



*Finding the Best Practice Approach to Leading and Managing the  
Performance of Remote Working Recruitment Consultants.*

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## **Abstract**

### **Background**

Those working in recruitment and sales have witnessed a particularly unprecedented rate of change since the onset of the pandemic. The purpose of this research dissertation is to investigate remote working in the recruitment industry, and through qualitative research, identify how management can adapt and find the best practice approach to leading and managing the performance of remote working recruitment consultants (RCs).

### **Research Question & Objectives**

What is the best practice approach to leading and managing the performance of remote working recruitment consultants?

This is done through investigating the following research objectives:

- To identify the new main challenges that management have, and how best to overcome these new challenges.
- To investigate and critique the strategies currently in place intended to manage and improve remote teams' performance.
- To ascertain the most and least effective leadership style(s) and identify the most important leadership traits.
- To investigate KPI's in the recruitment industry and how they can be used most effectively.

### **Findings**

Three significant findings from this study include:

For a leader to succeed in the recruitment sector they must be a proven high performer and successful RC in their own right. Therefore, someone entering from another industry would struggle to lead effectively.

The absence of a clearly defined communication plan greatly exacerbates the negative effects of remote working in the recruitment sector, such as lack of culture, engagement, collaboration, and high turnover.

A hybrid approach of two-to-three-days remote working a week, yields the best results. Once this is exceeded the negative effects associated with remote working become more increasingly prevalent.

**Research Students Declaration Form**

**Submission of Thesis and Dissertation**

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**(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)**

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**Material submitted for award**

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## **Key words:**

Remote Working, Performance Management, Leadership, Key Performance Indicators, Communication, Productivity.

## **List of Abbreviations:**

- Recruitment Consultant (RC)
- Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
- Learning Goal Orientated (LGO)
- Performance Goal Orientated (PGO)
- Transactional Leadership (TAL)
- Transformational Leadership (TFL)
- Learning & Development (L&D)
- Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

# **Chapter One – Introduction**

## **1.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this research dissertation is to investigate remote working in the recruitment industry, and through qualitative research, identify how management can adapt and find the best practice approach to leading and managing the performance of remote working recruitment consultants (RCs).

The Covid-19 Pandemic has radically changed many aspects of the world around us overnight, the recruitment industry included. Greg Brasher, LinkedIn's Head of Search and Staffing, claims those working in recruitment and sales have witnessed a particularly unprecedented rate of change since the onset of the pandemic. He goes on to argue that the very nature of the industry and its key success factors have changed more over the recent months than it has over the past 5 years (Cottell, 2020).

Covid-19 has accelerated the transition to remote working and has forced employees and management to adapt overnight to a new digital world of remote working. This poses a challenge, particularly to the recruitment industry, as its culture typically relies on accountability and employees being present. This long-drawn-out pandemic has been complemented with ever-improving broadband speeds, communications technology and new government legislation allowing workers the right to request remote working. Tánaiste Leo Varadkar insists that remote working may serve to benefit both the employee and employer if managed effectively and that this new digital world of remote working is here to stay (Sunderland and Loughlin, 2021). This presents a variety of both new challenges and opportunities for management within the recruitment sector.

According to recent studies conducted by PWC (2020), McKinsey (Park et al., 2020), Harvard Business Review (Larson et al., 2020), and Cooke (2019), the most prominent challenges associated with remote working include difficulties in performance management and appraisal, lack of direction, motivation, morale, training and development, culture, unsuitable leadership styles, team structure, reduced communications efficiency and increased feelings of isolation and occasionally stress.

This report is an exploratory analysis of said challenges which will focus specifically on performance management and appraisal of remote working RCs. However, to provide a holistic view, it will also investigate the other aforementioned factors at play to paint a more comprehensive picture of the challenges that the recruitment industry faces today.

This investigation into performance management of remote working recruitment professionals seeks to identify and test, through primary qualitative research, the management practices which the literature in this field has discussed, in order to ascertain a best practice approach specific to the recruitment industry.

Carefully constructed questions will be put to senior recruitment managers, directors, and consultants. These answers, supported by key literature, will form the basis for the research and consequently, will establish what challenges and strategies are conducive to success, failure and conflict when managing remotely. Resultantly, these key strategies and factors can be adopted and implemented by management when needed. Thus, providing a road map to this new style of working and how to best manage it from a recruitment perspective.

The recent surge in remote working due to Covid-19 has presented a gap in research. Previous pre-Covid reports have focused on the influence remote working has on the overall well-being of remote workers within the recruitment sector (Maguire, 2019). However, this report aims to examine the industry from a performance management and leadership perspective. Through investigating this largely unexplored field the researcher aims to bridge this gap to help management identify and overcome the new remote working related challenges and implement a best practice approach in remote performance management.

Finally, some academically and theoretically researched recommendations will be offered to managers at the heart of this technology-enabled industry, with the aim of helping recruitment professionals harness their employee's full potential, improve the morale, motivation, and overall performance of their remote teams and overcome these challenges that remote working has brought to this industry.

## **1.1 Research Question**

What is the best practice approach to leading and managing the performance of remote working recruitment consultants?

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

To answer the research question, the researcher seeks to further examine the following research objectives, in the context of a fully remote working recruitment sector during Covid-19, to gain a deeper understanding of the following issues:

- To identify the new main challenges that management have, and how best to overcome these new challenges.
- To investigate and critique the strategies currently in place intended to manage and improve remote teams' performance.
- To ascertain the most and least effective leadership style(s) and identify the most important leadership traits.
- To investigate KPI's in the recruitment industry and how they can be used most effectively.

These objectives are discussed further in detail in section 3.3.

### **1.3 Purpose of this Dissertation**

Through investigating the new challenges that management face, the researcher aims to gain a better understanding of a new best practice approach to managing RCs performance remotely. While there has been previous research done on the subject of remote working in the recruitment sector in the context of employee wellbeing (Maguire, 2019), this is a new and largely unexplored area of research which focuses on performance management within the recruitment industry. The main objective of which, is to identity these new challenges and the best way to overcome them.

The insights from this research report will provide recruitment managers with answers of how best to adapt to remote working, the most effective leadership style(s) to utilise, and generally how to improve and manage the performance of their remote teams. This report will be an important tool in bridging the gap for recruitment agencies and their management to gain a competitive advantage in remote performance management in an already highly competitive industry.

### **1.4 Research Approach**

A qualitative research approach has been elected for the purpose of this report and its research objectives. This approach allows the researcher to effectively investigate and explore the subject of remote working and the experiences of remote workers and management in the context of performance management and improving output.

A quantitative research approach was considered however, this method was quickly deemed unfit for this particular purpose due to the open-ended nature of the proposed questions needed.

This open ended, semi-structured interview style allows for elaboration and is required to gather reliable answers, which can then be organised into themes to highlight any trends present.

This report will focus on remote working exclusively within the recruitment sector. The sample group will be a mix of individuals who are currently working full-time remotely, due to Covid-19. This will comprise of three RCs and three Recruitment Managers, from a variety of recruitment agencies, who will be asked the questions seen in appendices 2.1 and 2.2, order to attain the forementioned research objectives.

The resultant data will then be analysed through a thematic analysis which involves identifying trends and categorising the data into different themes in order to answer the research questions and objectives effectively.

## **1.5 Structure of the Dissertation**

The following structure will be used for the purpose of this dissertation:

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

The opening chapter of this dissertation will describe and justify the area of research as well as its objective. To provide some context, an overview of the recruitment industry, remote working practices and statistics will be presented. This chapter will outline the justification for the study as well as briefly discuss some of the key areas and themes explored in the literature review section. Lastly, the research question will be presented followed by the methodology employed in the primary research.

### **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Chapter two will investigate and critically analyse previous literature in the areas of remote performance management and leadership, primarily in a sales environment, while the researcher attempts to apply this to the recruitment sector. Based on this literature, the researcher will propose some insights and findings from relevant studies on similar sectors to identify prominent themes and challenge any gaps in the research.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the research methodology and the justification for its selection, as well as the competing approaches which were considered and subsequently dismissed. Included in this chapter will be the research question and objectives, a detailed description of the research methodology employed, the justification for the elected qualitative approach, any limitations which were encountered and finally, the ethical considerations.

## **Chapter Four: Findings & Thematic Analysis**

In chapter four the researcher will present the findings from the study and categorise them into five main themes. Quotations gathered from the participants from the semi-structured interviews are presented, organised into each of the five themes and commented on to give the reader insights from which conclusions can be drawn.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

Chapter five, the researcher will review the purpose of the study, the set objectives of which and the research question presented in the previous chapter. Through the lens of the new findings extracted from primary research, the researcher will integrate these with the insights presented in the literature review section.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion & Recommendations**

The final chapter summarises the findings and offers some recommendations which may be beneficial to recruitment agency managers and directors in this new environment of remote working. Some further research recommendations will also be proposed.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The purpose of the literature review section is to provide a comprehensive review of the research that has been conducted by academics in the areas of remote working, performance management, leadership, KPIs, communication and productivity. To achieve the research

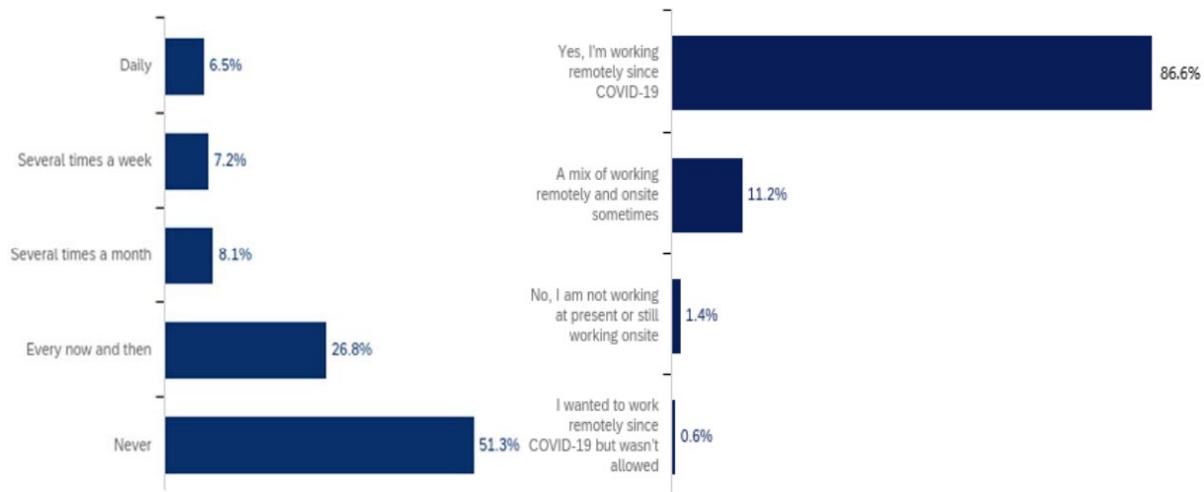
objectives, it is important to evaluate, examine and critique previous research and highlight gaps in this area. This section will offer an understanding of these areas.

## **2.1 The Rapid Rise of Remote Working**

Remote working, working from home, or teleworking, are terms used to describe this now widely adopted, technologically enabled practice (Grant, et al., 2019). Madlock (2018) defines remote working as a working agreement that permits individuals to perform their work obligations from another location by utilising the internet and technology to communicate with the organisation.

The number of remote workers grew exponentially in 2020 due to the current pandemic (CSO, 2020). As seen in Figure 1 below, CIPD's (2020) report highlights a stark contrast in remote working figures before and after Covid, with 86% currently remote working, compared to just 6.5% in 2019. 2020 bore witness to an acceleration of this trend on an unprecedented scale. Hence, why the study of remote working and the challenges associated has never been more relevant and of greater importance.

***Figure 1: Effect of Covid-19 on Remote Working, Before Vs After Covid-19***



Source: CIPD Ireland (McCarthy et al, 2020)

Through working in the recruitment industry, both before and throughout Covid-19, the researcher witnessed first-hand that recruitment as an industry, typically relied on its employees to be present and accounted for. Like many sales-orientated roles, management created and enforced a culture of ‘bums on seats’ and ‘phones to ears’ which demands the physical presence of its employees. Remote working within the industry was typically regarded as a luxury and

an uncommon work practice afforded only to a seldom few RCs who earned the right in the minds of the management. Referring again to Greg Brasher, Covid-19 has accelerated ‘virtually everything’ in many areas, from selling to recruitment (Cottell, 2020).

## **2.2 Benefits of Remote Working**

It is important to firstly highlight some of the many substantial benefits which remote working offers management and employees. This provides the reader with a well-rounded and informed perspective, allowing for an accurate and honest analysis of the trade-off being made.

The move to virtual has created unforeseen opportunities for increased efficiency, productivity, and growth for the industry (Cleary, 2020). An increase in remote working employee productivity is evident in Bloom et al.’s (2015) report of a Chinese company which allowed its 16,000 staff to work remotely, resulting in a 13% increase in output. This was a result of two factors:

1. A reduction in absenteeism and fewer breaks meant employees worked more minutes on average,
2. Increased focus due to working in a quieter environment and more convenient location.

However, the findings from a recent Irish study conducted by CIPD (McCarthy et al, 2020) are not in complete agreement, as it contends that an increase in productivity is ultimately circumstantial. The report states that 37% of those working remotely felt their productivity was the same, 30% felt productivity was higher, and 25% said productivity was lower than normal. According to CIPD’s (2020) report and Maguire’s (2019) findings, physical workspace and gender can play a large role in this circumstantial productivity, as women were found to have higher levels of stress while working remotely and resultantly, reduced productivity to that of their male counterparts, who were often exempt of childcare duties.

Furthermore, an increase in remote working productivity can depend on whether or not management have been trained appropriately. It is important to note that there was a considerable difference in productivity between the companies whose managers were given training in managing remote workers, and those organisations that hadn’t. 43% stated that productivity had increased while remote working fulltime during Covid-19 in companies that offered this training whereas, only 29% of those that hadn’t offered training (CIPD, 2021).

As cited in numerous pre-Covid compiled reports, it is argued that remote working can increase productivity, employee engagement and efficiency, reduce absenteeism, office politics, distractions, overheads, aid in attracting and retaining valued staff and finally, helps to instil loyalty and create a more inclusive culture (Cook, 2019; Madsen, 2011). However, as a result of fulltime remote working brought on by the pandemic, some of these benefits may have been mitigated, or transformed into challenges, as discussed in the following section (2.3).

