour in managerial/ supervisory roles and a good balance on the on the floor as well. I think it's a lot better, easier now because I think there are a lot more women now than there were ten, fifteen years ago”* ***Participant H***

> *“I think women are supported and more so now. I'm relating my feedback based on current situations and circumstances that I see in our workplace as an example because there's been an influx of women in a senior management level holding senior roles in very specific business units. They drive their business unit”* ***Participant I***

Participant I reflected on the changes to internal systems such as compensation, noting that changes to these traditional systems should have taken place years ago but that changes to structural barriers to inclusion were being visibly addressed across the organisation.

> “*I know this is generally dealt with very confidentially, but in my 20 years, I've always noted that in corporate and just based on observations and discussions that people have within the organization, you generally see that males, from a salary perspective, were quite well taken care of at one point. But it's good to know that right now, they've evened out the playing field irrespective of gender, which for me, I find quite interesting. I think it should have happened a long time ago, but I'm glad it's starting to*

happen now. I think that's the one thing that I've seen a huge change in" ***Participant I***

All of the participants in the study agreed that new technology and increased digitalisation have been very beneficial for them both personally and professionally. For women leaders, who are also mothers there was a strong indication that this allowed greater flexibility for them in their working day. They were also able to include their families and the reproductive role of child care into their working day as opposed to having to keep work and family care as separate dimensions of one's life. The views shared reflected that while the process of digitalisation might not have intentionally been designed with women in mind, it was benefiting women and the reproductive roles they have to play daily and it was experienced positively by the participants.

"This is working brilliantly! It's like I'm staying at home with my kids here, and I'm doing my work while looking after my child. If my child is sick or whatever or I have to look after my baby during the day, at night, and when everybody's sleeping - I do what I need to do. I do my work" ***Participant B***

"I don't think it was put in place to necessarily accommodate women or include women. It just so happened to benefit a lot of women by default" ***Participant D***

"During the day, I'm able to go see the doctor. Schedule it, you know? But wake up early to be able to push my productivity to a certain level, and then I can do what I need to do for my kids and go see my kids play soccer and then come back and push that productivity, later on*. It gave me comfort that working from home I could see that my children are breathing. I could see that my children are not coughing or when they cough, I can attend to them and just make sure it is not the pandemic. I can see that they are understanding of what's happening and I can manage their fears."* ***Participant E***

"The silver lining is that I got to spend more time with my daughter than I would have had I had to go back to the office. So, I was able to still

breastfeed her while I work. It was easier to just be able to breastfeed in the middle of the day versus in the office having to go to the bathroom stall to go pump so that she has enough supply or just stopping altogether. Some mothers do. And I was there when she took her first step when she first started crawling. I was there for all the big moments for her and I wasn't just watching it on a video as people had to, or missing it completely and just hearing stories of it" ***Participant H***

"I think also for me, spending that quality, quality time that I missed out in the last twenty years of being with my kids, you know, rushing in the morning, being having them in my space for me was a really, really invaluable experience. Indeed. To the to the point that they actually know my work better than me right now because they were, you know, they'd hear my meetings, they hear me speaking" ***Participant I***

4.1.2 Digital Enablers

When participants reflected on the role and ease of digital enablers, they indicated they have various challenges. The majority of participants struggled to work virtually citing issues with equipment needed to work from home, sufficient internet access and stable remote connectivity. Participant G also reflected on her experience in an organisation not progressing digitally highlighting the hesitancy to enable employees through technology.

"When I say put capabilities in place, I mean using our own wi-fi connectivity and even from an ergonomics perspective, we had to use our own workspace within the home. So, I don't think they really thought about that" ***Participant A***

"At the beginning, we had issues in terms of technology, in terms of maybe, the wi-fi wasn't working, we couldn't hear people clearly, and then our data was always getting finished" ***Participant B***

"We still work off desktops tethered to like a central server, like there's no wi-fi in the building. They (the organisation) are so afraid of the staff having

access to the wi-fi. My computer box is literally one of the first computer boxes that the company ever bought in 2011" ***Participant G***

"We were fortunate that we were working on laptops beforehand. I think the biggest thing that we needed to check was that everybody's VPN was working, that everyone had access to stable data because some people previously could just hotspot using their phone. But that's not a long-term solution. Some people had dongles and the connection is quite erratic so sometimes it would be fast, sometimes it would be slow. So, things like that we had to initially overcome" ***Participant H***

As the participants reflected on the transition to virtual work during the lockdown, there were mixed sentiments however the majority of participants noted that the transition was not smooth. The participants offered a range of perspectives based on their experiences including being open to this change, finding this shift to be very difficult, experiencing the acceleration as a compliance-related activity, lack of infrastructure to consider virtual work, being excluded from the change while on special leave and the general pace of change in organisations. While every participant was going through the same change at the same time, it is also clear that their contexts were vastly different and played a key role in how they experienced this transition.

"On the acceleration of our move to work virtually, so actually, you know, there was an overwhelming compliant, on the go acceleration" ***Participant E***

"In my current workspace, we do not have laptops; we have desktops. So, at the point of the pandemic, we were so poorly resourced for anyone to be able to work from home" ***Participant G***

"For me, it was a bit of a shock. I went on maternity leave just before the pandemic hit. I left the office thinking I was going to come back after four months, So I joined again, I think in July, and everyone was used to the digital way of working. For me, it was to try and get used to this new way of working with everyone already gone through the initial change" ***Participant* H**

"I think we, in our organization, even pre-COVID, we were a little bit slow on getting things done, so it took us a while to get going" ***Participant I***

The participants being leaders in their various organisations shared that during the transition, they were not included in decisions around the technology used during this time. They reflected on the silos within their organisations where IT teams were solely responsible for the procurement of technology. They also indicated that some new technologies and applications were introduced and seemed to have duplicate features and functionality but the reason for deploying these technologies was not explained. The participants reflected on their roles as users of this technology focusing on how to adopt and use this to benefit their teams, deliver organisation objectives and perform in their roles.

> *"It wasn't my call as much because we've got a technology stack that is selected by the IT department. So, it was not my decision as to what's the technology that we use, but it was these are the technology options that are available that we as a company subscribe to and then we obviously use more or less based on how useful that technology is to us"* ***Participant B***

> *"Microsoft teams, which had been introduced to us two years before and we had not been using it at all became like an everyday thing as opposed to like this thing that we had no idea why we even had it because it was like it's the same thing as email. So, what's the point?"* ***Participant C***

> *"All of those technologies were deployed by IT and, it was a case for us of either swim or sink, and we made it work"* ***Participant I***

During this transition, participants indicated that before the pandemic, their organisations did enable them to work virtually on laptops indicating that employees were given access to a certain about of technology. Despite having this technology, participants did indicate that they did have to learn how to do all job-related activities in a virtual world. They were also curious about the use of new applications and technologies as they adopted what was offered in their organisations, comparing features and exploring how they use these new technologies to deliver the work required. There was also a view that in certain instances features from different technologies were used to deliver expected outcomes. Participant C reflected on their interest to use new technologies that had not been introduced by their organisations. She also highlighted how challenging it was to procure or deploy new technology due to internal processes and dynamics.

“ It was in place for everything that I needed to do; what I needed for my job was ready before the pandemic. The only difference was our meetings were face-to-face, and we used to like present on a board and draw pictures and things like that. You do the same now, but the only difference now is we do it ahead of time. So, if we have that meeting, we are already showing or presenting - we're not drawing at that time. It's mostly pre-planned” ***Participant B***

” If I contrast Zoom versus teams. Zoom was a lot more sophisticated than what teams was two years ago. Teams has put in a lot of other functions now but before. Zoom was like superior to teams in many ways, with Zoom you could have the main meeting, and you could have meeting rooms that you could break people into. You know, you could have breakout sessions and have the main meeting room, which teams couldn't adopt. So, depending on what we were trying to do, we would then either use teams or use Zoom. There's a free version of Asana, but the friction internally was too much. It was too much effort to use Asana. I wanted to use Monday also as another tool. We couldn't get Monday signed off, and we didn't get Asana” ***Participant C***

We also used WhatsApp; we had Kaizala and all of those. The combination thereof really helped quite a lot in one, ensuring that there is consistency in the communication that we were driving. ***Participant F***

4.1.3 Digital Workplace Design

As participants reflected on how their internal capabilities and technologies were set up, there were differing views about the readiness of organisations. Participants highlighted that their organisations were progressing in this space but felt that most of them were largely unprepared for everyone to work from home. There was a specific view from Participant I, highlighting that while the organisation intended to digitally transform, this seemed to be taking place at a very slow pace. Participants also indicated that while they were given sufficient technology to work from home before the pandemic working virtually was very limited requiring permission to be outside of the physical office. They also noted that while their organisations adopted new technologies, the internal processes which dictated how they produced work did not change. Participant G being situated in an organisation that wasn’t digitally advanced shared that there was no urgency in wanting to digitally transform and the existing structure of the workplace made it very difficult to work effectively.

“I mean our capabilities weren't even geared up for it, so from accessing the workplace remotely, I think they had a standard requirement that was in place, but it didn't actually include the whole of the bank needing to follow a remote working strategy” ***Participant A***

“Even though before COVID we had the means to work from home, we couldn't, and we had to work in the office. You know, there were only under certain circumstances when we were allowed to work at home” ***Participant B***

"I was not working from home before the pandemic. There would be maybe once or twice a month where I might say this, and I'm just going to work from home because I want to kill a couple of things” ***Participant C***

“New technology came in, but we were stuck using old methods. I'm referring to, so, for example, I mean, an accountant knows that if I need to get my books to balance, I need to check BCD. So, in terms of methods, although it’s okay to do things the way we always have done it, but with the new technologies, there could be a new and easier way of doing it, you see? Do you get what I'm saying” ***Participant D***

“We are still very outdated in our technology, and the way we are making employee's lives easier, there's almost a push to keep life as difficult as possible. It's almost like you must earn your right to work, you know? It's such a strange phenomenon, and it's almost like there's an attitude of, if it works, if it's not broken, don't fix it” ***Participant G***

“In one of our divisions, there was always talk for the last ten years about going onto an online platform where people can buy directly. I think people kind of were dragging their feet, and COVID expedited a lot of these things. And I think it also, in my personal view, it also gave people that edge to say, okay, you know what,

things can work remotely, things can be done, and they finally did it" ***Participant I***

Delving deeper into how participants worked virtually and delivered on their expectations, they shared that the level of digital enablement depended on the role and hierarchy that employees found themselves in. The participants shared that junior, frontline, customer-facing roles with specific financial mandates needed to be sufficiently enabled to work virtually and in certain instances were forced to go into the office during the height of the pandemic. Participants also indicated that individuals in senior management categories were set up at home to work efficiently and were not burdened with the cost of having to invest in personal equipment. The nature of the financial services industry as highly regulated was also a consideration when deciding which roles would be virtually enabled and which would not.

"Well, yes, but you must remember, I can do my job, hundred percent at home. There are the people that cannot do their job at home. They can do a certain aspect of their job at home, but they need to be in the office as well. So those people probably will have an opinion in terms of maybe they would like to stay at home, but they are forced to go to the office because of their role and setup" ***Participant B***

"So, depending on your level of operation in the workplace and the more senior you were, the more you had a lot of the tools already built into your home. So, for example, I had wi-fi, and I was set up at home so I didn't have to stress about like, you know, how to access things and so on, whereas other people either had to have that extra cost of, of getting the wi-fi or they relied on the company suppliers" ***Participant C***

"I think financial services is highly regulated, and I think at the beginning of the pandemic, to be able to get approval, to move people with certain capabilities to certain mandates at home was quite a concern, which actually forced us to think beyond, the

current thinking, just to make sure that there are no control breakages" ***Participant E***

In my environment, the one area which was quite challenging and has quite a lot of females was the contact centre. Where contact centre people were not enabled to work from home and therefore were required to be at the office. I think in that instance, there were areas where it felt like they are excluded just because of the role that they play. And it so happened that majority thereof were females and for that matter, black females. Otherwise, in terms of what we wanted to do, we wanted everybody to be technologically enabled, but there was this small group of roles that we couldn't support, and it did feel like they were excluded from digitalization that happened as a result of the pandemic and the lockdown" ***Participant F***

"Look, my core function; I'll be brutally honest with you, is being on the road, seeing our clients face to face. So that was something that we obviously couldn't do, and we didn't do face-to-face meetings for a good two years, you know" ***Participant I***

As participants were transitioning to work virtually they were also trying to understand how to efficiently use the technology that was available to them during this time. Participants reflected on how they had to work within their defined organisational context around what was chosen and readily available. The participants highlighted that they weren't given a choice and did their best to find ways to make this work for themselves and their teams and in instances where they were able to find a way to effectively use this, there were positive outcomes achieved. Participant H indicated that in a post-pandemic workplace, they are still not actively included in the decision-making of their teams and how they work in a new hybrid context.

"The likes of Zoom definitely came into the fore. We didn't adopt things like Slack because our technology department is quite strict, but we also

*started using things like, like WhatsApp, which we had and try to create social spaces using digital tools**" Participant C***

"Look, I think, you know, at first, we were not really set up in order to be able to work remotely as efficiently as now. But this technology is obviously what was there, and I had to enable the organization to collaborate virtually. At the same time, these technologies did really help, and while we had to learn how to use it, the key driver was we were left with no choice on digital adoption because the digital platforms were already there and had to be used" ***Participant E***

"We are forced to adjust – first to working virtually and now because the company's updated their hybrid working policy. So, it went from 100% virtual to 20%, now at 60%. Our departments actually asked for that to be reduced to 40% because it's been very difficult for people" ***Participant H***

Participants noticed increased performance expectations as this time linked to the availability and access to technologies. As the working world extended into the private homes of employees, participants noted that because organisations had supplied technology to work virtually, there was an expectation to remain connected to the office and deliver continuously. Participants indicated that they were expected to work even though they had challenges connecting to the office. Participants also noted that the increased connection and digitalisation at this time also came with security risks which grew in intensity as teams worked virtually in the home and other spaces. There was a view that increased virtual performance expectations could be used to stop employees from opting to work virtually. These increased performance expectations also impacted customer behaviour as customers became accustomed to being answered instantly. Participants indicated that they were expected to work longer hours, answer work-related messages 24/7 and deliver services to customers overnight.

