



## **Performance Management of Remote Teams in the Irish Tech Sector**

A Dissertation Presented by

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Submitted to the National College of Ireland in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Business Administration

18th August 2021

## ABSTRACT

### *Performance Management of Remote Teams in the Irish Tech Sector by Ahmed Ahmed, MBA, National College of Ireland*

Today's world is undergoing a lot of challenges with the COVID\_19 pandemic dominating our life, our decisions, and our future. As the world is held captive to mandatory quarantine over the last 18 months, organisations all over the globe experienced complete transformation to their workforce working model. Organisations forced adoption of remote work is associated with a lot of doubts and ambiguity. Anderson and Kelliher, (2020) for example state that abstract relocation and remote work brought flexibility and freedom to employees' ability to manage work and non-work-related events. Therefore, the necessity to conduct research on the subjects of remote working and performance management became inevitable.

The dissertation's key purpose is to comprehend in more depth the nature of remote performance management in the IT industry. Moreover, to explore from a managerial perspective the challenges, gains, and consequences to conduct remote performance management. Additionally, to investigate the role of cultural differences in the process of remote performance management. The researcher relied heavily on the assessment of present literature to particular study subjects that to date are still primitive, and the adoption of pragmatic research within the secondary data.

This research explores the gaps in the dictated adoption of global remote work. Additionally, investigate in-depth the link to employee performance and remote work, the associated gains, and challenges.

The researcher throughout this study adopted a mono method strategy which is sponsored by semi-structured interviews of a small sample size, and the outcome was analysed through the deployment of the qualitative data assembly approach. Additionally, the adopted inductive method empowered the researcher in the process of developing a comprehensive knowledge of the subject of remote performance management across cross-cultural teams in the IT industry. Consequently, supported the researcher in extrapolating the proper information to fill the research gaps within this subject.

# SUBMISSION OF THESIS AND DISSERTATION

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, David Hurley, National College of Ireland incredible asset. This dissertation wouldn't be accomplished without David's incredible dedication, guidance, honesty, and time devoted throughout the supervision process. David's constructive approach and valuable feedback played a key role in my completion of this dissertation.

I would also like to recognise the lecturers and staff at The National College of Ireland. The MBA class of 2021 is a brilliant and supportive group who I have been lucky to have had this journey.

My sincere gratitude to all the people who generously gave their time to participate in the interviews and for your open and honest opinions on the subject of remote performance management for cross-culture teams and for adding value to the important conversation of performance management.

A special thank you to my partner in crime, my better half, the light of my soul, my treasure, my today, my tomorrow, my forever, and my everything. My lovely wife (Sarah). Thank you for being the reason I embark on this journey. As always you have been my rock throughout this entire process and have been right there with me every step of the way. Your love, support, passion, and encouragement have meant everything. Nothing is possible without you.

To my incredible Mum. Thank you for your consistent words of encouragement, I could not have got through this without your prayers, and unwavering support. To my father, my role model, my guiding star, and the one without him I wouldn't be the man I am today. Thank you, I feel that you would have been proud of this accomplishment.

Finally, to all my friends, thank you for all your support and patience, and to Florian, thank you for being so generous with your time and sharing your experiences to support and guide me over the last two years.

My deepest thanks to you all.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS AND THE RESEARCH TOPIC

## 1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1.0.1 COVID\_19 DICTATES REMOTE/VIRTUAL WORK GLOBALLY

In 2020 COVID\_19 pandemic has disrupted the quintessence of the global work model causing a revolution towards the global adoption of remote work. COVID\_19 pandemic obliged governments and organisations to adopt extreme safety measures to protect people's health which paved the way for the rise of remote working in Ireland and across the globe. Eurofound (2020), a socio-economic survey on COVID\_19's implications to people's lives estimated that the percentage of Ireland people working from home grew between 40-45%, placing Ireland in the second place following Belgium for European countries with the highest levels of working from home. Particularly with today's sophisticated technology, Cook (2019), and how it is enabling organisations to operate their businesses normally regardless of the geographical restrictions of their workforce.

### 1.0.2 ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORM

The shift in working paradigm influenced by COVID\_19 urged the Irish government to adopt a new national remote work strategy as announced by the Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment (2020). Moreover, several technological organisations in Ireland, such as Microsoft also empowered their workforce with the choice of permanent remote working as reported by the Independent.ie (2020).

### 1.0.3 CHALLENGES OF REMOTE WORK

The decision of empowering the workforce in organisations, such as Microsoft Ireland, with the choice of permanent remote working is partnered with challenging performance aspects. Remote work challenging aspects have been discussed over the past decade by several conceptual scholars, such as Siha and Monroe (2006), and Bailey and Kurland (2002), where they focused on remote work framework and specifically its complex elements. They researched and argued elements of remote work challenges for managers and employees, motivational aspects to adopt telework, and the characteristics of an efficient telework workforce.

## 1.1 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

### 1.1.1 GLOBAL REMOTE WORK

While the concept of remote work is not new-found in nature. However, the adoption of remote work on a global scale has not been examined before the COVID\_19 pandemic.

Pinsonneault and Boisvert (2001), state that leveraging remote work can lead to several positive outcomes, such as workforce attraction, job satisfaction, developing a sense of belonging and loyalty, productivity improvement, and workforce retention. Our review of the scholar's empirical studies discovered a focus on workforce productivity and job satisfaction.

For workforce productivity, Apgar (1998), reported that 87% of IBM's workforce who participated in the remote work program stated that their productivity grew substantially. In most of the examined articles, their workforce reported similar productivity growth, Bailyn (1988), Hartman et al. (1992), and Be'langer (1999). While only one study reported a decline in productivity, Phelps (1985).

Comparably, the studies produced by Hartman et al. (1992), Be'langer (1999), and Rance et al. (1995) present a few obvious indications that the job satisfaction rate grew among remote workers. The studies were limited since their observation is mainly measuring job satisfaction without clear evidence for how telework positively influenced an increase in job satisfaction.

There is an opportunity to argue the previous reports as the workforce in these studies requested remote work and were not forced, like what happened with today's workforce because of COVID\_19. Therefore, there is a possibility that these self-reports data might be biased to the workforce request and limits the support for productivity and job satisfaction claims. Accordingly, there is a gap in the research field in offering an in-depth analysis of the challenges and the gains that are associated with the adoption of remote work on a global scale.

### 1.1.2 THE LINK BETWEEN EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND REMOTE WORK

Performance management framework conducts a mutual agreement between the organisation's leadership and its workforce, this agreement sets leadership expectations of workforce performance concerning the organisation's strategic objectives and goals, Pulakos (2009). Moreover, the framework as proposed by Sulistiani (2018), sets a performance plan that is agreed upon and executed by both leadership and workforce. The performance plan ensures the tasks and activities performed by the workforce through leadership continuous guidance and support, lead to better workforce performance and achieve organisational objectives. Fried and Hansson (2013), shed the light on how the various aspects involved in the process of managing employee performance, including goal setting, ongoing coaching, and continuous reviewing; rely mainly on human interaction.

On managing remote employees' performance Zapier (2015), suggests that remote working does not mean micromanaging and that micromanaging eventually counteracts and leads to frustrated underperforming employees. Moreover, it means that managers are admittedly not trusting their team members which leads to creating a toxic work environment. Zapier

alternatively gives guidance to managers of remote teams on building cultures, motivating, and managing performance all done remotely. The guide although published in 2015, content cannot be more relevant today and various aspects of what is covered in the book will be subject to investigation and examining in the research especially after remote working has become the new normal, we are all living in currently.

Pulakos and Battista (2020), focus mainly on performance management processes reform and how the process has changed and transformed over the years. The authors debated and examined some performance management elements' effectiveness including but not limited to goal setting for example. They continued to examine different approaches of top-bottom vs bottom-top goal setting and how attempts to streamline the performance appraisal process have led to eventually develop performance management as a systematic approach as a continuously ongoing process that aims at building performance cultures.

How all that fits into today's reality of working remotely will be subject to experimentation, trial, and error in the coming period. Moreover, performance management systems are already largely automated, it is suspected that systems will be developed further to adapt to the new nature of work. Consequently, the research will investigate remote performance management covering its contextual aspects that include practices and laws as well as the technological aspect that include Performance Management systems.

### 1.3 ACADEMIC JUSTIFICATION

World organisations before Coronavirus didn't foresee, plan, or exercise the adoption of a fully remote workforce model into their labour systems. However, with COVID\_19 in place, organisations were forced to adopt new strategies and introduce remote work in their working model. Moreover, learning from their mistakes, organisations seeking operating resilience are expected to incorporate permanent remote work as a possible strategy into their working systems.

Coronavirus pandemic has propelled the world workforce into an unpremeditated study of working without a fixed physical place of work. According to a study by Magni et al., (2020), COVID\_19 created a conjuncture of unprecedented levels of ambiguity about the remote worker's performance. Mason (2020), states that the pandemic dictation to remote work, the use of virtual software as a way of communication, and the absence of face-to-face interaction; are powerful drivers to depressively impact the employee well-being and mental health, and possibly negatively impact the employee performance.

There is a green field of studies to research the influence of remote work on employee performance. As the existing literature to examine the consequences of a pandemic dictating global remote work over the employee performance across different cultures are limited. Therefore, there is still a significant volume of studies that can be conducted to cover the different aspects and challenges of remote work including performance management which is the core subject of this research paper.

## 1.4 RESEARCH AIMS

This research will seek to understand how does remote working affects employee performance and engagement and how might performance management adapt to help? Although, remote performance management has been discussed previously; however, it has never been discussed in the context of a pandemic impacting public and private sectors around the globe. There is a scope of an exploratory study to identify how managers will adopt the new approach of managing performance remotely.

The research will examine the change in behaviour that results from doing the process remotely comparing the givens and unveiling its pros and cons. This will construct the debate surrounding the effectiveness of the process. Also, the research will investigate the new methods and tools created to support a successful sustainable remote performance management process, that includes systems, applications, and individual best practices that have proven successful over the past course of time.

The research practical focus will be on how the process is managed in Microsoft Ireland. As in 2017, Microsoft built its digital sales hub that serves its EMEA corporate customers in Ireland. The hub is diversely populated with more than 2000 employees originating from 70 plus different cultures. Another question that the research tackles is how remote working will impact workforce demography in the future and whether demographic changes will have any impact on employees' performance, and this will also lead to investigate the factors in the Irish labour law that touch on remote working and workforce diversity.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Overarching Research Question: “*Performance Management of Remote Teams in the Irish IT Sector*”.

The research question is driven by the researcher’s curiosity in the subject of remote performance management for cross-culture teams. Additionally, the researcher holds the responsibility and experience in managing and leading cross-cultural teams. However, the remote work scenario introduced new challenges to the process of performance management, which led to the desire of understanding the nature of these challenges and the need to present different perspectives to yield these challenges.

### 1.5.1 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the managers’ challenges for remote performance planning and goal settings?
2. How do managers conduct remote performance monitoring that incorporates effective coaching and feedback, and at the same time consider cultural differences among team members?
3. From a managerial perspective, what are the remote challenges that influence team members’ performance?

4. How do managers isolate the remote challenges when conducting performance assessments and reviews with their team members?

