

An Examination of the Digital Transformation of Human Resources  
post Covid-19

By

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## Abstract

The benefits of digital advancement are well documented but there is a significant research gap into understanding how digital technology impacts the HR function, leaving substantial opportunity for research to be undertaken (Chytiri, 2019). The focus of this research is ‘How has Covid-19 reshaped and redesigned HRM and employee relationships through digitalisation?’

This paper proposes to examine how the adaptation of technology has enabled people to work from home. This research will engage with HR professionals who have experience working from home in office-based businesses because of Covid-19 and necessitating a need for the use of technology to fulfil their role. This paper will examine the advantages and disadvantages of using technology, with an emphasis on participant’s interaction with employees in their business during their working day. Digital HR has several shortcomings that are not well understood or documented, and this research will attempt to identify these issues. This paper was researched through the methodology of the interpretivist paradigm. This means allowing the research inform the analysis of the research question and forming the conclusions based on personal reflection of the data.

According to a study by KPMG, to remain effective the HR function needs to be modernized with businesses needing to provide the best experience to their employees. This research paper will address the impact digital technology will have on the HR function in comparison to the traditional function.

According to Golden and Geisler, (2007) Work-related performance and work-life balance are two areas that have been professionally researched independently, however, little research has been undertaken on these areas collectively. The introduction of the right to disconnect legislation in Ireland means there has never been a better time to undertake research related to this area.

This study conducts seven interviews to explore the experience and knowledge of professionals who have practised or had to work in HR during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings of this paper suggest that a review of HR functions is needed as Covid -19 has illustrated that the relationship between HR and employees requires new dynamic as working from home becomes more predominate in today’s world.

## Declaration

# Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

**National College of Ireland  
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**Title of Thesis:** An Examination of the Digital Transformation of Human Resources post Covid-19

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## Abbreviations

- AI – Artificial Intelligence
- CI – Continuous Improvement
- CV – Curriculum Vitae
- DMEXCO – Digital Marketing Exposition and Conference
- HR – Human Resources
- HRIS – Human Resources Information System
- HRM – Human Resource Management
- WFH – Working from Home

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction and Background

This research dissertation was undertaken as part of the Master of Arts in Human Resource Management (MA) in The National College of Ireland. The purpose of this research is to focus on the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on organisations that implemented a Working from Home (WFH) policy in Ireland. It will examine the adoption of technology to facilitate the new ways of working that organisations were reluctant to implement until they were forced to because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many organisations were forced to adopt new internal working practices and felt an intense pressure to offer these practices through various digital channels. Companies have experienced profound changes and in a noticeably short time implemented solutions based on what digital technology can offer. According to Andrew Wilson, CIO at Accenture, “to ensure a smooth digital transformation, it is essential for organisations to put their employees first rather than the technology” (Lalwani, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic continues to disrupt countries around the globe whilst putting significant stress on the continuing HR function, necessitating the need for the use of modern technology to deliver everyday HR duties.

Covid became a catalyst for this need to change the relationship between HR and the employee, as HR needed to become more visible to a remote workforce to build trust between upper management and their colleagues. When trust is given, employees feel respected and tend to reciprocate this respect with hard work and loyalty towards a company. The pandemic has shown a clear need for this relationship to change, and this dissertation seeks to answer the question of how would the implementation and use of digitalisation affect this relationship?

The pandemic has exposed the inefficiencies in many businesses’ HR infrastructure, identifying areas for digital transformation. Simultaneously, this pandemic has established a new reality with the need for virtual working. Virtual working can be characterised by simple, intuitive, and "waterproof" technologies that can be accessed at any time and from any location.

## 1.2 Rationale for the study

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact digital technology is having on the future of HR. In researching the digitalisation of the HR function, this paper will explore the latest trends and advancements in technology and how these will impact on the future role of HR practitioners. This paper will explore the impact that remote and hybrid working environments will have on the more traditional and in-person elements of Human Resources such as Recruitment & Selection, Employee Engagement and Performance. It will explore the impact on the wellbeing of an employee and their work-life balance because of new working practises.

Most employees now work from home to maintain business continuity during Covid meaning that the lines between work and home are becoming increasingly blurred and resulting in different experiences of work-life balance for employees. Berger, R (2020) states that a key factor for the success of teamwork during the Covid-19 pandemic is the inclusion of all team members in the Company's major challenges. Employee inclusion has become more complex for businesses as the flow of information that would have occurred naturally in person is now becoming increasingly challenging to reach employees in an agile and efficient way. As a result of home working, companies are faced with the challenge of providing their HR departments services virtually. According to Snell et al. (2002), Virtual HR Departments can be defined as "a network-based organization built on partnerships and mediated by information technologies in order to be simultaneously strategic, flexible, cost-efficient, and service-oriented." A positive aspect for both employees and employers is that some businesses are set to offer remote working post-pandemic to offer more flexibility and become more attractive for people looking for alternative working lives. By companies offering this type of working, it allows them to continue to reap the return on their decision to invest into Virtual HR services during the pandemic.

## 1.3 Expected outcomes of the study

The focus of this research is to ascertain how, if at all, HR and employees are benefitting from the use of digital tools in the modern workforce. As a result of Covid, the relationship between HR departments and an organisation's employees was impacted. The once accessible,

physically based services were now no longer available due to the forced introduction of remote working and a lack of digital infrastructure to ensure business continuity in a remote setting.

Specific research questions are presented through interviews which were used to gather data for this dissertation. These questions can be grouped into three separate categories, understanding of HR and digital tools, integration into the modern workforce and the performance and engagement of employees. Understanding of HR practices and the integrated use of digital tools will focus on the HR Manager's perception of whether employees know what tools are available to them, whether extra training is needed for understanding and whether they can see the benefits of technology in hybrid and remote working. Integration focuses on whether digital tools should be integrated more into the daily workings of HR allowing for freedom and flexibility for the HR staff to get to know their workforce and allows for more personal engagement and involvement. Inclusion attempts to analyse whether the use of technology in HR affects the attentiveness of HR management to the needs of their workforce and the interest levels of the employees towards HR.

#### 1.4 Dissertation Overview

This dissertation consists of seven chapters:

**Chapter Two:** The Literature Review which aims to explore and contextualise this research by examining other relevant writings around the subject. It will include an overview on the uses of digital tools in HR and a discussion on the learning value of digital technology.

**Chapter Three:** The Research question aims to set out the objectives for the research paper and gives an overview of the route in which the researcher will take for the project.

**Chapter Four:** The Methodology, which will outline the steps taken in the conduction of this research, a discussion on the research paradigms and methods that will frame this research and the ethical considerations and safeguards employed during this research.

**Chapter Five:** Analysis and Findings, aiming to present and discuss the findings of this research, any issues and opportunities that arise from this research, and the implications of these results.

**Chapter Six:** The discussion section will include both explanations and interpretations of the results and findings section in the context of both the literature review and the thesis question.

**Chapter Seven:** The Conclusion, will outline the key conclusions to be drawn from this research, provide recommendations based on this research, identify the limitations of the study and their implications, and finally conclude with the closing remarks on the future of this area considering the research findings.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to explore literature concerning the topic of the digital transformation of Human Resources. The term Human Resource Management continues to evolve, shifting from the original term personnel management, referring to how an organisation can make the best use of their employees. It now looks at an employee as a person and examines how the changing nature of society and the economy can impact a person's well-being.

The term Human Resource Management (HRM) is a term used to refer to management activities in organising work and employing people. HR researchers, academics, and practitioners have suggested many definitions for HRM based on their philosophies, the work context examined, and the management ideas adopted. No one definition identifies the “best way” to manage people and no universally agreed definition of the meaning of HRM exists (Beardwell and Thompson, 2017).

For this research HRM can be defined as: maximising the productivity of its employees whilst also protecting the company from any issues which may arise with the workforce. This review will look at determining what digital tools are available to allow individuals to work from home and the benefits that they have for HR users, by answering the following questions:

1. In a remote setting what are the responsibilities of the employees, management, and the company when it comes to selecting and using digital tools for those who are working remotely, and why does using the right tools matter?
2. What provisions should be made for recruitment and selection, performance management and employee engagement with having a remote/hybrid workforce?

## 2.2 Defining Terms: What is meant by the Digital Transformation of HR?

It is important to understand the meaning of the term digital transformation of HR or the digitisation of HR, as this forms the basis of the research being undertaken. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to place a strong demand on the HR function. Overnight HR managers have had to transform the way they manage their teams. Suddenly and without warning entire departments were shifted to work remotely. This meant that the usual HR processes were only available online. In addition to this many, companies had to impose reduced working hours over a prolonged period and as a result, it severely impacted the recruitment process. Gone were the days that businesses could advertise in newspapers and shop windows and people would come flooding in with applications. The pandemic has shown that HR must become digitised to keep up with the changing media landscape. With everyone forced to work from home, people were turning to the internet to look for jobs and they expected companies to have an online digital presence.

The HR digital revolution is in full swing. According to Hannah Jesse who authored an online article for Digital Marketing Exposition and Conference (DMEXCO), titled Digitalisation in human resources – still some catching up to do? ‘Digital transformation in recruiting means recognising the potential, avoiding risks, understanding new technologies, and implementing them in a targeted way.’ This opens a whole host of opportunities, which just a few years ago, were not widely utilised in the field of HRM, with the pandemic accelerating the necessity to implement such technology where there may have been reluctance to implement pre-pandemic. But the other side of this is HR managers must walk a tightrope between the analogue (paperless) and digital worlds.

The digital world allows HR managers/ professionals to unlock exciting new potential by implementing new platforms and tools, which in turn reaches a wider audience. It opens HR departments to streamlined and automated reporting and services whilst providing employees with an always on and accessible HR department and is not based on the availability of a Human resources representative.