"I found that they still expected you to work your eight hours and sometimes even more. When you couldn't work, you just couldn't work - there was no adapting for that. It was a case of work remotely and get the work done. I mean given that in this financial institution and a lot of other

institutions, they all have performance management methodologies in place which rates you according to the work and what you have delivered" ***Participant A***

"Digitisation also impacted us from a client perspective. So, suddenly we needed to be streetwise on the streets, but we also needed to be streetwise virtually and the number of threats, just being able to see, what's a credible document versus what is a fraudulent document. The amount of fraud and attempts at fraud and phishing went up exponentially. You just can't trust the virtual world as much as what you know. No one trusted it before but the exposure and risk were a whole lot more. So, we had to find ourselves teaching each other about some of the tricks and tips to say, listen, just be careful of this. This is not legit. That is legit." ***Participant C***

"We got our clients used to us being so efficient that now that we're going back to the office, we can't meet the same standard, but it's expected because we've met it before. Now, we spend time in traffic, getting ready for work- you must be pepped up and all that for the office. Then finally leave, do your school run, sit in the car, sit in traffic for an hour before you get to the office, settle in and then work. So, you lose about 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the afternoon, I would say. So, we are not able to deliver the way we used to, but it's becoming a problem because now that's the standard and the expectation" ***Participant D.***

"I had to pull my teams to deliver with me; they [organisation] gave it to me 10:00 pm, that change needed to be live at 7:00 am and because we had to deliver something very quickly the next day and we had to work overnight to be able to do that, to automate and digitalize processes quite quickly to be able to touch the customer the next day. I couldn't do it without them" ***Participant E***

"I guess working for a corporate organization, there are certain measures and, I think, functionality that we look out for. And for us, security is one key item and feature that we will look at. The data protection was also quite important, but also for us, what was also important was the scalability and

the fact that whatever tool that is, it should allow everybody to be able to work from anywhere. What that means is one could decide that they're working from the office or they were working from their home or they working from a coffee shop, but we will still keep a level of security and data protection, intact. In the beginning, there was several trial-and-error type solutions that we were looking at which we were already using, but have not adopted at the scale that the lockdown required" ***Participant F***

"If your performance expectation in the office was for example four things, if you're going to work from home, your expectation is now six things, which is obviously a way to get people to want to come into the office. It's like a deterrence, which I think is unfair. If the in-office expectation is to produce four things, then the expectation should be the same whether you're at home or work. If you miss a call or you don't respond within time, it comes with severe penalties. Also, if you were at home again, it's like there's this distrust around what were you doing; why couldn't you answer the phone? Why didn't you respond to the email within an hour? It's just a weird space which means a lot of people actually don't opt to work from home" ***Participant G***

"There is also this expectation that you are available to answer messages immediately just because- it's not whether you're in the office or not. It's why are you not seeing this message or email coming through on your laptop or on your phone or some people even have it connected to their watches. So, there is this expectation that you need to be available 24 seven" ***Participant H***

As participants reflected on the levels of productivity working virtually, they noted that working virtually increased individual and team productivity. Participants reflected on their ability to manage a higher workload but also being able to deliver productivity levels within a virtual space that they were unable to deliver in their physical workplace. Participants noted that they were more aware of how they worked virtually and the type of work that they produced which resulted in notable performance gains for their organisations.

“We were delivering like crazy” ***Participant D***

“In my space, productivity tripled. I could handle exponential volumes than I've never managed before. I couldn't under normal circumstances, you know, and that remained post-pandemic” ***Participant E***

“I've got an executive coach at the moment, and based on an assessment that they did, it proved that if I'm working alone, I'm 100 times more productive than being in an environment where there's people with me, constantly being answerable to people. We've actually been mapping that, and we see that there is a huge difference from the when I was working from home versus prior” ***Participant I***

“Within a six-month period of collaboration, the digital platform went live, and it turned out to be a huge success. We sold in excess of a million-rand worth of premiums online. So, it also kind of gave people that edge to say, okay, you know what, things can work remotely, things can be done” ***Participant I***

4.1.4 Social Implications

The theme of social implications revealed the deeper context that the participants were working in. Participants reflected on the challenges and socio-economic impact of having to invest in the personal setup (Wi-Fi, generators, additional data cost) and where there were affordability constraints, employees had to find the next suitable place to work from or create schedules to share and optimise the use of available technology within the home. Participants also indicated that their ability to work virtually was impacted by their geographical location which determined access to network infrastructure and the level of family support within their homes. Interestingly, where participants had access to and availability of infrastructure to work virtually, their organisational restrictions around virtual work impacted their ability to remain productive during the lockdown.

“We have to supply our own wi-fi capabilities. I still use my own wi-fi. When I said router, I mean it just extended the battery of your own router, which is probably up to, at the most, five hours; even when you have load shedding, you won't be able to work if it's your intention if your battery actually runs out on your laptop or on your wi-fi. So, from my perspective, I'll speak personally, and then to the team. From my personal perspective, I've actually had to invest in a generator to be able to work. But from my team's perspective, we have tried to adapt by trying to work somewhere else, maybe not from home, but actually going into the office, and this was not during the pandemic, this was afterwards” ***Participant A***

“Our data was getting finished all the time, and certain applications wasn't working because of the area we lived in. So, there wasn't proper signal, and I had to connect using data” ***Participant B***

“From a resource’s perspective, my friend and I both have - she has three kids, but one was really small and the other two; our son and daughter were the same age, same grade, both doing grade eleven but, in her house, the only computer they had was her work computer that she used for work, and in my case, I quickly bought a new computer for my son because my daughter already had her own her own computer. When it came to working from home and doing virtual classes, for me - it was everyone go to your own spaces and go and attend your classes. But in her case, when we spoke about it, it was, I need to schedule my meetings and try, if possible, negotiate so that I am not having meetings when my son is supposed to have math class because he's doing it from my computer -and that was like a very big eyeopener for me. I would imagine that a lot of single women would have had that burden even more pronounced” ***Participant C***

“At the beginning of the pandemic, it was actually quite interesting because, in my personal life, I was quite digitally proficient and able to work from home. I've got a laptop. I've got wi-fi, I've got an office at home like I'm all set up, but because the majority of the company wasn't, most

people didn't have wi-fi, and most people didn't have laptops, no one could work from home" ***Participant G***

"It was difficult for me because I couldn't get a nanny or a babysitter in because no one was looking for work, and you couldn't get one because everyone couldn't travel during lockdown. So, it was difficult to get a nanny or even put her in day-care. I was trying to juggle being a mum, working full time and the new world, this new digital world. It was quite a change for me. I also ended up moving to cape town for family support I needed for me and baby" ***Participant H***

Participants highlighted that there are ongoing concerns related to how women's reproductive roles were taken into consideration during this work-from-home period. Participants expressed women specific events such as maternity leave or pregnancy were not an intentional consideration while working virtually often resulting in women who might be on specific leave categories feeling left out of the transition process.

"For me, it was a practice that was not aligned with the needs of females because men don't have the obligation to bear children, and there are many other such examples. But for me, you know, gender inclusion is exactly about taking care of women in such a way that they are not prejudiced when they go about their careers and life events or things that are exclusively female happen to them" ***Participant C***

"I think everyone went through it together in March, but for me, I was a bit lagged just because of my maternity leave, and it was very difficult to adjust" ***Participant H***

As participants reflected on the social implications that they had to consider while working virtually, they highlighted that women's reproductive roles were not taken into consideration. Participants noted that stereotypical assumptions concerning women were ongoing and assumptions were being made about individuals' home lives without asking directly about their considerations or potential constraints. Participants also indicated that their context was not fully understood but there also seemed to be no attempt to understand this on an individual level.

“It's not like they know you in the environment unless you are working very closely with whoever you are working with. Sometimes you find that they don't even know that you have a child, or you are an actual mother, or you are a wife, or you have another partner or looking after your parents. But I do find that, and I still find it, even when you are taking vacation time, that if you are single, it seems that you are almost less prioritized to take the leave that you are actually entitled to because they feel that -well you are single, you don't have a family that you need to go on vacation with or care for in the case of the pandemic. They don’t know that you actually have a life outside of the work environment” ***Participant A***

“Unfortunately, in South Africa, a lot of women are still burdened with house chores. They're the ones that have to do the house chores at home, you know, whether their husband is there or not, whether the kids are there or not. It's usually the female that needs to do the cooking, the cleaning and, getting the kids ready, helping out with homework. I'm not saying in every household, but I'm saying in the majority of households in South Africa, and most households are women-led” ***Participant D***

“Sometimes you have females who are expected to work from home, but home is not conducive for working. While it could be a case of young kids, so lots of distraction, it could be a case of, I think, the environment just not being conducive where you've got maybe ten people in one room, you know, and they're all trying to work in this one room. And because we sit in our houses where everybody has space to work, we then assume that everybody has that type of environment just because we've provided data and maybe a laptop and whatever else. But what about the environment?” ***Participant F***

Participants reflected deeply on the social implications of women working within South Africa highlighting that the safety of women was not considered as organisations shifted into working virtually through technology. Participants noted that the experience of women was different to that of men and the environment in which women lived and worked was a key consideration to how they leveraged technology and digitalisation. Gender-based violence in homes, safety while

travelling with public transport or living in townships with little to no access to infrastructure and the country's electricity crisis impacted negatively on women's ability to work virtually.

> *"They did inform us that if load shedding gets to a point where it is interrupting working hours and working from home, then we have to go to the office"* ***Participant B***

> *"The experience of women during the pandemic was very different to the experience of men, and the reason why I say this is because, in our own experience, some of the first people to request to come back to the office were women. It wasn't many women, I think two or three over the first month or so, that had insisted that they wanted to come back to the office. On further investigation, it was because gender-based violence in the home was untenable with both partners being home, so work was a form of escape for the specific women that they had to request to come into the office. At first, we were quite taken aback to say, why? Why do you want to do this? We've given you all the tools, and you know you should be able to work from home. Don't come in. You know, we don't want the responsibility if you're coming in during the pandemic and could be infected - it came out that due to gender-based violence, women wanted to come back."* ***Participant C***

> *"What we didn't think of was the persona of a black female staying in a township, using public transport, unable to carry a laptop, maybe even not clear access or stable access in terms of connectivity - and therefore the quick answer was just come back to the office. When we said that, we did not take into consideration that it's the majority, of this particular group of people and only when it happened, we were like, oh geez, actually, it seems more like we are excluding a specific gender and race group just because of the roles that they occupy and their background"* ***Participant F***

> *"I would say that we have shown that it is possible, and we have the capability. In supporting gender inclusion way, it's also preventing people*

from having to step onto public transport, to begin with, travel late or put themselves into dangerous situations. Someone else that works for me, she has to go from where we are in Bryanston into Gandhi Square, into Bez Valley, sometimes at 7:00 pm or 8:00 pm. I feel like people like her should come up for consideration because we do live in a society that's not necessarily safe or geared towards protecting women. I feel like examples like her and like a lot of other people, should be given the opportunity to work from home, and they should be given the tools to be able to do so. The nuance of South Africa is not taken into consideration. I think sometimes there is no understanding of the nuance and the subtleties that inform the greater space" ***Participant G***

Understanding how women are seen and positioned within the workplace and the country as a whole is another key aspect that participants reflected on. Participant E indicated how they were able to adjust to the situation and lead using their intuitive feminine characteristics such as compassion, agility and collaboration to deliver against their objectives. Participant G also noted how women stepped up and lead during this transition and it was done so effectively that women were promoted because of their valuable contributions to their organisations. Participants noted that while women were not taught or had no time to prepare how to approach a full-scale work-from-home project during a global pandemic, women were stepping up to lead during this time and evolving with the situation.

"I had to think on the moment; I had to lead that complexity with minimal teams, and the organisation entrusted me to touch millions of customers at the same time at the moment of impact. But it enabled me because we [women] are collaborative in nature, and we think on our toes. We can influence to work with different capabilities and technology, and then to really find a solution now that we can drive and impact the customers. Women, we've got that compassion. It's a natural instinct. Now, when you start reading a desperate request from a customer, you understand the impact. Actually, we completely understand the context quite quickly and make sense of it. But our compassionate nature brought the capacity that we didn't think that we had as women. We didn't think and weren't taught

about how to leverage those inner capacities. It just came in the moment, and it was driven by that compassion and knowing that we've got to do what is right for the clients at that point in time. And I actually shocked myself, if I can put it that way" ***Participant E***

"It just dawned on me now, the majority of the staff that were asked to stay on as the core company team and had to come into the office every day, majority of those people were women. After the pandemic, a lot of them got promoted into managerial, junior managerial and senior managerial positions because of what they were able to do in that time, because of how they were able to keep everything together and keep the company running in a time that a lot of people didn't know what was going to happen" ***Participant G***

Participants engaged on the shifts they are still seeing being in a new context where organisations are considering how to shift from virtual working into a hybrid working approach. Participants noted that time taken to travel to physical offices is seen as wasted and engaging in discussions with colleagues is a distraction when in the office resulting in lower productivity levels. Participants highlighted that while most men seem to be happy returning to the office, women would be reluctant to give up the life-work balance that they found when working virtually. Participants indicated that the productivity levels and gains experienced while working virtually were more difficult to maintain in a hybrid construct. Participant H reflected on the difficulty that introverted team members were experiencing after they had been allowed to work in a manner that suited their personalities.

"The other day, for example, I went to work because there was a meeting; I left here after I dropped Josh. I got to work after half past nine; I met my buddies there, we had a little chat, and they had one or two meetings. I did no work; I went to the meeting, and that is the reason why I was there; at 1:00 pm, when the meeting was done, I got into my car and came home. I got here at half past two, so going into the offices is wasting our time" ***Participant B***

“I would think women are loving this more than men. And this is why now, when corporate is saying; Guys, COVID is over, you need to get back to the office. The men are quick to say, when can I? how soon can I do it? And the women are like, Wait, wait, wait, wait. I'm enjoying this. Do I really have to go back to the office? I'm managing my life better. That has just been my own personal observation” ***Participant D***

“We're all asking each other, how did we do it pre-COVID? Because we find that now when we go to the office, we just waste a lot of time on the road getting to the office and doing what? We don't get to do as much work. We don't cover much when we're going to the office, and we're like, but how did we do this pre-COVID? So, I find that on the days that I go to the office, I'm less productive. I guess I'm productive in a different way because I'm in meetings and seeing clients, but I'm not pushing my paperwork. I don't like this shift. I don't like it at all it's causing me a lot of stress” ***Participant D***

“What happens with some people, in particular in my team, is that it's more draining and less productive being in the office because we're not going every day. There is more of a human element. You haven't seen this person in a month catch up a little bit with them? It's less productive in the office that you have to make up extra hours when you're not in the office just to be able to do the work that you have planned for that day. When we’re in the office, it's not the same for everyone, but I think for the more introverts, that's been the case, and I feel more relaxed with my team in terms of asking them not to go into the office as regularly as they should just because it's had an impact on their productivity” ***Participant H***

4.1.5 Culture

The theme of culture was an important theme raised by participants and they reflected on the importance of culture as a component of digitalisation and gender inclusion in their workplaces. Participants noted that the financial services environment is generally very clinical and numerical and it was challenging to incorporate a softer, human approach into their interactions as teams worked

virtually during the pandemic. Participants also reflected on the difficulty of leading teams with varying maturity levels and supervision needs. Participants indicated in the virtual working space some team members required constant supervision.