Research objectives are illustrated in detail in Chapter 3 along with Appendix 1 that includes sub-questions to support the main research questions. Furthermore, the next methods are employed to answer the research objectives and questions.

## 1.6 METHODS AND SCOPE

The approach the researcher adopted in this study is the mono method qualitative approach. Saunders et al., (2019), define the qualitative approach as the methodology adopted by researchers mostly in informative philosophy, Denzin and Lincoln (2018), gather data through conducting interviews. It studies the values and relationships among informants through applying structured, semi-structured, in-depth, and group interviews which maintain naturalistic and interactive dialogues. Moreover, Qualitative research utilizes non-probability sampling methodology, diverse data compilation methodologies to categorise and analyse non-standardised and non-numerical data.

This approach is adopted to explore how does remote working affects employee performance in Microsoft Ireland. In this research, the researcher adopted semi-structured interviews, qualitative analytical procedures, internet-mediated interviews, and a thematic analysis approach as a data compilation methodology. As stated by Saunders et al., (2019), the qualitative inductive approach is adopted often in research to build and develop a stronger academic perspective. The authors also emphasized the importance of developing harmony between the researcher and research informants to enable the researcher in unlocking access to the informants' data.

The author chooses the qualitative approach as performance management is executed differently by the organisation's leaders and received also differently by organisations' workforce, even if they both share organisational guidelines. The author is expecting informants to share personal experiences and to provide a lot of details and information around these experiences. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to adopt a survey approach where the author would simply be asking the participants to rate their answers from one to five. As the author would then miss out on some of the nuances around the participants' performance management experience.

The qualitative interview approach has also limitations due to the current COVID\_19 pandemic safety measures. It would be difficult to conduct one-to-one physical interviews. Therefore, to overcome this obstacle the researcher would purpose to conduct Teams video interviews with informants according to their availability. Conducting a synchronous electronic interview through Teams might lack the personal interaction or the bond to unlock access to important data. However, the author mitigates against this risk by sending to the participants in advance and assuring them about confidentiality around the information that they provide.

### 1.6.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH SAMPLE

The research employed a qualitative semi-structured interview tactic. Six interview participants were chosen based on their wide range of experience in conducting performance management both onsite and remotely. Table 1 below illustrates the role, gender, performance management years of experience for each interview participant.

TABLE 1 - INTERVIEWEE INFORMATION

Interviewee	Role	Gender	Performance Management Years of Experience
IV1	Manager	Female	7
IV2	Director	Female	11
IV3	Manager	Female	9
IV4	Director	Male	15
IV5	Manager	Female	5
IV6	Director	Male	20

### 1.7 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

#### CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS AND THE RESEARCH TOPIC

This chapter introduces the background to the study subject and presents a brief outline of the remote performance management subject and its challenges to the leaders in workplace. Additionally, the chapter covers the gaps in the literature around the research subject, the academic reasoning behind the selection of the subject, the key objective of the study, the main research questions, and the adopted methodology.

#### CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The Literature review chapter covers a comprehensive review of the research questions' relevant academic literature around the challenges of remote work, performance management, and leading cross-culture teams. As the key objective of this study is to explore real-world perspectives regarding remote performance management and to address any similarities or critiques to the current academic literature.

#### CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces a detailed analysis of the study objectives, the selected methods, and the tactic executed for primary data collection. It also covers an in-depth review of selected philosophies, population sample, and how the primary research was conducted.

#### *CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION*

The research findings and discussion chapter critically assess and evaluate in a thematic approach the findings of the primary research. Armstrong's performance management framework was employed as a guiding model to the research questions and objectives.

#### *CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS*

This chapter covers a critical review and a comprehensive outline of the discovered gaps in the study subject. It also introduces a final summary, recommendation, and guidelines for further studies.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Creswell et al., (2007), identified literature review as a form of studies that reveals other studies related to the one being examined (Franekel and Wallen, 2006), expand preceding studies by filling the gaps (Marshall and Rossman, 1989), and introduces a study framework and a benchmark to examine outcomes with additional related studies.

Insights to a study's correlated literature are essential throughout all the stages of a research investigation and analysis. Literature reviews provide guidance to the researcher to ensure that the professional standards are met, the duplicative study is avoided, and perspective methodology is presented (Maggio et al., 2016). Boyer (1990) also suggests that promoting scholarship is attained through the comprehension of research-related literature through contributing to the scholarly work evaluation standards. Hofmeyer et al. (2007) proposed that literature review assists the researcher to effectively communicate the research objectives, provide proof to competent groundwork, adoption of the appropriate methodology, deliver proper outcomes, and connect with reflective critique.

Failure to conduct a research's proper literature review could lead to conduct a repetitive study that is monotonous and hideous, lacking substantiated methodology and theory, and might fail to uncover the science beyond a monocular view (Albert et al., 2006).

In this chapter, the research will address the existing literature on the definition, history, and value of performance management. The research will first deep dive into the objectives of performance management for teams, the methodology to measure, conduct and analyse performance, development plan, and coaching procedure. The research next explores the literature around the aspects of remote work and discusses extensively the benefits of remote work flexibility to employee well-being and work productivity. Finally, the research attempts to explore the literature about challenges of managing and evaluating remote workers especially cross-culture and multi-ethnic teams.



## 2.1 THE MANAGEMENT OF PERFORMANCE

What is performance management? According to a people survey done by Rao (2016a) performance management is a description of a profession's related key responsibility area (KRAs) and key performance areas (KPAs). It is a way of measuring and assessing people's performance. Moreover, performance management is a mean of informing workers that they do not deserve anything through setting challenging goals that are difficult to be achieved. Or even in its simplest form a methodology for setting targets.

Although the above definitions might be true, they are just part of the truth. These definitions are not comprehensive, they are just a reflection of people's experience of the performance appraisal system, which is covered later in this chapter.

Armstrong and Baron (1998) explained performance management as the strategic tactic to promote the best performance out of individuals towards organisational excellence. Tyson and York (2002) identified performance management as the methodology that guarantees that organisational strategy and objectives are successfully and efficiently accomplished. While Briscoe and Claus (2008) characterized performance management as the framework organisations adapt to define work related key performance indicators (KIPs), evaluation processes, feedback methodology, training and development requirements, and rewards allocation mechanism. Rao (2016b) defined performance management as the process of outlining the elements of performance in reference to a specific position, and the assumption, and beliefs of workers, managers, teams, and the entire organisation to these elements.

### 2.1.1 HISTORY OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The history of performance management according to (Koontz, 1971; Hattingh, 2019; Chatterjee, 2020), goes back to 221 – 265 AD, where the Wei Dynasty emperors applied the performance management concept to measure and rank every governing family member in reference to his/her performance. Later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Robert Owen a pioneer of personnel management developed the first performance management system using 'Silent Monitors' to evaluate the performance of his cotton-mill workers (Clayton, 2016).

At the dawn of the 1900s, Scott WD, introduced the concept of performance appraisal to evaluate his workers' competencies. Scott WD's performance appraisal concept is considered the cornerstone of the present performance management framework (Hattingh, 2019; Chatterjee, 2020; Mangipudi et al., 2020). Scott WD's performance appraisal concept was not heavily adopted until 1937. During this period, the public sector questioned the public management to explain their business decisions, not only from the aspect of business efficiency but also from the aspect of the delivered results (Moynihan, 2008). Throughout this period, financial performance was the only driver behind questioning public managers about the delivered results, derived primarily by the array of economics, neglecting the behavioural aspects. Even though when theorists included the behavioural aspects in the performance management process, the array of economics was also the driver for behavioural aspects inclusion as part of the Agency Theory development process (Otley, 1999).

By observing the evolution of the performance management concept over time, Cokins (2009) indicates that performance management was historically predominantly related to the employee's monitoring, evaluating, and the improving process, which shifted and expanded later to address and incorporate the performance of the entire organisation.

### 2.1.2. ESSENCES OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management essences is an extraordinarily rich topic that have been discussed by various theorists across several perspectives. Winstanley and Stuart-Smith (1996), state that performance management essences are based on individuals mutual respect, fairness, sanctification of moral values, and transparency.

Armstrong (2009) expands Winstanley and Stuart-Smith beliefs by indicating that the essences of performance management should be based on the beliefs that individuals should be respected not only based on their identity, but also based on their accomplishment. He also states that people in the organisation should feel empowered to share their beliefs especially when it comes to the objectives they are asked to deliver. Furthermore, Armstrong foresees that organisation's leadership are responsible for availing a healthy working environment for individuals to meet and exceed the assigned goals.

While Strebler et al. (2001) believe that performance management essences should incorporate an unobstructed vision to the connection between the individual's performance goals and the goals of the entire organisation. Baron (2004) view on the essences of performance management is that performance culture is the driver for organisational success and such success can be achieved through leading and developing people, not through managing systems and rewarding through pay.

Armstrong (2009) also highlighted the existence of superior performance management essence. The essences themselves are not holey in nature, which means they should not be imposed by leadership, but they should be discussed and debated across all levels of the organisation from leadership to managers to individual contributors. Boyett and Conn (1995), also shed the light on another superior essence 'reality checking', which is simply a framework that evaluate whether individual and organisation behaviours are coherent with performance management essences or not, and if not, the framework should be able to identify and address the gap whether it is in essences or in the behaviours.

### 2.1.3 IMPACT OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The performance management framework is critical for organisational both performance excellence and effectiveness (Cardy, 2005; Buchner, 2007; Gruamn and Saks, 2011a). Huber (1980) indicates that performance management has a significant impact over the organisation's payment and career development frameworks, it is the foundation layer for salary schemes, promotion attributes, redundancies and layoffs, and even organisation restructure. Wiese and Buckley (1998) also state that performance management is a critical asset to the success of the organisation. It is the methodology of informed decisions; it helps individuals to understand the gaps they need to develop and the obstacles they need to address to achieve both career and organisational excellence.

While Jacobs et al., (2006) shed the light on the impact performance management when it comes to defining the path for individuals' career progression. It presents essential information that guide workers towards promotion requirements, pays and benefits, employee performance and feedback, and training and development resources. Performance management could also have a direct impact to employees' motivation. Lang (2018), suggest that when employees receive a constructive feedback form leadership, they will get motivated and will accept suggestions and advice that will make them progress towards their career goals. While if leadership feedback is limited without clarification on how to address the current gaps towards a better state, employees will get demotivated, and this will consequently negatively impact organisation's performance objectives.

### 2.1.4. CRITIQUES OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Despite the clear impact of deploying performance management system to achieve organisational performance excellence. According to McCunn (1998) 70% of performance management deployments fail to achieve the organisation's essential performance objectives. Burdan (2010) state that both organisation's managers and subordinate's belief that performance management systems operate disappointingly.

While Latham et al., (2007) indicates that although organisation's leadership might have the knowledge for managing individual's performance and they also might have the skill for evaluating and assessing individuals objectively. However, leadership failure to overcome the political blockers of placing their performance management knowledge and skills into action, is the barrier for performance management systems to achieve its objectives. Leadership needs to recognize that performance management is an enduring constant process that takes place all year long, not only during an annual or bi-annual appraisal discussion.