Whilst there are several benefits to the digitalisation of HR services, the analogue world allows for greater control of data protection, no extra infrastructure costs and zero technical problems. In terms of data protection, by leveraging paper-based policies, procedures and forms, this data

is only accessible via the HR department and is not at risk of a data leak or unauthorised access. Analogue can be considered more cost effective than digital, due to the limited infrastructure investment, staff training and maintenance of tools to provide HR services to employees. The use of paper-based services also mitigates the risk of any technical issues arising that would be seen through digital means.

A digitalisation of any work-based process is possible, but it will not have the intended effect unless it is thought out properly, has a benefit and a reason and is not done for the sake of being done. Forbes Human Resource Council (2022) suggests fifteen considerations to keep in mind when looking to digitise the HR function. They can be summarised into the following points:

1. **Understand the Business's Needs** – Gauge the company's readiness to move to a more digital based process and how fast this should be done. To have a successful transition the HR process and digital transformation should synchronise as closely as possible.
2. **Reimagine Current Practices/Determining the Necessity of Going Digital** – Will the new way help to achieve your overall goals? 'Huge improvements often come from reimagining and digitising a single legacy practice and not jumping to total automation.' In other words, are we going digital as it is the way forward to safeguard the future and everyone is doing it? Or does HR practices need to change?
3. **Keep it Simple/Prioritize Productivity** – The new interface needs to be as simple as possible. This will not only entice employees to your company, but it stops them from getting overwhelmed with the process. 'The number one reason current HR tech isn't used is too many logins.' This turns people off as it is too much to remember.
4. **Maintain Human Contact/Adjust Your Management Plan** – It needs to be said that humans are your greatest resource when it comes to job performance and any digitisations needs to be done with this in mind. A digital transformation needs to enhance and not hinder the process. It can also allow for a blank slate and old processes to be redesigned and re-examined. This must be done gradually as many people find change hard and will need to be guided through the process.
5. **Use New Technology for Networking** – In the modern world, people have less and less time to devote to job searching so they look for the companies which have the most time saving devices, companies who are "digital-first." They will usually have chatbots on career sites to quickly answer questions, virtual hiring and onboarding events to

employ and train remote and hybrid employees. This allows more work to be done as there is no travel time to be included.

6. **Ask Questions** – Take the employees on the digitisation journey with you. Hand out questionnaires and get their feedback on what they feel needs to happen. At the end of the day, they will be the ones using and implementing it, so they need to be comfortable with it and know how to use and interact with it.
7. **Start Tracking and Measuring the Impact/Understand the Process Before Acting.** Ensure HR understands the difference between a “digital lipstick” approach versus deeper real digital transformation. Make sure the technology being designed and used has a purpose and is not just there for show. ‘Be mindful that the process or need should drive the technology choice and not the other way around.’ All too often many companies think they need a digital input or renovation in some areas, only to come to the realisation that it achieves nothing, and the same results could be achieved using an analogue method which proves more fruitful.
8. The final consideration may be the most important: **Put your Customers First.** For digital transformation to become successful within the company. The value of the transformation should be measured around three key areas: **A)** Delight the customer with your new fresh approach and ideas. **B)** Simplify the process to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. And **C)** Keep the data secure and compliant.

As previously outlined in this research paper, technological advances are resulting in HR functions changing the way they operate which is having an impact on their workforce. According to Berber, Đorđević and Milanović (2018), digital technology supports the workplace on many levels which is evident today, as employees are now enabled to carry out their work remotely, whilst at the same time, staying connected to their team. HR managers still have a long way to go in identifying obstacles to fully master the digital transformation. To achieve this, a calm approach is required.

## 2.2 Considering the Benefits and Disadvantages of Technology

While exploring the digital transformation of HR, it is important to be cognisant of both the benefits and disadvantages of using Digital HR. This would become relevant if there was ever a move from the “universal design” approach where one model fits all, to the individual approach where technology and IT systems are designed with a specific company and

functionality in mind. All companies use some form of technology in their day to day running of the company which has both its advantages and its drawbacks.

### 2.2.1 Benefits of Technology

According to Berber et al (2018), the key component of the modern business is influenced by the development of technology. One of the best things about technology is it allows mobility. This is knocking down the walls of time and creating a “digital nomad.” The work can be done from anywhere if they have an internet connection. This is also saving time allowing people to be more creative and innovative. With the use of meeting apps and meeting rooms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom, this allowing work to be completed in real time eliminating the need for in-person discussions while still achieving the primary objective. This allows the employee to be more productive in their role. The use of computers also allows for the correction of mistakes instantly and reduces human errors. This also allows for faster decision making as the information is at your fingertips and you no longer must search manually for it.

### 2.2.2 Disadvantages of Technology

Communicating using smart phones, text messages and virtual video conferencing tools can lead to a lack of human contact in the workplace, and this can lead to some employees feeling left out and isolated or the other side of it shows they become self-centred and reserved. Technology also has the tendency to be very risky if not handled properly, especially when it comes to the management and storing of data. Many employees will need access to the data streams which over time means more people have access to confidential data making it harder to manage the privacy and usage of this information. Employees need to be careful not to fall into the trap of letting technology do all the work for them, and as a result become less productive. Over time as more processes within a business are becoming automated, employees tend to over rely on these systems and as a result are not using their brains. With companies becoming more acquainted and comfortable with the idea of remote working, they need to be guaranteed their employees will still put in the required effort and not rely on technology to produce the solution. “The best option would be to leave the tedious and time-consuming tasks to computers, and then use technology to come to more creative with innovative solutions.” Sintelly (2022). The key to making any digital transformation work is balance.



Redman et al (2017). suggests that digital technology supports companies not only with HR but also with their recruitment & selection, performance management and employee engagement. A report by CIPD (2019), states that digital technology in the workplace is ‘everywhere’ and it is important for the development and growth of the HR function and ensuring it stays up to date with advancements. However, CIPD (2019) and CIPD (2021), state that for the introduction of new digital technology to be successful in HR, all stakeholders must be involved from the start with an input into the planning and implementation stage and ensuring that employees are listened to, and opinions are taken on board.

### 2.3 Recruitment & Selection

According to Ryan and Ployhart (2014), recruitment and selection remains one of the most prominent and key areas of research and practice in the HR field. However, the traditional approach of the recruitment and selection process for companies is costly (Markoulli et al., 2017). The recruitment and selection process has been heavily impacted due to the pandemic and calls for an increased need for the use of technology to fulfil these activities. HR needed to find a way to recruit, screen and interview people remotely. Technology allowed for this whilst not waiting for restrictions and lockdowns to lift to allow people to travel for interviews.

Increased use of social media has made a substantial impact amongst organisations who are advertising and recruiting for roles and professionals seeking a new role. This changing landscape, due to innovative technology, has attracted increased research interest into work/organizational psychology and human resources management (Montuschi et al. 2014) According to Van Iddekinge et al., there is a significant gap in research into the use of social media in recruitment and selection. Although several studies have appeared recently on various technology-related issues and their interaction with recruitment and selection, there is a need for more research on this topic with CIPD (2019) suggesting introducing virtual recruitment and selection processes to condense job applicants based on the organisation’s job specification.

Implementing the use of technology within the screening process allows for candidate to be screened using criteria selection software, also known as the artificial intelligence (AI) approach. AI uses algorithms to match key words to the job advert seeking out those with the most relevant experience. Johansson et al. (2019) state “that this ensures speed and accuracy

in what was once a repetitive and time-consuming task” By shifting this task to be handled by technology it frees up HR executives to focus more on managing their workforce.

## 2.4 Performance Management

There are several different elements of technology involved in performance management processing, namely the use of computers, mobile technology, dedicated apps, and networks. By using these elements, the outputs of a performance management system are more effective and efficient. Performance is often met with a negative view. No one likes to sit there and be told you are good, but not good enough. It is often rushed due to time constraints and can leave an employee feeling worse about themselves.

Parry and Battists (2019), state that the increase of recent technologies in the HR function allows for increased flexibility and the creation of appropriate policies and performance management systems ensuring employees meet a required standard whilst eliminating the negative effects of digital technology on social interactions. For example, flexibility to PwC means a happier, healthier, and more productive workforce (Donovan, 2019). Significant changes are happening in the production of hardware, software, and industrial production, but also in management where decision support systems are well established.

Performance management processes focus on managing employees’ behaviours which have a direct impact on their manager’s perception of the value they are generating for their team. But how does one assess the behaviours when one is not able to meet their team face-to-face? Remote working is here to stay, and performance management processes will need to adapt to this new normal. According to Srivastava, R. (2020), Companies are grounding their performance management systems and processes in outcome-based models rather than behaviour-based models giving their employees’ independence and flexibility to complete their tasks at their own convenience and measure the quality and quantity of their output rather than the number of hours spent at their desk.

There is a need for the shifting of attitudes to behaviour-based models and offering employees independence and flexibility, to allow employees to be more productive and efficient in the outputs of their role. By offering employees to manage their ways of working to deliver on business objectives, this will not only increase their productivity but also their job satisfaction.

In this context, the role of HR would be to provide the framework and metrics to track and measure employee performance.

By using technology to simplify the evaluation process this can reduce time spent on the admin processes which come with these evaluations and allows better management and control of objective and achievements.

## 2.5 Employee Engagement

Shaik, F. et al (2019), defines employee engagement as an employee's cognitive, behavioural, and physical state directed towards organisational outcomes. They state that while employee engagement has been researched in a co-located team context, it remains an under-researched area in a virtual team's context. Moreover, engaged employees have been found to outperform their disengaged counterparts. This highlights the issue of whether working remotely bring with it an inherent group of distractions which can otherwise be avoided in the office.