> *"The financial service environment, it's just very cold essentially, and I think that's across the board, it's just a cold environment because we deal a lot with numbers and nothing else. I think to now bring in a little bit of the softer touch so that it's not always so black and white."* ***Participant A***

> *"It wasn't that it was just junior employees that couldn't manage themselves. There were some junior employees who were phenomenal, but there were then some more senior employees, not quite executives, but management level who couldn't manage themselves and couldn't just get on with the work without the supervision. It was just the lack of being constantly supervised that was a challenge"* ***Participant C***

> *"On the other side of things, the more mature people were able to grasp what you needed, understand, and get the stuff done. There were varying levels of maturity within the organisation and teams which is what we were seeing"* ***Participant I***

Participants reflected on the difficulties with team management when working virtually. Participants indicated that while organisations offer the opportunity to communicate openly, the fear of honesty being used negatively remained a concern. Participants noted that this fear of honesty created an environment where employees felt that they needed to hide time spent taking care of family or personal responsibilities. While the participants had to manage their teams virtually, they also had to understand how to approach their virtual relationships with their line managers and they pointed to the top of the organisation is far from the majority of employees which continued in the virtual space. Participants also indicated that the virtual space made it difficult to understand and interpret emotional, visual and auditory cues from their team members. Opting to have virtual calls and not being able to physically see and sense what was happening

with employees meant that it was difficult for leaders to proactively identify when team members needed additional support.

> *"We encourage that open channels of communication between a staff member and line manager to say that the door is open if you do need to discuss something and if you do need help and it's not about because I'm asking for help that I should be penalized through the performance management methodology within the workplace. What is said to you is confidential and will be taken as such and will not be used against you. I think sometimes we still have that fear that everything we say, any sort of weakness will be held against us"* ***Participant A***

> *"And if I cry, nobody can see me crying. How's that?"* ***Participant B***

> *"I think it led to a culture of people trying to cover up what they were doing instead of being honest about, listen, I'm unable to work at this time because I'm going to attend to my child's event or I need to take care of something personal"* ***Participant C***

> *"I guess when you're seeing someone, you're able to just show that much more empathy when they're going through something compared to when it's virtual. It's difficult to tell what's the true essence of the emotion in an interaction through a virtual channel"* ***Participant C***

> *"It's a complicated relationship with the staff because there's a huge divide between the top of the company and then the bulk of our company across ideology. It's a very disconnected space, and there's an unwillingness, but also no one was in a position to be able to change it"* ***Participant G***

> *"I had a client that used to be really, really rude and abrupt to me as a female, you know, because I was a female, and I physically saw it happening in front of me where because he held a very senior role, he had talked down to women and I had to address this with my manager"* ***Participant I***

“I think people always had this phobia around what if I brought whatever I'm saying face to face to somebody and I am seen as being stupid, so most of them just stay dead quiet” ***Participant I***

Participants reflected on team disconnection and its effects noting that miscommunication led to reworking and team members found it difficult to communicate effectively in a virtual space. Participants noted that they had to manage work allocations and communication within the team and they had to learn how to navigate and manage teams with differing needs and capabilities in a virtual space. Participants indicated that working virtually did change their team dynamic in some instances organisations distrusted the productivity of team members who worked virtually and in other instances not being close in the office resulted in team members not leveraging each other’s knowledge and skills or developing a close working relationship with each other.

“On the professional side, understanding what the capabilities were so that when you do allocate something to be done, that it is going to be done and it is going be done correctly so that there is no back and forth or reworking. Also, from a female perspective in terms of being a specialist or being at a higher level in the organization is that we need to be seen as being multifaceted and not just this cold professional that you supposedly see in the professional environment” ***Participant A***

“I think the dynamics of how we worked did change because you must remember no one was seeing our faces or I couldn’t see their face, they were just seeing the picture or the bubble, so when you have a session, you're not sure how you’re coming across” ***Participant B***

“I found that with the new people that joined, we hardly got to know them better unless they were working very closely with us. We missed out on being able to leverage off each other in the office. I think it was easier in the office when you're sitting next to each other to leverage off each other, like; hey, I've got this deal; I've never seen something like this. Have you done something similar? No, no, no...go chat to Lucy there; she's done something similar. We missed out on that” ***Participant D***

“There was a lot of back and forth because previously it was just come to me, tell me what you want and done. You know, here things are getting a little bit lost in translation on email” ***Participant E***

“I managed to at least learn, and where there is clarification that was required, I would then have more like the offline discussion. I was more deliberate in leading in a different, much more effective way for the team” ***Participant F***

“They [organisation] wouldn't want to set up anyone to be enabled to work from home. I think the style of work we have is very much like, If I can’t see you, you're not being productive. There's a lot of distrust around what people would be doing at home, and productivity is like our bottom line. There's a fear of stats manipulation, so you might be doing things that we can report on but not actually doing the work that needs to be done” ***Participant G***

“I must be honest with my staff member in particular; they found it very, very difficult constantly phoning me to understand, to understand whether my mail to them in terms of what I wanted was aligned with their thinking: ***Participant I***

As participants shared their experiences of working virtually, they noted that they had greater freedom to adapt their leadership style and lead with empathy in a manner that made sense to them. Participants also grasped the impact that the pandemic and virtual working were having on their teams. Participants noticed that team members who were on virtual calls with their cameras off found a new sense of confidence to speak up during meetings that they didn’t have in face-to-face meetings.

“We adopted specific leadership principles, and those then became our anchor. One was around how you deal with people, that was “act with humanity”. So, irrespective of whatever else that was happening, it needed to be done from a work point of view. We needed to act with humanity, and how I applied that within my team was, in the beginning, quite a lot of people were impacted by the pandemic, they had multiple jobs at a same

time. So, you became a mom; you became a teacher; you became the team member within at work; you became a caregiver for the elderly; you became a psychologist in supporting others, all of those. I think it was it was quite important for me as the leader to understand each individual on a day-to-day basis. I guess when the pandemic started for me, I had to wear a whole lot of hats, and at work it was, I think, leading from the front and on a daily basis, just ensuring that I display empathy" ***Participant F***

"The thing that really stood out for me, and we actually spoke about it the other day in the office, lots of people, when you in a in a boardroom, in a meeting, have a fear of voicing their views and opinions but because they were on a team's call, where they didn't have the cameras on and didn't have that fear to talk, which I found quite an interesting dynamic that we've picked up" ***Participant I***

The participants stated that technology played an important role in facilitating team connection and development. Participants indicated that they experimented with a range of planned engagement interventions to motivate, engage, connect and develop teams while working virtually. Group and individual connect sessions were facilitated through technology allowing teams to maintain organisational rituals, habits and celebrations that were key aspects of cultural connection. Participants also noted that cross-skilling and upskilling of team members were also effectively facilitated in the virtual workspace through technology keeping teams productive.

"We have these educational talks, and motivational speakers that come over and I can at my desk and watch. I have the opportunity to go and sit in the auditorium, but I'm allowed to sit in my home and listen" ***Participant B***

"There was something in the business called Power Hour, which would happen once, once, once every month. We then requested that the training department change that and make it into a companywide thing that is online. That's something that we've kept now, and it was changed from Power Hour to Empower Hour" ***Participant C***

“We couldn't have a year-end function because obviously we were we were separated, so we had to solve for that. What we did is we organised a comedy show, but the comedy show was virtual. We got a couple of the top comedians, and they did they did a performance for us online, got some musicians to sing while we were all logged on and gave everyone Uber eats vouchers so they could order from their own homes. Although we were apart, we felt like we were together because we could make comments on the chats and try and keep their company spirit and keep everyone completely engaged” ***Participant C***

“We did coffees, we did teams coffees. You make your own coffee, she makes her own coffee, and wherever you are, you have coffee via teams and catch up” ***Participant D***

“I can tell you we cross-skilled colleagues from multiple capabilities and services; previously, they used to do one thing. Today they can do multiple capabilities, and they don't want to go back. They actually experienced personal growth during the pandemic, and we tripled productivity because the tools, the digital tools, enabled us to give them that platform, and they could easily make time for that” ***Participant E***

“One of the other things that they set up within my team was just a regular virtual meeting with each other, and it was just to catch up with each other because you no longer have the interaction that you had before where you come in and you greet individuals and catch up with them, find out how they're doing on a personal level, and not just work-related questions, just to try and keep that human element” ***Participant H***

Participants noted the changes that were taking place with themselves and their teams creating greater shared accountability, the opportunity for innovation, leading with trust, embracing a new way of thinking and working, a more diverse top management mindset and finding their own voices. Participants acknowledged the benefit of diversity in team teams from multiple age groups and more women who lead with different approaches working together to deliver for their organisations during this unprecedented time.

“We became a squad of collective accountable leaders This is when you're forced to put into practice shared leadership, distributed leadership - looking after the flock, looking after the work and looking after ourselves as leaders. It actually exponentially changed how the leaders below me used to work and how the pandemic forced us to work and forced them to work. They became more data-led and insights-led because you needed to know what happens with what insights, what informs your quick decisions. So, data and our collection of data became very important because we relied on data to really drive certain shifts that will help us impact our customers and be able to look after the colleagues.” ***Participant E***

“I think as leaders, we became the trusted voice and based on the type of industry we are in, being insurance, we were tracking the trends and the numbers and all of that. There were quite a lot of numbers that were flying around on the Internet, and people didn't know what numbers to believe, so we became the trusted source of information for, for our employees and we used collaboration tools to communicate with them” ***Participant F***

“We had younger people. It was a team of only women management supervisors and junior staff, completely women. And it was actually a very interesting thing because they used to call us the “think tank” of the company. We were solution-driven, and we looked at ways to bring ourselves into like the 21st century, like using databases, using software. I remember going to my manager at the time and saying, there must be a digital database for this” ***Participant G***

“The other thing is I think with time, the gender gap at the top of organisations also has changed slightly. This is because the traditional person that would be on top is either your single male or your male who's married to a stay-at-home mom who looks after kids. I think their ideas of how everyone else is able to balance their work life is slightly different. So now, you've got a slightly more diverse management on top across all the companies, and I think that also allows and allows for progression on the way that the companies work” ***Participant H***

"As much as it pained me, I said to my boss, I refuse to deal with this client; either you take me off the account, fire me, do what you want. But I refuse to be in this position or treated in this manner. We always felt very intimidated because of him and his knowledge, and there were times where, as females in meetings, we were told to keep quiet. You know, whereas now the tables have turned drastically and I was very surprised by his response" ***Participant I***

4.1.6 Well-being

Well-being as a theme was another key finding that the participants reflected on. Participants noted concerns around job stability and some organisations weren't impacted heavily by job cuts while other organisations saw drastic changes in their workforce at the same time, specifically where organisations were unprepared for the transition to work virtually.

"It did lead to, in some cases, terminations and or disciplinary and at that point, everybody was concerned about job losses. Needless to say, we didn't lose any jobs, we didn't lose any salary where there were salary cuts in some other organisations" ***Participant C***

"I think about 95% of our staff were sent home, and we didn't work for the whole of April and May, and I think the whole of June. They ended up paying us our annual leave for the first month and, after that, UIF. There was just this executive decision to send everyone home and establish a core group of people to be able to work and I was one of the first people brought back around June of 2020" ***Participant G***

As participants reflected on the extension of the workplace into their homes, they indicated that they found themselves working long and excessive hours. Participants stated that they didn't feel they had time for anything else but work and highlighted that there was an expectation to be available 24/7. Participants also noted working from home was safer as there was no travel required and there were no other reasons to rush out of the office, even family considerations were placed on hold and they found themselves working non-stop.

“You would literally work the whole from morning till evening, not spending time with a family but still managed to get your work done because there was no option” ***Participant A***

“The hours got longer, and I found myself, to be honest, and maybe this is too much information, not even having time to go to the bathroom. I mean, some of the practices got to a point where it's like, you go to the bathroom, and you leave the computer just outside the bathroom, and the volume is at full blast. You rush into the bathroom; you get out and walk around with the computer to drink or to make a cup of coffee. There was just never room to breathe and to think because it was one thing after another and because we're working from home, the calendar became a space for people to just schedule you and schedule you and schedule you! If I'm not scheduled, I'm busy returning calls or doing other things in between” ***Participant C***

“We found ourselves working long hours, and I don't know if it's discipline in terms of, this is the time in which I log on, and this is the time in which I log off - so, we never logged off, our computers were always on. At 6:00 am in the morning, you'd find that most people are already on their laptops because usually, that's the time they in their car and would have been travelling to work. They get up and get, and they've logged on so they working and so we found ourselves working long hours” ***Participant D***

“The expectation is that I should be readily available 24/7, so always online, if that makes sense” ***Participant F***

“We honestly ended up working much longer hours than what we had in the office. In the office you were limited to the time we needed to leave because we are based in town. We needed to leave town at a relatively decent hour because it's not safe to leave town late at night. If we had to work late, we drove behind one another and so that we all make sure we leave town and get on to the highway safely. Working from home, we could work all hours of the night because it wasn't a safety issue, so, in terms of

productivity, we definitely lengthened those hours more than we should have" ***Participant H***

Participants indicated that as employees they experienced their own difficulties noting that leading new teams, navigating their personal challenges and difficulties including not having the support they would normally have in the office, learning how to use new technology experiencing being overworked and navigating their own households and being management representatives of their organisations, acting on behalf of their organisations even if they did not agree with the approach. Participants noted that as leaders they needed to intervene to stop employees from burnout, manage team members who struggled to cope in the virtual workspace, help teams navigate the devastation of the pandemic and keep teams healthy, productive and focused.