### **2.3 Remote Working Challenges**

Eikenberry and Turmel (2018) conducted a survey in 2017 on 225 remote managers and leaders across all industries, who have at least part of their team working remotely. The results of which stated the biggest concerns and problems managers faced were ranked:

1. Effectiveness of leadership when working remotely (58% answered),
2. Uncertainty around sufficient and reliable feedback (52% answered),
3. Social interaction, or lack thereof (46% answered),
4. Being able to effectively monitor staff (28% answered).

(Eikenberry and Turmel, p. 18, 2018).

More recent and similar studies conducted by PWC (2020), McKinsey (Park et al., 2020) and CIPD (McCarthy et al, 2020) show that the most prominent challenges that remote workers face today include lack of direction, engagement, motivation, L&D, culture, reduced communications efficiency, and the feeling of isolation. This indicates that there is a point of diminishing return connected to remote working that has been surpassed. Thus, remote working, when mismanaged, can result in negative effects. These recent studies have limitations as they are generalised studies not focused on one particular industry. Therefore, to validate this hypothesis, it will be tested throughout the primary research conducted in this study, in order to highlight any differing challenges specific to the Irish recruitment sector. Only once these are identified, can best practices be implemented.

For the purpose of this dissertation, these main challenges identified in the recent studies, are organised into five themes: Communication (2.4), Leadership (2.5), Performance Management (2.6), and Key Performance Indicators (2.7), which are explored further below.

## **2.4 Communication**

Recent studies (McCarthy et al, 2020; Smith et al, 2018; PWC, 2020; Park et al., 2020) highlight some areas which remote working employees deem to be most impactful on their productivity. Arguably the most prominent and recurring theme is communication and finding the right balance, be it one-to-one or video conferencing (VC) calls or a team instant messenger chat box. The optimal amount of communication makes employees feel connected, energised, motivated and part of a team, which in turn feeds into the culture and improves retention and morale (McCarthy et al, 2020; Smith et al, 2018)

Management must strive for the optimal balance, as excessive communication can result in increased stress, pressure, and a decline in performance. Furthermore, it is important that check in calls are not perceived as micromanagement, but rather friendly two-way conversations, as this would likely exacerbate the situation if not made clear. A lack of these informal, ‘watercooler chats’ can have a negative impact on both employee and management if the right balance cannot be found or if lacking an effective communications strategy. This is evident in Yahoo’s decision in 2013 to recall 700 remote staff to working in the office full-time, due to a lack of innovation and productivity. Yahoo were lacking a communication strategy and resultantly, a lack of communication, collaboration and a significant reduction in productivity followed (Sarabyn, 2019; Pathak, et al., 2015). The justification for this decision sent via email Yahoo’s remote workers stated that “*some of the best decisions and insights come from hallway and cafeteria discussions, meeting new people, and impromptu team meetings*” or watercooler chats’ as previously referred to. Much to the dismay of the remote workers and criticisms of onlookers such as Richard Branson who stated “*give people the freedom of where to work & they will excel*”, a return to office was enforced. The end result of this was a lack of employee performance and satisfaction which led to more than a third of Yahoo’s staff leaving in the same year (Dixon, 2019).

This move was widely received by employers as confirmation that remote working gives rise to communication and collaboration problems. Later that year, Yahoo’s CEO, Mayer publicly stated that she didn’t intend to imply that remote working cannot or does not work, rather it just wasn’t suited to Yahoo at the time. Mayor also argued that while productivity is better when employees are working alone, collaboration suffers. (Dixon, 2019). Therefore, a trade-

off between the two must be considered by employers or the right balance, specific to the employee, can be found to yield the best outcome.

Based on this information, in an industry which is heavily reliant on communication, the importance of establishing, implementing and maintaining an effective communication plan is crucial in avoiding reduced performance due to a breakdown in collaboration and/or innovation. This will be investigated further in the primary research of this study to ascertain the right balance and an effective approach.

## **2.5 Leadership**

### **2.5.1 Leadership Defined**

Defining the concept of leadership can be a difficult task. As cited by Stogdill (1974, p. 259), “*There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept*”. Put simply by Clawson (2011, p. 231) “*Leadership emphasizes the exercise of interpersonal influence and motivation to accomplish the mission*”.

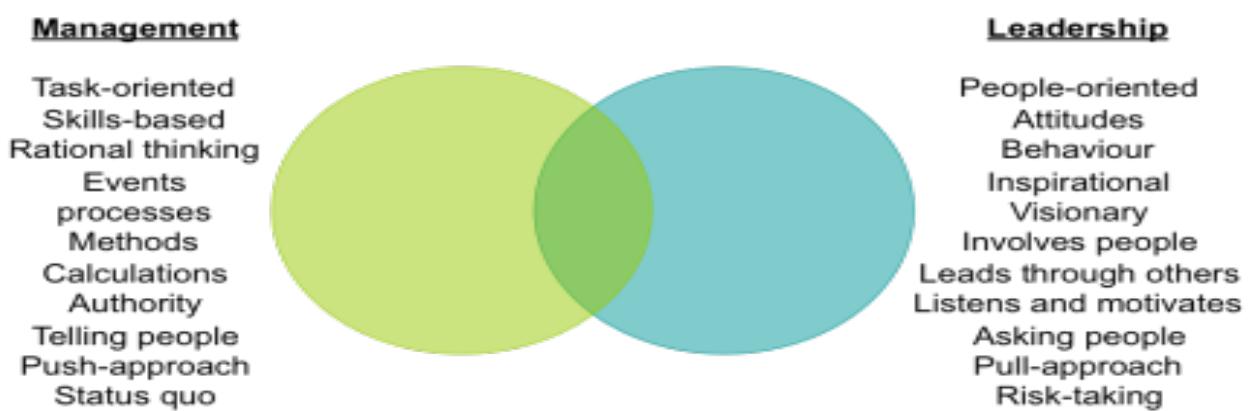
According to Armstrong (2015, p.329), “*Leadership means inspiring people to do their best to achieve a desired result. It involves developing and communicating a vision for the future, motivating people and securing their engagement*”. Armstrong (2015) goes on to highlight the effect that leadership can have on the workforce, when an effective and suitable approach is elected. Such leadership involves communication, persuasion, inspiration, clarification of the task at hand and why it needs to be done. This is validated in the sales sector by Avolio et al. (2004) who argues that leadership style is a primary situational factor that guides, motivates and influences salespeople and plays a key role in their performance efforts. Eikenberry and Turmel (2018) take this a step further by arguing that as a manager you are one of the most influential people in your employee’s life, and that you impact many facets of their life including their pay, work environment (even while remote), as well as the level of stress and satisfaction they feel at work. Rafferty et al (2010) supported this theory, abusive leadership can cause greater stress among employees.

“*Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to.*” – Richard Branson

Eikenberry and Turmel (2018) argue that when discussing the topic of remote performance management, remote leadership must also be discussed, as the two are intrinsically linked.

While the differences between the two are clear, there is a considerable amount of overlap, as can be seen in figure 2 below. As leadership is a broad topic, this section will focus on leadership styles and strategies deemed most relevant to the recruitment industry. Namely, a leader's ability and responsibility to understand, monitor, motivate, reward and support their team. Due to the lack of research specific to the recruitment sector, and the many similarities in the sales sector, studies conducted on the sales industry will also be considered, and challenged through primary research.

**Figure 2: Management vs Leadership**



Source: Madsen, 2014

### 2.5.2 Leadership Styles

There are many different leadership styles, models and theories used today. Lewin et al (1939) proposed three contrasting types of leadership styles which are Authoritarian, democratic (participative), and laissez-faire (delegative). Authoritarian leaders strive for complete control and make decisions without consulting anyone else on the team. Democratic leadership in contrast is a leader who seeks input and engagement from their team to achieve buy-in and collaboration. Laissez-faire leadership involves very little direction and maximum freedom and authority to make decisions (Bass & Riggio, 2008; Billig, 2015).

Referring to McGregor's (1987) X & Y Theory, there are two types of employees, those that dislike and avoid work (Theory X) and those that participate in and get satisfaction from work (Theory Y). Lewin's Authoritarian style lends very much to McGregor's Theory X, while the democratic and Laissez-faire styles are suited to Theory Y. From first-hand experience the researcher can conclude that RCs working in a sales environment would fall into McGregor's theory Y category, simply due to the fact that if they were in the theory X category they would

promptly be let go or leave on their own accord as a result of their lack of drive and motivation to succeed which is crucial in any sales orientated role such as recruitment.

In a recent study conducted by Domingues et al. (2017) they investigate how leadership style effects sales performance by comparing and critically examining the effects of two widely utilised leadership styles in sales, Transactional leadership (TAL) and Transformational Leadership (TFL).

### **2.5.3 Transactional leadership (TAL) Vs Transformational Leadership (TFL)**

TAL theory was first put forward by Weber (1947) and then reinforced by Stogdill & Bass (1981) who characterized it as directing and motivating team members largely through rewarding performance and appealing to their own self-interest. According to MacKenzie et al. (2001, p.118) TAL involves “*an exchange between the leader and follower, such that the leader provides rewards in return for the subordinate's effort*”. In contrast, TFL as defined by MacKenzie et al. (2001, p.118) considers the “*values, goals, and aspirations of followers, so that (employee) perform their work because it is consistent with their values*”.

By studying the effects of these two competing leadership styles on salespeople, Domingues et al. (2017) found that there is a beneficial relationship between a salesperson's performance and the salespersons goal orientation. As discussed further in Section 2.3.2 ‘Performance Measurement & Management’ a salesperson tends to have a greater focus on either performance goal orientated (PGO) or learning goal orientated (LGO). Additionally, the TFL approach can lead to an increased dependency and over reliance on the leader for support and guidance (Eisenbei and Boerner, 2013; Howell, 1988). Manager dependency is particularly damaging to performance when working remotely as guidance and support is not as readily available.

### **2.5.4 Criticisms of TAL**

However, the transactional style of leadership also has its flaws. Khurana and Nohria (2010) and Juneja (2020) argue that this style limits a leader in developing their maximum potential and should not be the only leadership style in practice. If a transactional leadership style is the only approach utilised, this will create a shallow relationship between the leader and the follower, and create an environment dominated by power and politics.

The researcher delves deeper into these forementioned leadership styles in the primary research section, to ascertain what are most commonly used styles, what works and what doesn't, and what changes (if any) have managers made to their leadership style while working fully remotely.

Eikenberry and Turmel (2018) argue: the better understanding a manager has of the psychology of their team's strengths, weaknesses and what motivates them most, the more successful they will be as a manager. In a repetitive, largely commission-based, individual contributor role such as a RC, the importance of motivation cannot be understated. RCs must remain resilient and find motivation, be it internally or externally, through a leader or manager.

In support of this theory, Tamkin et al., (2010) contends that leader's undoubtedly have an impact on their subordinate's performance in their role. However, there is two sides to this argument, as the leader's impact can also have a hugely negative affect on their employees, be it physically, mentally or emotionally, which can in turn cause negative effects such as absenteeism and high employee turnover (Refferty et al., 2010; Harter Schmidt & Hayes, 2002). Similarly, according to the results of Reina et al.'s (2018) leadership study based on a financial services company in America, it was concluded that leaders provide both pressure and inspiration. Too much pressure can result in an abusive leader, too little can result in a lack of performance.

## **2.6 Performance Management**

### **2.6.1 Introduction to Performance Management**

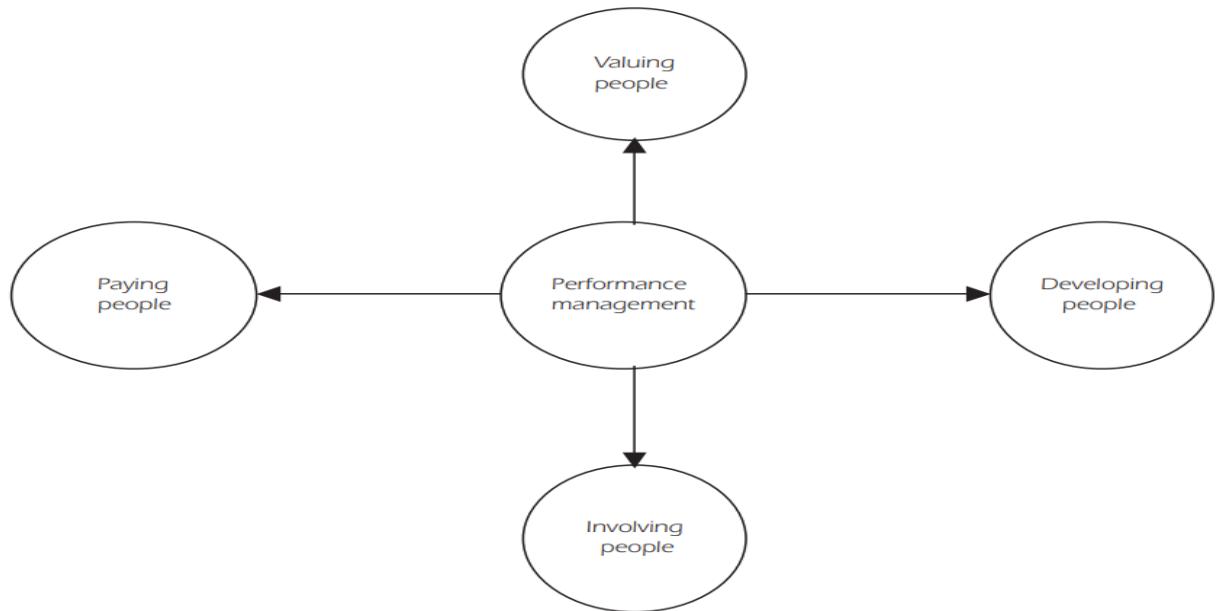
When discussing performance management (PM) in the context of recruitment and sales orientated environment, the concept of performance and the measurement of which involves the assessment of an individual contributors' market share, ability to build and maintain working relationships with clients and candidates, and most significantly sales (revenue generated from placements).

Armstrong (2006, P.12) defines PM as "*a strategic and integrated process that delivers sustained success to organizations by improving the performance of the people who work in them and by developing the capabilities of individual contributors and teams*". Simply put, PM is the study of what people do, how they do it and what results they achieve, for the purpose of getting better outcomes. This is supported by Philpott and Sheppard (1992) who argue the main purpose of PM is to establish a culture in which both groups and individuals have a shared

focus for the continuous improvement of business processes as well as their own contributions and skills.