Pulakos et al., (2008) highlight that the main problems of performance management are that individual contributors do not believe in the efficiency and the effectiveness of the process itself. They believe that it is simply a managerial task that need to be conducted to simply eliminate its administrative burden. Pulakos et al., (2008) also shed the light that both managers and individuals avoid having a sincere performance discussion. Even from a timely manner, individuals believe that performance discussion is never allocated enough time to conduct an effective discussion with a clear objectives and action plan.

## 2.3 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FOR TEAMS

Teams are the motivation factors that energise the performance management process. As Purcell et al., (1998) suggest a team functions as the alignment element between the performance objectives of the organisation and the performance goals of the working individuals. Jones (1995), shed the light on the importance of having an established common objective among team members to succeed in the alignment process between the performance objectives of the organisation and the performance goals of the working individuals. He also highlighted the importance of having a diverse set of skills among team members to smoothly achieve the team's established common objective.

Mohrman and Mohrman 1995, point to the importance of managing each team member in a sense that each one of them feel empowered to influence the performance of whole team. All team members should have the right to engage in team-self management opportunities that leads to achieving the organisation performance objectives.

Bussin (2017), state that performance management process for teams is no different than performance management for individuals. The process starts with the individual's clear understanding of his or her role alongside the organisation's predetermined objectives. And only through this understanding, the individual then can be evaluated, and held accountable to his or her performance outputs.

Theorists have detailed the performance management process into a number of phases with different labels and different orders. However, the performance management process across all different theories entails the following phases: goals definition, performance evaluation, performance discussion, development plan establishment, and coaching and feedback.

### 2.3.1 SETTING GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Locke and Latham (1984), Goal theory points to how the performance of people takes a turn for the better when the organisation sets clear, challenging but achievable goals. And for leadership to ensure an outcome of high-level performance, goals should not be ambiguous or vague, they need to be extremely specific, clear, and challenging (Locke and Latham,1990). However, for people to accept that goals are achievable. A mutual trust relationship needs to take place between people and their leadership. Leadership should also support and equip people with the right resources and tools that would help them to achieve the required goals.

Mone and London (2003), describe the process of setting goals and objectives, first with managers outlining the steps of the overall process and its timeline. Then leadership instructs employees to review the recent organisation vision and mission, department and team strategies, and their role description. After that leadership starts with revealing the forthcoming overarching goals and objectives. Later, managers request form their subordinates to produce a perspective draft to their performance goals supported by a development plan. Soon after managers conduct a discussion with their employees to review the produced draft to make sure that it is aligned with the organisation's overall goals and objectives. Also, to guarantee that produced draft will help employees excel in their current role and will advance them in their career plans. Next employees include managers' feedback

and observations and start producing the final version of performance goals and development plan. Finally, managers and employees sign off the final version of the performance goals and development plan so employees can start working on achieving the established goals.

### 2.3.2 COACHING AND COUNSELLING

Ellinger et al., (2003) define coaching as a frequent activity where managers guide employees through opportunities that could develop their performance and skills. London et al., (2004), highlight the important role of the continuous coaching, feedback, and counselling aspects in the self-regulation of the overall performance process. Moreover, Lee (2005) points to how the coaching process reconceptualizes the nature of the relation between the manager and the individual, empowering the individual to produce the best performance. Coaching includes both short-term and long-term activity, short-term activities to guide the individual in solving day-to-day performance problems, and long-term activities to ensure that the individual follows the career development and learning plans.

Clutterbuck and Megginson (2005), highlight the significance of developing a coaching culture in the organisation. They emphasize that coaching culture is a management style, which should be adopted across different leadership levels in the organisation. Coaching culture is a dual commitment strategy of developing both the organisation and the individual performance. Lindbom (2007), also indicates that deploying a coaching culture as part of the organisation identity establishes at all levels the expectation and the acceptance of the feedback as part of the performance development and improvement process. Woodruffe (2008), states that coaching focuses on enhancing the individuals' self-awareness, so they can accurately realize how they are perceived by the rest of the organisation. Coaching constructs a growth environment where individuals' performances and actions are challenged and developed.

### 2.3.3 CONDUCTING PERFORMANCE DIALOGUE AND COMPETENCY ANALYSIS

Performance Management is a framework for planning future goals based on past evidence and events. Hence, an analysis of the employee's previous and current performance is a cornerstone for the success of the performance management process (Gruman and Saks, 2011). The process of conducting performance and competency analysis includes behaviour, proactivity, adaptability, and job performance assessment.

Armstrong (2009) shed the light on the key problem for conducting performance and competency analysis, which is managers' ability to judge subordinates' performance properly. Armstrong adds that for an efficient performance analysis practice, managers must have clear standards to measure performance and that their judgment should be based on straightforward evidence, avoiding any assumptions or projections.

Bussin (2017) indicates that throughout the actual performance dialogue, the manager should listen to employees' feedback regarding their achievement against the initially set objectives and goals for the period being assessed. Moreover, the manager needs to be clear on

performance problems, if exist, and be also evident to the given assessment, because this will help the employees with their future development plans to overcome performance problems. Furthermore, managers should avoid sharing feedback only during performance dialogues, as feedback is a continuous all-year activity that is key for employees to stay on the course of their performance development plan.

#### 2.3.4 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Employee development is the most important phase of performance management. Antonacopoulou (2000), states that the organisation that adopts conducting development activities is an organisation that is concerned with its employees' best interest and wants them to grow and develop.

Herzberg (2003), points to the importance of employee development. He argues that there is a strong relationship between employee career growth and job satisfaction. He adds that individuals across all organisation levels are motivated by growth, learning, and development opportunities than any other form of reward presented by the organisation. That is why having development plans with clear goals encourage employees to produce their utmost performance as a way of proofing that they are ready for the next growth opportunity inside the organisation.

Hosmer (2015), state the employee development plan is constructed based on three main aspects. First is the employee's knowledge, skills, and competencies required to achieve the organisation's performance excellence. Second is organisational goals and objectives, where the employee's development plan should be aligned and not contradict with the organisational goals and objectives. The third is the employee's needs and aspirations. The employee's development should consider the employee's ability and desire to fulfil current and future jobs through focusing on developing the employee's career aspirations and resolve existing gaps through a clear roadmap for developing those gaps.

## 2.4 REMOTE WORK

Remote work is a way of conducting normal office work from a different site at any time such as an individual's apartment or home (Olson, 1983). Remote workers leverage communication technologies to communicate with work colleagues and to access and conduct work-related tasks and activities (Niles, 1997; and Perez et al., 2003). Rupiotta and Beckmann (2016), stated that remote work has two main elements, first is the employees' ability to work anywhere away from the traditional office. The second is the availability of communication between the remote location and the office, and the ability to exchange work-related information with other employees leveraging technology and communication systems (Bélanger 1999; Bailey and Kurland 2002).

### 2.4.1 WORKING FROM HOME – REVOLUTION OF THE NEW NORM

Sahin et al., (2020), states that in March 2020 the world as we know has changed with the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaration of COVID\_19 as a global pandemic because of its rapid prevalence across the globe. Global governments implemented extreme measures to control the spread of the virus, started with extreme social distancing measures to self-isolation and quarantining to shutting down offices, and urging organisations to adopt remote work business model to safeguard employees' wellbeing (Leonard and Lo, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). The COVID\_19 pandemic reshaped the remote work business model with organisations around the globe adopting what is known as 'The New Norm' as a permanent working model even after the pandemic is over (Banerjee and Pati, 2020).

#### *2.4.1.1 WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY, REMOTE WORK PRODUCTIVITY, AND EMPLOYEE HEALTH*

Wessels et al., (2019), highlights organisations offering their employees the opportunity to choose their ideal work location to avoid any kind of stress and to execute their work activities efficiently. The flexibility of work location offered by the organisation is especially important mainly when working during the COVID\_19 pandemic, as employees are facing several kinds of stress in their working environments (Chong et al., 2020; Shockley et al., 2021).

Shao et al., (2021) argue that employees' choice of work location could change frequently based on diverse types of stressors, which are driven by their recent working environment experience or driven by future work delivery requirements. For example, (Hartig et al., 2003, 2007; Ng, 2010), suggest that employees might choose to work the next day from home after experiencing a stressful day at the office, as the home offers easy access to coffee, lunch, exercising, or even for a quick relaxing nap than the office. However, working from home could also be stressful due to the lack of boundaries between work activities and family demands, pushing employees to choose the office as a less stressful location than home (Shockley & Allen, 2010).

Literature around the correlation between working from home and productivity is limited, as the world never experienced before a situation like the COVID\_19 pandemic where the whole globe was forced to work from home. Earlier studies by (Dutcher 2012; Bloom et al. 2013) conducted on subgroups indicate that there is a relation between creative jobs with improving productivity and monotonous jobs with reducing productivity. Moreover, their studies reveal that employees' performance rises when working in a quieter atmosphere away from their colleagues' stress and distraction.

However, with COVID\_19's recent literature, Toscano and Zappala (2020), point to stress's negative impact on employees' productivity regardless of the workplace location, as the stress caused by the COVID\_19 pandemic would impact employees' productivity whether they work from their offices or remotely from their homes and that productivity could be negatively impacted by distraction driven by work colleagues or family members.

#### 2.4.2 REMOTE WORK FOR TELEWORKERS – BLESSING AND PITFALLS

Olson et al., (1995), point to the importance of having both self-discipline and self-motivation as vital traits for remote workers. Remote workers declare high satisfaction levels (Wheatley, 2012), because of the blessings of remote work such as, absence of commuting time, work hours flexibility, higher autonomy, and extra time to focus with fewer interruptions, which leads to higher performance and increased productivity (DeSanctis, 1984). Moreover, Olson et al., (1995) highlight how remote work impact positively the relationship between the employees and their families as employees' presence at home, even if they are working in an isolated room, strengthens the family bond. The authors continue to list the advantages of remote work to employees from having a flexible work schedule to a reduced formal environment, and fewer social contact. While Madsen (2011), suggests that remote work offers the employees the opportunity to engage in fewer office politics, a better quality of life, less commuting expenses, a fair amount of work-life balance, more autonomy, and less stress.

However, Bailey and Kurland (2002), a common pitfall for remote work is that state remote employees' achievements are less noticeable by their organisation leadership. The time and effort consumed by the remote workers are not visible to their managers, which reflects on the reward aspect being less than expected. Another common pitfall is that everyone thinks that remote workers have more personal & family time which could be true, at least because of saving commuting time. Unfortunately, this is not true, (Hill et al., 2006; Wheatley, 2012; and Grant et al., 2013) argue that the time saved by employees mostly is directed towards more work and increased working hours. That is why (Bailey, and Kurland, 2002) argue that studies reveal that saving commuting time is not an influential factor for the choice of remote work.



### 2.4.3 LEADING VIRTUAL TEAMS - THE MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

Madsen (2003), points to the role of remote work in attracting talents. The ability to hire remote team members provides the managers with the ability to diversify teams with a distinct set of skills and knowledge required to achieve performance excellence.

Cook (2019) state the key challenge that faces managers when leading virtual remote working teams, is that managers cannot depend on their teams' physical presence to identify their work performance and engagement. Pullan (2016), indicates that managers leading virtual teams might need to have self-motivated team members, which in reality is a difficult trait to naturally exist across all team members. Therefore, managers should compensate for this uncommon trait through the adoption of a management style that is based on empowerment and trust, where team members are engaged with both their minds and hearts so they can feel that they are part of the family and consequently, will provide their utmost performance for the team and the organisation.