Employee engagement currently requires a high level of HR involvement. Engaged employees are a key success factor and under the current situation, establishing employee engagement measures with the help of technology is essential for the growth of the organisations whilst also keeping employees motivated and committed. Bedarkar and Pandita (2014), projected an integrated model of employee engagement with the study showing that leadership, communication, and work–life balance are the key drivers of employee engagement. However, Peasley et al (2020), talks about the importance of having boundaries between work and home, as when your home becomes your office, employees tend to bring their personal stress to the workplace which can lead to burnout. Singer V. (2020) discusses the importance of managers maintaining interaction among their employees, and how employee engagement is key in ensuring employees do not feel isolated. Companies are now developing numerous employee engagement practices like virtual team meet-ups, virtual learning and development, and webinars for anxiety and stress and online team building activities to drive employee engagement.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this review has highlighted several benefits of using technology within HR. There has been a huge body of research conducted on this topic. There is a need for HR to understand the needs and capabilities of the end user of the platform, to support them effectively. Defining what HR is, is difficult as many different definitions exist, but commonly throughout the literature it has come to mean the job department, which screens applicants to find the best fit for the company. Research has led to the conclusion that this task can be aided using technology, and an improved understanding of the capabilities and possibilities of its use in managing a remote workforce, which will lead to greater inclusion of remote and hybrid employees in every job role.

There is a need for the HR function to stay aware of technology changes to maximise the use they will have in the workforce. There are many different approaches when using technology within the workforce, which can make it confusing when looking for information. There is a need for a centralised database, for all HR needs allowing the benefits to be better utilised. Technology does improve productivity, but it is not limited to this alone.

The universal design approach would work for many companies, but the smaller workforce may get lost in the crowd, so they are better to have a tailored individual approach, like a clock-in application which monitors remote working with the community. This can ensure an organisations employees and service users are both benefitting. The disadvantages of using technology are that it can be very costly and time consuming to implement. But over all the benefits out way the negatives.

## Chapter Three: Research Question

The study aims to highlight Human Resource Management in the era of digitalisation, putting emphasis on the roles of HR managers in contemporary organizations and discussing the impact of technological changes on employees, HR practices and the impact of these changes on a blended workforce. Therefore, this research paper asks the overarching question ‘How has Covid-19 impacted HRM and employee relationship through digitalisation?’

As companies adapted their approach and made changes to their HR function considering the Covid-19 pandemic and with these new work practices expected to remain post-Covid, the questions this research will ask is?

**Objective 1: How will the provision of a digital HR service impact employees in the future in the different areas of their working life? (Bondarouk and Brewster) (Berber et al.).**

This objective aims to explore the impact that a digital HR function will have on employees in terms of the shift from in person performance meetings and handwritten forms, to performance meetings being potentially held virtually and tracked through an online system.

**Objective 2: Will the use of digital devices allow for a more flexible working week, adapting to an individuals' lifestyle and providing more of a work-life balance?**

This objective aims to explore the advantages and disadvantages to employees working under a Hybrid model. One example of this is considering if employees are feeling guilty if they miss a call whilst working remotely, when in comparison if this occurred in-person, would that guilt still be present? This objective will also explore the flexibility of an employee's working week. Is the standard 9:00am – 5:30pm, Monday to Friday fully onsite for a role still a requirement? Or has it at least been minimised for most companies because of the introduction of remote and hybrid working?

**Objective 3: Does the responsibility of setting the parameters for “switching off” after work fall with the employer or employee?**

This objective aims to explore the working hours of employees. Are employees using the time that would have been spent commuting to and from work, as working time rather than personal time, while working from home. Prior to Covid-19, most employees would leave their work laptop, phone, and other tools in their place of work. However, now as most employees are working a hybrid model, and as a result are now bringing work devices into the home, it begs the question if employees are switching off from their professional life and if not, who does the responsibility lie with? The Right to Disconnect bill came into effect on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, and with that, came with three main objectives.

1. The right of an employee to not routinely perform work outside normal working hours.
2. The right to not be penalised for refusing to attend to work matters outside of normal working hours.

3. The duty to respect another person's right to disconnect (e.g., by not routinely emailing or calling outside normal working hours) (What is the Right to Disconnect, 2021).

## Chapter Four: Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

Discussed within this chapter are the steps taken to research this topic and the methodologies employed to help answer the research question. The research aims to highlight Human Resource Management through digital revolution, with a focus on the roles of HR managers in contemporary organizations dealing with a blended workforce. The methodology will help to provide a framework to answer the overarching question 'How has Covid-19 impacted HRM and employee relationships through digitalisation?'

The research will be conducted using the interpretivist research paradigm and will include the rationale for employing this method throughout this study. Included will be a section on the collection and storing of gathered data, justification, and analysis of using interviews to undertake this research. It will also explore the analysis of the gathered data including sections on limitations and reliability, highlighting the ethical considerations taken into account before, during and after the research. The primary qualitative research methods used by the researcher were semi-structured interviews. There was a total of seven interviews conducted, all through Microsoft Teams by employees working in the HR field. It was important that each participant in the interview was working in HR to ensure the information collected during this research would be relevant for this study.

### 4.2 Research Paradigms & Philosophies

According to Burgess(1985), A good research paradigm includes the following elements:

- Considering the problem being studied and identifying the variables causing it or affecting it.
- Formulate a hypothesis or research question based on existing knowledge about the subject.
- To build theories or to understand and generalize the phenomenon or to explore insights about the theory under investigation.

According to Kuhn author of *Scientific Revolutions* (1970), the word paradigm is ‘a framework containing the basic assumptions, ways of thinking and methodology that are commonly accepted by members of a scientific community.’ Kuhn also states that ‘a paradigm is a worldview, which is widely accepted to produce the best results necessary for the outcome in any research project’ (1970). Paradigms provide a framework to researchers as they begin their research and provide a framework for defining the data they have collected and are analysing. Saunders et al. (2019), defines ontology as “assumptions about the concept of existence”. The concept is a way of viewing research philosophy and is a concept that centres on the definition of an individual about what amounts to a fact.

In the context of this research, the ontological position this research takes is, that due to the impact of digitalisation on the HR function, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the core function of HR is going through significant changes. This research is being undertaken to assess the impact that digital transformation is having on HR functions.

The nature of reality is that there is a change between HR practice and the employee because of the Covid-19 pandemic. If we look back to the 90’s, computers did not exist in a HR department; HR services tended to be paper-based and filed in cabinets within the HR departments offices. Computers were only introduced to the HR department in the early to mid 90’, meaning that organisations were able to adapt their HR function to this technological development. After the introduction of the computer to the department, suddenly, the internet comes along which in turn brought the rise of recruitment specialist organisations. Recruiters would then go out and hire for organisations.

If we compare this to today’s world, the Covid-19 pandemic came along and forced everyone across the world to stay at home due to the serious and dangerous nature of the pandemic. Working from home and the hybrid model had been discussed for a very long time prior to this, however, this was never put into full scale practice as there was never a requirement to, but the Covid-19 pandemic forced this. HR’s function had to incorporate employee wellbeing and ensure they are being looked after when they could only see and speak to them using Microsoft Teams every few days. The ontological position is that the HR function had to change because the ways of working globally had to change overnight.

Previously, there was a big amount of resistance from both HR and senior management in organisations who believed that people should not be able to work from home as they would not be able to work as effectively as if they were in the office. This point was identified in the research interview where participant HRM3 stated:

*“In our organisation, we had some staff working from home for a period before the pandemic due to personal reasons. From my experience, we saw a dip in their productivity and the outputs of their role as a result of working from home. We found this by comparing outputs of their role from the same period the previous year when they were based in the office to the same period working from home”*

*“I suppose it’s also possible that employees are too afraid to speak up when their working conditions do not suit them or there is a reason behind why they are not as productive as if they were in the office. For example, I spoke to an employee who would need to leave their desk for an hour each day to check in on an elderly relative during the pandemic meaning they would lose an hour of work that day.”*

The University of Sheffield's Department of Philosophy defines epistemology as “the theory of knowledge. It is concerned with the mind’s relation to reality.” In simple terms, it refers to the contrast between knowledge and belief and what is considered great knowledge.

As a result of Covid-19, the issue with working from home in Ireland has been a topic of mainstream discussion in the media. The Irish Government introduced a working from home bill to support Irish citizens work-life balance whilst providing employers with thirteen scenarios in which this request can be refused. This is aiding the change in relationship between both employees and employers.

Based on this research and the desired outcomes, it is important for interviews to be conducted rather than using surveys for many reasons. According to Peters K et al (2015), the use of interviews provides the opportunity for the participant and interviewer to have a two-way conversation about the subject of this paper whilst also allowing the interviewer to develop a deeper understanding of the context of responses by allowing follow up questions from those originally posed by the interviewer.



The researcher is looking for experiential knowledge and the opinions of skilled professionals working in HR who have been impacted by the advancement of digital technology which has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The use of statistical analysis and mathematical techniques as described by Carson et al. (2001), leads the researcher to feel that a positivist approach to this research would not be suitable or sufficient. The use of surveys would only identify common themes based on the researcher's hypothesis and would have limitations on the researcher's ability to gain further insight into participant responses. The researcher would not be able to understand and interpret the participants' feelings, thoughts, and experiences that an interview would offer.

### 4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection method for this paper will be through interviews. The reason this collection method was chosen is that it allows for versatility and for researchers to adapt questions to their relevant audiences. According to Sapsford (2006), data collection is, 'the activity of collecting information that can be used to find out about a particular subject'. There are many different forms of data collection which vary to suit the nature of the research. It is important to keep in mind the ability of participants to engage with the chosen method of data collection.