Hartle (1995) proposed that for PM to be effective, it should be aligned with how the performance of the business is managed, as well as integrated with key processes such as employee development, organisational strategy, and total quality management. This approach called ‘vertical integration’ is when an organisation’s and an employee’s goals are aligned to create a shared purpose. As can be seen in figure 3 below, ‘horizontal integration’ involves aligning PM strategies with HR strategies regarding paying, valuing, involving, and developing employees (Armstrong, 2006).

**Figure 3: Performance Management as a Focal Point for Integrated HR Activities**



Source: Armstrong (2006, P. 21)

This dual integration approach is similar to bundling, which involves the development, implementation, and integration of numerous HR practices so as a result, they reinforce and complement each other (Armstrong, 2006). Based on David Guest’s (1998) findings, practices such as extensive training and development programmes, performance related bonuses and psychometric testing during the hiring process can all contribute to increased overall performance however, there is no guarantee. Rather than spending time and resources on specific practices, the key to effective performance management is finding the correct balance in the bundle of elected practices. This is supported by Armstrong (2006, P.19) in asserting that

*“one of the most important concepts of performance management is that it is a continuous process that reflects normal good management practices of setting direction, monitoring and measuring performance, and taking action accordingly”.*

## **2.6.2 Setting Goals & Measuring Performance**

In a sales orientated environment, such as a recruitment agency, performance planning and agreements are a key tool in attaining success. These practices define expectations, set goals and identify the measures used to monitor and assess performance (Armstrong, 2006). By setting ambitious, yet achievable goals and breaking them down into smaller weekly actionable tasks, RCs can achieve their overall agreed goals and objectives. Armstrong (2006, p.19) expresses that *“performance agreements, also known as performance contracts, define expectations the results to be achieved and the capabilities required to attain these results”*.

PM hinges on the measurement of performance. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Managers cannot improve upon an unknown standard level and therefore implement measures and set goals. The characteristics of ‘good’ or effective goals include, consistent with organisational value or objectives, clear and concise, challenging yet achievable, measurable, agreed with the manager and employee, timed and lastly, have an emphasis on teamwork. These SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-framed) goals are an effective performance planning and management tool (Armstrong, 2006). An example of this in a recruitment context would be, the number of CVs a RCs sends in a given time and how many of which convert to interviews. In the researcher's opinion, this CV send to interview ratio, is usually the most accurate, reliable and agreeable measurement of performance however, this approach does have its limitations in that it is a purely quantitative approach which ignores customer (candidate) satisfaction for example. This hypothesis will be put to the test in the primary research section of this paper.

Domingues, et al. (2017) discusses two goal orientations of sales professionals, learning goal orientation (LGO), and performance goal orientation (PGO), and considers their effects on performance. According to Silver et al (2006, p.28), LGO is “an overall positive affect towards learning”. Whereas performance goal orientated (PGO) entails sales professionals with a focus on performance outcomes, demonstrating their skills to supervisors and outperforming their peers (Ahearne et al., 2010; Harris et al., 2005). In a sales orientated environment with a focus on performance outcomes and achieving targets, the researcher would argue the industry is

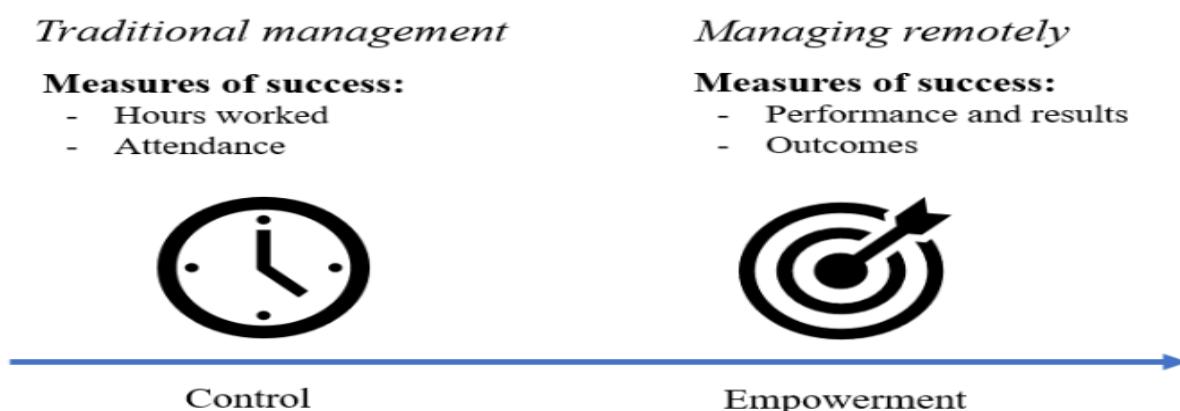
dominated by PGO focussed individuals. However, this will be validated in the primary research of this report, and whether more of a balance of PGO and LGO would be beneficial.

### **2.6.3 Remote Performance Management**

Remote working means that management can no longer rely on employees being present to monitor their performance (Cook, 2019). The recruitment industry can be seen to foster an organisational culture which strongly relies on monitoring activity, KPIs and time spent at the desk, rather than focusing on the outcomes. While Bloom et al.'s (2015) study shows remote workers can benefit from increased productivity, this can come at a cost. According to recent studies (Grant et al, 2019; McCarthy et al, 2020; Maguire, 2019) remote workers' increased productivity can be attributed to a number of both positive and negative factors including, an incumbent culture of presenteeism, less distractions, an inability to 'switch off', as well as trust issues between management and employees. This topic will be investigated further in the primary research section of this dissertation so as to identify the most influential factors at play.

Harvard Business Review (2017) and Grant et al, (2019) state that managing in person and managing remotely are very different practices which require different approaches. When managing remotely, managers must adapt their management style to compliment the conditions that come with remote working, failure to do so may result in conflict, burnout or reduced performance. As seen in figure 4 below, this means sacrificing the control over employees made possible through a physical presence, by empowering them through delegation, and trusting them to complete the tasks assigned. Therefore, this new shift in management style involves an agreement of team and individual's key performance indicators (KPIs) and monitoring them, as discussed in detail in the next chapter (Cook, 2019).

**Figure 4: Traditional Management Vs Managing Remotely**



Source: Cooke, 2019

RCs fall into the category of ‘individual contributor teams’. Eikenberry and Turmel (2018) state that when leading a team of individual contributors there is a lesser focus on remote collaboration however, managers must also be cognisant of their team becoming too individually minded. Finding the right balance may be achieved by setting team goals and objectives. Generally, the frequency of remote working leads to a more individually minded, and less team-oriented mindset (Eikenberry and Turmel, 2018). Research conducted by Jarrett (2020) and Kahnweiler (2018) indicates that this can have mixed results in team members depending on their psyche. Introverts tend to perform better while working remotely, while extroverts generally lack the social interaction and the subsequent energy, they would receive from it. Videoconferencing somewhat mitigates this but is no substitute for physically being present. Therefore, it is crucial for managers to know their team members psychological needs and under what circumstances they perform best in.

Performance reviews are an essential part of a manager’s job and the PM process, particularly in a performance-related paying job such as a RC. However, RCs and managers can sometimes lose sight of the main purpose of performance reviews. Some might question the point in them if a RCs performance is strong. For performance reviews to be worthwhile and effective they must provide motivation and positive feedback, development of capabilities as well as, a platform for constructive two-way communication. Also, it’s crucial that performance measures are agreed upon. If performance measures cannot be agreed upon then the individual and the organisations objectives are not aligned which can result in withdrawal and reduced performance (Babb, 2015. Armstrong, 2006).

From researchers experience in the recruitment industry, there is not only an overreliance on KPIs for the purpose of performance reviews but the KPI’s being measured are too broad, unreliable and a source of distraction. Typically, KPIs are imposed on RCs, rather than agreed upon with them. To quote Armstrong (2006, p.72) “*To have any chance of success, the objectives and methodology of performance reviews should either be in harmony with the organizations culture or be introduced deliberately as a lever for change*”. Based on the research discussed in the following section, typically KPIs are neither in harmony nor a proponent of change within the industry however, this will be investigated further in the primary research.

## **2.7 Key Performance Indicators**

According to an article by Babb (2015), KPIs have for a long time been the ‘scourge’ of the recruitment industry, and in his experience are the main reason for conflict and turnover within the sector. While it can be agreed that numbers are a key in the measure of performance and driving results, often these numbers fail to capture any of the complexities of an individual’s market or capability. Attaining buy-in from RCs and fostering good intentions will always supersede imposed KPIs (Babb, 2015).

Referring to a study by Lublin (1994), a robust approach towards evaluating a sales teams or individuals’ performance is one of the most important aspects of the sales management process. KPIs are a widely adopted approach to monitoring and evaluating sales team’s performance and output. Oxford’s (2007) dictionary defines KPI’s as “*a quantifiable measure used to evaluate the success of an organization, employee, etc. in meeting objectives for performance*”. Simplified further, “*a KPI is a measure reflecting how an organization is doing a specific aspect of its performance*” (Kaplan, R. S. and Harvard Business School, 2009).

KPI’s are a key metric for management when considering whether to train, fire, reward, or promote employees. Due to fully remote-working employees as a result of Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increased reliance on KPI’s for the purpose of remote performance evaluation. While KPI’s can be beneficial, they are sometimes met with resistance in the recruitment sector and are seen by management as an unpopular but necessary tool. Based on Babb’s (2015) article on KPI’s in the recruitment industry, KPI’s have a widely negative connotation attached to them and are one of the most prominent reasons for dissatisfaction resulting in high turnover within the industry. Even with the associated flaws and general dislike, KPIs have been and are currently becoming ever increasingly relied on for the purpose of remote performance management and evaluation. Performance evaluation defined by Johnson et al (2001, p.43). as “*any combination of social and technical metrics which assess past and current task performance and generate and implement actions that tend to reinforce or correct that level of performance*”.

This increased reliance on KPI’s can be harmful if the KPI’s aren’t an effective, intelligent or reliable form of performance evaluation. Phone time monitoring for example is sometimes used as a KPI within the agency recruitment sector. It’s controversial with no proven correlation with high sales figures. Hope and Player (2012) argue that, when implemented effectively, KPI’s enable managers to continuously learn and improve, react to arising issues quickly and

take corrective action, as well as measure progress toward set goals. However, organisations often spend months adjusting and determining their KPI's and still struggle to verify effective KPIs that contribute towards performance rather than distract from it. In order to set effective KPI's and maximise their potential for contributing towards success, Hope and Player (2012) propose some key points for consideration. Firstly, avoid setting KPIs as fixed targets. This practice can act as a distraction and will tend to shift the focus from achieving the actual strategic goals to simply meeting the set targets. Making fifty sales calls a day will not necessarily lead to more sales. A more effective sales approach such as focussing on the conversion rate of CV sends to interviews for example, would result in an emphasis on quality over quantity and likely yield better results.

A recent study conducted by Zaripov, et al. (2021) argued that assessing employee performance based on KPIs has both its advantages but also doesn't come without its drawbacks. In its favour, the use of KPIs can be a helpful way to quantify the work done by employees in a transparent manner which can allow for further analysis of where employees worked well and where they did not. However, it is argued that many managers are hesitant to use this method in isolation as some indicators will not be easily measured or will not provide an accurate summary of all employee's performance. A standardised process of measuring all employees can leave some at a disadvantage (Zaripov, et al. 2021).

Hope and Player (2012) propose that the most important element of an effective KPI is that it is derived from the purpose, and in line with the strategy, of the team. When the purpose becomes making the highest number of sales, rather than setting an activity target which becomes the primary focus, both the measurement of progress, and the management attention is shifted toward making real progress rather than achieving somewhat abstract targets. From working in the recruitment industry, the author would agree that RCs and management can have a tendency to fall into this trap of losing sight of achieving the important targets (ie. Placements and revenue) as a result of being distracted by working towards arguably unrelated and abstract activity targets such as number of calls made.

As mentioned, KPIs do have their benefits, and in today's environment of remote working KPIs are seen as a necessary tool to monitor performance. However, if the above points are not taken into consideration this can lead to KPIs that are ineffective. In this case, RCs not only have to achieve their primary sales targets every month, they also have to reach weekly activity targets which aren't always aligned with their primary target.

In a commission-based role such as recruitment it is in the RCs' interests, financially, to continually push themselves, work efficiently and intelligently, to achieve their goals. Therefore, if a RC is financially driven, which most are, these severely limits the need for and the effectiveness of KPI. This will be investigated in the primary research, in which the researcher will explore the effects KPI's have on remote working RCs, with the aim of identifying the associated benefits and drawbacks therefore, enable management to implement effective KPI's which compliment performance, rather than hinder it.

## **2.8 Literature Review Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter the concepts of remote working, in the context of performance management, have been defined and discussed. With the aid of various cited academic journals, it is clear that there are many advantages and pitfalls associated with remote working, for both employees and management. While effective performance management can depend on a number of factors, many of these new remote working challenges are rooted in communication, or lack thereof.

While previous pre-Covid studies highlight the benefits associated with remote working, many of these benefits are reduced or even converted to disadvantages given the economic, socio-cultural challenges and uncertainty presented by remote working fulltime. Furthermore, an increase in productivity is circumstantial, and there is a point of diminishing return associated with the benefits of remote working that has been surpassed. Management must strive to restore these remote working benefits where possible, or face a reduction in communication, collaboration, and performance.

From the research and studies discussed throughout this chapter, several factors have been identified which either positively or negatively affect the performance of remote working RCs. These factors will be further investigated in the primary research, to establish the best practice approach to leading and managing the performance of remote working RCs.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This section discusses the methodology selected and provides further information as to how and why this research was conducted. Based on Hudson & Ozanne's (1988) report, a robust

methodology comprises of many factors including research design, approach, analysis, data gathering methods and reporting. The researcher will justify the use of a qualitative approach, as well as explain the rationale behind the research design and philosophy. Furthermore, this chapter highlights any limitations encountered, as well as the data collection and interpretation techniques utilised.

### **3.1 Research Aim**

The principal aim of this dissertation is to investigate remote working in the recruitment industry and how management should adapt so that they can lead and manage team performance effectively. Through this research, the author aims to ascertain industry best practices and bridge the gap between existing literature examined in section 2, with the information gathered through the primary research conducted in this report. Given the radical changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and current challenges the industry faces, the findings of this study will help the industry as a whole to refine their current strategies, adapt, and succeed.