#### *2.4.3.1 SUCCESS FACTORS IN MANAGING REMOTE TEAMS*

Cook (2019), suggests that for managers to lead teams successfully, they need to adopt the supportive leadership style and conduct a regular one-to-one to help solve teams' business challenges. Also, managers should pay attention to their teams' well-being and the negative impacts of working virtually in isolation without regular face-to-face work interactions. Cook adds that managers should adopt an empowerment leadership style than a controlling one, where the empowerment style is based on mutual trust and that team evaluation is based on outcomes not based on monitoring performance.

Newman and Ford (2021), suggest important pillars to effectively manage virtual teams, especially in COVID\_19 pandemic time. The authors suggest that leaders should always be clear and transparent with current challenges and reality, and at the same time set the guiding rules for work routine and procedures to overcome such challenges. At the same time, leaders must show understanding and empathy to the impact of such challenges on the team members' business and personal lives. Moreover, leaders should adopt a shared leadership approach where managers grow the sense of leadership inside the team through delegating collective leadership tasks across the team members. Shared leadership encourages team members to frequently engage in team interactions, which leads to having a more interconnected and unified team with a mutual understanding of collaboration aspects required for the team's success.

## 2.5 CROSS-CULTURE MANAGEMENT

Organisations with a successful and resilient corporate culture can attract top talents and drive their employees towards the utmost level of engagement, productivity, and performance excellence. Shachaf, 2008; and Han & Beyerlein, 2016), point to why organisations are keen to recruit people from the diverse cross-cultural background. The authors believe that cross-cultural teams always bring innovative ideas to solve business challenges. Their diverse backgrounds bring different exposure that encourages group-thinking to solve business challenges which increase team confidence and satisfaction.

Konard et al., (2006), define culture as a group of shared principles, values, and beliefs throughout a certain community. While Luthans (2005), defines diversity as the means to exhibit respect and recognition to people's distinctions and distinctiveness. Henderson (2001), states that cultural diversity reflects the presence of a group of different societies or cultures in a particular territory or around the globe. This also applies to organisations recruiting talents from across the globe which will reflect in having a different group of employees affiliated with different societies or cultures.

Adler (2008), state that cross-culture management reflects how everyone in the organisation performs and interact with other individuals based on his or her cultural background, and how his or behaviour will be reflected on the business aspects. Therefore, organisations around the globe should behave and perform in a way that recognizes, appreciates, and welcomes employees' distinct cultural backgrounds. Because failure in taking into consideration such differences might lead to the rise of cultural conflicts and consequently reflect negatively on organisational performance (Dalluay and Jalagat, 2016).

### 2.5.1 CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL VIRTUAL TEAMS

Diversity is appraised, respected, and appreciated by many organisations around the globe (O'Neill, 2016). However, leaders of today's diverse virtual teams are facing a new challenge that did not exist when earlier leaders were managing people who originated from the same cultural background (Han & Beyerlein, 2016). The challenge leaders might not understand is that cross-cultural virtual teams occasionally suffer from cultural miscommunications challenges which could lead to social adaptability, trust, confusion, and conflict issues between team members (Shachaf, 2008; Han & Beyerlein, 2016).

Fisher and Fisher (2011) state that to overcome such a challenge, organisations need to adopt and deploy communication frameworks and procedures that are built to ease social integration and encourage mutual collaboration among cross-cultural virtual teams.

## 2.5.2. WORKPLACE ISOLATION AMONG ETHNIC VIRTUAL EMPLOYEES.

Workplace isolation is a terminology that was founded based on three main aspects, ' the physical location, communication and collaboration resources, and information availability (Bartel et al., 2012). Golden et al., (2008) emphasize that isolation as a behaviour is a reflection of the social interaction and integration between the individual, his or her team, and the leadership.

Bartel (2012), point to the physical location as the main challenge to organisations' adoption of virtual teams working model. Curseu et al., (2008) highlight that knowledge sharing is another challenge that triggers isolation in virtual teams. Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012), explain that knowledge sharing is at risk of being confusing or vague because of the nature of virtual communication tools and lack of face-to-face interaction. Wiesenfeld et al., (2001) also point to the role of the lack of face-to-face interaction in triggering an isolation environment that is empty from any socialization opportunities (Kurland and Egan, 1999). Consequently, pushing the individual to adopt a sense of disconnection that negatively impacts his or her well-being (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001).

Nielsen (2009); and Tomaskovic-Devey and Stainback (2007), state that the structure of the organisation is influenced by the rise in the world globalisation and workplace integration among different cultures and scarcities. That being said, Frenkel (2003), point to the rise in workplace diversity compared to the twentieth century. This is driven by the independence of role and work requirements from being exclusive to a certain society or culture (Ditomaso et al., 2007).

However, virtual team members coming from different ethnic backgrounds, are not only physically separated from the rest of the team, but also separated socially, emotionally, and psychologically. They are positioned out of the group circle and are seen dissimilar to the managers and managers' circle. Consequently, they do not enjoy the same communication and benefits, like leaders' groups and they experience fewer opportunities for a leader-individual exchange (Hunter and Chekwa, 2019).

Therefore, organisations should encourage leaders to offer proper networking opportunities to members from different ethnic backgrounds. Since these opportunities will function as a bridge to unite dissimilar members to the rest of the organisation. Moreover, the unity across organisation members will reflect on delivering better organisational performance and will reduce employee turnover out of loyalty and a sense of belonging.

## 2.6 ACADEMIC LITERATURE TO METHODOLOGY

Based on the researcher's analysis of the existing studies on managing employee's performance within the organisation, in combination with the relevant literature that covers the subject of telework work; an introduction to the challenges of remote work and performance management has been presented. Moreover, complexities surrounding monitoring people's performance, providing guidance, coaching, feedback, and assessment in a virtual world have been addressed.

Additionally, the author covered the challenges that employees face as an outcome of the adoption of remote work, such as productivity, flexibility, and well-being. Furthermore, the managerial perspective to the complexities of leading virtual teams along with the consideration of performance management of cross-cultural teams has also been discussed.

Consequently, the research outcomes shed the light on the existing gaps in the academic literature. These gaps presented an opportunity for the researcher to conduct further studies which are examined in Chapter 3 through offering an in-depth discussion of the research objectives, associated with the relevant and appropriate research methods and approaches to achieve the study objectives.

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN, PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

## 3.0 INTRODUCTION

Saunders et al., (2019) define research as the methodology that a researcher adopts to examine and comprehend specific events or issues through following a systematic approach. The authors' definition is pointing towards two key attributes. The first is the examination attribute, which highlights the different possibilities that drive the research process such as the researcher's need to investigate an event or to acquire knowledge about a specific subject matter (Saunders et al., 2015). The second is the systematic approach attribute, which stresses that the process of answering a research question should be not be based on just philosophies or ideas but should be based on reasonable connections, evidence, and indicators (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010), that lead to knowledge growth through adopting a detailed examination and analysis approach (Wilson, 2014).

## 3.1 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

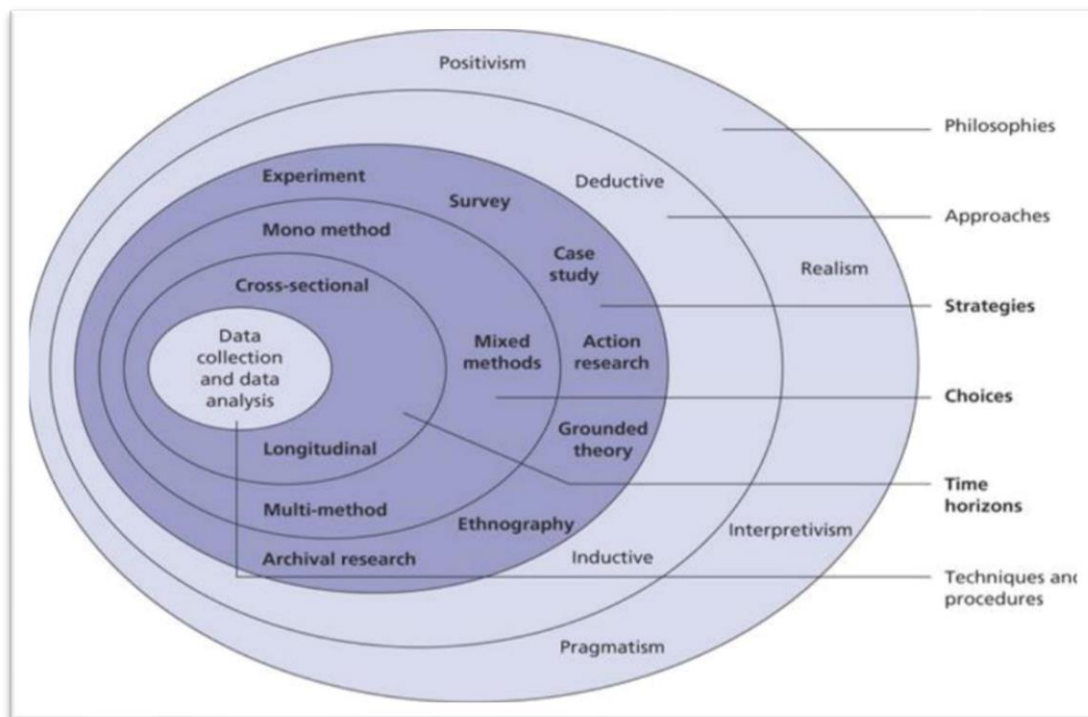
The primary objective of this research is to investigate and comprehend through an exploratory approach how remote working can affect employee performance and engagement and how performance management as a process changed in a new forced setting of remote working. Although, remote performance management has been discussed previously; however, it has never been discussed in the context of a pandemic impacting public and private sectors around the globe. There is a scope of an exploratory study to identify how managers will adopt the new approach of managing performance remotely. The research will examine the change in behaviour that results from doing the process remotely comparing the givens and unveiling its pros and cons. This will construct the debate surrounding the effectiveness of the process. Also, the research will investigate the new methods and tools created to support a successful sustainable remote performance management process, that includes systems, applications, and individual best practices that have proven successful over the past course of time. The following research objectives have been established to achieve these aims.

Research Objective 1	To investigate the planning of performance measures and development activities
Research Objective 2	To assess the monitoring process of ongoing performance
Research Objective 3	To examine the execution process of performance activities
Research Objective 4	To investigate the process of performance assessment

The research methodology objective is to reveal to the researcher various data collection strategies, and techniques. Thus, the researcher can adopt the best relevant techniques that are most beneficial to the undergoing study (Fisher and Buglear, 2010).

Hence, the researcher follows Saunders Onion framework as the direction to the designated qualitative methodology in this research. Saunders et al., (2009) introduced the Research Onion framework, as highlighted in (Fig.1) which is based on three levels, an outer layer, an inner layer, and the central core area. Each layer introduces a different set of attributes that uniquely define each research method.