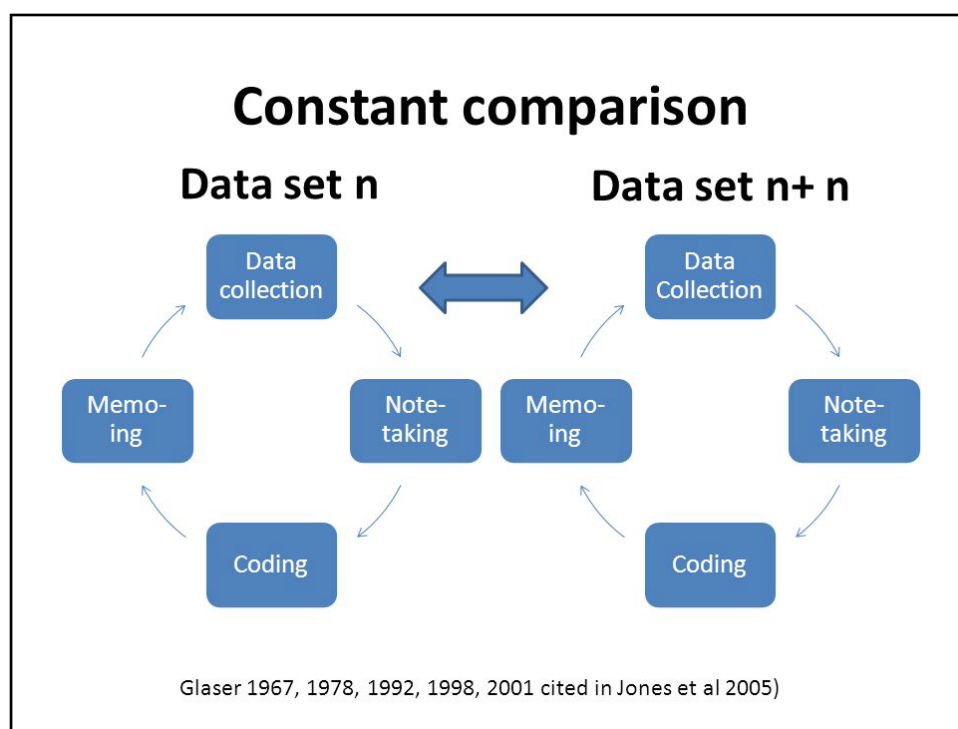
All qualitative data collected such as interview notes will be analysed thoroughly and repeated topic ideas and patterns will be identified and placed into common themes, using the thematic approach to research. The different themes and subthemes identified in data outputs will be displayed within the paper in table format.

Qualitative data will be collected during the undertaking of these structured interviews, with each of these interviews being transcribed to allow for the identification of themes and subthemes as stated above.

The researcher will store all resources, interview recordings, transcripts, and notes on their private laptop in a secure password protected folder, with all data being deleted after five years in line with NCI's ethics policy.

#### 4.3.1 Constant Comparative Method

The constant comparative method was the process used to dissect the gathered data. Glaser, who first advanced the idea of constant comparative analysis, describes the method as being ‘concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting many properties about a general phenomenon...that should result in an integrated theory’ (1965). Thomas (2013) states that the purpose of the constant comparative method ‘is to generate theory more systematically by using analytic procedures. It involves constantly assessing and re assessing data collected, and comparing similar elements, trends, and responses until a definite number of reliable inferences can be made in relation to the research question.



*Figure 1 – Diagram of the Constant Comparative Research Method*

#### 4.3.2 Method of Data Collection – Interviews

Recorded one-to-one interviews will be held in a semi-structured approach using virtual meeting software to understand participants' attitudes, motivations, and engagements with digital technologies in office-based businesses. As previously stated, according to Peters K et al (2015), the use of interviews provides the opportunity for the participant and interviewer to have a two-way conversation about the subject of this paper whilst also allowing the interviewer to develop a deeper understanding of the context of responses by allowing follow up questions from those originally posed by the interviewer.

Although this qualitative method has several benefits, there are also several limitations. This method can be quite time consuming for the interviewer depending on the size of their research sample. This method of data collection also has the potential risk of unconscious bias, particularly confirmation bias, where the interviewer may follow up with additional questions to confirm the beliefs they already hold. Despite these risks, this method is more suitable than quantitative methods as feedback is specified and reduces the ambiguity of answers found in quantitative methods.

The interviews were designed around 4 key themes uncovered in process of the literature review. These themes included: Remote Working, Technology Tools, Performance Management, and Employee Engagement.

According to Jennifer O'Connell from the Irish Times, between April 2019 and August 2020, employees were found to be working 30 per cent more hours than they were prior to the pandemic (O'Connell, 2021). This results in employees working overtime, and therefore organisations breaching their employees right to disconnect.

The issue around technology tools resulted in organisations not having the correct or advanced tools to interact with their employees whereas in relation to Performance Management, as the pandemic hit, and companies knew it was a possibility that they were going to have to send all of their employees home, many companies had no remote performance management tools in place and had no idea how they were going to navigate the first few months.

Finally, Employee engagement was highlighted significantly during the interviews, as the pandemic put a focus on the lack of employee engagement initiatives that are out there. In many companies employee engagement does not even exist, and this can make many people, especially when working from home full time, feel invisible. The pandemic highlighted this on a behavioural, cultural, and organisational level.

## 4.4 Research Design

### 4.1.1 Interview Design

Depending on the time constraints of interview participants, the researcher aims to conduct interviews between 25 – 35 minutes. Interviews will be undertaken and recorded using the Microsoft Office communication tool “Microsoft Teams” using a set of pre-arranged questions (Appendix 1). Prior to the interview taking place, the researcher will send a consent form to all participants (Appendix 2). At the beginning of the interview, the researcher will provide an overview of the project, discuss the ethical considerations of the project, and confirm that all responses will be handled confidentially. The researcher will request to record the interview and inform the interviewee that the purpose of this recording is for the purpose of data analysis only.

*Table 1 - Participant Demographics & Coding*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Interviewee Title</b>	<b>Length of Service</b>	<b>Interview Duration</b>
HRM1	HR Manager for Europe	9 years	34 minutes
HRM2	Regional HR Business Partner	27 years	36 minutes
HRM3	HR Business Partner	6 years	28 minutes
HRM4	HR Generalist	8 years	30 minutes
HRM5	HR Project Manager	4 years	28 minutes
HRM6	HR Executive	5 years	30 minutes
HRM7	Global CI/ Operational Excellence Leader	35 years	50 minutes

### 4.4.2 Research Sample

**Population:** Human Resource Professionals working in companies offering remote or hybrid working because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Sample & Sample Size:** HR professionals ranging from Middle to Senior Management positions. (7 HR Professionals)

**Method of Sampling:** Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling.

**Rationale:**

According to Thomas, ‘sampling is the means whereby the participants...are chosen’ (Thomas, 2013, p.135).

Sampling can be classified into two distinct groups, probability samples and non-probability samples. Probability samples include random sampling, whereby participants in a study are randomly selected, ‘each selection is entirely independent of the next’ and cluster sampling whereby participants are all selected from the same geographic area,’ (Cohen *et al*, 2011). Nonprobability samples may consist of convenience sampling, where the sample is chosen from those who can be easily accessed by the researcher, and purposive sampling, where the researcher handpicked the sample to suit their specific needs. This research was carried out with a random selection of employees who has either worked remote sue to the pandemic or those who were not given the option. The aim of the research is to examine the effectiveness of remote or hybrid work post pandemic. It could be argued that the research contains an element of convenience and purposive sampling, as the participants were those to whom the researcher had access to.

The research sample was formed from a pool of HR industry connections working across a range of industries. The researcher chose this sample as those in the sample had experienced the impact of digitalisation on their human resources department whilst also chosen to ensure the research captures the impact of technology on HR professionals irrespective of the industries they work in.

This sample was formed by the researcher through 2 sampling methods, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling can be defined as “elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher.” (Dudovskiy, 2022) and allowed the researcher to identify and interview participants with the relevant experiences and criteria for this research paper. The researcher formed this sample through emailing HR professionals, they had previously encountered in their career through the form of an email (Appendix 3). As a result of this sampling method, three participants were obtained for the purpose of this research.

Following these interviews, snowball sampling occurred where participants were willing to reach out to other industry connections to gauge if they would be interested in taking part.

Through this method of sampling, the researcher was able to add an additional four participants to the study.

#### 4.4.3 Test Interviews

The researcher aims to conduct one or two test interviews. These test interviews are necessary to identify and mitigate any potential issues with the relevancy and structure of the questions. Undertaking test interviews allow the researcher to ensure the proposed questions will have a logical flow and will not cause any confusion for the interviewee in this research. Prior to undertaking this research, the researcher has not had any experience with interviews. The researcher believes for these interviews to be successful; it is necessary for the researcher to familiarise themselves with the interview process before undertaking the structured interviews for this research.

#### 4.4.4 Timeline of Research

The interviews forming part of this research were undertaken during the period of June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, to July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

#### 4.4.5 Limitations of Research

There were several limitations that arose during this research and data collection. The predominant limitation with this method of data collection was the potential risk of unconscious bias, particularly confirmation bias, where the interviewer may follow up with additional questions to confirm the beliefs they already hold. To avoid this bias, the researcher ensured the results of these interviews were an honest and accurate reflection of the responses received by undertaking practice interviews to ensure that questions were unbiased and would not skew the data in favour of the interviewees beliefs.