### **3.2 Research Question**

The primary research conducted in this dissertation is designed to answer the question of:

*“What is the best practice approach to leading and managing the performance of remote working recruitment consultants?”*

### **3.3 Research Objectives**

To answer the research question, the researcher seeks to further examine the following research objectives, in the context of performance management within a fully remote-working recruitment sector during Covid-19, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the following issues:

- 1. To identify the new main challenges that management have, and how best to overcome these new challenges.**

The researcher aims to identify and understand the new main challenges the industry. This is based on the literature review section 2.3, whereby the new main challenges that have arisen

as a result of fully remote working are discussed. As there is a lack of literature on this topic specific to the recruitment sector, the author will focus on the main challenges identified in section 2.3 and through interviewing recruitment professionals, investigate whether these new challenges identified are different to those most prominent in the recruitment sector. Once these new main challenges are identified, the author can then begin to investigate the most effective strategies that can be utilised to overcome or mitigate these challenges.

**2. To investigate and critique the strategies currently in place intended to manage and improve remote teams' performance.**

Again, due to lack of recruitment specific literature available, the author must conduct qualitative research into what strategies are currently in place to effectively manage and improve remote performance management.

**3. To ascertain the most and least effective leadership style(s) and identify the most important leadership traits.**

Based on the information gathered in literature review section 2.4, the researcher will investigate common leadership styles present in a sales environment to assess what styles are conducive to high performance. Leadership traits which the participants deemed to be the most important will also be investigated to help gain further insight into this research area specific to the recruitment sector.

**4. To investigate KPI's in the recruitment industry and how they can be used most effectively.**

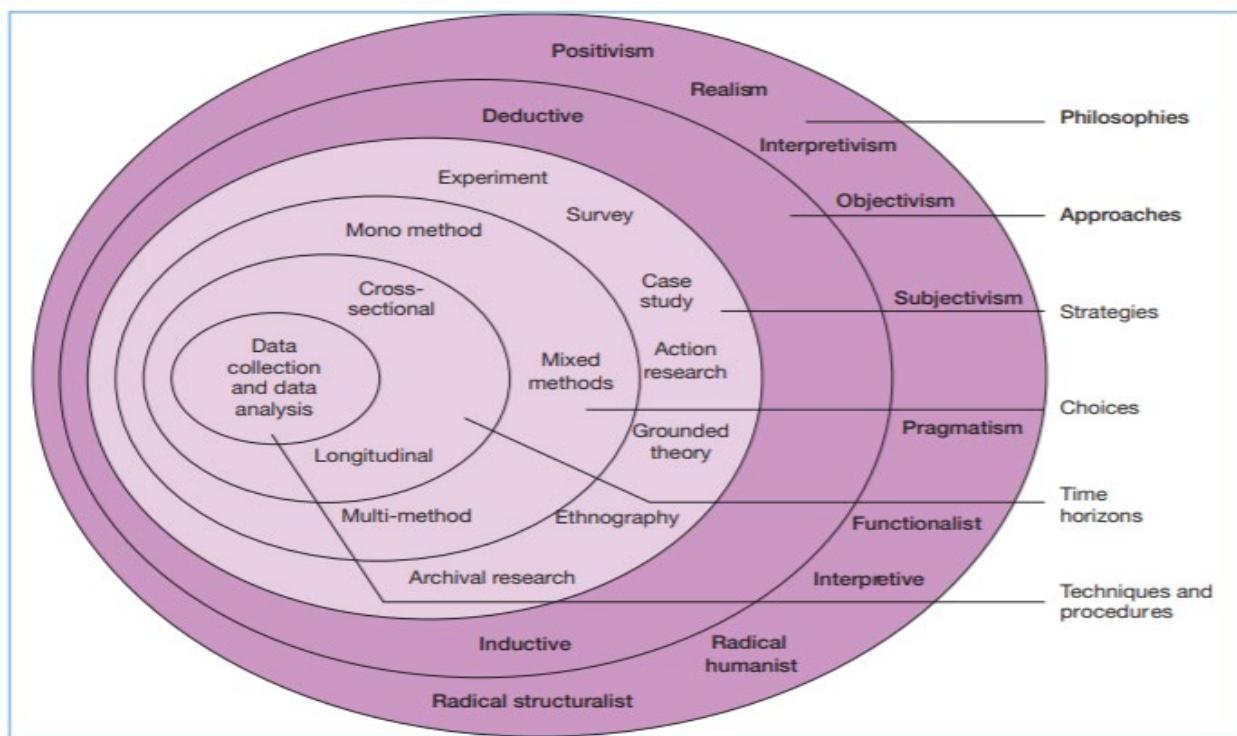
Referring to the literature review section 2.6, the researcher will consider theories and insights proposed from a variety of sources with the aim of applying these to the recruitment industry, investigating what KPIs are in place, and ultimately what changes can be made to improve performance and satisfaction.

In conclusion, the researcher aims to identify and investigate these four areas through a qualitative research. This will be achieved by interviewing six recruitment professionals and obtain their views on the subjects through carefully crafted open-ended questions.

### **3.4 Research Framework**

The ‘research onion’ framework (Saunders et al., 2012) was elected as the framework of choice for the methodology purposes of this study. This framework consists of six layers involving philosophies, approaches, strategies, choices, time horizons and finally, techniques and procedures. This is a very important step in the structuring of any dissertation as it provides a guiding light for the progression of the research as a whole, ensuring the outlined structure is adhered to (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, both theories align to further strengthen the credibility of this framework in use.

***Figure 5: Saunders’ Research Onion***



Source: Saunders et al. (2016, p.102)

### **3.5 Research Philosophy**

#### **3.5.1 Introduction**

Saunders et al. (2016, p.101) claim research philosophy is an “*overarching term which relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge*”. Similarly, Bajpai (2011) asserts that research philosophy considers the source, nature, and development of knowledge. Put simply, it is the thought process that goes behind the ways in which data regarding the

research topic should be gathered, analysed, and utilised. Creswell (2013) argues that a research philosophy plays a crucial role in a dissertation, as it assists the researcher in formulating research questions and shapes their approach when investigating the topics and findings. Rephrased by Saunders et al. (2016), when stating that "*research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge*". Saunders et al. (2016) discusses two relevant main schools of thought regarding research philosophy: epistemology and ontology. Selecting the correct research philosophy is an important step in the research process, as it can help to avoid bias and help to make sure the research process remains structured throughout. Thus, this report will now conduct a critical analysis of both research philosophies, epistemology and ontology, which will then enable the researcher to identify the most strategic path to choose.

### **3.5.2 Epistemology**

According to Saunders et al. (2016), Epistemology considers the relationship the researcher has with the research itself and what qualifies as acceptable knowledge when conducting a study. It deals specifically with the social background of the research, including the assumptions and experience of individuals within certain areas of study (Mason, 2002; Burrell & Morgan, 2016). Additionally, it enables the researcher to evaluate the validity and relevancy of data that is gathered based on the context of the research objectives (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Epistemology involves two separate branches: positivism and interpretivism. These diverging theories under this main heading differ in many aspects, such that positivism is often found within quantitative research, whereas interpretivism is dominantly applied within a qualitative research context. Additionally, positivism adopts the theory that our knowledge of reality is a social construction by human actors", and therefore, the researcher is ultimately guided by their preconceptions on this area of study. Resultantly, this hinders their ability to gather and use value-free data (Walsham, 1995, p.376). In contrast, interpretivism contends that the information gathered by the researcher is ultimately objective, and can therefore be used to prove/ disprove the previously held research hypotheses (Walsham, 1995).

### **3.5.3 Ontology**

At its core, ontology considers an individual's beliefs about reality. Saunders et al. (2016) argue ontology involves the nature of reality of people and considers how they can affect the world they live in. When explored in detail, ontology can be divided into two main schools of thought, being subjectivism and objectivism (Bryman, 2015). Saunders et al. (2016, p.135) state that "*objectivism incorporates the assumptions of the natural sciences, arguing that the social reality that we research is external to us and others*". Whereas in contrast, Bryman and Bell (2015) infer that subjectivism involves identifying any present underlying motives or purposes which could have an effect on social phenomena. Therefore, what the researcher believes about the nature of reality surrounding the area of research and beyond, will dictate what kind of relationship they think the researcher should have with whatever is being studied.

### **3.5.4 Conclusion**

After careful consideration of these research philosophies and their differentiating sub-sections the researcher elected an epistemology philosophy approach with an interpretivism perspective to compliment the qualitative nature of the study.

## **3.6 Research Methodology Approach**

The next layer of Saunders et al. (2016) onion is the research approach which encompasses the testing of the data collected and the subsequent findings. Saunders et al. (2016) proposes that there are two differing research approaches, inductive and deductive.

According to Zalaghi (2016) and Godfrey & Hudson (2010), the inductive approach focusses on observation and deriving conclusions through unbiased observation where the researcher impartially documents what their findings and observations. These observations provide the foundations for which the theories are built upon. Ketokivi and Mantere (2010) propose that an inductive approach acknowledges the present gap in literature and takes all theory, findings and information gathered into consideration before reaching a decision on a topic. Simplified by Saunders et al. (2016, p. 38), an inductive approach is when a study is "*based on the principle of developing theory after the data has been collected*".

On the other hand, a deductive approach can be described as when “*a clear theoretical position is developed prior to the collection of data*” (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 38). A deductive approach, according to Ketokivi and Mantere (2010), relies on challenging theory through theoretical propositions and considering it validated if all elements are aligned.

The researcher elected to use an inductive approach for the purpose of this dissertation. The rationale for this decision is based on three key factors:

1. The purpose of this study is to identify and investigate themes identified in the literature review and the primary research of this study. Through thematic analysis the researcher will critically and impartially assess the information and findings before reaching a concluding judgement/opinion.
2. An inductive approach is more suited due to the small sample size and qualitative nature of the research. This is supported by Saunders et al. (2016), who asserts that an inductive research methodology approach is usually used for a small sample size, whereas a deductive approach is typically elected for a larger group.
3. There will be no hypothesis or theoretical propositions developed by the researcher to rely on for theory validation over the course of this dissertation.

### **3.7 Research Methods**

Saunders et al. (2016) states research methods can fall into three categories, casual, descriptive and exploratory. Domegan & Fleming (2007) argue that exploratory research is best suited to aid researchers in establishing trends, patterns and distinguishing common behaviour patterns. Thus, an exploratory research approach was deemed to be the most suitable and applicable research method. Through this approach the researcher intends to explore, test and validate previous data and findings, as well as identify potential themes and patterns that present themselves through the research process. Saunders et al., (2016) further justify this choice of an exploratory method when stating that an exploratory approach is utilised and suited to when the researcher’s intention is to gain a comprehensive understanding of a topic.

Considering the above, the researcher has deemed an exploratory method alongside an inductive approach to be the most suitable and proven strategy to identify and investigate themes that arise from literature review and primary research. This combination of approaches will afford the researcher flexibility and an open mind when collecting and analysing data.

### **3.8 Data Collection**

Saunders et al (2016) and Adam et al. (2014) propose two primary data collection methods: quantitative and qualitative. Dey (1993) and Healey and Rawlinson (1994) differentiate the two by categorizing quantitative data based on numbers and deriving meaning from which through analysis of diagrams and statistics. According to Saunders et al. (2012, p.162-163) “a quantitative method considers numerical measures, questions are clear and concise, uses probability sampling techniques and are often carried out in large sample numbers”.

In contrast, qualitative data involves the collection and analysis of words and data in non-standardised form which needs to be categorised and organised into themes which can then be studied through a thematic analysis approach (Dey, 1993; Healey and Rawlinson 1994). Saunders et al. (2012, p.162-163) state that “*qualitative research methods are used when collecting data in a non-probability manner and enables researchers to study participants freely, measure the relationships between theory and reality, before arising to a conclusion*”. Quinlan et al. (2009) simplify the description of the two contrasting methods by describing qualitative as having a focus on observing and interpreting, and stating that a quantitative approach has an emphasis on measuring and testing.

After careful consideration of both methods, a qualitative approach was deemed to be the best fit due to the nature and complexity of the subject. The researcher aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges due to remote working and how best to overcome these new challenges and drive performance. This would only have been possible through an exploratory qualitative approach, as while numbers do tell some of the story, they lack the flexibility and open-endedness to delve deep, highlight unforeseen challenges and themes and ultimately, reach the crux of the challenges faced by RCs and management. In summary, a qualitative method through the lens of a exploratory and inductive approach is well justified and will afford the researcher to be adaptive when uncovering new themes and insights, and the flexibility to explore them.

### **3.9 Data Collection Methods**

The researcher first considered a questionnaire so as to capture a large data set from a big sample group with a view to gathering a comprehensive snapshot of a remote working recruitment sector. However, this approach was quickly dismissed as it is most suited to a quantitative and descriptive style of research. While descriptive research is typically used to

uncover an opinion or attitude toward a given subject, for example a RC's opinion of their managers style, this therefore could sound suitable for this study. However, upon further investigation a questionnaire was ruled out due to the qualitative and exploratory nature of this investigation. This decision was further justified by Saunders et al. (2016, p. 356) when stating "*questionnaires are usually not particularly good for exploratory or other research that requires large numbers of open-ended questions*" and further solidified by Bryman & Bell (2015) who argue that interviews are the most common and applicable research approach for a qualitative study due to the associated flexibility.

According to Collis & Hussey (2014) interviews can be categorised into three types, unstructured, semi-structured and structured. The researcher tested all three methods for suitability in the pilot interview. Structured was dismissed as its rigid nature and lack of creativity afforded to the interview participants is not suited to an exploratory qualitative investigation. Unstructured, in contrast, was dismissed due to its lack of direction and organisation of themes. The information gathered was too random and as a result, it was proving difficult to extract themes and deduce findings. Through elimination and common sense, semi-structured interviews were the preferential method and deemed most suitable for the purpose of gaining an in-depth and accurate understanding of remote PM and leadership.

The sample group in this study comprise of six carefully selected recruitment professionals ranging experience from a Senior RC with four years' experience to a Managing Director with twenty years recruitment experience. As a result of this varying levels of experience among participants, semi-structured interviews give the researcher the flexibility to adapt the questions to better suit the interviewee's experience. Aided by pilot interviews, the researcher devised two sets of questions: one for management level, and another for RCs. These carefully crafted, specific and mostly open-ended questions resulted in better flow of conversation and ultimately yielding more interesting and deeper insights.