FIGURE 1 - THE RESEARCH ONION



Source: Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2015 p. 108)

Saunders et al., (2009) state that the Research Onion framework is based on a sequential procedure that initiates first through the peel of the outer peel, subsequently shifting further to the following peel. The peeling process for each layer reveals a set of attributes that reflects the decisions the researcher needs to pick out such as, the data and collection process, so the researcher can produce the final research methodology.

Saunders et al., (2009), continue to explain in detail each peel. First, they start with the outer layer and how it resembles the initial stage of the research, it reflects exploring potential philosophies, beliefs, and tactics towards theory development. Second, they move to the inner layer, which is the process of exploring and evaluating the methodology to adopt and its related strategies and techniques. Finally, they explain the central core area of the research onion as the process of actual work through the assortment and examination of relevant information, data, and statistics.

## 3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The main objective of any study is that the researcher aspires to explore and expand his or her beliefs and assumptions in a certain area of interest. Accordingly, Saunders et al., (2015) defined research philosophy as the procedure of expanding the researcher's understanding and knowledge through rationalizing researcher beliefs and assumptions. Therefore, in this study, the researcher's objective behind selecting the right philosophy as indicated by Dudovskiy (2018), was to conduct a logical and accurate study and to eliminate any form of bias, personal views, or suppositions.

However, selecting the right methodology out of several acceptable ones could be a problem for the researcher. In addition to the beliefs and suppositions that are produced unintentionally and unquestionably by the researcher while progressing throughout the study (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Consequently, Wilson (2014), debates that the researcher's choice of the right methodology is driven by the researcher's ability to make rational conclusions, exclude other suitable methodologies, and efficiently evaluate all assumptions.

Saunders et al., (2015) divide the researcher's assumptions which contribute to his or her understanding of the study objective, into three categories: ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

### 3.2.1 ONTOLOGY, AXIOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY ASSUMPTIONS

Ontology; as stated by Saunders et al, (2019) is the definition or the objective of realism. Moreover, Moon, and Blackman (2014) describe ontology as the 'study of being', which is the declaration of realizing what knowledge already exists and what doesn't, and whether researchers are competent to discover the non-existent. Saunders et al, (2019) add that ontological assumption reflects the researcher's perception and vision to the conducted study and the world.

On the contrary, Moon and Blackman (2014), explain the axiology assumption as the focus on the study objectives driven by the researcher's value, role, and perspectives throughout the study. It is the focus on the study's ethics and values drivers. Amabile, et al., (1996), suggest that the individual's values and beliefs influence his or her judgment of the conducted research throughout its different stages.

In this study, epistemology assumption was selected driven by the need of exploring the what, the how, and the why. Moon, and Blackman (2014), explain epistemology assumption as the 'study of Knowledge'. It is the comprehension of knowledge acceptance (Wilson, 2014; Moon, and Blackman, 2014) along with an empirical detachment to this knowledge (Aliyu et al., 2015).

The reason behind the researcher's selection of epistemology in this study and the rejection of both the ontology and axiology assumptions is that epistemology includes the proper aspects for knowledge acquisition: the precision, the probability, and the inclusion of distinct methods and tactics (Saunders, 2019).

### 3.2.2 INTERPRETIVISM, POSITIVISM, PRAGMATISM, REALISM APPROACHES

Saunders et al., (2015) stipulated four distinct styles: positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism that are adopted in diverse research approaches and are correlated to the ontology, axiology, and epistemology assumptions.

Bryman and Bell (2007) defined interpretivism as the process of critically evaluating and assessing the integration between the participants and their organisation to expose the participants' perceptiveness of reality. Moreover, Bryman and Bell highlighted that the interpretivism approach has several attributes based on the purposed philosophies.

Accordingly, the researcher for this study selected the epistemology; interpretivism approach because of it is data reliability trait and its ability to challenge the research's data evaluation strategy (Wilson, 2014). Moreover, because of its unique trait in endorsing the study's research question through empowering the researcher with the ability to view insights from the eyes of research's participants (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Furthermore, as critically highlighted by Bryman and Bell (2007) interpretivism have another key trait of empowering the researcher with the ability to explore information and expertise that are relevant to the research's participants.

Critically the alternative approaches were rejected. As positivism is based on empiricism which requires the scientific approach of verifiable data that entails disconnection from research participants (Wilson, 2014). Moreover, interpretivism is correlated with value-bound qualitative research, which is the adopted approach in this study, while positivism is correlated with value-free quantitative research. Furthermore, the third approach; pragmatism was also rejected as Wilson (2014) states that the pragmatism approach is only adopted if interpretivism or positivism cannot be associated with the researcher's perspective, which is not a valid argument in this study. Likewise, realism, the fourth approach, was also rejected because as stated by Saunders et al., (2015), realism adopts the factuality experience and positivist principle.



### 3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

Bryman, and Bell (2007) state that Empiricism is a theory that indicates that knowledge acquisition is driven primarily or uniquely through receptive experience. Bryman et al, (2012) additionally highlight the important aspects of research approach and theory exploration, especially in the researcher's decision to theory selection and whether it is inductive or deductive. Wilson, (2014), states that both the inductive and deductive approaches are equally connected to the research methods. Therefore, as highlighted by Bryman (2001), it is critical to include one of the two approaches as part of the research process.

#### 3.3.1 DEDUCTIVE VERSUS INDUCTIVE RESEARCH APPROACHES

Saunders et al. (2019) state that the deductive theory recognises the real correlation between theories and the researcher's possible projections, and hence, recognises that the researcher's suppositions are also pragmatic in nature. Wilson (2014) additionally indicates that deductive theory focuses on constructing a proper research tactic through selecting a theory and examining its suppositions. Bryman, and Bell (2007) highlight that the deductive theory focuses on theories that are researchable, in other words, further examination of what already exists. Dudovskiy (2018) suggests that usually there is an association correlation between the deductive theory and the highly constructed quantitative approach, endorsed by the positivist methodology.

On the other side, the inductive approach, which is recognized as the "bottom-up" approach, as defined by Wilson (2014) is a systematic logical procedure that starts with the examination stage, then the model analysis stage, followed by the theory suppositions stage, and the final stage is the production of theory conclusion.

Dudovskiy (2018), states that the approach chosen by the researcher whether inductive or deductive is mainly driven by the research question itself. Additionally, Saunders et al. (2019), shed the light on how the inductive approach is more focused on the examination and experience aspects of the unknown than the deductive theory. And that researchers' adoption of the induction approach over the deductive one, is driven by the deduction approach offering few limited justifications to the research outcomes.

Consequently, the researcher in this study adopts the inductive theory. The inductive approach guides this study to gain further understanding of the challenges of conducting performance management to cross-cultural virtual teams through the sample of societal personas. Saunders, et al., (2019) highlighted that a sample of a few numbers of participants is effective for the inductive approach, contrary to the deductive approach which requires a large sample of subjects. For this study, the inductive approach was deployed through the conduction of qualitative interviews to a limited sample of subjects.

Although the difference between the inductive and deductive approaches is very clear as the two have different adoption drivers and strategies. However, according to Dudovskiy (2018), several researchers proposed the necessity for adopting the colliding approaches together. Saunders, et al., (2019) argued that researchers are empowered to adopt an abduction ideology and consequently, they can shift from one approach to another, however, this ideology was rejected in this study.

### 3.3.2 DESCRIPTIVE VERSUS EXPLORATORY

Saunders, et al., (2019) offered two models of research strategy: the descriptive, and the exploratory, where each research strategy serves a different purpose driven by the selected research methodology. They defined the descriptive strategy as the model that illustrates the natural association and existence of individuals through an event, or an incident, which was criticised by Wilson (2014) because of its limitation to justify the drivers behind the event or the incident. Hence, it can be adopted only by research subjects that was never been explored. Consequently, the descriptive strategy was rejected as a model for this study.

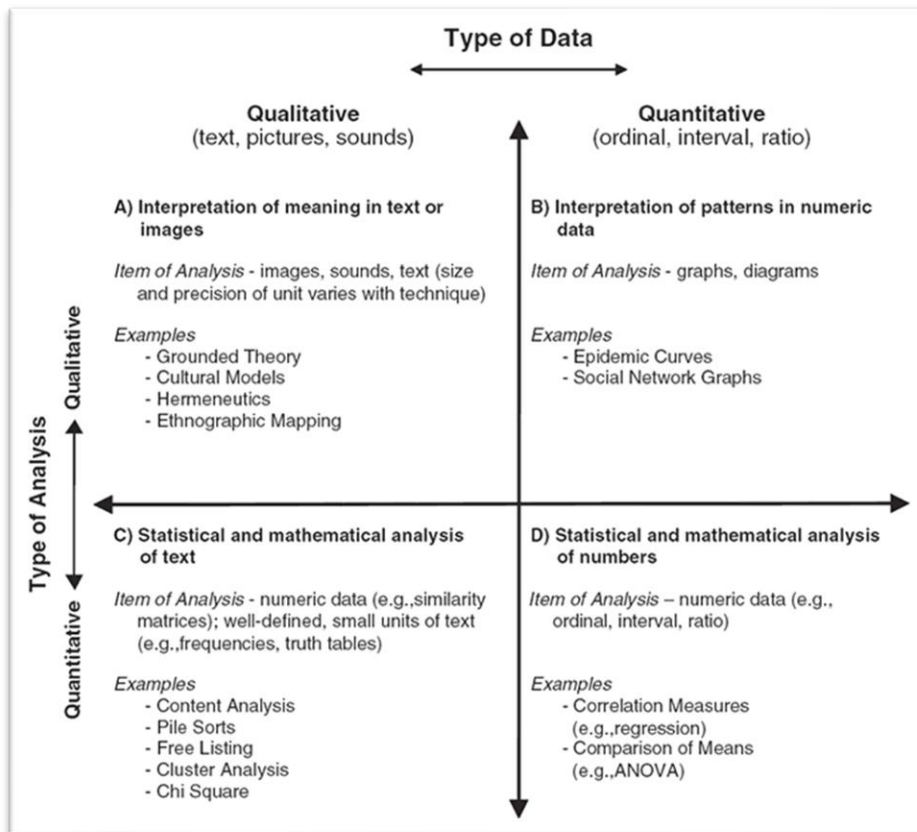
On the other side, Saunders, et al., (2019) state that exploratory model empowers the researcher to gain participants' perspectives and beliefs regarding a specific event, its triggers, circumstances, and outcomes, through an open-ended question flexible approach. Hence the exploratory model is key when conducting qualitative research, which will be covered later in this chapter.

Pointing out to the previously discussed existing literature; an in-depth analysis and understanding is required to disclose the challenges of conducting performance management to cross-cultural virtual teams. And considering the exploratory strength in investigating aspects of the study and its ability to empower the researcher to adopt different research paths in case required (Blumberg, et al., 2011). Hence, the researcher decided to adopt the exploratory model for this study.

### 3.4 RESEARCH STRATEGY

Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest that for conducting research, there are two main data collection techniques: Quantitative and Qualitative. Saunders et al., (2019) state that the researcher’s decision to choose the Quantitative or the Qualitative technique is driven by existential expectations or by cognitive beliefs.