Another limitation was the time constraints in which this research was undertaken. Using the method of interviews can be quite time consuming for the interviewer depending on the size of their research sample. This method can also have an impact on the research sample and their availability due to the time intensive nature of the data collection. The researcher was limited to a sample of 7 participants because of the time and attention needed in the analysis of the data following each interview and the deciphering of common themes throughout the sample.

#### 4.4.6 Ethical Considerations

In advance of each interview, the researcher will contact the proposed interviewee via email detailing all the relevant information about the research project, the ethical considerations and how the research will be conducted. The researcher will also provide a consent form for the interviewee to review and sign to indicate their consent to participate in the research.

Prior to the commencement of recording of each interview, the researcher will provide an overview of the objectives of the research and an opportunity for the interviewee to ask any questions relating to the research. The researcher will also ask the participant to consent for the interview to be recorded and inform them that all transcripts will be anonymised for inclusion in the research paper. In line with the NCI ethics policy, all interview recordings, notes, and transcripts will be deleted five years following the submission of this research.

During the interviews, interviewees would refer to their own organisation's where their own organisation is named within, the analysis and findings, and therefore, the researcher has removed this and included the wording 'Their Company'. The researcher has ensured that all ethics of this research are in line with NCI's Ethical Policy.

#### 4.4.7 Research Themes & Coding

To maximise the results of the seven interviews conducted, similar questions were posed to each interviewee. This was done to explore common themes throughout each interview. Several questions were also tailored towards each individual interviewee with the expectation from the researcher of developing new insights into the future of HR.

There were five themes throughout the interview questions posed to each interviewee.

1. Remote Working
2. Technology Tools
3. Performance Management
4. Employee Engagement
5. Future of HR

Table 2 - Table of themes, codes, and theme description

<b><u>Themes</u></b>	<b><u>Codes</u></b>	<b><u>Theme Description</u></b>
<b>Remote Working</b>	<i>Decision making</i>	<i>This theme discusses the needs around the decisions to allow the employee to work remotely.</i>
<b>Technology Tools</b>	<i>Automation of mundane tasks, support from management, implementation, tailored systems, and feedback</i>	<i>This theme discusses the need to have competent, tech savvy employees able and willing to train existing staff on new platforms. Also discussing the needs for the correct software to meet the companies' needs.</i>
<b>Performance Management</b>	<i>Decision making, Maintenance of records</i>	<i>This theme discusses the need to have better access and control over KPIs, to better keep track of performance and productivity</i>
<b>Employee Engagement</b>	<i>Flexibility, motivation, goal setting and employee recognition</i>	<i>This theme discusses the need to have better remote engagement to stop employees becoming disengaged and isolated.</i>

#### 4.5 Setting and Participants

There were two viable options to conducting the interviews and collect the data, by hand or through an online provider (Zoom or Microsoft Teams). Due to impracticalities in securing a suitable time to allow participants a face-to-face interview, the research was conducted through Microsoft Teams. Participants were given a set time and date in which to meet over teams to complete the interview. Before the interview, the Plain Language Statement was read to the participants, and they had an opportunity to ask me any relevant questions before the interview began. They also had the option to say no and decline participation in the interview.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

This methodology chapter outlines the steps taken in the conduction of this research. The interpretivist concepts which formed the nature of the research were explored. The method of data collection, interviews, and rationale for its use were provided. The constant comparative



method of analysing data and the ethical considerations attached to a project of this nature were highlighted and relevant ethical precautions explained. It was important that participants for this study had worked in HR both pre and post pandemic. This was to ensure that they would have experience in HR prior to Company's now making the shift towards a more digitalised function. In the next chapter, data gathered will be analysed and conclusions will be drawn. It is envisaged that this will then inform the effectiveness of remote and hybrid working patterns in a post pandemic society.

## Chapter Five: Analysis and Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will analyse the implementation of the research along with the analysis and findings from the research data collected. The findings will be presented under the following themes highlighted with in the interviews: Transformation of digital technology, recruitment and selection, performance management and employee engagement. With reference to the relevant literature discussed in Chapter two, conclusions will be drawn from the research.

### 5.2 Implementation

The focus of this research was how the role of Human Resources has dealt with the rapid shift towards remote working brought about by the pandemic and how the digital transformation has impacted it. Over a period of several weeks seven semi structured interviews were conducted with HR personnel who had both worked with in the industry both pre and post pandemic, along with a comprehensive document review. The participants were interviewed by the researcher using Microsoft Teams with their answers recorded and transcribed.

The interview candidates were chosen based on their background and knowledge of working within the HR industry and the colleagues in which the researcher had access to facilitate the interviews. All of the candidates who, were interviewed for the research are currently working in a hybrid or remote role with six out of the seven favouring this approach over working a standard week in the office.

### 5.3 Findings

Data from the interviews was correlated to determine current trends within the HR industry around the issue of remote work and the effect of the digital transformation to facilitate this shift in working practices. The participants in the interview had all worked within the industry both pre and post pandemic, so they witnessed first-hand the cultural shift towards remote working brought about by the pandemic and the success and failures of this aided by digital transformation. Participants in this study were all established HR employees with an average of eleven years' service in the profession. The data was gathered by means of interviews over Microsoft Teams with the questions arranged under the themes of: Transformation of digital technology, recruitment and selection, performance management and employee engagement. The method of analysing the data was outlined in chapter three methodology. It was conducted using the constant comparative method of data analysis. Each question was studied with words or similar responses, then colour coded. Red was for negative feedback on remote work and the digital transformation and Yellow for neutral view and green for positive responses. When all responses to a question were noted and colours assigned, responses of a similar nature were merged and quantified. These responses were then categorised to give a collected and rounded summation of the view or views expressed by the participants in response to the relevant questions. In this way, responses to questions can be used to explain the findings of the interview. These will be discussed below.

### 5.4 Current Trends within The HR Industry

From the interviews, it can be established that HR is going through a period of change and development around all its core disciplines, not just with the introduction of more digitised processes.

Participant HRM1 mentioned:

*“There are a lot of employment regulations where you would have to have it written down in a contract....so the flexibility post pandemic is starting to reach its limit”.*

They go on to mention that:

*“Maybe within the next ten years or even five, employers may come to realise it was not the best of ideas’ mentioning that ‘a massive cultural shift is happening and needs to still happen with quite a few companies.’”*

Within the next year, most HR departments are planning to lean more into growing HR trends, like digital transformation, employee wellbeing, with a focus on mental health awareness and workplace and work practice flexibility.

Participant HRM1 mentioned:

*“It’s about optimising the remote working situation and getting as much out of it as possible ... capitalising on when people are in the office and scheduling more group work, more team building work, meetings and brainstorming in presence.”*

This will be aided using people analytics. Simply put, businesses surveying and asking their employees what they want and need to succeed. This would align in with Forbes Human Resource Council (2022) , who suggested approach of keep things simple to drive productivity and being mindful that the process should have value to the needs of the company.

A common thread throughout all the responses from the interviews was the lack of engagement between department managers, supervisors, and upper management with HR around employee matters, in terms of disciplinaries, working practices, performance management and engagement. During the pandemic HR became invisible in most companies. Especially when it came to managing remote workers.

Participant HRM3 mentioned,

*“HR was not really a focus in retail. Mostly there to ensure all employees where on the PUP and we could hire them back when things settled down. Their Company’s policy was HR became invisible when the pandemic hit and that was it. There was no engagement we were just told to stop.”*

Many companies had no idea how the pandemic would impact the way companies conducted their business and reduced communication with their staff around this until they knew more about the situation themselves.

Most of the candidates interviewed for this research paper moved into the role because either there was a need for the position to be filled, their other positions allowed them to fulfil that role as well, or they were good at managing people. Before the pandemic HR was not performing the function of managing people. As the name suggests “Human Resources” fundamentally means managing humans. The people who allow your company to function daily and keep a high level of productivity.

Participant HRM1 mentioned that the digital tools on offer:

*“Were being used as more of a default tool rather than a tool of choice to manage people from a distance.”*

Meaning they had little understanding of the benefits of digital tools in terms of performance management and engagement so in turn this made a lot of remote and hybrid workers feel left out and essentially ignored by HR. Again, quoting from participant HRM1:

*“There can be a bit of an overload when it comes to meetings, emails, and teams’ messages, because, instead of popping your head in someone’s office and just asking a question, you are putting in a 30-minute teams meeting, as it now takes a call to answer a question. So, people end up with more calls and meetings as they don’t have that opportunity to interact remotely.”*

They go on to back this up by adding,

*“You can put in as many tools as possible, but you will never be able to fully replace that informal interaction, in a remote environment. Which doesn’t mean it’s better or worse, it’s just different and we need to find tools which will diminish that loss of informal communications.”*

This can be backed up by Nguyen (2021) suggestion of using a hybrid approach to overcome this problem. Have designated time when each team is expected to be in the office to collaborate on projects, so a sense of ‘flow’ can be maintained.

### 5.5 Theme 1 – Transformation of Digital Technology

The focus of this research paper is the implementation and use of digital technology in shifting HR paradigms. A common response from all interviewees was the shift to remote and hybrid working practices could not have been achieved without a strong digital foundation within the company and the willingness of employees to engage with this process.

As participant HRM3 mentioned,

*“Some people will need an extended lunch for whatever reason, and they justify it by starting early or answering emails out of hours. But then you get the others who will be like, ‘oh 5:30 laptop off and phone way done and dusted.’ But then there are people who hear a buzz, or a beep and they have to look. It’s getting them into that mindset that no, your day is done and dusted. It is definitely something which needs to be worked on.”*

It begs the question: are people over engaging out of fear that they will be disciplined if not seen to be productive 100% of the time?