### **3.10 Research Instrument**

Based on the information gathered in the literature review section in chapter 2, the author highlighted some key areas and themes within the recruitment sector which warranted further research. Firstly, the researcher wanted to validate remote working challenges identified by studies conducted by Eikenberry and Turmel (2018), PWC (2020), McKinsey (Park et al.,

2020) and CIPD (McCarthy et al, 2020) and investigate if the same challenges apply to the recruitment sector and whether there are any unidentified or unique challenges present.

From these main challenges identified, the researcher has organised them into four primary overarching themes: Communication, Leadership, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Performance Management, and are explored further below.

A second area requiring further investigation was highlighted by Domingues et al. (2017) when comparing Transactional leadership (TAL) and Transformational Leadership (TFL) styles on sales professionals in the retail sector.

From the insights presented in the literature review section, there were significant challenges and limitations when attempting to apply these insights to the recruitment sector, the most prominent of which include differing sample sizes, research methods and probably the most apparent, differing sectors and the resulting lack of applicability.

### **3.11 Interview Structures**

The researcher has divided the interview into four sections: (1) Changes/Challenges due to remote working, (2) Leadership, (3) Communication (4) Performance Management and (5) KPIs. Each section will challenge, and validate or dismiss, findings presented in the literature review section. The pilot interview with the management level questions took 35 minutes, which was 5 minutes longer than the RC pilot interview, so the researcher adapted the questions and closed the gap. The interviews were planned accordingly in 30 minutes time slots and the participants were asked to allocate the time needed so the interviews could be completed uninterrupted.

The first section investigated the new challenges and changes brought about by remote working. The main purpose of this section is to identify new challenges presented by remote working as well as changes in productivity and opinions of remote working and the best balance. More specifically, the researcher seeks to validate remote working challenges identified by studies conducted by Eikenberry and Turmel (2018), PWC (2020), McKinsey (Park et al., 2020) and CIPD (McCarthy et al, 2020) and investigate if the same challenges apply to the recruitment sector, and whether there are any unidentified or unique challenges present.

Section 2 investigates the subject of remote leadership in the context of the recruitment sector and aims to identify what leadership styles are used, which are most and least effective, and if remote working has caused managers to adapt their approach. Findings from section 2.5 will be tested to ascertain if a TFL, TAL or other style is used and which is most effective.

### **3.12 Pilot Interview**

Before the semi-structured interviews took place, the researcher conducted two pilot interviews, one with a Senior RCs, and the other with a manager. The reason for the pilot interviews was that there are two different lists of questions for each. These pilot interviews enabled the researcher to identify the timeframe required for each set of questions, to refine the questions, help organise them into themes, and generally adapt the structure and style of the interviews to provide the most compatible answers. This is supported by Bell (2005) who argues that a successful interview can be contingent on a trial run, as without a pilot interview you have no way of knowing your questions will give you the data you need.

For example, the question of “has working remotely made you more or less productive?”, was changed to “how has working from home effected your productivity? & why?”. As the former was too rigid and typically resulted in a short unrevealing answer. The other questions were modified similarly to make them more open ended and thus their answers more elaborative.

Additionally, some questions such as “what is the best way to manage remote RCs?” were removed as they were too general, open ended and often already answered through asking other questions.

The enhanced questions asked in the interviews can be seen in the appendix sections 2.1 and 2.2.

### **3.13 Sample Selection**

Saunders et al. (2016) proposes two sampling methods, non-probability, and probability. Probability is the most suitable and widely used method in quantitative research, where typically there is a large sample size of participants who are selected at random. Non-probability, in contrast, is the most applicable to qualitative research, where there is a relatively small sample size and as a result, participants are carefully chosen (Marshall, 1996). As this study requires information from experienced RCs and seasoned managers with an in-depth

knowledge of the recruitment sector, a qualitative approach was deemed as most suitable for this study, which led to the researcher justifying a non-probability sampling method.

Saunders et al. (2016) further breaks down the non-probability sampling technique into five varying methods, quota, purposive, snowball, self-selection and convenience which were considered by the researcher when assessing the most suitable sampling approach.

Purposive was considered to be the best fit approach. According to Neuman (2000) purposive sampling allows the researcher to use their best judgement in selecting interview participants that are the most likely to provide you with the information needed to meet the research objectives and answer the research question. Furthermore, purposive sampling is commonly used and highly suited to studies with very small sample sizes, as is the case with this dissertation involving six participants (Neuman, 2000). On this basis the researcher dismissed the other four methods as non-probability and purposive sampling was the only approach which would suit this small and investigative style of research.

Having an in-depth knowledge of the recruitment sector through working in both small and large recruitment agencies, the researcher felt it crucial to carefully select six participants who had a broad and in-depth knowledge of the industry. Through non-probability and purposive sampling the author carefully chose the six individuals best placed to give the most reliable, accurate and holistic information, which would give the researcher the best chance of yielding the best results and findings possible from the study. To ensure bias remained absent, the researcher selected participants from varying backgrounds, organisations and with different job titles to provide the most accurate possible representation of the sector, with only a small sample size.

As seen in figure 6 below, the six participants consist of a variety of recruitment professionals, three male, three female, including a Manager, Director, Managing Director, Senior RC, Team Lead, and an Associate Director. All of which are experienced RCs having worked in small and large agencies and recruiting for different market sectors.

**Figure 6: Interview Participants**

Participant	Gender	Job Title	Organisation
Participant A	Male	Manager	Large Recruitment Agency
Participant B	Male	Director	Large Recruitment Agency
Participant C	Female	Managing Director	Small Recruitment Agency
Participant D	Male	Senior RC	Small Recruitment Agency
Participant E	Female	Team Lead	Large Recruitment Agency
Participant F	Male	Associate Director	Large Recruitment Agency

*Source: Authors Own*

### **3.16 Data Presentation and Analysis**

According to Saunders et al. (2016) qualitative data analysis is a process which involves summarising insights, categorizing patterns or trends, and developing themes based on the data gathered. Due to the investigative and qualitative nature of this study, and supported by Saunders et al.'s (2016) methodology theory, a thematic approach was deemed to be the most suitable approach to presenting the data and findings obtained.

Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 79) state that thematic analysis is "*a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail*". This is reinforced by Saunders et al. (2016) when asserting that thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify themes or patterns in the data gathered which may have been embedded in the research. Braun & Clarke (2006) discuss the thematic approach in detail and outline the necessary phases it entails, of which there are six. These stages are sequential and include familiarisation of the data gathered, coding, searching for and identifying any patterns or themes, reviewing identified themes, defining and naming the themes and, writing up and producing the report.

As this dissertation is an exploratory investigation into the recruitment sector, a thematic analysis approach was deemed most suitable as the researcher aims to identify important and noteworthy themes in the data collected. Once identified, the researcher can use these themes to help steer and focus the investigation in the pertinent direction(s), and therefore enhance the research and its findings.

### **3.17 Ethical Considerations**

Myers (2013) states that qualitative research typically raises many ethical considerations regarding respect for the participants and the security of their data. This study is no exception as there were several ethical considerations encountered by the researcher.

Due to the highly sensitive nature of the information gathered from participants regarding their opinions of management style, and the strategies or practices imposed by their employers/organisation, the author had to be cognizant that if this information fell into the wrong hands this could have serious repercussion and therefore must act ethically throughout this study. This means taking a sensible and private approach when documenting, storing and writing about this sensitive information to protect the jobs and identities of the participants.

Before starting the dissertation, the researcher completed the National College of Ireland Ethical review form which ensured the researcher understood and would comply with ethical considerations when conducting the primary research, discussing and researching the industry, as well as accurately gathering and safely storing the information.

It was important to inform all participants that the data gathered would be strictly private, confidential and in adherence with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the National College of Ireland's guide on ethics. The author reassured participants of this beforehand by way of email and again immediately before the interview. Participants were required to sign the consent form in advance of the interviews and were informed that they did not have to answer anything they were not comfortable with, and they may terminate the interview at any point. Due to covid-19 all interviews took place over video calls which were recorded and deleted once all the pertinent data was gathered and the research questions were answered.

### **3.18 Limitations of Research Design**

The interviews were time-consuming and required careful planning and scheduling into the participants busy schedules. The researcher strived to remain cognisant of Bryman & Bell's (2015) point that qualitative research can be biased as a result of the researcher's perspective, so that the findings would be accurate and impartial.

Additionally, as the small sample size selected for this study comprised of only six people, although carefully chosen through a purposive sampling approach, one could argue this isn't

representative of the industry as it only considers a small minority. Saunders et al. (2016) reinforces this point in stating that the purposive approach affords only a ‘low’ likelihood of being representative while being ‘dependant on researchers’ choice’ of participants. A larger sample size might have resulted in statistically slightly more reliable results, but this approach was deemed unsuitable for the rationale discussed in section 3.8.

### **3.19 Methodology Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the research aim, question and objectives and discussed in detail the rationale behind the research methodology chosen for this study, and comprehensively justified its selection having dismissed alternative methods. Based on this rationale, the researcher elected a qualitative and inductive research approach, through the lens of an epistemology philosophy approach from an interpretivism perspective. In regards sampling, a non-probability approach with a purposive technique was deemed most appropriate. As discussed, a semi-structured interviews were considered to yield the best results after the questions were refined and organised into themes with the aid of the pilot interviews which could then be assessed through thematic analysis. Lastly ethics and GDPR were considered carefully throughout the study.

## **Chapter 4: Findings & Thematic Analysis**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the data collected from the six participants in the semi-structured interviews. Subsequently, through a thematic analysis, this will enable the researcher to explore the present themes, and analyse the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to answer the research question and fulfil the objectives, the researcher identified and organised the data into the themes discussed in this chapter.

### **4.1 Thematic Discussion & Analysis**

The researcher analysed the collected primary research data through thematic analysis. In chapter 2, the researcher identified dominant themes which presented themselves through reviewing literature. Having identified these themes, the researcher was able to organise the questions around each in order to answer the research question and meet the objectives outlined

in section 3.3. Mindful of these themes and objectives the researcher listened to the recorded interviews, took notes of answers, key information and any insights or opinions shared. This thematic analysis approach involved highlighting, coding, and organising the data into the following five key themes, which could then be analysed and compared with the insights obtained from the secondary research.

1. Challenges & Changes Due to Remote Working (4.2)
2. Leadership (4.3)
3. Communication (4.4)
4. Performance Management (4.5)
5. Key Performance Indicators (4.6)

## **4.2 Findings Theme 1: Changes & Challenges Due to Remote Working**

The researcher explored the various new changes and challenges experienced by RCs and management while working fully remotely throughout covid-19.

### **4.2.1 Individual Productivity**

In terms of individual productivity while working remotely the results were varied. Participants D and F found their productivity had increased greatly with F claiming that their “*productivity has probably increased by 100%*”. Both attributing this increase in productivity to less distractions, increased focus, better work life balance, as well as gaining “*two extra hours a day that would have been spent commuting to and from work otherwise*”.

Participant E felt initially their productivity had decreased as they “*were not used to working remotely, but after establishing a routine and improving the workstation, productivity increased probably to higher than what it was pre-covid-19*”. The reasoning for this is the same as D and F.

The remaining two interviewees A and B had a similar response when asked about their productivity while remote working. Participant A claimed that he “*tends to get distracted at home, feels isolated and as a result productivity has fallen*”, and B stated that he is “*extroverted and gets energy from other people, therefore productivity suffers when working remotely*”.

#### **4.2.2 Introverts and Extroverts Productivity**

Participants A and B both consider themselves to be extroverts and both experienced remote working fatigue and a significant drop in productivity.

Participants C and D are both introverts and felt far more productive working remotely, largely due to the lack of distractions.

Interestingly, Participants E and F who categorised themselves as extroverts noticed a significant increase in productivity due to remote working.

#### **4.2.3 Team Productivity**

Regarding team productivity, the responses were more one-sided with a noticeable, more recent increase in productivity. This is reflective in Participant A's statement that "*at the start productivity definitely dropped but this was reflective of the job market at the beginning of the pandemic. It has since bounced back and is now probably higher than it was pre-covid-19. However, it really depends on the individual, but overall a definite recent increase as people have adjusted to the new normal*".

Much more definitively, Participant F stated that "*team productivity has definitely increased due to the extra two hours not spent commuting and from having no distractions at home*" whereas Participant B argues that it is "*probably the same as it was pre-covid-19, maybe a little higher due to less distractions*".

#### **4.2.4 Hybrid Model**

All participants felt a hybrid working approach would result in the highest productivity, with A, C and G opting for 2 days of working remotely a week, and B, D and F electing a 3-day remote working week. This validating the researcher's hypothesis that there is a point of diminishing return associated with remote working that has been surpassed. Therefore, excessive remote working can lead to negative effects such as isolation, lack of communication and collaboration, as revealed in the primary research.

#### **4.2.5 Main Remote Working Challenges**

Participant F – “*Trust is a big issue when managing remotely. As there is a lack of visibility you have to really trust your team are doing the work*”

Participant C argued that this “*lack of visibility and increased reliance on trust was very unusual for the industry and came as a bit of a shock. As a result, KPIs were rolled out and relied on as a way of monitoring staff*”.

Having recently taken on 2 new starters, Participant A felt that “*Training new starters was very difficult. Mainly due to that you weren't sitting beside them, and any questions or problems had to be addressed over video call or messenger. This was very time consuming and caused a delay for those waiting for answers and created a need for scheduled daily check-in calls that wouldn't have been necessary if we weren't working remotely*”.

Feelings of isolation was also a common theme raised by all participants, some worse affected than others, which typically related to if they were introverted or extroverted. Participant E stated that she “*often felt isolated and as a result collaboration and productivity sometimes suffered*”.

Participant D believes that “*communication has become very formal. If you are not sure of something you will often just go with your gut feeling as if you call someone to ask you will likely be on the phone for twenty minutes*”.

Participant C argues that “*a strong culture typically leads to high performance and remote working has taken this away. As managers we have tried to mitigate this through organising team building sessions but this a quick and ineffective solution to quite a serious issue*”.

From Participant B’s experience: “*Culture or lack thereof is defiantly a major challenge when working remotely. It's difficult to keep RCs motivated and engaged, maintain strong performance and retain staff when culture is diminished. This coupled with strict KPIs can lead to low morale and high turnover*”.