FIGURE 2 - QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS



Source: Guest et al., (2012)

### 3.4.1 QUALITATIVE VERSUS QUANTITATIVE

Saunders et al., (2015) state that quantitative research empowers the researcher with an outcome of statistical facts driven by a procedure of statistical analysis and practice of measuring variables, such as actions, views, and beliefs. Furthermore, as highlighted by Perrier, et al. (2020), quantitative research is conducted through the adoption of close-ended questionnaires, polls, or surveys over a large sample of subjects.

On the other side, as stated by (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Yin, 2016) qualitative research evolves around people's experiences, perceptions, and exposure to the study subject. Bryman and Bell (2007), adds that qualitative research is the practice of recognising a challenge, analysing the challenge, and proposing a resolution to the challenge.

This study takes into consideration previous studies looking after similar subjects, specifically Armstrong, and Baron (1998), where their research and findings around performance management have discussed the limitation in conducting quantitative research and recommended the adoption of qualitative research to gain a depth understanding of population's perspective to performance management.

Bryman and Bell (2007) also criticised quantitative research limitation focusing on the researcher's perspective rather than the contributors' perspectives, which is, on the contrary, the key area of focus in the qualitative research. Dudovskiy, (2018), emphasized Bryman and Bell's understanding that qualitative research provides the participants with the freedom to explain and justify their perspectives; offering an in-depth view of the data collected. Perrier et al. (2020), also agree with Dudovskiy that qualitative research adopts an open-ended question approach which presents the participants with the opportunity to express their beliefs, emotions, and perceptions. However, qualitative research outcomes can be complicated to analyse and control due to their array of variants (Yin, 2016).

Considering the in-depth perspectives and perceptions required from the participants to disclose the challenges of conducting a virtual performance management process; the researcher preferred to adopt a mono method of qualitative research for this study leveraging semi-structured interviews. Moreover, as highlighted in previous sections, for this study the researcher adopted the inductive research method in conjunction with the exploratory practice to empower the selected qualitative model (Dudovskiy, 2018).

The conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews considered the following:

1. Five interviews for data collection.
2. A 45-minute interview session per participant.
3. Selected participants are people managers leading cross-culture virtual teams.
4. The interviews' objective is to explore participants' perspectives on the research question through a twelve-question dialogue.

### 3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Yin (2016) suggests that data can be characterised as an association of distinct qualitative or quantitative standards. Yin adds that are four design techniques that may be used by the researcher to empower the research strategy: Authenticity, Reliability, Triangulation, and Rival thinking.

1. *Authenticity: is the process of validating the assembled data, admitting, and accepting bias to the nominated sample, and accurately analyse the outcomes.*
2. *Reliability: is the process of efficiently project authentic, reliable, and trustworthy assembled data.*
3. *Triangulation: is the process of emphasizing the research integrity through seeking every lead available whether related to existing theories, strategies, investigation techniques, or data sampling.*
4. *Rival Thinking: is the process of highlighting the study gaps that might lead to rejecting the research by other rivals studying the same research subject.*

It is essential to highlight how the chosen design strategy accomplishes a leading part to the truthfulness of the assembled data. This was emphasized by (Bryman and Bell, 2007; and Yin, 2016), stating that research impartiality is extremely significant to the conducted study, which can be achieved through the genuine accountability, and acquisition of trustworthy data. Consequently, the author in this research was keen to request validation from the participants that the process of data assembly accurately reflected their beliefs and arguments, based on the constructed interview transcript. And therefore, the key role of the adopted qualitative data assembly technique is to ensure an accurate and reliable inference to the participants' views, reflections, and challenges of conducting a remote performance management process.

#### 3.5.1 QUALITATIVE DATA PRIMARY COLLECTION

Yin (2016) point to the significance of conducting fieldwork and to the engagement of participants with a real and solid experience throughout the qualitative data assembling approach. The fieldwork as defined by Yin (2016), is the process of assembling fresh data from an unrestricted establishment.

Moreover, Yin (2016) states that there are two models of interviews: the structured quantitative model and the more valuable semi-structured qualitative one. The structured technique of interview adopts a quantitative technique of a closed-ended questionnaire through conducting surveys or polls. While (Bryman and Bell, 2007) state that semi-structured qualitative is a better and more flexible approach as it empowers the researcher with a formerly prepared set of open-ended questions constructed to assemble participants' critical views and beliefs to guarantee critical knowledge is captured.

In this study, the data assembly process execution was conducted through engaging participants in individual, semi-structured, recorded, and virtual interviews to gather their beliefs, views, and reflections on the research subject. As stated by (Bryman and Bell, 2007) the adoption of qualitative interviews is more valuable than other data assembly techniques as it provides the researcher with an opportunity to capture accurate descriptions and justification to participants' events and encounters. Also, the adoption of individual interviews as emphasized by Saunders et al., (2019) is to empower the researcher with detailed insights into the participants' knowledge, behaviours, actions, and beliefs. Moreover, digital recording of virtual interviews was executed to guarantee an efficient data assessment of the assembled data. Later in chapter four, the research will discuss and analyse extensively the outcomes attained throughout the data assembly process.

### 3.5.2 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

In this research, the researcher was keen to critically evaluate existing literature and the associated knowledge in the subject of virtual performance management, throughout a detailed assessment and examination of accessible books, e-books, journal articles, and web conferences to ensure comprehensive knowledge, insights, and interpretation to the research subject. As suggested by (Bryman and Bell, 2007) subjectivity along with thorough consideration is key when reviewing and debating any research subject. Consequently, the critical analysis executed by the researcher about conducting virtual performance management revealed gaps in existing literature critical to this study. Moreover, the presented information in this study was assembled from the NCI library and other supplementary online archives and databases throughout an extended timeframe, and with the adoption of a scholarly peer-reviewed approach to guarantee the credibility of the utilized academic literature.

### 3.5.3 POPULATION SAMPLE

Vital to this study was to capture distinct perspectives from several participants with real-life experience to the research subject. Hence, six semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted. The selected participants were remote people managers with strong knowledge and expertise in the field of remote performance management. A remote people manager can be identified as the person with the ability to lead, coach, and evaluate a group of people or a team stationed at various remote locations. The interviews were conducted through leveraging the Microsoft Teams application to leverage its resilient digital recording capabilities, and participants gave their consent for digitally recording the interviews.

As highlighted in the research limitations, the samples size presented challenges to the research's findings. Appendix 1 can be reviewed to examine the interview questions. Moreover, the sample undertook the interviews entailed 60% females and, 40% males. And chapter 1 can be reviewed for further details on the subject of the interviewees' gender split, age, the field of work, and expertise. Considering the aspect of data protection, interviewees' personal data were removed. Furthermore, in chapter four where the findings and discussions

sections are covered, the researcher refers to each as principally as the Interviewee. The researcher references each of the interviewee's answers or quotes, for example, Interviewee one is referenced as (IV 1).

Interviews were executed and the researcher held the ownership and responsibility of the interviews-related recordings, transcripts, and data assembly. The interviews were executed with the Microsoft Teams application and leveraging its digital recording capabilities. Moreover, the recordings were stored over the Microsoft OneDrive cloud application to leverage its robust security and to maintain future access. Assessment and evaluation of the recordings were conducted by transferring the recordings into transcripts.

Furthermore, a comprehensive error inspection was conducted to ensure interviewees' critical beliefs, and positions were captured. The transcripts were also thoroughly examined to expose common themes among interviewees' perspectives from one side and comparing transcripts to existing literature, previously discussed in Chapter 2, from the other side; searching for a probable fresh perspective that may not be captured within the literature review.

#### 3.5.4 ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA

Saunders, et al., (2019) suggest that researchers need to avoid any subjective bias to the outcomes of the conducted study. While Yin (2016) states that researchers executing qualitative-based research need to adopt a thorough listening capacity approach to effectively articulate and interpret participants' perspectives. For this approach to be executed successfully, Yin identified five mandatory data assembly skills: active listening, curiosity, effective time management, information acquisition from various data sources, and original, primary, and secondary data differentiation skills. Yin also states that the qualitative approach is characterised by an extremely detailed nature, hence, suggests the researcher's need to recheck the assembled data to guarantee a comprehensive and extensive assessment and analysis.

#### 3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical consideration is a critical trait that requires attention whenever research is conducted. It covers the treatment approach adopted by the researcher towards the study participants. Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest that researchers should adopt an examination approach to each research activity that involves participants' engagement to validate the necessity of incorporating each research activity as part of the conducted study. Additionally (Yin, 2016; Bryman and Bell, 2007) state that research's integrity and the code of ethical conduct encourages researchers to evaluate the impact of the conducted research activities on the research participants. Consequently, the researcher in this study conducted a comprehensive ethical assessment, highlighting the research's actions and measures to certify that the study participants were integrally treated and offered the proper ethical protection. And the ethical form was filed and reviewed by the National College of Ireland.

### 3.7 LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH

It is acceptable to highlight that the outcomes of the research are subjective, biased, and not completely inclusive as the study was conducted on a small group of samples of six participants. It is also acceptable that discovering common themes is challenging. The reason as suggested by (Bryman and Bell, 2007) is because of the discrepancies in the assembled data-driven by the variation in participants' experiences and exposure to the subject of remote performance management across cross-cultural virtual teams. It is important to highlight the possibility to expand the research sample and broaden the study audience through conducting more interviews, including more participants, and conducting further investigations, if and only if the researcher had more time.



## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

The extensively discussed literature within chapter 2 demonstrated how performance management can be significantly important as it introduces the right work environment where employees can deliver their best performance, and through which organisations will have the ability to achieve their strategic goals and sustain ideal outcomes (Sahoo and Sukanta, 2012). It is worth mentioning that the adopted inductive method empowered the researcher with an in-depth exposure to the participants' perspectives along with a grounded theory of expertise in the subject matter of virtual performance management. The rationale behind the objectives was to explore the participants' perspectives to the research question "Performance Management of Remote Teams in the Irish Technology Sector". Moreover, as previously discussed in chapter 1 and chapter 2, the sub-objectives reinforced by Armstrong's Performance Management theory presented a supplementary in-depth data assembly to emphasize the adopted structure within the subsequent chapter.

The objective of the following segment is to explore any analogies between the research's data assembly and the previously discussed existing literature. The information evaluated from the sample conducted offered the participant's perceptions of virtual performance management and explored their diverse beliefs regarding virtual performance management challenges. Moreover, recognised the participants' viewpoints on whether managing a team of diverse ethnic members presents a challenge to the process of performance management or not. Furthermore, researched new performance disputes along with the identified literature gaps, as discussed in chapter 1. This study has investigated the literature gaps throughout the adopted structure of this study research's design.

### 4.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research questions were built to cover the performance management framework with sub-questions to support data gathering (please refer to Appendix 1).

The study outcomes identified that 100% of interviewees had a consistent daily practice of different performance management aspects from planning, to monitoring, to coaching, to assessment and feedback.

However, with remote work challenges, they identified the need to conduct coaching and feedback as a key to overcome remote work obstacles. This was supported by Clear Review (2021) Performance Management Report, as they state that in light of the pandemic 90% of managers and 80% of individuals believe that they need to have more regular coaching and development discussions as it positively influences performance progression.

#### 4.1.1 OBJECTIVE 1 “TO INVESTIGATE THE PLANNING OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES”

Through this objective, the researcher outlines and discusses the data collected to investigate the process of planning performance measures and their related key performance indicators (KPIs). Additionally, point out whether cultural differences have an impact on the performance planning and agreement processes.