"I had just started in the team at the end of 2019 basically, and this was a completely new team for me, and I had to take up an interim leadership role, so it was a case of trying to get to know the people personally as well as professionally, but then also changing it up a bit because there was no face-to-face engagement. The thing is, we've worked for so many years with people, and now you take out the interaction, and there's only work, so, there is going to be a bit of negative, it can't be all rosy" Participant A

"There were also many deaths, so a lot of people personally lost family and friends, and that was something else they had to cope with on top of everything else" ***Participant A***

"Let's say when you have a personal issue, normally, when you're sitting with other people, you have a workmate that you can talk to or you can go and you can share. When you're on your own, you feel you're sitting in a dump wallowing in your failure or sorrow. Sometimes you just don't feel productive, I've spoken to a friend of mine, and she's saying, you know, some days she just feels all alone, and she just can't get things done." ***Participant B***

"What I did notice was that there were some people who coped with virtual, and there were some people who completely fell apart with virtual. There

were some people who were less effective in a virtual environment and people who actually had to stop from overworking and burning themselves out in that virtual environment. So, if I reflect on the group that couldn't cope, the output just went to zero" ***Participant C***

"This impacted me very negatively as a mom - overworked. Overworked as a result of working from home. It's got its pros and cons. It's convenient to be at home, but you end up being overworked because you don't know when to switch off" ***Participant D***

"Contact Centre people were not enabled to work from home and therefore were required to be at the office during the pandemic" ***Participant F***

"There was a lot of uncertainty in that sense, and I think that a lot of people were completely disheartened and upset, and those feelings haven't gone away. There's no one that's like really company proud or brand proud. It's actually as if everyone's just waiting to leave because of the way that they were treated during this transition. It's really bad. It's like a running joke in the company, and there's no decisive want or need to change that. In fact, it's almost like - okay, well then leave; there are 100 other people looking for a job" ***Participant G***

"There's definitely less resistance because they [younger team members] come from the generation which love technology. I think they actually prefer working from home and opening up a laptop than seeing people face to face. One person even said that seeing people and going into the office is quite draining for him. I also think because of the type of work that we are, I think actors are typically introverted individuals and being in an environment that you can control, the amount of human interaction also gives them an extra boost of energy than being in the office and you having to open yourselves up to anyone just coming into your desk versus being able to set your team status to when you are available to take calls from people or to organizing and setting up meetings" ***Participant H***

"If I can be honest, I am a dinosaur when it comes to technology. I guess we had to really, really sharpen our pencils in terms of how we did things

*and learn quite quickly. I mean, MS teams was something that nobody in our business ever used pre-COVID, but it was something within half an hour that was deployed to our systems, and we fathomed it out fairly quickly in terms of how to use it****" Participant I***

Participants indicated that there were also well-being benefits noted including proactively monitoring their teams, reallocating work where needed, being able to manage performance with evidence and supporting each other as a team. Participants also noted that women reached out looking for more connection and engagement, their next-level leaders were taking accountability for proactive decision making and because teams were working so closely together team members we are to step into each other's roles, especially when team members were ill during the pandemic.

"It was a case of just checking in with my team and then seeing that there was a balance of how the work was distributed" ***Participant A***

"The virtual environment did make it a lot easier for documenting poor performance because a meeting like this can then be recorded. So, it made the case for discipline and HR a lot stronger because there was a lot more evidence, and recorded evidence" ***Participant C***

"I found I found that happened a lot more with the females. I don't think it ever happened with any of the males. Maybe the males were supporting each other, but the females were a lot more connected with phone calls and just trying to support each other" ***Participant F***

"They felt empowered because they didn't have to consult with me on certain things because they had to think on their toes. We were more synchronized in terms of that, and there was a high level of accountability and ownership and shared leadership. At some stage, three of my senior leaders where in hospital with the pandemic, and they are team managers but because they were so synchronized, they stepped up to lead; they could actually step into each other's shoes" ***Participant E***

Participant E noted her own concerns about keeping her team members safe and shared a specific example of how teams were connecting and caring for each other while working virtually.

> *"Safety was my concern and just making sure that they can get back safely to their families. While I was implementing initially the tools for them to be at home. But given the intensity of the of the pandemic, through the managers, I made sure that I had a daily report. There was a daily reconnect with the teams to make sure that they did the check in's and to make sure that their check-in is not about work but about the people and their families and the support that they need from the organization and to for them to make sure that they know how to access us should they need help. I'll just give you an example; there's one colleague where her husband could not breathe. I think in that moment, one of the colleagues, because we instilled the culture of them checking in on each other and letting us know what's happening, the colleague realised what was happening and had to organise an ambulance to go and pick their colleague and her husband to take them to the hospital"* ***Participant E***

Aside from the benefits of increased collaboration and concern, participants stated that they were able to support and help teams to learn how to establish better balance, they were also able to understand their team members and their unique working styles in greater depth and as they empowered teams to have more agency over their output team members were being honest about needing time for family and personal matters. Participants indicated that they benefited from increased flexibility during their working day which allowed them to incorporate their responsibilities within the home and they learnt more about their own health and well-being working virtually.

> *"People are picking up extra time when they shouldn't be. It's coming up a lot, and we are encouraging people when it's half past four, you switch off that laptop, and you go. The thing is, you have to have discipline. With me, at half past two, I need to log off. I have to close my laptop and put it away in my bag, so I don't see it, so I know I'm going home"* ***Participant B***

“There were other people who are great individual contributors, and they just loved it because they didn't have to do the small talk; they just came, and they did what they needed to do, and they didn't find it distracting because no one was coming up to them. So, it depended on the personality and organizational maturity” ***Participant C***

“I think the more agency you had over your work, the more you could be honest with that, and then you also gave people indirectly permission, to be honest with it too. I had children who are school-going age; I could say to people, I'm going to go fetch my children between two and half past two; I'm not going to be available. If I hadn't been that honest with the team to say, listen, I also have life, and I'm also dealing with specific things. I think they wouldn’t have been as open and transparent” ***Participant C***

“I think it sort of helped women to juggle and be able to do school runs easier to be able to, you know, you wake up, you're on your laptop, you work, but you can knock off at five and cook immediately. You know, you don't have to drive back home and then start cooking at seven or 8:00 o'clock. You can throw your laundry in the washing machine. And while it runs, you're busy writing your report on your laptop” ***Participant D***

*“They equipped us with techniques, and I knew I needed to cope, and I needed to pay attention to that, to empower me to be healthy in the way I work from home. At first, I had swollen legs, but I quickly understood I could click, and that's why digitisation is very important, that you could click and play a video that helps you understand what you're going through at that moment****”*** ***Participant E***

“I think the possibility of remote working has helped women quite a lot and the flexibility. It's not standard that everyone is flexible, but I think the flexible hours do also help because then you can plan your life around it, rather than plan life around work. I think that flexibility does make it more attractive than being forced to be in the office from 8 to 5 for the whole day and have to plan everything else around that” ***Participant H***

> “I think it's more beneficial because I was at liberty to do things when I wanted, how I wanted, as long as I got my stuff done. I could get up at 6:00 am and do an hour of exercise, knowing I'm not going to be having to jump in my car and drive an hour to work to get my day started as early as possible. By 8:00 am, my lunch was on the stove, so it is those things for me that really, really worked well for me” ***Participant I***

As leaders in their respective organisations, participants reflected on their growth creating space to support their colleagues and teams, using the virtual space to close the gap and distance between themselves and their teams so that every employee could feel cared for, learning new ways to observe and lean in to understand what their team members were facing.

> *“It also challenged us from a leadership perspective, particularly as a female leader; I find that a few of us as females tend to be a lot more connected to people's emotions intuitively. If you don't create that space for people, it would be very easy for someone to be going through the most difficult time and have no support whatsoever”* ***Participant C***

> *“I have more than 390 people, and most of them were essential workers. I would send them personal messages. Each day I would select if I go into 30 responses; that would be great so that I can personally respond to the people, and they must feel me and know that they are matter. Those that had some serious situations, I would personally give them a call because I know with that I can get as close as we can”* ***Participant E***

> *“I had to learn a very different skill of listening for what is not being said or for, call it that voice. We usually say it's a body language, so the voice language. So how do I know, from listening to the voice, then say, Talicia is not in a good space. I had to learn and I had to force myself in making working from home more effective for me as a leader. I managed to at least learn that, and where there is clarification that was required, I would then have more of an offline discussion. I was more deliberate in leading in a different much more effective way for the team”* ***Participant F***

4.1.7 Digitalisation and gender inclusion

Participants were asked to reflect on digitalisation and gender inclusion and the majority of the participants indicated that they believe there was a relationship between these two aspects. Participants noted that this relationship involved how women use technology in driving further digitalisation, breaking gender stereotypes in the workplace and offering greater opportunities for women to be active members of the workforce while choosing to care for their families.

> *"I do because for me, it's purely from the role that gender can play in driving the inclusion agenda. And I do know that sometimes there is a belief or misconception that it's too complex for this gender, and I do not believe that it's too complex for this gender. It's more about how the gender is leveraged to be able to drive digitalization. It's doable. I do believe we are the perfect gender that are outcome-based, that are transformational, that can bring this into organizations"* ***Participant E***

> *"Yes, definitely. I think that in the current climate, especially after the pandemic, with people being able to work from home, especially because we are still prone to gender stereotyping roles. I think it's allowed a lot for lot of moms to be able to excel in their careers or move forward and have like a work-life balance with their children. So yes, there definitely is a link between - Digitalisation and gender inclusion"* ***Participant G***

> *"Yes, I do. I think it's been easier for women through digitalisation to be part of the conversation. I think, especially for working moms; it's opened up opportunities that were previously, I guess, limited. So, in households, I think there is still a strong expectation where mothers have more of a role to play with children. Whether that should or shouldn't be the case is a different debate"* ***Participant H***

Two of the participants indicated that they didn't see a relationship between digitalisation and gender explaining that they believed this was a gender-neutral, business imperative for the organisation to cope with the effects of the pandemic.

“I didn’t see digitalization as a gender imperative. I saw it more as a is a business essential. So, I don't know if there was any specific gender nuance to digitalization. With regards to technology or digitalization, I don't think there was any exclusion or inclusion of women. I think it just had to happen. So, from a technology perspective, it's not like women got better tools or less tools or different tools. I don't think it was necessary for women to have different tools. ” ***Participant C***

“I feel like it's so inclusive. I mean, digitalisation. Well, I guess it depends on what context you're asking that question because I didn't see anyone, any male or female, being excluded in the transition. It was easy for everybody because everybody was already involved in using the gadgets and the tools involved in working from home” ***Participant D***

Participant I noted that there is still a tendency to seek more feedback from males on the topic of digitalisation and that females are only asked to provide feedback on specific aspects of digitalisation

“I want to note for the record that this is purely my view - So when it comes to digitalization, I think it is still a very male-dominated area. I don't know whether people feel that males have more ability to understand digitalisation, but I still believe it's very male-dominated, not including women's opinions. I get the feeling that they're very selective regarding the information they obtain from females. Just my view.” ***Participant I***

Participants G and H noted that new entrants to the workforce during the period of rapid digitalisation and virtual work have adopted this experience as their baseline for understanding the workplace. Having no prior knowledge of the world of work, they need to be guided around how to work effectively in the home and a new hybrid workplace.

“I finished university in 2018. I took a gap year in 2019. I was working for two weeks when the hard lockdown happened. I only know COVID conditions. I have no point of reference. So, for me, I can't say what changed because this is my only the only thing that's been normal” ***Participant G***

"My team is a team of all singles just because they're fairly young and they've recently graduated. They don't have that same level of responsibilities, but they do have, so it might not be immediate family responsibilities, but they've got other responsibilities that they would also like to prioritize. And it's so good for them to know you're not just focused on work 24/7 because I think going digitally also created the problem of bringing your work home and being able to access it 24/7" ***Participant H***

4.2 Linking the themes related to the propositions of this study

4.2.1 Proposition 1: Understanding the perceived effect of digitalisation as experienced by women leaders in financial services

The research review focused on understanding the digital workplace, how it started and evolved, and the challenges in the digital workplace including the experience of the digital workplace in the financial services sector. From the review, it was unclear exactly how digitalisation affects gender inclusion and whether there was a relationship between digitalisation and the inclusion of women in the workplace. While the review of literature positioned both positive and negative effects of digitalisation, there was a strong and common view that digitalisation is seen as the "moonshot" to the rapid progression of gender inclusion by addressing the inequalities that previously existed within the workplace. As per numerous seminal reviews, governments and global organisations are relying on the private sector to take up its role in progressing digitalisation to grow the economy and pave the way for women to become economically active. Women leaders are further challenged in leadership roles where they are simultaneously experiencing the effects of digitalisation and leading their teams and organisations through this transformation.

Using the consistency matrix – *Appendix G*, we can link the themes from the semi-structured interview questions one to six which were used to understand the perceived effect of digitalisation to proposition one. The participant's responses

highlighted that four themes were important in understanding proposition one, these four themes were existing gender inclusion in organisations, digital enablers, digital workplace design and social implications. The participant's views indicated that both digitalisation and gender inclusion were taking place simultaneously in two previously separate but now dynamic and interchangeable environments at various states of readiness. While women leaders reflected on both the positive and negative effects of digitalisation, there was consensus that digitalisation of the workplace offers women the opportunity to work in a way that complements the multifaceted roles they need to play. Participants indicated that there is an opportunity to allow women leaders to explore, understand and increase decision-making around tooling and digitalisation processes, thereby enhancing their ability to lead in digitally maturing organisations. Extending work into the home means that organisations must reconsider how they intentionally include, support, retain and progress women leaders. With increased digitalisation forcing changes across the workplace, the industry also needs to consider moving away from traditional and standardized employee value propositions to individual value proposals that take into account unique social circumstances to promote sustainable gender inclusion.

4.2.2 Proposition 2: Explore the challenges and opportunities concerning women working virtually in this industry

The second part of the literature review focused on understanding the research around women's journey in the evolution of the workplace, how women work virtually and gender inclusion in the SA financial services industry. There have been several opportunities and challenges mentioned in various studies. Most of the research was done when the digital workplace was still maturing across SA. The surge in digitalisation during the recent pandemic became a catalyst for the largest virtual working phenomenon observed worldwide, impacting organisations differently. Women remain marginalised both in terms of representation and leadership in organisations. At the same time, the financial services industry in SA was reported to have achieved gender parity entering

2020 as the global pandemic arrived (Labour, 2020). Understanding women leaders' experiences in financial services helps us understand the opportunities and challenges that surfaced during this period and if this support or derails future gender inclusion efforts. Most organisations are considering the pros and cons of a hybrid working construct where employees can work both in and outside the physical office. We need to understand if virtual working is beneficial for women to ensure that we understand the changing needs of women and women leaders in the workplace.

Interview questions seven to ten were used on the consistency matrix – *Appendix G* to explore the challenges and opportunities for women working virtually. The participant's views highlighted three main themes: culture, well-being, the role of digitalisation and gender inclusion. While culture and well-being have developed as dominant and significant themes influencing both digitalisation and gender inclusion, these two themes have been further subdivided into opportunities (plain text) and challenges (italics). Table 7 below summarises the key findings from the participant's feedback across these three themes. The findings related to opportunities for women working virtually emphasised the need for flexibility, accountability and autonomy. It also highlighted mutual benefits for organisations, teams, families and women leaders. The findings also supported increased performance, embracing feminine leadership attributes and enhanced accountability. The challenges shared ranged across a range of concerns affecting how teams and their women leaders operated on a day-to-day basis; despite having access to technology and being able to work virtually, there were other considerations that women were faced with that organisations did not think about or include in their business strategies and planning. The extent of the challenges experienced indicated the extreme conditions women leaders had to lead in and the effects of workplace digitalisation in the home.