#### **4.3 Findings Theme 2: Leadership**

The topic of leadership, and in particular remote leadership, was investigated in the primary and secondary research of this dissertation with the purpose of ascertaining the most and least

effective leadership style(s) and identify the most important leadership traits, as mentioned in section 3.3.

### **4.3.1 Most Important Leadership Traits**

The recurring traits which recruitment professionals felt were most important are as follows.

Participant A - “*my main goal and inspiration was to be a high performer like my manager. If he wasn't a high performer, he would have lacked the most important trait to be a leader in this industry and would probably lack the respect or buy-in of the team*”.

Participant B – “*A leader needs to have buy-in and respect, this respect can only really be gained through performance. If you weren't a successful recruiter, you would not only lack the knowledge but also the ability to inspire*”.

Participant C – “*leaders in recruitment need to be able teach, motivate, engage and inspire. They need to be a proven leader with excellent industry knowledge and be able to clearly communicate a common goal to the team*”.

Participant D – “*a good leader is supportive, approachable and has great communication skills. Keeping in touch is very important when working remotely*”.

Participant E – “*experienced and successful, leads by example and doesn't micromanage. These are the traits I look for most in a leader*”

Participant F argued that “*communication, honesty and leading by example*” are the most important leadership traits.

### **4.3.2 Leadership Styles**

All managers said they used a transformational leadership style as there were too many negative affects with a transactional leadership style.

Participant B concluded that “*transactional tends to lead to a purely money motivated environment and generally culture suffers greatly. It creates a toxic culture purely focussed on money.*”

This was reinforced by Participant C when stating that a “*Transactional approach is outdated and not fit for purpose. It generally leads to a high turnover rate and low employee satisfaction*”.

Participant A echoed this by arguing that “*the recruitment industry is transactional by nature so there is no benefit to adopting this approach. I would always opt for a transformational approach by which I would support, inspire and motivate my team to achieve goals and hit targets*”.

#### **4.3.3 The Role of a Remote Leader**

All participants felt the role of the leader has become more important while working remotely, as can be seen in the following statements which are representative of the sample group.

Participant A – “*The role of the leader has become more important than ever. A strong leader is needed to pull you through the hard times like at the beginning of the pandemic*”.

Participant C - “*The role of the leader has changed quite a bit, now it's all about motivating and keeping people engaged with work and the team. It's very important to have a strong central voice to coordinate and organise everything. Especially when working remotely*”.

Participant E – “*when working remotely it's easy to become narrow sighted and lose vision of where you're trying to get to. Discussing and setting goals with your leader is very important and helps you stay on track*”.

### **4.4 Findings Theme 3: Communication**

#### **4.4.1 Changes in Communication Due to Remote Working**

Primary and secondary research indicates that communication has changed drastically since the onset of the pandemic. Participant E – “*nearly all communication is now over video call or messenger*”. While some problems have arisen, thankfully due to advancing technology communication hasn't been hindered too much.

Participant A feels that communication hasn't necessarily suffered but more so that it's become more time-consuming by having to schedule timeslots to communicate – “*the nature of remote working has created a need for scheduled daily check-in calls that wouldn't have been necessary if we weren't working remotely*”. Participant D has a similar view in that

*“Communication has become more formal. Everything is scheduled and it delays the process and hinders performance somewhat. You need to call someone for a quick question, and it often turns into a twenty-minute chat. This can lead to a mindset of not bothering to ask for advice”.* This has resulted in less advice being given and received leading to increased autonomy and independence in RCs and management.

Based on the following quotations, communication while remote working has led to a lack of collaboration and innovation. Participant B makes the point that *“there is a lack of on the desk information sharing and communication between teams, collaboration has definitely suffered as a result”*. According to Participant A *“this is particularly damaging for new starters who, in normal times, would learn from listening to a replicating more experienced consultant”*.

#### **4.4.2 Optimum Amount of Team Calls**

All Participants felt 2 or 3 team calls a week was best however, Participant F made the point that this *“depends on how experienced your team are and if they are introverts or extroverts. An experienced team made up of introverts for example would require fewer team calls a week”*.

Participant F went on to stress the importance of *“casual, one-on-one catchup calls”* as an opportunity to offer support and gain insight. The rationale for was that *“team calls are a great way of checking in on everyone and getting an update on who’s working on what, but if someone has a problem with something that is hindering their performance, they tend not to voice this in a team call”*.

### **4.5 Findings Theme 4: Performance Management**

#### **4.5.1 Micromanagement**

None of the managers felt they ever micromanaged, nor did any of the RCs feel they are, or have been micromanaged. Furthermore, all participants felt a very hands-on micromanaging approach isn’t suitable for the sector.

Participant B explained the rationale behind this as – *“While it’s important to give consultants the attention and support they need, I would never micro-manage. It’s important that they have autonomy and are able to stand on their own two feet especially when working remotely”*.

Participant E – “*experienced and successful, leads by example and doesn't micromanage. These are the traits I look for most in a leader*”

#### **4.5.2 Learning Goal Orientated (LGO) Vs Performance Goal Orientated (PGO)**

Five of the six participants felt they are more performance goal orientated than learning goal orientated.

The one remaining participant (B) claimed that “*at the beginning of his career as a recruiter he was very much performance goal orientated, but over the years this has shifted to a learning goal orientation and feeding my teams success rather than my own*”.

#### **Changes in Management Style Made Due to Remote Working**

Participant F – “*Pre-Covid-19 I was pretty hands on but never micromanaged. At the beginning of remote working, I was initially more hands-on, but this wasn't working. I have had to change to a more trusting, supportive and hands-off approach, which is far more effective*”.

This is supported by Participant B – “*I started very hands-on, expecting everyone to work in a similar way as myself. I quickly realised everyone has their own way of doing things, so I shifted to a more relaxed approach. Knowing how much autonomy to give to people is key. Trust and autonomy are very important, especially when working remotely*”.

Here are two insights from two different manager who had a similar reaction to being thrown into remote working and the uncertainty of this new way of working.

Participant C who always had a relaxed management style, “*had to adapt to managing remotely by shifting all focus to setting standards, supporting and keeping RCs motivated and engaged with both the team and their work*”.

In summary, there has been a noticeable increase of importance on trust, autonomy, support, as well as keeping RCs engaged and motivated, since shifting to remote working.

## **4.6 Findings Theme 5: Key Performance Indicators**

### **4.6.1 Opinion of KPIs in Recruitment**

Participant D argues that “*KPIs are a necessary evil so to speak. Nobody particularly likes sticking to them, or enforcing them, but when agreed upon and implemented well, they can serve to be a powerful motivator and a reliable measure of output*”. However, as mentioned by Participant C, “*it’s often very difficult to get them (KPIs) right, and it’s a fine balancing act between being too overbearing or too lenient*”. Thus, here in lies the challenge.

Participant F argues that when it comes to KPIs “*organisations have to have a blanket approach. Imposing KPIs on some consultants but not all would lead to conflict. In a perfect world they should be reserved for junior recruiters and those who aren’t performing but this is too difficult to implement*”.

All participants agreed that, from their experience, while there is some correlation between KPIs and high performance, those with the highest KPIs are often not those with the highest sales figures. Furthermore, all participants except for C, felt if KPI’s were abandoned productivity and performance would stay the same.

Participant E – “*There is an overreliance on KPIs for the purpose monitoring output. This tends to lead to a focus on quantity over quality so as to reach activity targets. KPIs should be avoided for senior and proven recruiters as they are mainly act as a distraction from the important goals such as making placements*”.

### **4.6.2 Benefits of KPIs**

Participant A - “*KPIs are an essential metric used by management and directors to monitor the company’s performance, market trends and enables them to adapt accordingly*”.

From a learning and development perspective, Participant C argues that “*KPIs are an important tracker of activity. Partially for assessing performance of new consultants. If a new consultant has a poor CV send to interview ratio this means that the CVs sent are of poor quality or that they don’t understand the requirement*”. This is backed by Participant E’s statement that “*KPIs allow you to see where you’re going wrong. For example, securing lots of interviews but no placements might mean there is something going wrong that needs to be addressed. This info allows you to adapt and improve*”.

Participant F - “*KPIs can act as a type of safety net. If you don’t make any placements for a period of time but you are putting in the work and logging your activity, this can be excused, but if you aren’t putting in the work or logging your activity your job might be at risk*”

Participant B – “*logging KPIs allows the company to see what you are doing and justifies your salary. It’s also key in capturing important market data and sharing it with the company*”.

#### **4.6.3 Disadvantages of KPIs**

Participant A asserts that “*we’re not here to log KPIs, we’re here to make placements*”. Participant D made a similar point that “*consultants can become too focussed on reaching set KPIs and lose sight of important thing, making placements!*”

Participant F – “*Introducing KPIs to people who aren’t used to them can be difficult and damaging if not done carefully*”. This is reinforced by Participants C’s point that “*KPIs can be harmful if not implemented and managed well. There needs to be a strong reasoning for them, and this message needs to be communicated clearly to avoid pushback*”. Furthermore, Participant B found that “*culture suffers if KPIs implemented are too strict which can lead to reduced performance and as a result, a high turnover rate*”.

#### **4.6.4 Most Effective KPIs**

Participant A expressed that “*we should only be considering our CV send to interview to placement ratio. Tracking other metrics such as call time or just CV sends on its own typically leads to a quantity over quality attitude which can be damaging to both the company and recruiter’s reputation*”.

Participant F argues against this - “*this doesn’t lead to quantity over quality or harmful activity just to achieve set KPIs. People will just falsify when logging activity rather than actually doing it. However, this is time which should be spent actually working*”. Furthermore, Participant F states that by only considering a CV send, to interview, to placement ratio this is “*really only suitable for a reactive recruiter who has all their roles given to them*” and that it “*completely ignoring the consultants role of business development*”.

Participant D touches on both Participants A and F's comments when asserting that "*we should just be focussing on a CV send, to interview, to placement ratio. This cuts out all the noise, but it is limited in that it neglects to measure a RCs ability to win new business and being self-sufficient*"

Participant B proposes a slightly different approach when stating that "*by letting RCs set their own KPIs themselves there is no argument if they don't achieve them. This tends to stop RCs from fake logging, calling and sending CVs, just for the sake of reaching the KPIs imposed on them*".

## **4.7 Conclusion**

Chapter four has presented and discussed the findings gathered from the participants who took part in the qualitative semi-structured interviews, with the purpose of achieving the research objectives discussed in section 3.3, and answering the research question outlined in section 3.2.

The data collected was analysed and coded through thematic analysis, and by doing so the five main themes discussed in this chapter presented themselves.

# **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

## **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the researcher intends to uncover the answer to the research question of "*what is the best practice approach to leading and managing the performance of remote working recruitment consultants?*". The findings of the primary and secondary research conducted are integrated and discussed in detail in this chapter with the purpose of answering the research questions and achieving the research objectives outlined in section 3.3.

## **5.2 Discussion Theme 1: Challenges & Changes Due to Remote Working**

### **5.2.1 Individual Productivity**

In regard to individual productivity and the effects on which remote working has had, by referring back to section 2.2 it is evident that the findings gathered from the primary research support McCarthy et al.'s (2020) report stating that an increase in productivity is ultimately circumstantial, and dependant on a variety of factors. The findings were contradictory to, and

not as clear-cut as Bloom et al.'s (2015) report of a 13% increase in productivity, as most participants experienced a much greater increase in productivity either immediately or overtime, or in contrast, a decrease in productivity as a result of their extroverted nature, work environment or childcare duties. This supports CIPD's (2020) report and Maguire's (2019) findings, that physical workspace and childcare duties can negatively impact productivity.

McCarthy et al.'s (2020) report states that 37% of those working remotely felt their productivity was the same, 30% felt productivity was higher, and 25% said productivity was lower than normal. Factoring in the contrasting sample sizes, the findings from the primary research in this study are in line with McCarthy et al.'s (2020) findings.

In summary, those remote workers who are introverted, with no child-minding responsibilities and a good workstation setup have the optimum mix of factors and therefore enjoyed moderate to a 100% increase in productivity. This is exemplified by Participant F claiming their "*productivity has probably increased by 100%*"

In contrast, those who are extroverted, have childcare duties, and a poor workstation environment have the worst combination of factors and thus, experienced significantly reduced levels of productivity. This can be seen in Participant A who is extroverted, has childcare duties and "*tends to get distracted at home, feels isolated and as a result productivity has fallen*".

### **5.2.2 Introverts and Extroverts Productivity**

Referring back to the research conducted by Jarrett (2020) and Kahnweiler (2018) which indicates that introverts tend to perform better than extroverts while working remotely, the findings gathered from the primary research in this dissertation both strengthen and contradict this theory.

Supportive of Jarrett (2020) and Kahnweiler's (2018) findings, Participants A and B are both extroverts and both experienced remote working fatigue and a significant drop in productivity. Participants C and D are both introverts and felt far more productive at home, largely due to the lack of distractions.

However, contrary to this theory Participants E and F categorised themselves as extroverted and noticed a significant increase in productivity due to remote working.

Therefore, it can be argued that there is no direct correlation between remote working productivity and an individual's psyche. While there are other contributory factors at play that would also have to be considered, childcare duties and workstation set up for example, it's fair to say that there is a strong link, but an increase in productivity is not necessarily contingent on whether the individual is introverted or extroverted.

### **5.2.3 Team Productivity**

Regarding team productivity the responses were more one-sided with a noticeable, and more recent increase in productivity. This is reflective in Participant A's statement that "*at the start productivity defiantly dropped but this was reflective of the job market at the beginning of the pandemic. It has since bounced back and is now probably higher than it was pre-covid-19. However, it really depends on the individual, but overall a definite recent increase as people have adjusted to the new normal*".

Much more definitively, Participant F stated that "*team productivity has definitely increased due to the extra two hours not spent commuting and from having no distractions at home*" whereas Participant B argues that it is "*probably the same as it was pre-covid-19, maybe a little higher due to less distractions*".

In CIPDs (2021) recent report there was a considerable difference in productivity between companies whose managers were given training in managing remote workers, and those organisations that hadn't. In companies that offered training 43% noticed an increase in productivity compared to 29% of those in companies that hadn't (CIPD, 2021). None of the participants interviewed, nor their peers, received any training on how to manage remotely and essentially learned through a process of trial and error. This was certainly a factor which, alongside the unfavourable market conditions, would explain the initial decrease in team or overall productivity. Based on CIPD's (2021) findings mentioned, this initial decrease in productivity could and would have been mitigated had the managers been given the appropriate training, and not left to "*relearn how to manage*" as Participant C claimed.