##### 4.1.1.1 ROLE PROFILE DEFINITION

Each interviewee participating in this research demonstrated strong expertise in the area of performance management. However, it became evident through the data analysis that there was no general agreement on whether the nature of virtual/remote roles has an impact on the process of performance planning and its associated KPIs.

Although there was a clear belief from most of the participants that the KPIs are still the same regardless of the nature of the role. Nevertheless, some participants believe that the virtual nature of the job will impact the planning process. *“The remote nature of the job doesn't necessarily make a difference to the KPIs because the KPI is stated in the role profile are going to remain the same. The planning though is a bit much more challenging”* (IV3). Moreover, other participants consider the impact of COVID\_19 on roles that require and are measured based on the face-to-face interaction which, presently mandates a change to the role performance planning and the related KPIs as original KPIs are not achievable to any further extent.

##### 4.1.1.2 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PERFORMANCE GOALS

When the interviewees were questioned whether they consider the cultural difference while setting the goals and the KPIs. Some acknowledged they do, while others did not. *“When I do set my own KPIs, I'm mindful about the different cultures that I might have in my team, the different background and the probably the different understanding that might come out of the planning session, so I'm always mindful about giving people time to digest, providing the right clarity. I try to give them as well time to come back with questions or anything that might not be clear for them in terms of how we can adapt as a team and as a persona on their background, their culture, my background, my culture, and again map those things on the companies KPIs as well”* (IV3).

In Fact, the participants that shared that they don't factor in cultural differences; do actually but indirectly through measuring the impact of cultural differences on the business outcomes and consequently goals and KPIs are driven by the cultural impact on business; not driven by the cultural differences themselves. However, according to Han & Beyerlein (2016), managers shouldn't overlook cultural differences, as such differences might provoke hidden challenges which are reflected negatively on employee's performance.

#### 4.1.1.3 PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The researcher throughout this objective aimed to gain participants' perspectives regarding the methodology applied to set team members' development plans and how they make sure the plan is mutually agreed upon. All the participants referred to the development plan as a mutual agreement between the manager and the team member on a set of KPIs that need to be achieved throughout the evaluated period. The development plan develops a psychological trust contract between the manager and the individual, as stated by Herzberg (2003), the development plan act as the motivation factor to the performance management formula as it presents clear measurable milestone with clear rewards once the milestones are achieved

However, they also agreed that it also challenging to conduct the development plan remotely. *"When constructing a performance development plan, I look at the result in my mind and then I look at the resource that has been deployed, I look at the individual level, and then I develop a plan based on that. Now the development plan needs to be modified because of the remote or virtual nature of the role"* (IV4).

The participants also highlighted the importance to get the team members' views, concerns, and fears regarding the challenges associated with executing the measurable milestones remotely. *"When I am setting the development plan, I take into consideration the challenge that the plan will be executed remotely, and that measurable milestones are designed with the attention that associated tasks will be executed remotely"* (IV5). Furthermore, the participants stressed that it is equally important to get team members' agreement and consent to their development plans to avoid any uncertainty or mental blockers that would negatively influence the execution of the development plan.

#### 4.1.2 OBJECTIVE 2 "TO ASSESS THE MONITORING PROCESS OF ONGOING PERFORMANCE"

Regarding COVID\_19 challenges, nearly all organisations deployed new tools to empower managers throughout the process of remotely assessing and monitoring teams' ongoing performance. That being said and throughout the course of exploring the performance monitoring objective. The researcher discovered that there was consistency among study participants that remote monitoring is more successful and efficient than onsite traditional monitoring methods. *"As effective as monitoring onsite, I think remote performance monitoring has a different way of effectiveness. I think it's a more mature and more trusted relationship"* (IV3).

#### 4.1.2.1 MONITOR PERFORMANCE

Study participants revealed that it is easier to talk about performance with team members remotely by going through the performance measurable data because the data then support the conversation. *“What I do actually, I find sometimes that remote performance monitoring is probably a little bit easier, and the reason why I say that is because when you're dialling in to a call and you share a screen like we're doing now, you can share data bit easier”* (IV2).

Moreover, remote performance monitoring had a positive impact on the manager-team member relationship. Remote performance monitoring evolved the individual sense of ownership and transformed the basis of the manager-team member relationship towards a trust-based relationship. *“You're not there to see what that person is doing every single day or every single hour. So, the way I conduct the performance monitoring remotely is first of all based on trust”*. (IV3)

However, remote working has its drawbacks on performance monitoring. In remote work, individuals lose the accessibility to in-direct learn from peers and colleagues. They lose the interactive environment where they can learn through only listening to a problematic discussion between their colleagues. Furthermore, individuals might miss the advice that could be brought to their desks by a colleague who listened to their problem while he or she was just passing by. Hence, the lack of a real interactive environment would impact performance development and consequently performance monitoring. *“Monitoring performance is enhanced not just by the binary results. It's enhanced through observation and interaction, only seeing the binary results without an opportunity to observe it is much more challenging”* (IV4). Consequently, a new burden is developed, where managers explore other ways to monitor performance rather than only relying on data. As Bailey and Kurland (2002), stated that a common pitfall for remote work is that remote employees' achievements are less noticeable. Hence, managers are encouraged to search for feedback from different sources and stakeholders to amend the absence of real-time observations in binary data.

#### 4.1.2.2 PROVIDE CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK AND COACHING

The research participants acknowledged that feedback and coaching are key aspects in the process of performance management. They agree that virtual feedback and coaching are associated with major challenges and that managers should adopt special practices for effective coaching and feedback. Managers should consider the cultural background of each team member, where they are coming from, how to motivate them, and what are their career and personal goals. *“With senior team members, I have to be flexible and make them feel empowered where coaching activities are driven by their needs, while with junior team members I adopt a different approach, not a micromanagement one but more a shadowing one because they have a lot to learn so they require more coaching and feedback”* (IV1).

Furthermore, they drew attention to some attributes that should be considered when conducting remote performance management. For example, it might be difficult to judge how the individual on the other side of the call is perceiving the manager's feedback especially if it is more constructive feedback than a positive one. *“I find virtual coaching and feedback is difficult to land the right messages. When providing feedback virtually I might miss that kind*

*of the individual's body language which makes my judgment weaker to understand how the individual understand and recognise my perspective as a manager” (IV5).*

Moreover, managers also lose the ability to provide instant feedback and coaching like they used to do in the office. At the office, managers were sitting beside their team members in the same area and used to have the opportunity to monitor specific actions or behaviours that empower them to provide instant coaching and feedback. Therefore, as stated by Bussin (2017), managers need to adopt an active listening approach to every detail shared by their team members or by other stakeholders regarding their team members' performance. Additionally, managers need to be clearer and more precise while communicating feedback or conducting coaching. They need to make sure that their team members have the space and time to respond to, comprehend, and understand their shared perspective.

#### *4.1.2.3 DEAL WITH UNDERPERFORMERS*

The findings here state through the assembled data, the interviewee's thoughts, and views on the impact of virtual or remote work on employee performance. It is important to highlight that all the interview participants acknowledged that working remotely has an influence on the individual's performance.

From the moment the individual joins the company and starts working remotely, he or she might feel disconnected. The sense of belonging and inclusivity is lost. *“Peer-to-peer learning is difficult; some people learn the best when they are in the office, and they are asking questions to other team members. They have the ability to onboard themselves to new teams through their proactive approach of gathering knowledge and ideas from colleagues sitting with them in the same area” (IV6).* Without such office interaction, some team members might be suffering from slow onboarding and knowledge acquisition leading to later performance.

The interviewees recognized that their approach to deal with underperformers is the same regardless of the nature of work, virtually or onsite. *“I don't see any difference to my process of handling underperformers remotely or face-to-face. We just need to agree on a set of certain milestones to improve performance and set of KPIs to measure the progress” (IV5).*

However, Cook (2019), shed the light on the new remote work challenges that might lead to degradation in employee performance. He suggests that for managers to overcome the underperformance challenge, they need to adopt the supportive leadership style and conduct a regular one-to-one to help solve teams' business challenges. Also, managers should pay attention to their teams' well-being and the negative impacts of working virtually in isolation without regular face-to-face work interactions.

### 4.1.3 OBJECTIVE 3 “TO EXAMINE THE EXECUTION PROCESS OF PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES”

The primary goal of this objective is to understand the execution process of performance activities. Additionally, the researcher gained insights from the participants’ regarding the perspectives for challenges their team members might face throughout working remotely. Moreover, the researcher tried to explore interviewees’ viewpoints on team members’ challenges that are related to both performance and personal development plans.

#### 4.1.3.1 ROLE CARRY OUT

Interviewee (IV1) discussed that the main challenge for team members to work remotely is the aspect of building a trusted relationship with different stakeholders. It is difficult to plan remotely to an informal discussion with colleagues from different workloads, while it was easier to do so through a cup of coffee at the break area in the office. As highlighted by Olson et al., (1995), the importance of having both self-discipline and self-motivation as vital traits for remote workers. People working remotely feel exhausted from being in front of their laptop the whole day, so it is difficult to get their consent for extra time on the laptop for informal networking.

On the other side, with COVID\_19 forcing everyone to work remotely, organisations had to increase their workforce by recruiting different talents to support the pressure of remote work. Managers faced the new challenge of recruiting, onboarding, and training new employees remotely. *“As a manager, I need to be very smart with the way I am introducing a new team member to the team. The new member needs to feel welcomed and feel safe the surrounding environment is safe to ask any question and to request any type of support”* (IV6). Furthermore, the missing aspect of real-time knowledge acquisition by simply asking a colleague that is sitting on a nearby desk about his or her opinion on an issue. As remotely, a team member must check first the availability of other members through the remote communication channels, then explains the issue, and finally wait for the answer. Additionally, if the questioned team member doesn’t have the answer, then unfortunately the individual must redo again the cycle of remote knowledge acquisition.

#### 4.1.3.2 IMPLEMENT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The research finds that interviewees agree on adopting the same approach to track their team’s achievement in relation to the agreed performance improvement plan. *“For development plan, I always set a section for development areas that is detailed to what are the needed actions, and how they can be achieved”* (IV3).

The key to a successful performance improvement plan execution is to allocate where exactly are the performance gaps, whether they are business knowledge-related gaps or maybe they are more to a soft skill gap. Antonacopoulou (2000), states that the organisation that adopts conducting development activities is an organisation that is concerned with its employees’ best interest and wants them to grow and develop. Moreover, both the manager and the

employee need to keep a shared record of the plan and the executed actions; where they can review and discuss, analyse the improvements, and check if there is a need to modify the objective or actions based on the achievements. *“So, each month I have a touchpoint with each of my team members where we analyse his or her achievement. This gives me the opportunity to spot weaknesses and certain improvements. Consequently, I fine-tune the plan based on our joint analysis and findings to reflect future actions and objectives”* (IV5).

#### 4.1.3.3 IMPLEMENT PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The study findings to the personal development plan are different from the performance one at the level of the details but not at the structure level. *“I review the personal development plan every six months. As in general I think that it is a good period for a team member to improve himself or herself through knowledge acquisition or gaining extra skills to their persona”* (IV3).