According to the Government of Ireland’s National Remote Working Strategy (2021), The Irish state defines remote work as ‘A form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer’s premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis.’ Based on this definition there are some roles which lend themselves more readily to hybrid or remote work, such as a sales team or a research and analysis team.

The biggest challenge for HR was to quickly and with little disruption to the overall daily running of the business identify the teams that could go remote and not lose any productivity during the pandemic. This got a mixed response from the interviewees with a fifty, fifty split in terms of success across the sectors. The mixed response was because of some organisations

had either began to put processes in place or had them already in place prior when the pandemic occurred.

Participant HRM3 mentioned:

*“The other thing which is difficult to accept is: our digitisation, our automation, is not robust enough to support certain roles working remotely and this puts an extra burden on those who are on site. For example, we are still very much paper based. So, if someone needs something working remotely, they would ring up someone in the office and ask them to scan the document to them. This is causing resentment. If an employee is going to work from home, they need to be able to fully work remote without the need to rely on someone in the office to provide them with that kind of support. Which then pulls them from their job which they are on site to do.”*

This leads to the question can a job be done remotely at all if the company has not fully digitised yet? The answer: Yes. Through Nguyen’s suggestion of a hybrid approach to team collaboration, this will be discussed more fully in chapter six discussion.

It was identified in 75% of interviews that companies had to rewrite their HR practices and policies to include things such as: the right to disconnect; if you accidentally work longer hours from home just because you are in the head space of working and have not realised the time, does this count as over time? Flexibility – Can an employee working remote chose their own hours to facilitate childcare, school drop offs and pick-ups, can they work from another country? Essentially, going forward, what will the average working day look like?

Participant HRM5 mentioned that post pandemic their company are offering:

*“a hybrid role of three days in the office and two at home, with the option of working fully remote up to 4 weeks out of the year and these weeks can be based abroad if you wish, as long as the work gets done.”*

100% of responses from the interviews stated that HR had made some strive to answer these questions, but they had not gone far enough and in many cases, they had to start from nothing and rebuild their HR departments. This was Not so they could answer these questions but also

so they could define new areas such as performance management and employee wellbeing and how these will operate going remote. In other words, a HR department suitable to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Participant HRM3 mentions:

*“Their Company have made a few mistakes in the past and now they are starting to build up their HR from scratch and get more of a focus on employees. You know, engagement wise, retention wise... Business Strategy and HR Strategy are not combined at all. It seems to be that HR are there to fix rather than pre-empt.”*

One major issue which stood out from the interviews was that many HR practitioners were unfamiliar with technology and had little trust in those tools for performance management.

According to participant HRM2:

*“Many HR companies are taking a blind eye to performance management at the moment.’ This comes down to the fact companies don’t have a hybrid or remote working policy which sets out certain standards and expectations around performance and behaviours. Without this people are making up their own rules.”*

This came about primarily through lack of training and knowledge around the capabilities of these tools and most only used them for routine tasks and not to their full potential.

As suggested by Reim et al. (2022), trust is essential, when asking employees to use modern technologies. They suggest that there may be a reluctance from employees to engage with these technologies especially when they have not received any training to use the system. Another factor to be considered is the communication from management to the employees about the implementation of these technologies. There is a clear need for transparency around the reasoning for implementing these systems and why they are being adopted.

Participant HRM2 backs up this very point.

*“Technology is the tool, but people drive that. It can only be as good as the people who use them. Will the technology actually get used? We need to understand why people disconnect from technology use. Is it down to generational gap?”*

According to entrepreneur.com (2022), the rapid surge of technology and digital based tools within the workforce has led to the creation of new job titles which did not exist ten to fifteen years ago. This created a generational knowledge gap and company leaders had to embrace these differences as opportunities for a more diverse workforce.

## 5.6 Theme 2 – Recruitment and Selection

It was agreed in 100% of interviews that recruitment and selection needed to change post pandemic. Several interviewees discussed how recruitment especially, needed to be more streamlined to attract the right talent. Not only this but in a time of vast job opportunities available, how are companies supposed to keep their talent.

According to participant HRM2:

*“There is more of a focus on the attraction and retention of talent. Employers are being more selective, and the power has shifted from the employer to the employee post pandemic. When it comes to talent acquisition, which is a new term introduced just recently, it used to be called recruitment. We are being forced to look at what do we offer, we are updating policies, looking at processes but it’s really around benefits. What do we have to offer that will make a candidate chose us over someone else and even if they chose us, will they stay?”*

Participant HRM1 states that digitalising is the only way forward to connect with the younger and fresh talent needed to keep the industry going:

*“This is in line with the future generation of workers are interacting today when you look at social media and the new technologies etc. A company which does not fall in line with these way of communicating would not be competitive in the workplace or attractive especially to those younger generations.”*



The future is now, and the younger generations are going to take over the day to day running of businesses within the next decade. Therefore, HR must change its approach to meet this need. One issue which needs to be addressed is the issue of onboarding employees virtually.

According to participant HRM6 they were onboarded remotely into their current role within their company, and they feel that they have missed out on the bonding opportunities which happen when you meet people face to face:

*“Usually at home you have to figure it out for yourself as you don’t a good enough rapport with anyone to feel confident enough to ask them for help. You don’t catch onto something as quickly.”*

This ends up creating disengagement with the employee as they don’t feel as connected, or as loyal to the company and can cause them to lose focus. This will also have a huge knock-on effect when it comes to performance and engagement, which will be discussed in future chapters.

### 5.7 Theme 3 – Performance Management

There has been a consensus among all the interviews that the way we manage, and measure performance management must evolve. The use of digital tools to measure and manage performance creates a more efficient and positive experience as consistent feedback and performance development discussions are more interactive and engaging for the employee. The feedback can be given in a more real time and meaningful way. According to Berber et al (2018), it increases employee motivation and engagement as it provides an upward trajectory which helps the employee see their value and their worth to the company in concrete terms. The pandemic hit and companies knew it was a possibility that they were going to have to send their workforce to work from home. This happened virtually overnight and without warning. Many companies had no remote performance management tools in place and had no idea how they were going to navigate the next few months. The results of this were very telling.

According to [gallup.com](http://gallup.com) “in a time of crisis, the performance management systems of many major corporations were ineffective, frustrating and too rigid for a dynamic, high-risk business environment.” Based on feedback from the interviews the main ways performance

management needs to change is through better collaborations and an adaptive and individualised approach based on the conditions found on the ground.

All Interviewees found digitisation of performance management tools that had been implemented in their business to be a positive experience. The implementation of these systems offered benefit to both HR and the employees in the business especially transparency around promotions and bonus targets (Stone et al. 2015). Whilst the implementation of these systems provided some benefits, there were also limitations to the system including that machine feedback is not entirely sufficient in the delivery of performance reviews, as it does not account for social behaviours as stated in the findings of Ledford, Benson, and Lawler (2016).

According to participant HRM2 some departments have been without a manager for quite some time, and this had led to the expectations that they employee can come and go as they please and “self-monitor.” They are making up excuses not to come into the office and this is leading to resentment among the office staff.

Participant HRM2 mentions:

*“I can only speak about it from the complaints of the employees who are not working remote. Why doesn't this person come in for an in-person meeting? They don't always have to join remotely”*

The study also found that employees take feedback less seriously from a computer than in person. This can be overcome by implementing a hybrid approach to feedback. According to CIPD (2021), a hybrid approach to performance management is most appropriate to add value to feedback and provide support when coaching and developing employees.

This confirms that a hybrid approach is necessary to make employees feel valued and mitigate any distrust by employees. As a result of digital advancement, companies now have access to data that can be considered intrusive to the owner of that data, and this has the potential to be used unethically when justifying decisions in performance reviews. With the use of this intrusive data, this may lead employees to feel the need to work harder to avoid any negative reviews or outcomes that may occur because of this data.

## 5.8 Theme 4 – Employee Engagement

The pandemic shone a light on the lack of employee engagement initiatives there are out there. In many companies it does not even exist, and this can make many people, especially when working from home full time, feel invisible. The pandemic highlighted this on a behavioural, cultural, and organisational level. One thing can be agreed on from the outcome of the interviews is that despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, we have learned a lot. The initial learning curve was steep, especially for managers.

Participant HRM7 said:

*“If you are a poor manager, the hybrid or remote working you will love. As you will only have to check in with your employees when it is absolutely necessary. How do you engage employees who work remotely on a regular basis. We need to apply standards, expectation and monitor it. Here are the expectations and if you can’t meet them then you can’t work remotely.”*

One lesson highlighted throughout the interviews was the mistake with companies thinking that employee engagement is something which should be dealt with solely by HR. This is a mistake. Employee engagement is not just about, employee satisfaction, good salaries and recognition for a job well done.

Despite many people opting to return to the office environment to give them the social aspect of the job, they find themselves discovering a ghost of their former work environment. Gone are the daily gossip chats during breaks and lunch while you grab a coffee and the excitement of overhearing some good news from a colleague or the simple thing of celebrating an employees’ birthday. Celebrating these events over a computer does not have the same emotional connection and can leave the situation feeling staged and awkward. Also, while working remote many employees feel the need to be always on, always productive, to justify the privilege of working from home and taking time out for social purposes can be viewed by many as being frowned upon. Therefore, the event ends up going missed.