### **5.2.4 Hybrid Model**

All participants felt a hybrid working approach would result in the highest productivity, with A, C and G opting for 2 days of working remotely a week, and B, D and F electing a 3-day

remote working week. This validating the researcher's hypothesis that there is a point of diminishing return associated with remote working that has been surpassed. Therefore, excessive remote working can lead to negative effects such as isolation, lack of communication and collaboration, as revealed in the primary research.

### **5.2.5 Main Remote Working Challenges**

As discussed in section 2.3, there are several remote working challenges faced by managers which Eikenberry and Turmel (p. 18, 2018) listed as:

1. Effectiveness of leadership when working remotely (58% answered),
2. Uncertainty around sufficient and reliable feedback (52% answered),
3. Social interaction, or lack thereof (46% answered),
4. Being able to effectively monitor staff (28% answered).

PWC (2020), McKinsey (Park et al., 2020) and CIPD (McCarthy et al, 2020) further added to this list claiming the most prominent challenges that remote workers face today include lack of direction, employee engagement, motivation, morale, training and development, culture, reduced communications efficiency, increased stress, and the feeling of isolation. Primary research was conducted to test whether these challenges are reflective of those faced in the recruitment sector and if there were any unique or differing challenges present. The results are ranked in order of most common (1) to least (5) and are as follows:

#### **(1) Trust and Lack of Visibility**

Regarding new challenges faced by management 'trust and lack of visibility' was the most prominent theme revealed in the primary research and was raised by all management level participants. In contrast, this challenge listed as 'being able to effectively monitor staff' was ranked as the 4<sup>th</sup>, or least prominent challenge in a generalised study conducted by Eikenberry and Turmel (2018), whereas in the recruitment sector this is arguably the most apparent challenge. As discussed in section 2.1, this can be explained as: recruitment as an industry, typically relied on its employees to be present and accounted for. Like many sales-orientated roles, management created and enforced a culture of 'bums on seats' and 'phones to ears' which

demands the physical presence of its employees. Therefore, this was a dramatic change to the norm and forced managers to trust their team more as they worked remotely. As discussed in section 4.6, KPIs were heavily relied on to compensate for this lack of visibility. Participant F argued that this “*lack of visibility and increased reliance on trust was very unusual for the industry and came as a bit of a shock. As a result, KPIs were rolled out and relied on as a way of monitoring staff*”. These findings support Cooke (2019) conclusions that management must sacrifice the control over employees made possible through a physical presence, empower them through delegation, and trust them to get the job done.

## **(2) Culture**

Culture inevitably suffers as a result of remote working. As evident in the findings of the primary (section 4.2.5) and secondary research conducted in this study, culture, or lack thereof, is defiantly a major challenge when working remotely. The importance of strong culture in the recruitment industry is apparent in Participant C’s statement that “*a strong culture typically leads to high performance and remote working has taken this away*”. A lack of culture due to remote working has led to some RC’s becoming disengaged, underperforming, and quitting their role. In support of Participant B’s statement that “*culture suffers if KPIs implemented are too strict which can lead to reduced performance and as a result, a high turnover rate*”, the effects of this lack of culture were exacerbated by the industry wide rollout of, and reliance on, KPIs. From first-hand experience the researcher witnessed a noticeable drop in engagement and performance, which resulted in a very high turnover of close to 50% since the onset of the pandemic and remote working. This was a direct result of enforcing a strict adherence to KPIs coupled with lack of culture, and therefore validating Participant B’s statement.

## **(3) Training New Staff**

Participants A & B expressed that training new starters has become far more difficult and time consuming. Traditionally, junior RCs would benefit from on-the-job learning, listening and observing more experienced RCs. Remote working has eradicated this important L&D opportunity.

#### **(4) Communication Inefficiency**

As voiced by Participant A and D, communication has become very formal and inefficient. Remote working has created a need for video call meetings to discuss issues that would have been discussed casually in the office. Furthermore, RCs may rely on their instinct, rather than having to engage in a lengthy conversation for advice.

The subject of communication and the relevant findings from this study are discussed further and in detail in section 5.4.

#### **(5) Feelings of Isolation**

All participants inevitably encountered feelings of isolation, as is the norm when working remotely through a pandemic, however some participants relished the peace and quiet while working remotely and were less phased by feelings of isolation. These were typically, but not exclusively, the participants who considered themselves as introverts.

### **5.3 Discussion Theme 2: Leadership**

The topic of leadership, and in particular remote leadership, was investigated in the primary and secondary research of this dissertation with the purpose of ascertaining the most and least effective leadership style(s) and identify the most important leadership traits, as mentioned in section 3.3.

#### **5.3.1 Most Important Leadership Traits**

Through asking exploratory, open-ended questions and using thematic analysis, the researcher uncovered some of the most important traits of a leader. In summary, for a leader to succeed in the recruitment sector they must be a proven, successful, experienced, and approachable leader with excellent communication skills.

All participants said the most important trait for a recruitment leader is that they were, or still are, a successful, high performing RC. If this status wasn't achieved, they would not only lack the knowledge required to be a successful manager but also lack the ability to motivate and inspire. Thus, forcing them to rely heavily on a transactional leadership approach and try

managing the associated flaws that accompany this strategy. This is exemplified by Participant 3 when stating that “*my main goal and inspiration was to be a high performer like my manager. If he wasn't a high performer, he would have lacked the most important trait to be a leader in this industry and would probably lack the respect or buy-in of the team*”. Other important leadership traits which were a common theme among the participants answers included honest, supportive, and a good communicator that leads by example. Participant C believes that he has had to adapt his role as a leader by becoming more supportive by placing a greater emphasis on communication and checking in with RCs more often.

### **5.3.2 Leadership Styles**

The two main leadership styles in the sales industry proposed as by Domingues et al. (2017) were investigated further in the primary research. In line with Eisenbeij and Boerner (2013) and Howell's (1988) view that TFL approach can lead to an increased dependency and an over reliance on the leader for support and guidance, all managers agreed that a mix of both TAL and TFL is needed as an overreliance on TAL approach would lead to a “very macho, sales focussed and unpleasant environment with a high staff turnover”.

## **5.4 Discussion Theme 3: Communication**

### **5.4.1 Changes in Communication Due to Remote Working**

The findings from the primary (section 4.4) and secondary (section 2.4) research confirm that communication has significantly changed since remote working has become the new norm. As evident in section 4.4, this new formal, structured and inefficient style of communication has resulted in a lack of collaboration and innovation. This is supported by Participant B opinion that “*there is a lack of on the desk information sharing and communication between teams, collaboration has definitely suffered as a result*”. This lack of collaboration and innovation and can also be witnessed in Yahoo's case study discussed in section 2.4., adding to the considerable evidence that remote working does in fact hinder collaboration and innovation, especially when an effective communication plan is not implemented. From this research, it is apparent that a clear and well thought out communication plan is crucial in maintaining high levels of morale, collaboration and engagement. This is further validated by McCarthy et al (2020) and Smith et al (2018) who maintain that the optimal amount of communication makes

employees feel connected, energised, motivated and part of a team, which in turn feeds into the culture and improves retention and morale.

#### **5.4.2 Optimum Amount of Team Calls**

As expressed by McCarthy et al (2020) and Smith et al (2018), the optimal amount of communication makes employees feel connected, energised, motivated and part of a team, which in turn feeds into the culture and improves retention and morale. However, management must strive for the optimal balance, as excessive communication can result in increased stress, pressure, and a decline in performance. Through semi-structured interviews the researcher sought to find this ‘optimal balance’.

The participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews all felt that two or three team calls a week was the perfect amount of interaction. However, Participant F made the point that this “*depends on how experienced your team are and if they are introverts or extroverts. An experienced team made up of introverts for example would require fewer team calls a week*”.

From studying the data gathered it became clear that, other than scheduling weekly team check-in calls, there was very little in the way of a communication plan. This would likely have been covered in remote working training, had it taken place. Participant F noticed the importance of “*casual, one-on-one catch-up calls*” as an opportunity to offer support and gain insight. Emphasising the casual nature, Participant F was cognisant of, and in agreement with, McCarthy et al (2020) and Smith et al’s (2018) opinion that; it is important that check in calls are not perceived as micromanagement, but rather friendly two-way conversations, as this would likely exacerbate the situation if not made clear. Adding to this, Participant F expressed that “*team calls are a great way of checking in on everyone and getting an update on who’s working on what, but if someone has a problem with something that is hindering their performance, they tend not to voice this in a team call*”.

While some problems have arisen due to remote working, thankfully due to advancing technology communication hasn’t been impeded too much. Participant A supports this theory and feels that communication hasn’t necessarily suffered but more so that it’s become more time-consuming by having to schedule timeslots to communicate – “*the nature of remote working has created a need for scheduled daily check-in calls that wouldn’t have been necessary if we weren’t working remotely*”. Participant D believes that “*communication has*

*become very formal. If you are not sure of something you will often just go with your gut feeling as if you call someone to ask you will likely be on the phone for twenty minutes*”. This shows that communication is still ongoing, but rather has become more time-consuming and formal.

In summary, the findings outlined in section 4.4 show that communication while working remotely is formal, time-consuming, occasionally leads to delays and hinders the development of junior consultants. Based on this information, in an industry which is heavily reliant on communication, the importance of establishing, implementing, and maintaining an effective communication plan is crucial to avoid a lack of performance due to a breakdown in collaboration and innovation.

## **5.5 Discussion Theme 4: Performance Management**

### **5.5.1 Micromanagement**

All accounts from the primary (4.5.1) research reveal that micromanagement is ineffective and damaging to both relationships and performance. It was clear that none of the participants felt they ever micromanaged, nor did any of the RC's feel have been micromanaged. However, this is not to say this management style is absent from them industry, the researcher has witnessed this first-hand and its damaging effects. Furthermore, Participant E argues that “*an experienced and successful leader, leads by example and doesn't micromanage*”.

In summary, all participants believe micromanagement isn't suitable for the sector and it's negative effects are exacerbated further by remote working. Therefore, there is ample evidence to advise that this practice should be avoided in the recruitment sector whenever possible, and especially while remote working.

### **5.5.2 Learning Goal Orientated (LGO) Vs Performance Goal Orientated (PGO)**

All participants except for B stated they are definitely more PGO than LGO. This validated the researcher's opinion that the industry is dominated by PGO individuals as is the nature of a sales orientated environment with a focus on performance outcomes and achieving targets. With this in mind, perhaps encouraging and incentivising RCs to be more LGO would improve performance. This is an area that warrants further research.

Referring again to Eikenberry and Turmel (2018) who state that the better understanding a manager has of the psychology of their team, the more successful they will be as a manager and increasing team performance. Evidently, praise and recognition are highly valued among RCs and should be awarded whenever appropriate.

## **5.6 Discussion Theme 5: Key Performance Indicators**

### **5.6.1 Opinion of KPIs in Recruitment**

The findings from the primary (4.6.1) and secondary (2.7) research are very much in line with and supported by Babb's (2015) and Zaripov, et al's (2021) reports. In summary, KPIs are generally disliked and are component to conflict and high turnover. The participants and Babb (2015) are in agreement that numbers are a key tool used by an organisation in the measurement of performance and in driving results. However, establishing and implementing KPIs effectively is time consuming and difficult to get right. Often KPIs are arbitrary and can fail to capture any of the complexities of an individual's market or capability. To implement KPIs effectively and realise their benefits, firstly smart KPIs must be established, they then can be agreed upon, and ensured that they encourage activity that compliments the individual and teams' main goals. This is often achieved through a lengthy and cumbersome process of trial and error. Evidently, attaining buy-in from RCs and fostering good intentions is far more effective strategy than KPIs.

While all participants agree there is no direct correlation between high KPIs and high revenue, they do however agree that they serve a purpose and can be effective when implemented correctly.

However, KPIs are exceedingly difficult to get right. Firstly, smart KPIs must be established, so that they can be agreed upon, ensure they encourage activity that compliments the individual and teams' main goals, only then can they be implemented effectively.

### **5.6.2 Benefits of KPIs**

Referring back to Lublin's (1994) assertion that, a robust approach towards evaluating a salespersons performance is one of the most important aspects of the sales management process. KPIs can be a powerful tool in this regard, and carry many advantages for both the

user and the organisation employing them, but only when they are implemented effectively. As evident in the findings of the primary (4.6.2) and secondary research (2.7) KPIs serve as “*an essential metric used by management and directors to monitor the company’s performance, market trends and enables them to adapt accordingly*”.

From a learning and development perspective, KPIs can also act as an indicator of where a RC is going wrong. For example, “*a poor CV send to interview ratio this means that the CVs sent are of poor quality or that they don’t understand the requirement*”.

As well as being an important reference point for the companies’ employees and management to track engagement with clients and candidates, KPIs also offer a ‘safety net’ for those RCs who are putting in the work but not getting the desired outcomes. This may be a result of a variety of reasons including bad luck or unfavourable market conditions for their specific market. Thus, KPIs may support a RCs case if in risk of losing their role due to lack of performance. This is summarised by Participant B when stating that “*logging KPIs allows the company to see what you are doing and justifies your salary. It’s also key in capturing important market data and sharing it with the company*”. Hope and Player (2012) also share this opinion in that KPI’s enable managers to continuously learn and improve, react to arising issues quickly and take corrective action, as well as measure progress toward set goals.

### **5.6.3 Disadvantages of KPIs**

KPIs also have many disadvantages. From the findings discussed in section 4.6.3, the most common answer was that KPIs can distract RCs from the important goal, making placements. The findings were supportive of Hope and Player’s (2012) argument that; when the focus is shifted toward making the highest number of sales, rather than setting a KPI target which becomes the primary focus, the measurement of progress, and the management attention is shifted toward achieving the important results. This is demonstrated in Participant A’s assertion that “*we’re not here to log KPIs, we’re here to make placements*” and Participant D’s similar point that “*consultants can become too focussed on reaching set KPIs and lose sight of important thing, making placements!*”.

Evident in the quotations seen in section 4.6.3, KPIs are very difficult to implement and enforce effectively. They are often met with resistance, especially from those who aren’t familiar with them. To avoid pushback, there needs to be strong reasoning for them, and this message needs

to be communicated clearly. A lack of culture coupled with a rollout of strict KPIs without clear justification will very likely have negative consequences, such as diminished performance, withdrawal, and high turnover.