The final theme linked to proposition two relates to digitalisation and gender inclusion and provides a synopsis of the findings from the participants' views regarding digitalisation and gender inclusion and how they have made sense of this in their individual contexts. There was a clear rejection of gender stereotypes

relating to women and technology and a strong view that there is a link between digitalisation and gender inclusion.

The figure below provides a visual overview of the themes linked to propositions one and two of this study.

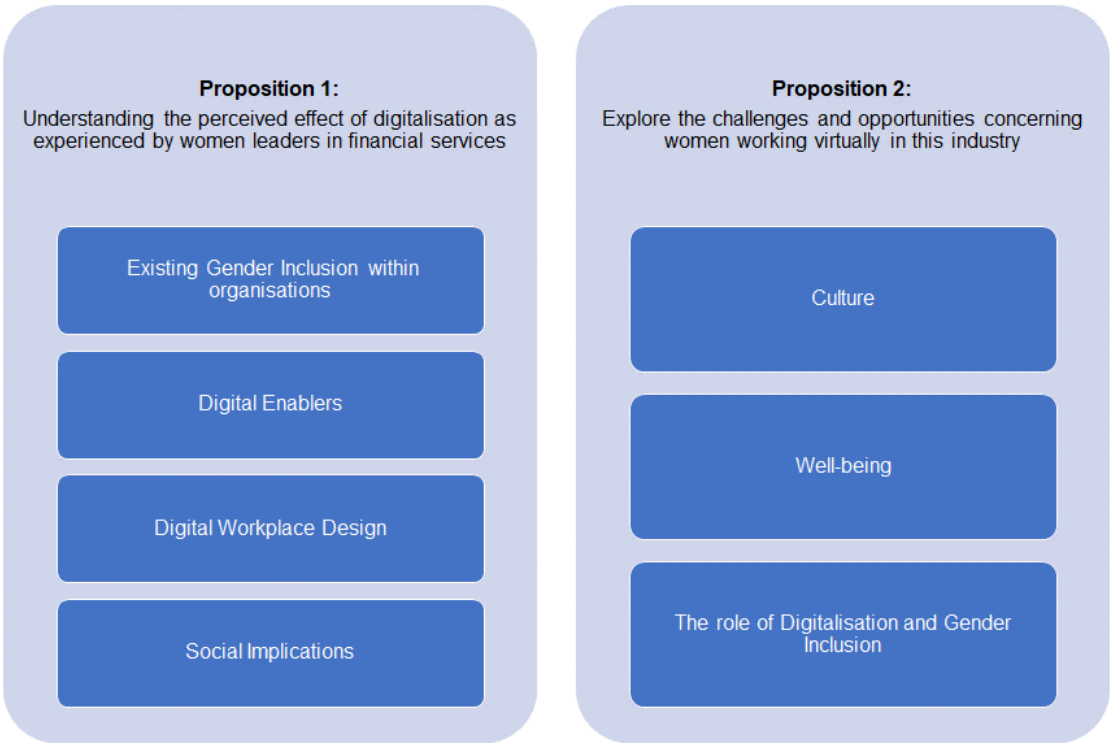


Figure 4-2: Themes related to propositions one and two

4.3 Summary of the findings

The findings from the analysis of the participant's interviews relate to a deeper understanding of their experiences. The findings have been grouped into themes and these themes have been linked to proposition one and proposition two for discussion as follows;

Proposition One:

- Existing gender inclusion in organisations
- Digital Workplace Design
- Digital Enablers
- Social Implications

Proposition Two:

- Well-being
- Culture
- The role of digitalisation and gender inclusion

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OR FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

Although the study by Lamon et al. (1997) positioned the rise of telework in the ’90s as the “most radical departure from standard work conditions”, this view pales in comparison to the extent of rapid digitalisation that took place during the biggest virtual work project across the world, as businesses desperately tried to respond to the effects of the global pandemic. Within this desperation to keep businesses afloat, women in the workplace were part of this global virtual work project, which brought their work into their second sphere of responsibility: their homes.

This chapter discusses the research findings into this phenomenon to understand the perceived effect of digitalisation on women leaders in financial services and explore the opportunities and challenges for women working virtually. The discussion offers insight from the understanding derived from the semi-structured interviews with participants. The discussion reflects on the similarities and differences noted compared with existing research on the digitalisation of the workplace and women working virtually.

5.2 Discussion pertaining to Proposition 1: Understanding the experience of digitalisation as experienced by women leaders in financial services

5.2.1 Gender Inclusion

While many seminal papers and research into gender inclusion referred to the inclusion of women in the workplace, and the 2005 UN Women report describing aspects of the digital divide along the lines of access and use of ICTs such as the internet and mobile phones (UN Women, 2005), the participants spoke openly about their extensive use of technology for a range of activities involving work

and the home, aligned to the findings from countless bodies of research indicating a massive shift in the adoption and use of mobile technologies The findings are supported in Hilbert's study (Hilbert, 2011). Although Hilbert's study could not provide a view on why women gravitated to technology, it opposed previous views on women being "techno-phobic". The research by Lee (2006) proposed that one of the gaps in feminist research within telecommunications was that researchers did not question "why" women came into contact with technology (Lee, 2006). As part of this study, the participant's views reflected that their use of technology was predominantly in the context of work. However, the views shared by participants provided deeper insight into why women are using technology and coming into contact with it. From the participant's views, technology was being used to manage and facilitate the many roles women leaders are expected to contribute to and as part of their reproductive and productive labour roles. Women leaders were coming into contact with technology and increased digitalisation as they looked for ways to juggle and manage their duties across every aspect of their professional and personal lives from schooling, shopping, learning, work, banking, doctors' visits etc.

Despite the participants sharing that there is still work to be done to progress women in the workplace, there was clear acknowledgement around the progression of the gender inclusion strategies that organisations within financial services had deployed, which was visibly contributing to better gender equity in the workplace. This view is supported in the research and seminal papers advocating for greater inclusion of women as active participants in economies leveraging technology as the medium to facilitate inclusion (G20 Insights, 2020; Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021; Hilbert, 2011; Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021; Kuroda et al., 2010; UN Women 2005). The findings indicated that organisations were clearly articulating the need to include women in the workplace as part of their overall strategy as well as making strides to address the structural and organisational barriers to gender inclusion in the workplace such as compensation. There was also a strong indication that workplaces have still not integrated women-specific events such as childbearing successfully. While there has been a large focus on the needs of women around childbearing and childcare, all organisations are silent on other impacts of

women-specific events such as menopause or menstrual-related illnesses which continue to affect women throughout the duration of their tenure.

While participants reflected on their positive and negative experiences of digitalisation during this time, overall, there was a positive view of digitalisation and a strong view that increased digitalisation had resulted in positive benefits for women. Although participants agreed that there was no specific or intentional inclusion of women that could be identified as technologies deployed to support virtual work, there was consensus that women were directly benefitting from this. Women leaders also felt that this was the first time they had successfully incorporated their domestic reality into their working lives which was indicated in research by several studies (Benschop, 2021; Hilbert, 2011; Lamond et al.,1997; Herbert, 2017). The surge of digitalisation experienced during the virtual working phenomenon was positively experienced by women leaders and was viewed as contributing positively to increased gender inclusion during the virtual working phenomenon, allowing women leaders to manage their roles and responsibilities at work and within the home. There was also an indication from participants that the transition to hybrid has been challenging and is placing additional pressure on women leaders as they try to navigate this new way of work. Participants indicated that being in the office was distracting, leading to productivity declines and time wastage at the same time, women did not feel included in the decisions around hybrid work indicating that sufficient consideration for women and how they individually prefer to work with technology is not being considered.

5.2.2 Digital Enablers

As participants reflected on the aspects that made up the theme of digital enablers, one of the key sub-themes involved the use of technologies. Digital enablement is viewed as a crucial component in creating an effective digital workplace. Participants expressed differences in the type and access to technologies provided to perform their roles while working virtually when lockdowns commenced. Participants reflected that while physical workplaces might have incorporated all the technology required to work efficiently on-site, as they were forced to transition into remote virtual work during the pandemic, they

did not have access to everything needed to work or collaborate effectively in a virtual workspace. These findings align with research into the digital divide, where access to technology was identified as the key determinant of the overall use of ICTs and the extent of collaboration and adoption (Mwim & Kritzinger, 2001).

While all the participants indicated that their organisations were progressing with digital transformation strategies, they highlighted that they had access to technology and were at various stages of their digitalisation journeys aligning to the research noting that industries in South Africa including financial services were investing heavily in the acceleration of their digital transformation strategies (Deloitte, 2016b; Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Louw & Nieuwenhuizen, 2020; Makola & Kgosinyane, 2020; Manda & Backhouse, 2017). Interesting to note that, is that despite the progression of digital transformation in financial services, there were different experiences of the readiness of the transition to full-time virtual work aligning with the view that the financial services industry in South Africa has faced rapid change over the past two decades but we can still argue, the industry was very unprepared for supporting the view expressed by Marous (Marous, 2018).

Despite black women progressing over the years into leadership and decision-making roles, due to the nature of the financial service industry and its internal structures, the participants indicated that technology teams were responsible for everything related to technology and women leaders were not included in decision-making around technologies to be used or deployed to support their team effectiveness during virtual work. This finding was in contradiction to research by Selimović et al. (2021) suggesting that in successful digital workplaces, leaders and employees must collaborate as integrated thought partners in the digitalisation process that organisations undertake (Selimović et al., 2021).

Although research by Herbert pointed to reduced levels of proficiency, access and technical skills in women and girls (Herbert, 2017), the participants indicated a deep interest in exploring and experimenting with new digital tools and features but were limited to what was available and adopted by their respective organisations and IT teams. Women leaders advocated for tools they

would have liked to have, but this was during the transition. Their organisations did not proactively seek their input as part of the overall digital transformation of the workplace or during the surge in digitalisation. It was apparent that intuitive and easier-to-use tools were adopted much faster than tools that proved to be more complex, corresponding to the view in research indicating that user-friendly hardware and software will accelerate organisational digital journeys (Attaran, Attaran, & Kirkland, 2019). There was also an indication that gender-based stereotypes and assumptions regarding women and technology are still prevalent and remain barriers to both digitalisation and gender inclusion as highlighted in several studies (Hilbert, 2011; Herbert, 2017; Sasake & Settecase, 2010).

5.2.3 Digital Workplace Design

Another key theme that emerged in the findings was that the digital workplace design that details how technology, business processes and people come together in a seamless and efficient ecosystem is key to delivering on business goals and objectives. Participants shared varied perspectives on organisational virtual working strategies during this time. While organisations within financial services were making strides in the extent of their digital transformation and adoption of technologies (Businesstech, 2022), participants noted that while they were given access to their organisations' digital capabilities and technologies before the pandemic, there was little appetite to allow women leaders the opportunity to fully leverage these new capabilities and work virtually outside of their physical workplace.

Some businesses had very primitive technologies and intentionally did not adopt any new technologies into their workplaces, citing that this strategy was aligned with their customer base and existing customer engagement strategies. There was also an acknowledgement of the tension between adopting new technology and following traditional working methods. This view contradicts research from Mićić et al.(2022) suggesting that introducing new technologies would transform the physical workplace into a digital workspace (Mićić, Khamooshi, Raković, & Matkovic, 2022). While technology is changing how people work and interact, the

participants indicated that they remain bound by the expectation to be in a physical workplace with the same methods and processes which has been noted as a barrier to digitalisation in research (Cijan et al., 2019; Graves & Karabayeva, 2020; Lamond et al., 1997).

Participants also reflected that there seems to be an internal digital gap within their organisations. Certain roles, based on their function, were not prioritised as part of the digitalisation process and employee levels within organisations dictated the access to tools, where seniority determined the highest level of enablement and access. The research by Mwim and Kritzinger (2001) reflected on the digital divide being defined by occupation, gender, language culture and attitude towards ICT (Mwim & Kritzinger, 2001); this view offers insight into the internal dynamics of organisations and the existence of an internal digital divide which affects women within specific roles and levels the financial services workplace. The participants indicated that customer servicing or customer-facing roles where women might be clustered in organisations needed to be digitally prioritised. At the same time, with the financial services industry being highly regulated in SA, there was also an acknowledgement of the risks that came with working virtually (Eurofond, 2018; Flanders Investment & Trade, 2021).

Research into digital workplace design highlighted that the overall aim was to centre and design flexibility around human practices and their context (Richter, Heinrich, Stocker, & Schwabe, 2018); it is evident that this remains complex to achieve as participants indicated that women and women leaders were not centred in the integration of people, business processes and technology. This successful integration of people, processes and technology has been identified as a key aspect of successful workplace digital transformation by several researchers (Cijan et al., 2019; Degryse, 2017; Deloitte, 2021; Eurofound, 2018; Haipeter, 2020; Loughran, 2000; Marsh et al., 2022; Merriman et al., 2007).

Business misalignment was identified in the inductive analysis as a key barrier to realising the full benefit of the digitalisation (Brynjolfsson, Benzell, & Rock, 2020). Within the theme of business misalignment across business strategy, use of technology and employee enablement, participants reflected on the increased security issues, the confusion between traditional performance expectations

versus increased performance expectations working virtually and how these increased internal performance expectations also influenced customer behaviour. There was also an indication that business processes were changing and evolving rapidly to reach customers, placing additional performance expectations on teams supporting the views in research into the impacts of digitalisation (Deloitte, 2016b; William & Schubert, 2001).

Although research indicated a trend to incorporate BYOD into the workplace, participants reflected mainly on using the specific technology supplied by the company. While there was a mention of connecting through “watches”, the participants did not provide any detailed insight into how other personally owned devices were used to connect to work virtually (Deloitte, 2016a). While research pointed to organisations being uncertain about the benefits of digitalisation (William & Schubert, 2018), the participants reflected on the increased productivity gains that they experienced during this period indicating that during unprecedented situations such as the surge in digitalisation during the pandemic, when employees and customers have “no choice” to adopt and use technology that productivity gains are more visible and tangible supporting the results in several studies (Agur et al., 2020; Attaran et al., 2019; Graves & Karabayeva, 2020; Jahangir Rony, 2021; The Citizen, 2019). It is clear that digital workplace design remains a key aspect of enabling teams to work virtually successfully. More importantly, it shapes how women leaders take up their individual and leadership roles as they work virtually. Based on the views shared by the participants, it appears that all the technology was not in place to enable women leaders to work effectively; they had to adapt to what was already in the organisation and help teams to work with tools as opposed to being active participants in the digital design of their workplace.