As mentioned by participant HRM7:

*“The happiest people are operations because they have to work on the floor. But they are also burdened because they are being asked to scan documents and send them to people working from home. This is causing a lot of frustration and resentment. “How come they can work at home, and we can’t?”*”

*“Personally, in my current place of employment, we have some people who choose to work from the office 100% of the time. There is a requirement that his full team be present in the office on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. He has come to us and mentioned that he feels lonely on the days he is in by himself. We have tried including him in the open space office floor, but he feels awkward and like a burden because we are making these arrangements to accommodate him, when in the past he would have been happy with where he was, working with his full team. Office buildings have now become a remote working hub, just another place you can go to complete your work to relieve the monotony of rarely leaving home. There are not enough people going into the office to make the return attractive anymore.*”

This highlights the significant need for HR departments to implement employee engagement initiatives if they haven’t done so already and supports for workers who have had a negative experience due to remote or hybrid working.

## Chapter Six: Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

The primary objective of this research was to explore the introduction of a more digital based approached towards some common HR functions to better support remote and hybrid employees, using qualitative techniques. The literature review was used to evaluate the impact of using technology, current and new, within HR to better support a new way of working during the pandemic. The results from the interviews were gathered using the interpretivist paradigm and the constant comparative method. They highlighted that although HR departments have improved their use of technology and how they implement it to better monitor productivity, there is still a lot of progress which needs to be made to ensure that they are addressing the short falls appropriately.

This chapter will assess the shortcomings which were highlighted in the research and will endeavour to provide critical insights which can be analysed to improve the use and implementation of technology for employees who choose to work remote or in a hybrid capacity.

## 6.2 Current Trends within the HR Industry

A shift can be seen in the mindset of HR personnel even before the pandemic. Companies rebranded their HR department to People Solutions and Recruitment became Talent Acquisition. This shift was accelerated due to the pandemic. 2021 became known as the year of the Great Resignation. More than any other point in recent history an increased number of people decided to leave their jobs; either for better pay, the chance to continue working remotely or because they no longer had an interest in the field, they worked in. This left a huge problem for HR. They now had to ask themselves how do we attract, retain, and engage the talent we need to remain successful?

According to Sarah Kieran and Deirdre O'Shea reporters for the RTÉ new website (2022), many employees feel that 'their organisations are not willing or capable of meeting their needs into the future. With around 40% of survey respondents saying they agree or strongly agree that "my future career lies outside of this organisation." There is an answer to this issue: Digitalisation. Many companies are going through what can be described as an "electronic revolution," they are streamlining HR practices to make them more efficient. This means better and smarter recruitment campaigns listing the benefits of the job to the employee. Word recognition programmes to dwindle down CV selection to the best suited candidates for the job, allowing HR to focus on something other than recruitment, like performance management and employee engagement. It has been said repeatedly that remote employees feel invisible and overlooked on things like enhanced training, promotions and their contribution to each project completed within their department. It has shifted from an employers' market to an employees' market within the last two years and HR must change its approach to meet these new challenges.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century computers were being introduced into places of work to modernise the way data was held and recruitment was done. This was accelerated by the explosion of the internet and suddenly there was endless amounts on research right at your

fingertips. Now that the pandemic has forever changed working patterns again and employees' relationships with their companies, HR once again had to change because the world changed overnight. This can be linked back to the point made by participant HRM3: "*Can a job be done remotely at all if the company has not fully digitised yet?*". There has been a lot of push back by HR around this stating that, 'working from home simply doesn't work and we shouldn't confuse a temporary abnormal with a new normal' (Nguyen, 2021). Nguyen suggests that a structure hybrid approach could overcome this problem. Having designated time in which each member of a team is expected to be on site to brainstorm and collaborate on projects, as this sense of 'flow' can be lost while working remotely. It would also overcome this notion that people who work from the office will progress and move ahead quicker than those working from home.

This highlights the recent discussion around an employees' right to request remote working. Currently the bill is still being debated in the Oireachtas as the unions say it lacks 'teeth' and is too broad with its reasons for rejecting someone's request for remote work. Under the terms of the proposed new legislation 'there will be thirteen reasons why an employer can refuse a request. These include: The nature of the work being carried out, potential impact on quality and performance and the burden of extra costs to name but a few (Irish Mirror, 2022).

Many organisations are advocating for the traditional way of working together, but employees want something different, according to a survey carried out by Brian Kropp (2021), '75% of knowledge workers say their expectations for working flexibly have increased.' Organisations need to think about the future of work in a progressive way and not just evaluating where we will be spending our time, but how we will be spending it. Will the time spent be synchronous, or asynchronous? HR departments usually rank the synchronous role as more important to team motivation, due to the fact we are still operating in a culture of meetings, but it has been shown that organisations need to invest more time into asynchronous roles as they contribute more to innovation. This needs to start by looking at the recruitment and selection process.

### 6.3 Recruitment and Selection

Businesses had to restructure their employee recruitment, selection, and retention policies overnight. Remote working is not new, it was predicted by a man named Alvin Toffler, author of the publication 'future shock' back in 1970 that there would be a shift in working practices

(BBC, 2016). Before the pandemic 20% of workers did all or most of their work from home, an analysis by the Pew Research Centre found that this figure has risen to more than 70% during the Pandemic (Nguyen, 2022.)

With the introduction of hybrid and remote working practices across many different sectors, it has broken down the geographical barriers to employment and location is no longer a deciding factor as recruiters are no longer limited by the company's location. This has created a much wider pool of talent for hiring agents to choose from. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this. It means on one hand more people are now competing for the same job and in effect this is allowing the employer the opportunity to choose the right hire and the best fit for the job. This has led to a demand shift within the labour market. People are no longer willing to take a risk on a less-established company or in high-risk sectors such as hospitality and tourism. They are seeking job security. This also means they are becoming more demanding and seeking higher salaries for the added responsibility.

This has meant that companies now need to impress potential candidates. As businesses slowly begin to recover from the pandemic, they have now been given the green light to start hiring again. However, this comes with its challenges, as companies now must sell themselves to the employee market to make themselves stand out. Employees are no longer willing to accept a job based solely on the job description. They want to know the benefits and rewards which come with the position up front. This includes but is not limited to flexible working policies, sick leave benefits and an employee wellbeing programme.

This had to create a shift in the way recruitment was handled and many companies used virtual job interviews only as a last resort. One-on-one, face-to-face interviews were the norm. It was virtually non-existent for HR to do a remote interview over Microsoft Teams or Zoom (Technology which existed but was not widely known or used). According to the Business of Apps website (2022), which keeps a record of the number of users who engage with a Microsoft based platform, in 2017 only around 50,000 people used Microsoft Teams, compared with 1 million people by the beginning of 2020. Now in a post pandemic world HR departments have discovered that virtual recruitment is not only more efficient, but also the way forward. Online job interviews and interviews which incorporate some form of tech use save time and money for both the employer and the person seeking the job. It also allows you the benefit of

scheduling a lot more interviews within the same period for those seeking a job, as they do not have to consider travel time. The interviewer has the added advantage of taking down notes as they go along. Also, it is much easier to get someone to hang up the phone, than it is to say goodbye in person. This eliminates any over-drawn-out goodbyes hoping to impress the employer. One major barrier to job hunting is now eliminated in that job seekers do not need to factor in the cost of getting to the interview.

#### 6.4 Transformation of Digital Technology

What is HR digital transformation? HR digital transformation is the process of changing operational HR processes to become automated and data driven. For it to be successful, this metamorphosis should involve the organisation. According to Stone et al. (2015), the “electronic revolution” is changing the role of HR by streamlining and eliminating repetitive and administrative tasks previously carried out by humans. This can be backed up by Berber et al (2018), when he states that ‘the most important component of the modern business is influenced by the development of technology.’ HR professionals are required to interpret and utilise data to drive business decisions and create a better employee experience. But are they?

According to participant HRM7 the move to remote work has caused many employees to find reasons, not to come into the office to work because they do not see the point if others from their team are not going to attend, and they fear that deep down this is going to cause people to disengage with the company and work for the sake of working.

*“Balance is missing from remote work. The work life balance has become more work and less life. At the end of the day, we are creatures of habit. We need a purpose to get up. This digital work could destroy the purpose that we have in this world.”*

HR needs to be conscious of this happening. This will become a huge problem if they are not careful. But how does HR monitor employee well-being remotely? It takes a huge amount of trust on both the part of the employee and the company for them to be honest and let them know when something is not working for them, or they are feeling overwhelmed. This relates back to Forbes fifteen considerations when implementing digital processes. ‘Keep it simple and maintain human contact.’ If you need all your team together for a specific purpose, then



make it mandatory for everyone to come in for that day. Be open and state clearly your reasons behind why this approach is necessary.

One point which has been left out of the discussion and not really thought about is, with the introduction of these new HRISs and software packages is that HR will need to become proficient in the use of these new tools to be able to roll them out to staff and make sufficient use of them. Otherwise, there is a risk of the new software becoming redundant as no one will want to use or engage with it. Participant HRM6 suggests this could lead to a completely new role being created within HR: HR Data Analyst and their role will be around the use, implementation, and benefits of the systems. Essentially, how can these roles be used to improve the company? Not just in terms of productivity, but also in terms of performance management and engagement. Bearing this in mind, according to academy into innovative HR (2017), ‘an analyst could have a broad role and depending on the organisation.’ Organisations could end up needing to have a data analytics degree to do their job. This needs to be something you consider when applying for the role.

## 6.5 Performance Management

Many companies used the same cookie cutter approach for everyone leaving many employees confused as to why they had received the same evaluation as their colleagues. Some companies ended up postponing or even cancelling their next scheduled reviews until it could be determined how to conduct them fairly or in some cases even at all with a completely remote work force. Pre-pandemic most companies believed they had modernised, and future proofed their management systems. When true disruption happened, flexibility and agility within the workforce was non-existent.