Participant J stressed the importance that an ‘all or nothing’, blanket approach is needed with KPIs, otherwise they are too difficult to implement, and can lead to conflict and accusations of favouritism if one RC isn’t required to follow them. He went on to state that “*in a perfect world KPIs would be reserved for junior RCs or under-performers, but this inevitably leads to conflict*”.

#### 5.6.4 Most Effective KPIs

In regard to finding the most effective KPIs, or at least improving upon current KPIs, there were a variety of opinions and recommendations gathered from the primary (4.6.4) and secondary research (2.7). Hope and Player (2012) argue that for a KPI to be effective they must be derived from the purpose, and in line with the strategy, of the team. This was proven to be true in the primary research as if KPIs failed to meet these criteria, they were considered to be a distraction. However, it’s ultimately a tailored approach for each RC depending on a number of factors, such as their role, responsibilities, market etc.

Participants A and D expressed an interest in only “*focussing on a CV send, to interview, to placement ratio*”. To eliminate distractions, false activity recording and a harmful ‘quantity over quality’ attitude. However, Participant F states that this approach is “*really only suitable for a reactive RC who has all their roles given to them*” and that it “*completely ignores the consultants role of business development*”. In agreement Participant D expressed that “*this method cuts out all the noise, but it is limited in that it neglects to measure a RCs ability to win new business and being self-sufficient*”. Therefore, this approach is flawed and only applicable to a RC that isn’t expected to win business.

Participant B proposed a solution, by allowing RCs to set their own KPIs, this creates accountability and eliminates pushback and harmful practices. This offered a solution to a contentious issue which management found themselves in and was a reasonable compromise to difficult dilemma. According to Participant B, this is a tried and proven approach that yields great results with minimal negative consequences, outlined in section 5.6.3.

## **5.7 Summary of the Findings**

### **5.7.1 Challenges & Changes Due to Remote Working**

There has been a noticeable yet varied increase in overall team and individual productivity, however, some participants took some time to adjust, and others had to adopt a hybrid approach to achieve the same or a higher level of productivity.

There is no direct correlation between remote working productivity and an individual's psyche. While there are other factors at play that have to be considered, from the findings it can be argued that there is a strong link, but an increase in productivity is not necessarily contingent on whether the individual is introverted or extroverted.

A two-to-three-day work week in the office, or working remotely, is believed to be the optimum balance.

In order of prominence, the main remote working challenges are:

1. Trust and Lack of Visibility
2. Culture
3. Training New Staff
4. Communication Inefficiency
5. Feelings of Isolation

### **5.7.2 Leadership**

For a leader to succeed in the recruitment sector they must be a supportive, experienced and approachable, honest leader with excellent communication skills, and most importantly a proven high performer.

A TFL style is far more effective than a TAL approach in the recruitment industry. TAL results in an unpleasant, money driven culture with a high turnover.

### **5.7.3 Communication**

A clearly defined communication plan is very important. The absence of which further exacerbates the negative effects of remote working, such as lack of culture, engagement, collaboration, and high turnover.

#### **5.7.4 Performance Management**

Micromanagement is not suitable for the sector and it's negative effects are exacerbated further by remote working.

The industry is dominated by RCs who are PGO. They crave recognition and praise.

#### **5.7.5 KPIs**

KPIs carry advantages and disadvantages and effective KPIs are very difficult to achieve. The key is to ensure KPIs are agreed upon and are in line with the individual or team purpose of making placements, rather than being a distraction. As proposed by Participant B, allowing RCs to set their own KPIs is an effective solution. Based on the research and the researchers own experience, in a commission-based role such as recruitment it is in the RCs interests, financially, to continually push themselves, work efficiently and intelligently, to hit self-appointed and/or imposed targets, and ultimately achieve their sales goals through placements. Therefore, if a recruiter is financially driven, which most are, these severely limits the need for and the effectiveness of KPIs. As Babb (2015) asserts Attaining buy-in from RCs and fostering good intentions will always supersede imposed KPIs.

### **5.8 Limitations of the Study**

Throughout this dissertation a number of limitations became apparent. Firstly, as interviews had to be conducted over video call it was more difficult to pick up on body language, which is sometimes key revealing what isn't being said and underlying emotions.

Time also played a factor regarding limitations as the interviews were time consuming and required participants full attention for circa thirty minutes which was challenging to fit into their and the researchers busy work schedule. It was time consuming to listen back to, and take notes on each interview conducted however, this was deemed the best approach as taking notes during the interview was too distracting for both parties.

Another limitation was the lack of literature available on the recruitment sector. The researcher had to rely on generalised studies or literature on similar industries, such as the sales industry, which again can be quite broad.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

This chapter comprehensively reviewed, integrated, discussed and summarised the findings from both the primary and secondary research conducted.

# **Chapter 6 – Recommendations & Conclusion**

## **6.1 Further Research Recommendations**

In the interest of conciseness and to keep a focus on performance management and leadership, learning and development (L&D) has been purposefully excluded from this dissertation. This research paper was written on the premise that the remote working RCs were skilled and trained enough to work remotely, independently and without needing guidance and support to go about their day-to-day assignments. From this exclusion of L&D, the researcher and reader can benefit from a greater depth in the fields of remote leadership and performance management. Therefore, the subject of L&D, and how remote working has impacted L&D is an area that merits further research. Furthermore, practical L&D initiatives for an industry dominated by PGO individuals, to encourage a more LGO approach, is an additional area that warrants further research.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Justified by findings from primary research and literature review the researcher has developed some recommendations for each of the five themes.

### **Recommendations Theme 1: Challenges & Changes Due to Remote Working**

Everyone is different and their productivity varies depending on a variety of factors. Therefore, trust RCs to know what works best for them and give them the freedom to choose when to work remotely is very important.

## **Recommendations Theme 2: Leadership**

Utilise a transformational, ‘lead by example’ leadership approach. RCs tend to respond best to this strategy by trying to replicate their leaders’ actions in a competitive manner. Avoid a transactional leadership approach.

## **Recommendations Theme 3: Communication**

Establish and agree upon a communications plan that both ensures engagement and collaboration, and prevents a lack of culture, high turnover, and reduced performance. This depends on the experience level of the team, the optimum amount recommended by the participants who are experienced was two or three weekly check-in-calls, supplemented by the occasional ‘one-to-one casual check-in call’.

## **Recommendations Theme 4: Performance Management**

Trust, motivate and support RCs to do their job. Never micromanage. It’s not suitable for the sector and its negative effects are exacerbated further by remote working.

The industry is dominated by RCs who are PGO, award them with recognition and praise whenever deserved. As RCs are naturally PGO, an emphasis on LGO should be encouraged to improve L&D and performance. This initiative should be as specific as possible to each RC and should focus on improving upon each individuals’ weaknesses which are impeding their performance.

## **Recommendations Theme 5: Key Performance Indicators**

To avoid conflict KPIs must be a blanket approach to performance management. The researcher recommends sitting down with RCs individually and allowing them to set their own KPIs. This creates accountability and eliminates pushback. These should be ambitious yet realistic, and always aligned with achieving placements and never acting as a distraction.

An emphasis on CV to interview to placement ratios promotes high quality work and should be regarded as a key performance metric, with the caveat that it ignores business development activity.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

The purpose of this research dissertation was to investigate remote working in the recruitment industry and identify how management can adapt and find the best practice approach to leading and managing the performance of remote working RCs.

As discussed in sections 1.0 and 2.1, the recruitment industry has witnessed a particularly unprecedented rate of change since the onset of the pandemic, which has forced management to adapt to a new environment of remote working, and all the challenges that come with it. The justification and purpose of this study was to essentially help those in the recruitment sector adapt to these changes and succeed.

To take a holistic view of remote performance management and leadership the researcher examined literature in the areas of remote working, performance management, leadership, KPIs, communication and productivity. After identifying gaps in the literature, the researcher was able to make some contributions by identifying new factors for consideration, as well as uncovering recruitment industry specific insights in the mentioned areas. As there was a lack of information available specific to the recruitment sector, the researcher studied non industry specific data and, if possible, sales industry data due to the many similarities.

These new insights were obtained and tested through qualitative research, in which the researcher questioned six senior recruitment professionals in semi-structured interviews and recorded their answers. This data was then compared with the findings from the secondary research and analysed using thematic analysis through which the findings were divided into five main themes; 1. Challenges & Changes Due to Remote Working (4.2), 2. Leadership (4.3), 3. Communication (4.4), 4. Performance Management (4.5) and 5. Key Performance Indicators (4.6).

Three major findings from this study include:

For a leader to succeed in the recruitment sector they must be a proven high performer and successful RC in their own right. Therefore, someone entering from another industry would struggle to obtain buy-in and lead effectively.

The absence of a clearly defined communication plan greatly exacerbates the negative effects of remote working in the recruitment sector, such as lack of culture, engagement, collaboration, and high turnover.

A hybrid approach of two-to-three-days remote working a week, yields the best results. Once this is exceeded the negative effects associated with remote working become more increasingly prevalent.

In conclusion, it is evident from the findings that remote working can offer many benefits when done in moderation, and with the right practices in place. On the other hand, if mismanaged or performed too often the findings display the many negative effects that the practice can bring. Remote working is here to stay, organisations and management must embrace it and adapt to it, in order to remain competitive.

## **Appendix**

### **1.0 Consent Form**

A Qualitative Investigation into Remote Working in the Recruitment Industry and How Management Must Adapt to Effectively Manage and Improve the Performance of Remote Working Recruitment Consultants.

I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves discussing turnover in the recruitment industry.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio/video recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the final dissertation as part of this study.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio/video recordings will be retained in a secured manner by the researcher until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact Ross Davitt to seek further clarification and information.

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Signature of participant

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Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

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Signature of researcher

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Date

## **2.1 Questions for Recruitment Consultants**

This chapter lists the questions asked to RCs, managers and directors who were questioned on their opinion from what they have experienced first and in the recruitment sector in the context of a fully remote working workforce due to Covid-19.

### **Changes Due to Remote Working Observed**

1. How has remote working effected your productivity? & Why?
2. What new challenges do you face while working remotely?
3. How have you tried to overcome these new challenges?
4. Does fulltime remote working lead to issues you wouldn't have if you were remote working part-time? If so, what are they?
5. What is the optimum remote and office working balance per week?
6. Are you introverted or extraverted? And how does this affect your productivity while remote working?

### **Leadership**

1. In the context of your current role what are the most important traits of a good leader? (what do you look for most in your leader/manager?)
2. Has this changed since working remotely?
3. Has the role of the leader become less or more important since fulltime remote working?

### **Communication**

1. How has communication changed since working remotely?
2. In your opinion, what is the optimum amount of team or manager calls a week?
3. Have problems arisen due to a breakdown or lack of communication? If so, what were they?
4. Has there been a lack of innovation or collaboration since fulltime remote working?

### **Performance Management & Measurement**

4. How would you describe your managers management style?
5. Has it changed since working remotely?
6. What (in your opinion) is the best way to manage you and your performance while working remotely?
7. Do you feel you are being micromanaged more, or at all, now while working remotely?
8. Do you place a greater emphasis on: (A) performance outcomes and demonstrating your skills to peers/managers OR (B) improving your abilities, learning new skills and how to be better in your role?
9. Is it your managers (or general organisations) approach to manage your performance and motivate you through: (A) providing rewards for good performance or (B) setting goals, and appealing to your values and aspirations to keep you motivated?

- When sitting down with your manager, do you find it more beneficial to review past performance or plan for the future? Why?

## KPIs

- What is your opinion on KPIs in the recruitment sector?
- Do you find KPI's beneficial? Why?
- Do you find KPI's harmful? Why?
- What is the most accurate and effective KPI in measuring your output, effort and overall performance?
- In your opinion, would your performance (A) increase, (B) decrease or (C) stay the same, if you didn't have KPI's?

## **2.2 Questions for Recruitment Management**

### **Changes Due to Remote Working Observed**

- How has working from home effected your productivity? & Why?
- Do you feel your productivity has (A) increased, (B) decreased or (C) stayed the same since remote working?
- What new challenges do you face while working and managing remotely?
- How have you tried to overcome these new challenges?
- How has working from home effected your team's productivity? & Why?
- Do you feel team productivity has (A) increased, (B) decreased or (C) stayed the same since remote working fulltime?
- Are you introverted or extraverted? And how does this affect your productivity while remote working?
- Would their productivity be higher if they were working only part time remotely?

### **Leadership**

- In the context of your current role what are the most important traits of a good leader? (what do you look for most in your leader/manager?)
- Has this changed since working remotely?
- Has the role of the leader become less or more important since fulltime remote working?
- Is it your approach to manage your teams performance and motivate them through: (A) Transactional: providing rewards for good performance or (B) Transformational: setting goals, and appealing to their values and aspirations to keep them motivated?
- Have you tried the other approach? What did you find?

### **Communication**

- How has communication changed since working remotely?
- In your opinion, what is the optimum amount of team calls a week?
- Have problems arisen due to a breakdown or lack of communication? If so, what were they?

- Has there been a lack of innovation or collaboration since fulltime remote working?

## Performance Management & Measurement

- How would you describe your management style?
- Has it changed since working remotely? Why?
- What (in your opinion) is the best way to manage you and your performance while working remotely?
- Is it your approach to manage your team's performance and motivate them through: (A) providing rewards for good performance or (B) setting goals, inspiring them and leading by example to keep them motivated? Why?
- Have you ever tried the other approach?
- What management style do you find works best when managing teams remotely? (relaxed – micromanaged)
- Do you ever micromanage?
- Have you started micromanaging more (or at all) now while working remotely? If so, why?
- In your opinion, what is the most effective way to manage recruiters?
- Has this changed since working remotely?
- When you were a recruiter (and not a manager), did you place a greater emphasis on: (A) performance outcomes and demonstrating your skills to peers/managers OR (B) improving your abilities, learning new skills and how to be better in your role?

## KPIs

- What is your opinion on KPIs in the recruitment sector?
- Do you find KPI's beneficial? Why?
- Do you find KPI's harmful? Why?
- Do you think the KPI's set are effective, reliable, accurate and fit for purpose or do you think they need to be adjusted?
- What is the most accurate and effective KPI in measuring your teams' individual output, effort, and overall performance?
- In your opinion, would your performance (A) increase, (B) decrease or (C) stay the same, if you didn't have KPI's?

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