5.2.4 Social Implications

Despite the level of technological adoption or increased digitalisation that was taking place in the workplace at the time, it was clear from the participant's interviews that there was a range of social implications that needed to be navigated. For this discussion, social implications should be understood as the

manner in which rapid digitalisation and working virtually affected women leaders. It considers the context of the women leaders' environment outside of the physical workplace as they were forced into virtual work during the pandemic. This finding correlates with research into the barriers to gender inclusion, highlighting “sociocultural norms” as a contributing and complex factor within the current debate (Casale & Posel, 2020; Hillbert, 2011; Huws, 2019).

While organisations were striving for increased gender inclusion and digitally transforming their workplaces, the social context in which employees worked was not considered (Hilbert, 2011). Participants shared the impact of working virtually, where their personal digital setups had to change to work efficiently from home. This meant that women had to cater to additional economic concerns to invest in the needed technology and infrastructure. Where affordability was constrained, women had to look at other workspaces. A participant indicated that she had to relocate to Cape Town to access her support network highlighting the extent that women were going to ensure that they were able to work virtually while supporting their families. While this participant was able to do so, there was also an acknowledgement that single women on single incomes would struggle with the cost of childcare but might not have the benefit of networks to help with safe childcare. The findings also indicated that participants expressed that stereotypical work patterns and processes were prevalent and remain a barrier to gender inclusion that has not been addressed as part of the digitalisation of the workplace or the introduction of virtual work supporting findings in the study conducted by Kohlrausch & Weber (Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021).

Extending the workplace into the home is another social implication organisations needed to be prepared to manage correctly. Although organisations understood the work requirements associated with roles, levels and expected delivery within the workplace according to specified working hours as per contractual obligations of women’s productive roles. Organisations did not explore or understand the extent of the reproductive labour required or how that would impact women as the virtual workspace was expanded so rapidly at this time (Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021; Mahajan et al., 2020; Parry & Gordon, 2021). The context of women’s

reproductive roles within the home remains an unexplored aspect of the virtual working phenomenon.

This virtual working phenomenon experienced as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic brought women's productive and reproductive roles together, colliding in the home environment (Hillbert, 2011; Huws, 2019; Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021; Mahajan et al., 2020). Research into remote telework noted the blurring of lines between work and home, which remains a major concern (Boncori, 2020; Casale & Posel, 2020; Hoefling, 2017; Huws, 2019; Lamond et al., 1997). The views from participants revealed how environmental factors like safety, security, travel and access to technology and basic necessities like electricity impacted women and leaders. This view no longer suggests that women were not already managing needs in the home while they worked in a physical workplace. However, the extent of reproductive labour in the home was a major aspect noted by participants.

During their eight-to-five working days, the specifics of their personal lives, needs and responsibilities were considered private and were kept away from the physical workplace. In the virtual workspace, participants indicated that very private matters had to be raised while working virtually such as gender-based violence and needing to care for parents. While organisations focused on ensuring that employees had on-site access, they didn't think about the specific contextual circumstances affecting workers outside the physical workplace which adds a new perspective on digitalisation in financial services (Benschop, 2021). A participant pointed to the difficulty that women were experiencing in the home where the only technology that a family had access to was in the context of work. This indicated that in many households in SA, access to technology to leverage digital technologies is still a gap within the country.

Although research by Ryan et al. (2011) positioned that organisations facing "unsuccessful" performance challenges, may tend to think of women leading in a crisis, expecting them to fail. The research also concluded that "successful leadership depends on a match between leader characteristics and the features of the situation that a leader confronts" (Ryan et al., 2011). The participants shared how resilient they approached this crisis and how they led this transition

embracing digitalisation and their gendered characteristics such as intuition, agility, tact, empathy and understanding (Graves & Karabayeva, 2020). Participants indicated that they believed that women were perfectly positioned to lead in this crisis and when women were asked to take the lead, they were also promoted to greater responsibility for making a positive contribution to their organisations. This finding challenges the notion that women may be thought to lead in a crisis only to potentially be set up for failure (Ryan et al., 2011).

While the participants indicated that women stepped into this challenge to lead their teams and organisations through this difficult transition determined to succeed, and while they were able to thrive, the question remains; at what personal cost did they thrive? While women leaders have adopted and adapted to both technology and working virtually, they are also now in the throes of another transition as organisations navigate a new hybrid working strategy, where they are attempting to bring employees back into the physical workplace and maintain the gains of working virtually, but again this transition may be again disproportionately impacting women employees and leaders (Graves & Karabayeva, 2020; Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021; Mahajan et al., 2020; Parry & Gordon, 2021)

5.3 Discussion pertaining to Proposition 2: Explore the challenges and opportunities concerning women working virtually in this industry

5.3.1 Culture

The culture was identified in research as a critical theme due to its influence on the behaviour of employees, including their adoption of new technologies and their ability to collaborate, communicate and connect in a digital workplace (Cijan et al., 2019; Deloitte, 2016a; Graves & Karabayeva, 2020; Hoefling, 2017; International Labour Organisation, 2019, Loughran, 2000; Oeij et al., 2019; Marsh et al., 2022; Price Waterhouse Coopers 2018). Culture also emerged as a strong

theme, with participants reflecting on the opportunities and challenges that they experienced working virtually. While there is wide acceptance that the type of technologies introduced influenced how women leaders worked and connected with their teams at this time, they also reflected on how they went about working and driving productivity across their teams.

Women leaders expressed their challenges with culture in three sub-themes: Management Issues, Team Disconnect and Conflict. Despite the availability of research into working virtually as well as solutions and approaches for managers and employees, the views shared by the participants reflected similar challenges experienced in team dynamics, the industry environment, the ability to manage virtually, differing levels of employee maturity, and societal versus corporate expectations. While managing employees on a day-to-day basis can be argued to be complex and challenging due to the nature of changing human behaviour, managing in a virtual environment has been as challenging and difficult as noted in research (Graves & Karabayeva, 2020; Merriman et al., 2007; Hoefling, 2017). The increase in technologies in the workplace was also considered to create longer-term management concerns (Degryse, 2017). Team disconnection emerged as an ongoing concern where team members relating and working in a virtual space, without the usual in-person, face-to-face working and engagement model became challenging for team members to navigate supporting findings in several studies (Attaran et al., 2019; Deloitte, 2014; Deloitte, 2016a; Deloitte, 2016b; ILO, 2019; Merriman et al., 2007; OECD, 2017; UN Women, 2020).

Participants shared challenges in emotional, visual and auditory sensory understanding such as reading and interpreting visual and auditory cues in a virtual setting, how openness with their own leaders left them concerned about being penalized for honesty, general phobia of speaking up, lack of proactive communication and team cohesion. Conflicts in the virtual workspace reflected the disparities and difficulties that women leaders observed both as members of their own teams and as leaders, leading and managing others (Hoefling, 2017; Loughran,2000; Merriman, Schmidt & Dunlap-Hinkler, 2007).

The conflicts noted included communication issues, misunderstanding work objectives resulting in reworking, messages from leaders to team members

needing help in translation, leaders finding that they needed to clarify instructions or communications continuously, and the tension between one-dimensional versus multifaceted capabilities needed. The cultural challenges experienced during virtual work were many and complex. Women leaders navigated this to the best of their abilities, looking for ways to resolve these and keep team members connected. It is also evident that the participants were navigating cultural complexity on three fronts, as they transitioned to working virtually, managing the cultural expectations of their work and home environments and managing the formation of culture in a distributed, fully virtual team.

Digitalisation and virtual working were identified in several studies as increasing collaboration among teams. The inter-relatedness of employees and the cultural context of organisations are determinant factors for how individuals and teams collaborate, connect or communicate within the virtual workplace (Deloitte, 2016b; Haipeter, 2020; Manda & Backhouse 2017; OECD, 2019; Price Waterhouse Coopers 2018). The opportunities the participants noted were considered positive for both leaders and employees. These positive cultural behaviours could be reinforced as teams continue to work virtually (Hoefling, 2017; William & Schubert, 2018).

The opportunities expressed by women leaders included social connection, learning, innovation, structured engagement with teams and collaboration. Participants indicated that as they led and connected with their teams in this challenging and unprecedented situation, they felt they had more freedom to adapt their leadership style according to the situation (Ryan et al.,2011), they expressed that they were able to lead with their emotions embracing their natural characteristics, they also observed increased confidence and respect amongst team members and actively reached out to networks and teams to remain connected as they sought greater connection with other women as well (Banks-Weston, 2020; Rajahonka & Vilman,2019).

Learning was a strong and continuous theme from participants. It created opportunities for them and their employees to learn new methods and approaches to lead their teams while keeping them motivated and productive. One of the approaches that women leaders found themselves adopting was

structuring the interaction of their teams. Although participants noted that they had team meetings, project updates and interaction in the office that would help the team to connect, there was a need to structure the interaction with the team differently in a virtual working world that helped to drive productivity. Throughout this period, women leaders also focused on driving their own learning, increasing their knowledge of leading their teams, navigating their families through the pandemic and enhancing their digital capabilities (Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Graves & Karabayeva, 2020). Participants also reflected on innovation and collaboration and simple adjustments in how they approached working with their teams, which resulted in incremental positive changes. Some of these incremental changes included access to virtual capacity in dispersed teams, renewed accountability and ownership from team members, embracing the diversity of leadership, continuously testing new ways of working and learning together (Hynes & Richardson, 2009) as well, as navigating the pace of across teams and organisations (Hoefling, 2017; Jenkin & Naude, 2018; Selimović et al., 2021; Rajahonka & Villman, 2019)

Despite the challenges that participants experienced working virtually, this also afforded women leaders greater freedom to adapt their leadership style, leveraging their natural characteristics in the transition with their teams and exploring new ways of remaining connected by leveraging collaborative digital tools and technology as the medium. This curiosity also allowed them to enhance their digital capabilities and empower their teams to collaborate effectively despite the physical distance between team members.

5.3.2 Well-being

Well-being concerns about using technology have been an ongoing debate and research since the 1900s. While introducing new technologies and increased digitalisation has changed how people work, interact and collaborate, it has also affected people's health and overall well-being differently. Five "dark side" impacts: overload, technology-related stress, distraction, interruption, anxiety, addiction and excessive use of technologies were identified in research before the pandemic (Marsh et al., 2022). With the onset of the pandemic, the rapid

progression of virtual work and a stark realisation that women continue to be disproportionately affected by reproductive labour within the home as noted in several studies (Casale & Posel, 2020; Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021; Hillbert, 2011; Huws, 2019; Marsh et al., 2022), women leaders and teams found themselves navigating a series of well-being challenges and opportunities (Lamond et al., 1997). While participants indicated that their organisations have been heavily focused on the introduction of new technologies, maturing their digital infrastructure and overall internal digital capabilities, aligned to the views positioned in research, “the expectations, behavioural intentions and psychological needs [of employees] are neglected” (Selimović et al., 2021).

While a range of challenges was experienced during this time, three sub-themes, stress and burnout, constant work and team disconnection, stood out from the experiences shared by the participants. Facing difficulties balancing productive and reproductive labour requirements, women leaders found themselves and their teams experiencing higher levels of stress and burnout supporting the findings in a study by Aldossari and Chaudhry (Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2021). Women leaders expressed their difficulty in understanding and managing their personal and professional boundaries which aligns with the themes identified in research (Benschop, 2021; Boncori, 2020; Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021) and in certain instances, some women in organisations had no choice but to divulge very personal and sensitive information that might not have been shared in a pre-pandemic, on-site working environment. Burnout and stress remain critical components impacting women in the workplace and has been cited as one of the major reasons for the attrition of women in the workforce. Further to this, Aldossari and Chaudhry (2021) confirmed the effects of burnout in the workplace are disproportionately affecting more women than men (Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2021). While research has debated whether or not increased use of technology would result in job losses (Degryse, 2017; Eurofound, 2018; Jenkin & Naude, 2018; The Citizen; McKinsey,2019; McKinsey, 2020; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2018a; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2018b; World Economic Forum, 2015), participants shared their experiences of the impact on “gendered jobs” (Benschop, 2021) acknowledging the effects of the pandemic on themselves and their teams.

Women leaders also mentioned a level of “technostress” related to the technological difficulties and challenges they experienced during virtual work as defined in the study by Selimović (Selimović et al.,2021). The obscurity between work-life, aptly articulated by Boncori as “no more hyphen or separation in work–family balance”, has led to incessant work or what research has termed a “never-ending shift” (Boncori, 2020). Participants reflected on the difficulty they and their teams experienced as they tried to get to some level of life-work balance, fighting fatigue and trying to understand their holistic well-being needs aligning to findings in research (Aldosarri & Chaudry,2021; Graves & Karabayeva, 2020).

As women leaders approached reviewing different methods of supporting their teams, there was an emerging danger around the levels of comfort experienced while working at home, where participants indicated that they were comfortable in their home environment which often resulted in them working longer than required. As women leaders navigated the complexities of keeping their teams motivated and healthy while working virtually, they also spent more time understanding how team members were experiencing and navigating this transition. Participants highlighted that it was challenging for them to fully understand the reality of the context in which their teams were working supporting findings from studies into the management of remote teams (Graves & Karabayeva, 2020; Hoefling, 2017).

Leaders also reflected on their own experiences in the workplace and the inconsistencies in the levels of support they observed and received. They also expressed concerns about the performance of team members struggling in this transition (Attaran et al., 2019; Graves & Karabayeva, 2020; Haipeter, 2020). It is evident that there was a range of well-being challenges that women leaders were faced with as they worked virtually; it is clear that while these women leaders were disproportionately negatively affected by the reproductive responsibilities that they were juggling in the home, they were also shouldering a heavy burden caring for their teams, driving productivity and trying to understand the context in which each of their team members was working.

While the challenges aligned with several studies that reflect the need to understand the well-being challenges and difficulties that teams have and

continue to experience, some opportunities were also noted. The participants highlighted the opportunities for women leaders working virtually, including productivity, flexibility and better balance and increased engagement as noted in several studies (Attaran et al., 2019; Cijan et al., 2019; Hoefling, 2017; Manda & Backhouse,2017; Mićić et al., 2022; Oeij et al., 2019; Selimović et al., 2021; William & Schubert, 2018)

Productivity is closely linked to well-being, and the participants shared that the environment in which virtual working was taking place mattered when it came to productivity (Graves & Karabayeva, 2020). During this time, women leaders also reflected on their ability to be solution driven and highlighted that employees who tended to be solution-driven were also sought after and succeeded in working virtually (Hoefling, 2017). Within their team, women leaders also welcomed the opportunity to empower their teams, and in the same vein, they also felt more empowered during this time.

They also acknowledged the increase in meaningful engagement within their teams and managed performance better. (Attaran et al., 2019; Hoefling, 2017 ; Huws, 2019; Oeij et al., 2019) Women leaders also expressed how flexibility and balance became a key outcome from their virtual reality, reinforcing the importance of the environment within which virtual work takes place(Attaran et al., 2019; Graves & Karabayeva, 2020). Participants acknowledged and accepted that their team members work differently and provided more agency around how their teams wanted to work and deliver their outcomes, moving from a time-based performance ideology to an output-based one (Hoefling, 2017). Women leaders also adjusted their engagement styles to help employees navigate their day-to-day contexts. While it has been previously mentioned that women were testing and learning different group engagement approaches using digital collaborative tools, they also reflected on how they could establish individual relationships in their teams as they maintained close contact with them (Selimović et al., 2021).