Additionally, more or less like the performance improvement plan, interviewees pointed to examine the personal development plan execution through a full review on team member career aspirations, where do he or she want to go, and what do he or she want to achieve. And the most essential question each manager tries to explore is the individual’s drivers to run through a specific path. Consequently, according to Armstrong (2009), the understanding will empower the manager to provide specific guidance through coaching or through recommending specific mentorship or sponsorship by other leaders within the organisation.

#### 4.1.4 OBJECTIVE 4 “TO INVESTIGATE THE PROCESS OF PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT”.

Throughout this objective, the researcher aimed to gain the interviewees’ perspectives about end-of-period performance assessment and discussion. The goal in this subject is to explore the challenges of conducting remote performance discussions, and how do the manager and the team member agree on the outcomes, weaknesses, strengths, and development areas.

##### 4.1.4.1 DIALOGUE AND FEEDBACK

An analysis of the employee’s previous and current performance is a cornerstone for the success of the performance management process (Gruman and Saks, 2011). The study participants agree collectively that when it comes to their preparation for the end-of-period assessment discussions, the process is actually the same as the in-office process. The process starts with notifying team members to start with the preparation of the performance assessment discussion. So, each team member can start with submitting the performance assessment document with their business and personal achievements throughout the evaluated period. Then comes the manager’s part to review the submitted information. *“I think it is important for myself to understand the information submitted, how do they assess themselves,*

*what are the things they submitted as achievements, and what are the areas they need to improve?” (IV3).*

The information submitted by each team member is an outcome of the frequent feedback, evaluation, and coaching discussions conducted throughout the evaluated period. *“For myself, the outcomes of end-of-period performance assessment discussion shouldn’t be a surprise to each team member or to myself. It is an outcome of the continuous dialogues that take place throughout the evaluated performance period” (IV4).*

Finally, the actual assessment performance takes place where the manager shares the feedback on the evaluated period which includes recognition, improvements, and next steps aspects. This is where the remote situation is challenging because throughout the face-to-face process it is easier to recognise how a team member is perceiving the feedback. Their body language will reveal whether they are disappointed or pleased, while remotely it will be challenging to observe exactly how they are perceiving the feedback.

#### *4.1.4.2 PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT*

Research participants acknowledged that the process of conducting performance management is challenging by nature and adding the remote factor makes it even more challenging. At the beginning of the actual performance assessment discussion, managers should try to relieve the tension and the pressure as possible out of the discussion. Moreover, leaders should consider the persona of the evaluated team member and consider any possible stress he or she had over the past period.

*“As a manager, it is my responsibility to adapt my style and tone in a way that demonstrates my understating to any personal or well-being pressure and to consider the cultural differences among my team members” (IV6).* It is also key for the manager to listen carefully and to provide each team member the opportunity to share their perspective and to avoid any assumptions (Armstrong, 2009). Because once the discussion is over, there is no opportunity to recognise the impact of the performance discussion over the evaluated team member. Dissimilar the in-office assessment where the manager has the opportunity to observe the facial expression and body language, and also the opportunity to monitor how the evaluated team member is behaving as a natural reaction to the performance discussion.

#### *4.1.4.3 AGREE ON STRENGTH AND DEVELOPMENT AREAS*

The final step of the performance assessment process is a mutual agreement between the manager and the evaluated team. It is the step of consent, it is the step of acknowledging the strengths, weaknesses, and the developed areas. *“I will never make a decision without my team’s consent, I want to provide clarity, I want everyone to be on the same page, and I need the buy-in to understand why this is important to them” (IV2).*

Moreover, the team needs to observe how the outcomes of the performance assessment process are going to help them forward in their career development. Interviewee (IV5) states



that the manager needs to convey their messages as clearly as possible with a clear set of objectives and actions. Therefore, concluding the performance evaluation discussion with measurable milestones and KPIs that clearly demonstrate that benefits over the team member's career development; is key to get his or her buy-in to the moving forward performance plan. Consequently, as stated by Newman and Ford (2021), leaders should always be clear and transparent with current challenges and reality, and at the same time set the guiding rules for future work and development plans and procedures to overcome such challenges.

#### 4.1.5 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The research findings from the conducted interviews exposed similarities to the existing literature. However, the findings might not be completely comprehensive, which is driven by the time constraints and the qualitative nature of the study methodology. Additionally, further comprehensive statistical assessment of an extensive cohort of participants would have been considered in case the researcher retained further time for data assembly and analysis.

Furthermore, the study methodology and the adopted inductive method principally had confidence in the knowledge and skills of the study participants. Notably in the area of demonstrating the gap in conducting virtual performance management versus the onsite one.

The author adopted extreme proficiency to avoid any personal bias which would influence the participants' perspectives towards a particular direction (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Moreover, the researcher believes that the sample size was adequate for this research. Correspondingly, from a data analysis perspective, the researcher's key objective was to explore the challenges of remote or virtual performance management. To inspire additional researchers to construct further studies around remote performance management as a tactic to encourage organisations to offer their employees the choice of remote work without fearing the challenges of remote performance management.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.0 CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY

The researcher examined the existing literature and its limitations to explore the remote performance management gains and challenges as a possible permanent working model post Coronavirus pandemic era. The key purpose of this study was to expound whether remote work positions have additional challenges to the organisation's leadership when conducting the performance management process. Additionally, investigate whether the organisation's leaders are required to adopt different approaches of performance management to accommodate cultural differences among team members. The main objective of the study's purpose and sub-purposes is to investigate and assemble conclusive information that prompts the research question.

#### 5.0.1 REMOTE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

According to the information assembled throughout conducting this study. The data rejected the hypothesis that the differences in the cultural aspect among team members heavily influence the managerial approach when conducting the performance management process.

In Fact, the managerial perspective takes into account the persona variations among team members which consequently reflect on the identification of performance goals and assessment measures to each team member. For example, coaching an introvert persona versus an extrovert one, or motivating through moral appreciation versus physical reward. That being said, the cultural differences are also considered but only through the communication level of the performance management cycle. In other words, throughout the communication of goals, measurable milestones, feedback, and assessment. However, the determination of performance objectives, KPIs, coaching, and evaluation shouldn't be steered by cultural differences.

Through analysing the previously collected data and comparing it to the examined literature in chapter 2. It is obvious that there is a discrepancy in the aspect of the influence of cultural differences on individual success. As Adler Dalluay and Jalagat (2016), highlighted that leaders' failure in recognising the cultural differences reflects negatively on the individual's performance and consequently on the organisational performance as well.

## 5.0.2 REMOTE WORK AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The gaps in the literature presented in Chapter 1 and the academic literature review introduced in Chapter 2, both shed the light on the performance challenges that virtual team members experience during the adoption of the remote work model. These challenges include difficulty in onboarding new team members, effective training, absence of real-time knowledge acquisition, and lack of self-motivation. All these challenges influence directly or indirectly the performance of each working remotely team member.

Consequently, as stated by Pullan (2016), leaders managing virtual teams should adopt different management styles to compensate for the lack of motivation trait provoked through the adoption of the work from home model. In contrast to the collected data across the research study, the remote challenges hypothesis was accepted as leaders throughout the study acknowledged the experience of these challenges.

Accordingly, the organisation's managers hold the responsibility of paving the way and removing the remote work performance obstacles. Since team members are working remotely, it is difficult for managers to leverage the onsite monitoring approach to recognise their team members' challenges. Therefore, managers are required to establish a mutual trust relationship with their team members now more than ever. They should always adopt the active listening approach to better understand their team members' challenges and to be able to coach and guide their teams to eliminate those challenges to achieve performance excellence.

## 5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research paper briefly discussed several recommendations that are worthy to mention. The overall studies by Apgar (1998), Dutcher (2012), and Bloom et al. (2013) cover qualitative studies that examine sub-groups of individuals working remotely by choice. The sub-group experiences are driven by partial policies constructed by their employers to fit a partial working model, without having clear and consistent policies to accommodate a fully remote workforce (Sylvia, 2021). Ideal research is to replicate the above-mentioned studies but across a larger sample size who experienced remote work by force, not by choice.

Furthermore, further studies that involve IT organisations from around the world are recommended to overcome the geographical dimension affecting the global remote work phenomena so evaluation could be expounded (Gigi and Sangeetha, 2020). Additionally, the challenges of both time and resources availability limited this research paper to conduct more research and assemble more inclusive demographic data and more comprehensive statistical assessment.

There are many opportunities for the role of remote work and its challenges on performance management. The primary focus of this research paper was to provide remote performance management challenges from the managerial perspective. Therefore, as the next step for more inclusive research, the same study should be conducted but this time the data to be assembled from the team members' perspective. How each team member working in IT world-class organisations experiences the process of remote performance management. And how the

interaction with leaders originated from a different cultural background influenced each team member's journey with performance management. As highlighted by Alyss (2020), employees working from home during the coronavirus pandemic reported a lower level of stress which positively influenced their overall performance.

Another important future field of study is the performance management experience post the coved era. Originally both managers and individuals across the globe conducted the performance management journey inside the premises of the organisation. With COVID\_19 in place, both managers and individuals across the globe experienced the nature of remote performance management. However, as highlighted by Kovar 2020; Parungao 2020, post coronavirus organisations will adopt a permanent remote work model either partially or even full their complete workforce. Consequently, there will be a new kind of hybrid experience of performance management. An experience that includes both aspects of onsite and remote experiences. Managers in these organisations will face a challenge to adopt different performance management tactics to team members working remotely versus on-site one.

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## **APPENDIX 1 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **PART 1: PERFORMANCE PLANNING**

Q.1 When you are planning the performance measures at the beginning of the year, does the remote nature of the job make any difference to the KPIs stated in the role profile?

Q.2 How do you set the KPIs and performance goals and do you factor in culture differences?

Q.3 At the beginning of the year How do you set the development plan for a remote/virtual team member and what is your protocol to make sure the plan is mutually agreed upon?

### **PART 2: PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

Q.1 How do you conduct performance monitoring remotely? How do you make sure it is as effective as monitoring on site?

Q.2 What are your challenges of conducting feedback and coaching to cross-culture team remotely?

Q.3 In your opinion do remote working and culture difference have an impact on performance? Is it positive or negative impact and how you deal with under performers remotely?

### **PART 3: PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES EXECUTION**

Q.1 What do you think are the new challenges that your team members face now that the job is done remotely? Have you seen any new challenges that were not occurrent on site?

Q.2 How do you remotely review the team member execution of the performance development plan, do you keep a designated record for the performance development plan specifically? (In this question the focus is on any actions in the performance development plan and not overall performance, do you give these activities any special focus?)

Q.3 How do you remotely review the team member execution of the personal development plan? do you keep a designated record for the personal development plan specifically?

(In this question the focus is on any actions in personal development plan and not overall performance, do you give these activities any special focus?)

## PART 4: PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT

Q.1 In the end of year assessment, before you start the connect what dialogues do you create with the team members prior to your feedback submission, what challenges do you face conducting remote dialogue and feedback?

Q.2 When it comes to the actual assessment, what differences do you feel in the process being done remotely vs face to face? And how do you factor in culture difference in communication and feedback?

Q.3 How do you make sure you and your team members successfully agree on the performance feedback, strengths, and development areas remotely?