5.3.3 Digitalisation and gender inclusion

One of the key questions, this study sought to answer was to understand if there was any relationship between digitalisation and gender inclusion in the financial

services industry. It was interesting to note that 56% of the participants shared that they do believe that there is a link between digitalisation and gender inclusion, especially in relation to the productive and reproductive roles that women are expected to manage and the role that women can play in increased digitalisation. A third of the participants shared that the link between digitalisation and gender inclusion was unclear but acknowledged that technology and digitalisation could solve specific problems in specific communities. There is more to explore to understand the exact correlation between the two aspects. A third of the participants shared that they did not believe a link between these two themes was necessary as they viewed digitalisation as a gender-neutral, business imperative process during this time. Women leaders expressed strong views throughout this study that while there are typical gender stereotypes related to women and technology, they disagree with this view correlating to findings in research challenging the notion of women being "techno-phobic" (Hilbert, 2011; Herbert, 2017).

There was also a shared view highlighting that there was still a tendency to seek out male input on the topic of digitalisation and women were only asked to provide feedback on specific aspects of digitalisation. This indicates that while research has challenged the notion of women being techno-phobic, the behaviour within organisations doesn't allow women access or agency to participate fully in this topic. Whilst the benefits of digitalisation are an ongoing debate (William & Schubert, 2018), the participants noted increased productivity, a positive experience of digitalisation during this unprecedented work-from-home phenomenon, positive outcomes on the use of technology, culture and well-being benefits that they observed. There was also evidence that women leaders' contributions during this time were seen as valued and recognised as "valued workers" (Benschop, 2021). Women leaders also shared insight into what can only be described as the emergence of a crisis workforce, referring to the first-time employment of employees during this time, who's only understanding of the working world was inextricably contextualised within virtual work during the pandemic.

Women leaders in the financial services industry believe there is a relationship between digitalisation and gender inclusion. Overall, the relationship between these themes fostered greater gender inclusion and was experienced positively. There was also an acknowledgement that while issues and concerns arose as part of the transition, it appears that women leaders had the freedom to flex and adjust where they needed to and that technology and digitalisation offered greater flexibility for them.

5.4 Discussing findings in relation to the theoretical framework

The domestication of technology theoretical framework that emerged from the literature review resonated with this study based on its focus on understanding technology in daily life and how users were interacting with and incorporating technology. The participants reflected on how they extensively used technology from laptops, desktops, wearables and mobile technologies. These technologies were used extensively by participants to manage and facilitate their productive and reproductive roles. The participants indicated that in the workplace they were restricted to use the technologies adopted by their organisations and had more freedom to explore and define their user journeys in their personal capacity than their professional capacity. Participants indicated that they did not provide input into the type of technology adopted and were forced to make the adopted technology work for them and their teams. Interesting to note is that participants' user journeys professionally were dictated by the internal technology stack procured by the organisation and personally were a result of their affordability and access to technology and infrastructure.

The four themes that emerged from the review; digital enablers, digital workplace design, culture and well-being featured prominently in the participant's feedback and were critical factors in women leaders' experiences of digitalisation. The themes of digital enablers and digital workplace design were key in understanding the role of digitalisation and gender inclusion while the themes of culture and well-being contributed to exploring the challenges and opportunities for women leaders working virtually.

5.5 Conclusion

Reflecting on the discussion of the findings and themes, there is a complex and mutually beneficial relationship between gender inclusion and digitalisation in the financial services industry that is closely linked to and dependant on the digital enablers in the organisation, digital workplace design and the social implications within which digitalisation takes place that is further influenced by the culture and well-being of women leaders and teams.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The introduction of technology and the rapid digitalisation that has taken place in the financial services industry has been a critical factor in how work is done within the workplace and has also been the foundation of the virtual phenomenon across the industry during the pandemic, which was also a point of acceleration in digitalisation across the industry that was experienced positively by women leaders. As we consider digitalisation and gender inclusion in the financial services industry through the lens of black women leaders in the industry, there is a complex and inter-related relationship between six key themes namely; the internal gender inclusion focuses of the industry, digital workplace design, digital enablers, social implications, well-being and culture. Each of these themes can impact each other and positively or negatively influence the outcomes for women leaders.

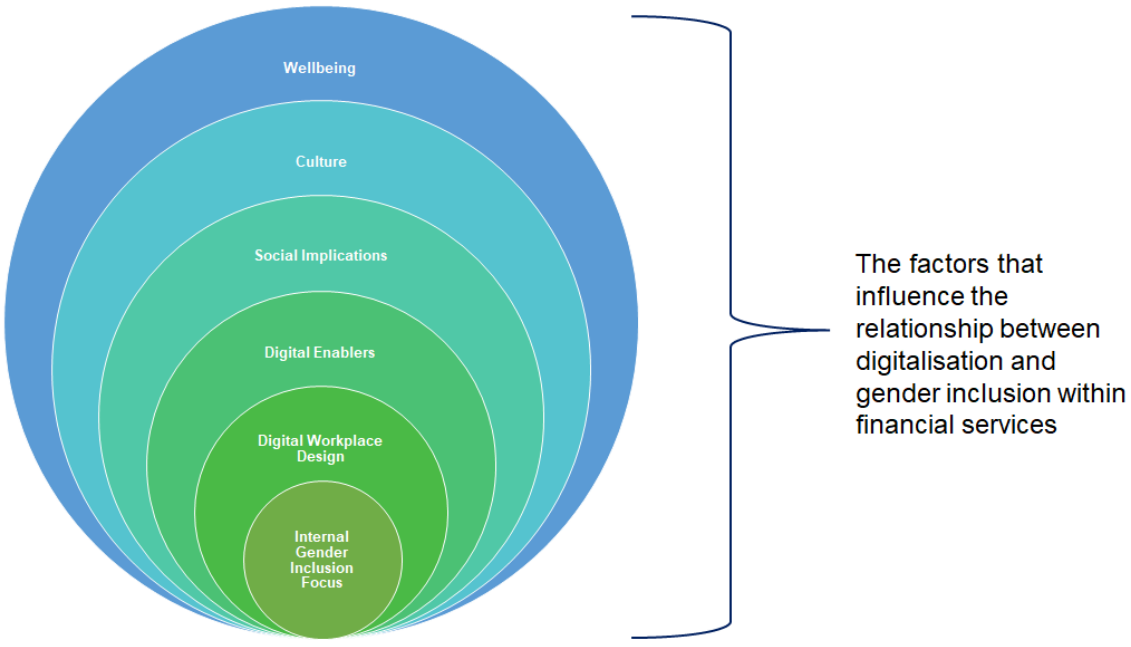


Figure 6-1: Visual depiction of the factors influencing digitalisation and gender inclusion (researchers diagram)

6.2 Conclusions regarding the perceived effect of digitalisation on women leaders in financial services

Technology and digitalisation are ways to manage or facilitate the many roles women leaders are expected to contribute to as part of their reproductive and productive labour responsibilities. There was clear acknowledgement around the progression of the gender inclusion strategies that organisations within financial services have deployed, visibly contributing to better gender equity in the workplace. While organisations continue addressing structural and organisational barriers around women, including leadership and compensation – it can be argued that these changes are taking place too slowly. The financial services industry, due to its focus on digital transformation and gender inclusion, has become an important environment in which women, technology and digitalisation are interacting. The development of deeper technical skills and proficiency can be designed and facilitated within financial services and organisations must consider in-house technical programmes to bring technology and women together in the workplace to solve specific business cases where they can lead and learn in a supportive environment.

The digital workplace design is closely linked to and is a critical component in driving gender inclusion as organisations create the blueprint around technology, business and people in the digital workplace. Within this blueprint, decisions should also entail how organisations view and design digital journeys for women leaders. DWD is an opportunity for organisations to review and recreate existing gender patterns within their organisations. The design must be human-centred, focusing on how women leaders would like to work with digital tools and enablers as they fulfil their various roles. As part of this process, it is critical that organisations proactively seek input from women leaders, on an ongoing basis, as a key input into how their teams need to collaborate, share information and how women leaders prefer to structure their delivery. Women's technical proficiencies are increasing as they encounter new technologies and

digitalisation within their workplaces and homes. A strong view suggests that increased digitalisation in the virtual workspace has resulted in positive benefits for women, even though no specific or intentional inclusion of women could be identified as technologies deployed to support virtual work. Research into digital workplace designs highlighted the aim of centring and designing flexibility around human practices and their context. This centring and flexibility around human practices remain complex to achieve as it was very difficult to assess to what extent human practices women leaders were centred in the integration of people, business processes and technology. It is, however, clear that the intentional inclusion of women in the digital workplace design is a critical factor that shapes how digitalisation and gender inclusion ultimately progress in organisations.

Digital enablers are the second critical aspect influencing digitalisation and gender inclusion and can be considered the point at which women's leaders interact with various technologies, applications and digitalisation. The types of tools, access, infrastructure and digital resources affect how women leaders connect and relate to virtual working through technology. The level of access to tools and technology will determine the level of adoption amongst women leaders, and the ease and convenience of use directly influence this. While organisations within financial services were making strides in the extent of their digital maturity and adoption of technologies, participants noted that while they were given access to their organisations' digital capabilities and technologies before the pandemic, there was little appetite to allow women leaders the opportunity to fully leverage these new capabilities and work virtually outside of the physical workplace, some businesses had very primitive technologies as well as a lack of digital readiness as discussed under the theme of digital enablers.

The research reflected on the digital divide being defined by occupation, gender, language, culture and attitude towards ICT and offers insight into the internal dynamics of organisations and the potential internal divide which affects women within specific roles and levels of the workplace. Women leaders expressed and demonstrated interest in and curiosity about using and leveraging digitalisation. Women leaders' technical proficiencies will be developed If given sufficient freedom and access to test and learn how technology and digitalisation can

benefit organisations. It is also critical that women and women leaders in all occupational categories be given a level of access that supports the development of technical proficiency across the organisation regardless of the role or hierarchy.

While organisations have not had to consider the social implications in which their employees work, it is evident that as the virtual workspace extends outside of physical work environments into the home, the social context and the subsequent implications that women leaders are a third key aspect that financial services as an industry needs to understand completely. As the lines between work and home blur extensively in a virtual working environment, organisations must consider the contractual and legal obligations of work requirements, stipulated rest periods and the importance of reproductive work in the home. It also is key that organisations understand their duty of care towards women leaders as work moves into the home to understand what services and benefits need to be included to keep women safe and sufficiently supported so they can be productive in a virtual workspace. This support includes understanding how women leaders exercise empathy and decision-making based on the social contexts of their staff members, ensuring that team members are equitably accommodated based on their circumstances. This level of accommodation is a crucial consideration that must also be applied to women leaders as their organisational leaders think of progressing and supporting women leaders across the industry.

In the highly regulated financial services industry in SA, there is an acknowledgement of the risks that come with working virtually and how these risks are inextricably linked to how women are viewed and treated in society. The financial services industry must continue to advocate for change and champion new benefits and services supporting women working virtually. More importantly, it highlights the importance of women's reproductive contributions to the development of society as a whole. Women are ultimately responsible for raising the individuals who become active members of the future digital workforce. Governments also play a key role in influencing and working with the financial services industry to continue employing, training, developing and creating a new workplace where women can contribute effectively physically or virtually.

Governments and leaders in the financial services sector can also partner on policy developments and funds that support women impacted by GBV.

6.3 Conclusions regarding the challenges and opportunities concerning women working virtually

The culture of an organisation is the fourth factor and includes the beliefs, behaviours and habits of the team, which impact both positively and negatively on digitalisation and gender inclusion. Team disconnection emerged as an ongoing concern where team members dealing with each other while working in a virtual space meant that the usual face-to-face working and engagement model became challenging to navigate. Participants shared challenges in understanding, reading and interpreting visual and auditory cues through virtual channels, how interactions with their own leaders left them concerned about being penalised for honesty, general phobias of speaking up, lack of proactive communication and team cohesion. Some incremental changes included access to virtual capacity in dispersed teams, renewed accountability and ownership from team members, embracing leadership diversity, continuously testing new ways of working and learning together and navigating the pace of change across teams and organisations. Where deeply rooted stereotypical views and the treatment of women remain an issue, organisations could struggle in the future to retain women in the workplace. The critical component of this is women leaders' flexibility to adopt and domesticate technology that fits their context and lives, protecting how their individual user journeys develop. There is also a need to embrace the virtual working world as not just the home but any place where an employee may choose to work or be productive, which will be a challenge within the financial services industry and the nature of the work to be done including the security and data privacy of clients.

The well-being of women is the fifth factor that influences digitalisation and gender inclusion and is another critical factor in these intertwined relationships. With the rise in mental, physical and emotional health concerns post the pandemic and noting the concerns around the “dark side effects” of technology, women leaders' health and holistic well-being are crucial when working virtually.

Keeping women leaders digitally healthy by cultivating positive holistic health experiences of and with technology, including encouraging the separation from technology to allow for rest, relaxation and recovery to reduce the negative effects of technology on women's well-being is vital. With the onset of the pandemic, the rapid progression of virtual work and a stark realisation that women continue to be disproportionately affected by reproductive labour within the home, it is no wonder that women leaders and teams found themselves navigating a series of well-being challenges and opportunities. Women leaders must spend more time in virtual spaces to understand how team members are experiencing and navigating this transition. They reflected on their own challenges in their transitions and the inconsistent levels of support. It also highlighted opportunities for women leaders working virtually, including productivity, flexibility and balance, and deeper engagement with their teams.

It is also evident that while organisations are moving into a phase of testing new hybrid ways of work in an attempt to include both physical and virtual workspaces, there is indeed a massive opportunity to understand how this supports the intentional inclusion, retention and development of women in this new workplace and how to leverage technology to achieve such gains successfully. It must also be acknowledged that the negative well-being effects of women leaders as it relates to long hours, stress and burnout can also be so severe that women might feel the need to resign from organisations that are not determined to make the necessary changes to support women in their specific contexts and needs which will ultimately also result in fewer women actively participating in the financial services industry.

6.4 Possible limitations and challenges of the study

Due to the nature of the study relying on qualitative methods, the sample size was driven by identifying saturation in the data where no new information was identified. The number of participants who opted in and volunteered to complete diaries was an uncertain factor and was identified as a possible challenge in this research. Due to the time constraints experienced by the participants, the daily diary was removed from this research activity. The participants from various

organisational positions could have relayed a standard “change management narrative” used as part of their leadership roles instead of their actual personal perspectives. Due to the nature of financial services and the current pressures to understand post-covid work arrangements, there was a large possibility that companies could be conducting internal surveys, interviews, focus groups or studies of employees. This aspect was important to note as participants might have had “survey fatigue”, which could influence their responses or level of participation during this study. Using the snowballing sampling method could have resulted in participants recommending next-level participants with similar views depending on the strength of their network connection. This risk was managed in phase 1 of the data collection process by ensuring a wide variety of participants were identified. Using semi-structured interviews that allow the researcher to explore concepts spontaneously, the responses from participants were different and varied, making correlation or cause and effect difficult to assess.

6.5 Recommendations

- While it is clear that women did experience the rapid digitalisation as part of the work-from-home project in response to the global pandemic as positive, it is evident that there is a greater need for the government in SA and the financial services industry across banking and insurance to understand the enormous burden that was placed on women during this time and how this has affected them at the workplace and in their homes.
- The lack of acknowledgement of the time and effort needed from women leaders to balance expectations in productive and reproductive roles still places women at a disadvantage as organisations consider a new hybrid approach to work that is expected to have a physical office and to work virtually component but is silent on the balance or effort needed from women to manage both expectations successfully.
- Organisational leaders must consider approaches that move away from the traditional employee value proposition expected to fit everyone in organisations to an individually valued proposition that focuses on the needs of the individual, their context and working style to contribute

effectively in their roles. Women leaders need to be allowed to express their leadership and work with their teams through virtual channels in a way that suits the team and cares for the needs of individual team members.

- The retention and progression of women leaders in the virtual working environment remain key considerations. Organisations are encouraged to think about how they design and offer individual retention and progression mechanisms that support the development of women leaders in the industry. While there is a plethora of women leadership development programmes already in existence, these recommendations ask for organisations to have a human-centred approach to the development and retention of women leaders, which may challenge the traditional approaches that have been adopted. The introduction of technology and rapid digitalisation have allowed women leaders to function and deliver outside traditional workplace approaches.
- With the increased flexibility of digitalisation, women leaders must be allowed to adapt their working style to deliver what the organisation needs, moving from a time-bound delivery focus to an output-based delivery focus. Women should also be allowed to domesticate technology to their specific team requirements and working approaches.
- While the ability of women to use and develop new digital technologies as active economic participants could result in the increased financial growth of companies, new businesses and sectors in emerging markets which is critical for the growth of the SA economy, it has to take into consideration how women are treated and how they are given agency to manage both their productive and reproductive roles. The well-being of women remains a crucial consideration in this debate. Although organisations are currently experimenting with new frameworks and solutions, such as adopting a four-day workweek to help teams and leaders cope with hybrid work, there needs to be more effort and time expected in the home, which remains a 24/7 requirement of all women. The ability to adequately address the negative impact of the “never-ending shift” for women leaders is critical in reducing the devastating effects of severe stress, burnout and mental

health concerns. Although gender inclusion has pushed for the equal treatment of women in the workplace, it is key for organisations to consider an equity-based approach recognising and accommodating women leaders to deliver what is expected of them, giving them the autonomy to balance the focus in the home. Flexibility in daily work practices such as availability and scheduling of key meetings, managing their delivery outside of the expected eight-to-five working day, proactively introducing women leaders to new technologies and involving them in the digitalisation across the organisations is key in supporting their involvement in the digital workspace.

- The burden of care within the home must be completely understood so that organisations can work on effective approaches recognising that women with family responsibilities, such as children and ageing parents, will need additional consideration as opposed to the needs of single women with no care responsibilities.
- Governments and organisational leaders should also ensure that policies and relevant regulations are reviewed to consider how women leaders can be supported with greater choice and flexibility as new technologies and increased digitalisation offers new opportunities in the dynamic world of work. While the women leaders who participated in this study did experience the surge of digitalisation positively, and while it is evident that working virtually does have pros and cons for women leaders, it was challenging to assess if digitalisation ultimately leads to greater retention however it is important to note that societal stereotypes, workplace bureaucracy and general behaviour will limit the realisation of the benefits of digitalisation and gender inclusion specifically where human behaviour stops of creates barriers to allowing women users to define their user journeys in a manner that fits their lives, homes and how they choose to be productive.

6.6 Suggestions for further research

The workplace will continue to be an area of change, and introducing new technologies and enhanced digitalisation will impact and change how work is

done and delivered. Research into the digital workplace and virtual working should focus more on how women can be effective in these environments. BYOD's role in working effectively should also be explored to understand how women are domesticating technology to manage their responsibilities at home and for work. This use of multiple devices also raises further questions about the extensive use of technologies and the subsequent health and well-being effects that still need to be explored and understood, especially the impact on women leaders and their ability to remain in formal employment. Researchers should consider that while this study focused on the phenomenon of the surge of digitalisation due to the pandemic, in replicating this study, they should also consider other factors that impact the workplace that could result in other surges and how organisations can think of approaching the ebb and flow of digitalisation and its impact on women.

Future research should focus on how technology and digitalisation support greater retention of women leaders, as this needs to be sufficiently assessed. There is a looming question, specifically in the context of SA, if organisations will use the ongoing debates around the cost of data, lack of infrastructure and worsening crisis with electricity to “force” women leaders back into the physical workspace and traditional ways of work or if they will challenge themselves to design new approaches to support women leaders in maintaining the flexibility and benefits they have experienced through technology while working virtually. Leveraging the domestication of technology theory, women’s user journeys personally and professionally should be explored to understand how their work and home environments influence their choice and use of technology.

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APPENDIX A: The Participant Information Sheet

Dear Madam,

My name is Talicia Smith. I am a Master's student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Prof. Ayanda Magida. I am conducting a research study to:

1. Understand the perceived effect of digitalisation as experienced by women leaders in financial services and
2. Explore the challenges and opportunities concerning women working virtually in this industry.

The study title is digitalisation and gender inclusion in financial services in South Africa

I invite you to participate in an interview and volunteer to complete a two-week daily diary. The interview will take place virtually via MS teams or Google Meets at a time that is convenient for you. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last approximately 60 minutes for the interview and two weeks to complete the daily diary activity.

I would like to audio/video record the interview with your permission. This data will be stored in a password-protected file and deleted after one year. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the data.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for personal information about you, including age, race, education, relational status, occupation, tenure and role.

The interview, as well as the daily written diary, will be treated as confidential. When I share the research study results, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this study, but your name and personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to participate in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. 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 decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. However, if you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are free of charge via your financial services industry employee benefit structure.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact either me or my supervisor at the details listed below. 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) by telephone at +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Talicia Lucia Smith

Researcher:

Talicia Lucia Smith, 9705822a@students.wits.ac.za, 076 413 1120

Supervisor:

Ms. Ayanda Magida, ayanda.magida@wits.ac.za , 011 717 3953

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form



Title of project: Digitalisation and gender inclusion in financial services in South Africa

Name of researcher: Talicia Lucia Smith

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me, and I understand what my participation will involve.

I agree to the following: **(Please circle the relevant options below)**

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO

…… signature …….signature

……(Participant) …….Talicia Smith

…… date …… date

APPENDIX C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Introduction	Welcome Participant, advise the time it will take to complete the interview	Request demographic data: age, race, education, relational status, occupation level (skilled, semi-skilled, professionally qualified and senior management), tenure and place of work.
Objective	Explain the purpose of the research into digitalisation and gender inclusion in financial services	Request permission to record the interview, use the transcript and the purpose of data collection is only for academic purposes. Reiterate scope and topic
	Theme	**Question(s)**
Research Question 1: **Perceived effect of digitalisation experienced by women leaders in financial services**	**Gender Inclusion**	1. What is your understanding of gender inclusion? 2. How did you experience the digitalisation at work that took place at the start of the pandemic? 3. Do you believe there is a relationship between digitalisation and gender inclusion? Can you elaborate? 4. How intentional is/has the inclusion of women encouraged and supported?
	Digital Enablers	5. How did the technologies you were using help you work virtually?

	Digital Workplace Design	6. How did you ensure that the technology was correct for your team based on what they needed to achieve?
Research Question 2: **Explore the challenges and opportunities for women leaders working virtually in this industry**		7. How did you and your team adapt to working virtually?
	Well-being	8. How did you approach having to work from home?
	Culture	9. How would you describe how you and your team worked during this period?
	Digitalisation & gender inclusion	10. What would make it easier for women to remain in financial services, maintaining the gains of gender inclusion achieved at the onset of the pandemic?
	Final Remarks	Is there anything important that we have not covered? Would you like to share anything else?
Notes and Records		Check recordings and transcripts for accuracy, keep notes from interviews, collate using codes as per thematic analysis

APPENDIX D: Daily Diary Guide

Title of project: Digitalisation and Gender inclusion in Financial Services in South Africa

Name of researcher: Talicia Lucia Smith

Dear Participant,

Thank you for volunteering to complete a daily written diary over two weeks. This section of the research activity creates an opportunity for you to diarise your daily experiences of digitalisation in your workplace. Guidance on how to record your daily thoughts, reflections, feelings, and experiences is included below:

- Choose a specific set time convenient to you during your day that you can set aside for this activity
- Use a simple word document or page (should you wish to write) to record your daily reflections. You may also record your diary using your mobile phone or any medium that you feel is easiest and most convenient for you to record and send the required information to me as a researcher
- Include the date and where you chose to work on that specific day, i.e., home, office, coffee shop, different region etc
- You can write as little or as much as you would like to. However, you should not spend more than 10 minutes per day completing this activity
- When your two-week period has come to an end, please send your diary to me via email on the email included below
- Please do not use any personal identifiers for your colleagues, team members, peers, family members etc., instead consider using a pseudonym

As you reflect on your daily working experience, technology and applications you used, you can reflect on the following:

- How you worked today – what made it easy or difficult to be productive?
- Where was your team today (office, home etc.) – how did you connect with them today? How did you experience connecting with them?
- How did you support your team to get their work done today? How is your team collaborating and communicating with each other?
- How have you prioritised your out-of-work responsibilities today?
- How do you feel at the end of your day – share your experiences, feelings, frustrations, thoughts etc., openly.

If you have any questions or need further guidance, you may contact me at the details below:

Researcher: Talicia Lucia Smith,

E-mail Address: 9705822a@students.wits.ac.za,

Contact Number: 076 413 1120

APPENDIX E: Ethics approval notification

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/DB9705822A/511
This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

Project title	Digitalisation and gender inclusion in financial services in South Africa
Investigator / Researcher	Mrs Talicia Lucia Smith
Nature of Project	MM (Digital Business)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed confidentiality.
Issue Date of Certificate	2022-10-25
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project / research report
Chairperson	Prof Anthony Stacey +27 11 717 3587 +27 82 880 4531 anthony.stacey@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

25/10/2022
Date:

APPENDIX F: Consistency Table

Overview of research questions, propositions, data collection and data analysis of the study

RO #	Research Objective	Prop #	Proposition	Data collection detail	Data analysis method
1	Understand the perceived effect of digitalisation as experienced by women leaders in financial services		Understand the relational aspects between digitalisation and gender inclusion. Research indicated that digitalisation should lead to positive and increased opportunities for gender inclusion	Interview guide questions	
		1.1	Gender inclusion	1,2,3,4	Thematic analysis
		1.2	Digital Enablers (Experience of Digitalisation)	5	Thematic analysis

RO #	Research Objective	Prop #	Proposition	Data collection detail	Data analysis method
		1.3	Digital Workplace Design	6,7	Thematic analysis
2	Explore the challenges and opportunities concerning women working virtually in this industry		What are the opportunities and challenges for women working virtually?	Interview guide questions	
		2.1	Opportunities for women working virtually. Benefits as per the research: **Culture:** Social connection, Collaboration, Innovation, Learning, Career progression **Well-being:** Productivity, Collaboration, Engagement, Flexibility and Balance	7,8,9	Thematic analysis
		2.2	Challenges for Women working virtually as per research:	7,8,9	Thematic analysis

RO #	Research Objective	Prop #	Proposition	Data collection detail	Data analysis method
			Culture: Miscommunication, Conflict, Management Issues, Lack of trust, Silo's **Well-being:** Job dissatisfaction, Trivial work, Unemployment, longer working hours, Team disconnection, Stress and Burnout		
		2.3	Digitalisation & Gender Inclusion	10	Thematic analysis

APPENDIX G: Codebook Development

The table below provides an over of the codes identified through the coding process, with the a priori codes recorded in plain text and the posteriori codes highlighted in italics. The table also details how many references were coded from the transcript files, providing a numerical overview of the number of references coded to the various child codes and aggregated to the primary codes.

A priori from the literature review & *posteriori* from examination of the data	Description	Files	References
Culture:	**Total**		**111**
Corporate culture refers to the beliefs ,behaviours, implicit rules, identities, traditions, knowledge, shared meaning that guide how employees and managers interact as they work together to achieve business goals/objectives (Gorton, Grennan, & Zentefes, 2021)	Challenges		53
	Conflict	6	11
	Lack of trust	8	14
	Management Issues	6	17
	Miscommunication	5	8
	Silo's	2	3
	Opportunities	0	58
	Collaboration	5	10
	Innovation	7	13
	Learning	8	15
	Social connection	8	20
Digital Enablers:	**Total**		**85**
These are the tools and technologies that workplaces select to support how work gets done. Organisations choose their tools based on their current needs, business drivers, historical contexts and customer needs. The tools incorporated into the workplace focuses on how employees work, be productive, remain connected and achieve business objectives.	Collaborative Tools	9	19
	Ease of use	5	8
	Managing the change	8	28
	Technologies	9	30
	Experience of digitalisation	7	16
	Intentional inclusion of women	8	29
	Relationship between digitalisation and gender inclusion	9	17
	Social Implications	9	(40) **62**
	Personal Digital Setup	6	11
	Remote health consciousness	5	11
	Understanding gender inclusion	8	8
Wellbeing:	**Total**		**91**
Refers to the (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual) overall wellbeing of employees defined by work and influenced by workplace conditions and interventions (Juniper, 2011)	Challenges		38
	Longer working hours	7	10
	Stress and Burnout	6	13
	Team disconnection	4	6
	Trivial work	2	2
	Unemployment	3	7
	Opportunities		53
	Collaboration	5	5
	Engagement	5	11
	Flexibility and Balance	8	15
	Productivity	8	22
Digital Workplace Design:	**Total**	0	**77**
Refers to the framework and strategies that organisations and senior leaders create when designing how technologies, business processes and people should be integrated into a seamless ecosystem that enables employees to be productive and organisations to realise their business goals	Business misalignment	9	27
	Digital readiness	8	13
	Human Centred Design	4	4
	Integration of technologies, business processes, people	6	13
	Performance Expectations	9	20