According to participant HRM2:

*“The lines are blurred in that they are self-managing and making up their own rules around which days they come in and reigning them back in is becoming a challenge. This has a long-term effect on the company and a detrimental effect on everyone. There has been a lot of push back in a lot of areas are going unmonitored.”*

Covid-19 has managed to disrupt the day to day lives of many individuals since it appeared two years ago, and it has forced many managers and supervisors into remote management of their employees which requires a different skill set than face-to-face management. This transition had to happen quickly, and, without training. This leads to the question of which jobs can be done remotely, which needed to be essentially “paused” during the pandemic and which became classified as essential services. This opened the question of how organisations manage those people working from home. The research would suggest that those managers whose workforce is invisible sometimes struggle to trust that their employees are indeed working. This can lead to unreasonable expectations and create a culture of always “being on” while in work, leading to resentment and burn-out. This, in turn, could create a negative spiral in which manager mistrust leads to micromanagement, which then leads to drops in employee motivation, further impairing productivity.

According to Parry and Battists (2019), ‘the increase of recent technologies in the HR function allows for increased flexibility and the creation of appropriate policies and performance management systems,’ none of the interviewees mentioned any current use of performance management systems within their companies despite multiple options being available. This itself is quite worrying as how companies ensure good business practices if they are not addressing the short falls and mistakes within the workforce. This can lead to employees becoming withdrawn and disengaged, causing morale to drop across the whole business, leading to job dissatisfaction and burn out. This can all be dressed in a solid employee engagement programme.

## 6.6 Employee Engagement

According to Qualtrics.com (2022), ‘remote employee engagement is the strategy of investing in the two-way process between managers and employees. It describes how organizations interact with their employees to keep them involved and motivated, and how employees respond and feedback to improve their working situation.’

It should be a company-wide approach with upper management taking an interest as well. An employee who engages with the company and has an emotional connection to it as well, will be more loyal to the company and therefore have better outcomes in their annual reviews and productivity. The onus is on the management to nurture this emotional connection and not the

human resources department. It is difficult to improve employee engagement, especially when half your work force works remote and may not all be on site on the same day during the week. So, how do we overcome this? Engaging with remote employees is more than simply replacing face-to-face meetings with remote video conferencing or calls. There is now an immense pressure on companies to change the company culture and workplace dynamic.

When both managers and employees are working in harmony, you have the most successful remote working set-up for good employee engagement. From the research there were numerous ways employee engagement could be improved they have been summarised below:

**1. Allow some flexibility around project deadlines**

Not everyone can be productive first thing in the morning and fit into the nine to five approaches to office work. They may be better suited to working later into the evening. Rather than say a project must be completed by 2pm on Friday, offer the flexibility of just saying Friday, meaning any time on that day would be accepted.

**2. Promote Disconnecting and a Work-Life balance**

Some people find it hard to switch off once they are in work mode. Share the idea of no emails after a certain time in the afternoon or even email and meeting free days allowing the employee time to catch up on any outstanding work, so they do not feel pressured. Also encourage breaks by setting an example of always taking you break away from the laptop or workspace.

**3. Ensure employees have access to the right equipment needed for their role.**

Accessing information remotely can cause problems if the system is not kept up to date, is inefficient or has network issues. Set up a cloud storage platform such as Google drive or One drive to allow all information to be accessed at anytime from anywhere with a secure password. This will give the employee the freedom to complete tasks.

**4. Keep the lines of communication open**

Never let your remote workers feel that they cannot ring you with an issue. Never be invisible. Some remote workers tend to be self-reliant and just get on with things. Make it a regular point to check in with them once a week, even if only for five minutes. Schedule regular meetings with employees during projects so they can be guided and feel they are just as important as a person as well as the task they are completing.

## 5. Social Meetings

Working from home can be isolating and lonely. It is harder to feel engaged with your colleagues and to feel part of a team. It is much harder to have a casual social interaction when the camera on video conferencing is often turned off. Make the time at the start of each meeting to ask about their day and how they are doing, set aside time for team building activities.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore the digital transformation of the HR function in a post covid era. This research paper explored the impact of digitalisation on the HR function post-covid, focused on organisations offering remote or hybrid working and understanding the impact from experienced HR professionals feeling this impact. This is because of limited research having been carried out to examine the shortcomings of digital HR. Through interviewing HR professionals, this research provides a better insight into how companies are utilising their digital options and how they intend on advancing these services in a post covid era.

Digital transformation is both a process and an outcome as it is a revolutionary change. As seen throughout the research, the transformation of the HR function is essential in the current climate.

It is clear digitalisation has a positive impact on HR, with it set to continue in the future. Feedback from participants highlights that digital technology not only adds organisational value to the HR function but also provides employees with more flexibility and control over their work leading to improved work-life balance. It also assists with a HR function's performance management and employee engagement strategies. Industry research has shown that organisations using digital technology have experienced reduced costs, and increased productivity amongst their workforces.

The main finding of this research identified that there was a lack of adoption in digital by organisations pre-covid, with adoption and implementation now required to take place to keep up with the new ways of working in remote and hybrid working environments. Organisations should invest in advanced HRIS systems now as the majority of organisations are either

working on a hybrid model or fully remote. Having an advanced HRIS system will dramatically improve not only reporting and analytics but also increase accuracy and engagement between both employers and employees and will subsequently improve their working relationship. The movement to more advanced HRIS systems includes a shift in the culture of the company that employers need to be mindful of.

### 7.1 Suggestions for further research

The findings of this research shows that the future of the HR function relies on the digitalisation of the HR function. The researcher suggests that companies now need to invest in advanced HRIS systems that can enable both managers and employees to work from home effectively. The researcher suggests that further research into the digitalisation of HR takes place, with a key focus on the outputs and benefits of using an advanced HRIS system in an organisation's HR department.

### 7.2 Limitations

There were several limitations to this research that could be improved upon. As the researcher used qualitative research, including interviews, this resulted in a smaller sample size and therefore this could have limited the research conducted for this paper. As interviews were the base of this research, there is the potential for the researcher to be biased in not only the selection process of the interviewees but also in the interpretation of the results and findings from these interviews.

## Chapter Eight: Recommendations

Based on the findings in Chapter Five; Analysis and based on the conclusion in chapter seven, the researcher has developed the recommendation for businesses to instal or upgrade to an advanced new HRIS System, whilst also providing a prospective timeline and the potential costs associated with undertaking this recommendation.

### 8.1 The implementation of a new HRIS system into the organisation

As identified in this research paper, one of the many benefits to ensuring organisations are still engaging with their employees, and managing them while working from home, would be to implement a more efficient HRIS system. This would enable not only HR but also benefit department managers in the sense that, they can see when their employees have their work done which in turn allows for more flexibility within the organisation.

### 8.2 The Timeline associated with implementing a new HRIS system

When implementing a new HRIS system, organisations have several different factors to consider. For example, if an organisation is already using a HRIS system and is looking to migrate towards a more advanced system, undertaking a project like this can take up to one year prior to implementing a new HRIS system.

Prior to the implementation of the HRIS system, it can take up to 6 months to move all the existing data from one system over to a newer system. For example, HRM 1 mentioned during their interview, that they are currently in contract with their HRIS system provider until September 2023, however, they are currently receiving various demonstrations from other HRIS system providers, with an expectation to sign one of these providers in the next 2 – 3 months to migrate to their system after their current contract ends. By identifying and agreeing a provider a year in advance, this will allow the organisation sufficient time to transfer all their data to the new provider without it having a significant impact on the organisation and its employees.

### 8.3 The Cost associated with the implementation of a new HRIS system

For this recommendation, the researcher has compared two different HRIS systems. The providers of these systems will be kept anonymous and will be given the pseudonym HRIS 1 and HRIS 2.

HRIS 1 is a HR lifecycle management cloud system which uses the latest cloud technologies. HRIS 2 is an all-in-one HR software that is built for small to medium business. The below figure – figure 2, details the software features that organisations can opt to add onto their basic package for an additional cost by calculating the unit price by the number of employees. As outlined below, each system will offer slightly different features to an organisation, and the decision on which level of service is needed will depend on the needs and requirements of that organisation.

Figure 2: Comparison between two different HRIS systems.

	HRIS 1	HRIS 2
<b>OVERVIEW</b>		
PRODUCT NAME	HRIS 1	HRIS 2
<b>SOFTWARE FEATURES</b>		
ABSENCE MANAGEMENT	✓	✓
BENEFITS ENROLLMENT	✓	✓
COBRA	✗	✗
COMPENSATION	✓	✓
COMPLIANCE	✓	✓
DISCIPLINARY ACTION	✓	✗
EMPLOYEE SELF SERVICE	✓	✓
FMLA	✗	✗
HEALTH & SAFETY	✓	✗

The below figures in table 2 and table 3 are based on a yearly basis excluding the one-off payment for installing the system by the system provider.

Table 3 – Cost Analysis of HRIS System 1

<b>Functions</b>	<b>Unit Price</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
HRIS Core Advantage Product	€ 43.20	€ 4,320.00
Performance Management Performance	€ 28.80	€ 2,880.00
Time/ Project Tracking	€ 16.56	€ 1,656.00
Recruitment & Selection	€ 56.70	€ 5,670.00
Implementation, Project Management, Customisation, Training & Onboarding (one- off)	€ 9,500.00	€ 9,500.00
Ongoing training @ 60 hours per month	€ 30.00 per hour	€ 21,600.00
<b>Total:</b>		<b>€ 45,626.00</b>

Table 4 – Cost Analysis of HRIS System 2

<b>Functions</b>	<b>Unit Price</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
Management based Cloud Service	€ 51.00	€ 5,100.00
Recruiting Cloud Service	€ 33.47	€ 3,347.00
Time & Labour Cloud Service	€ 22.08	€ 2,208.00
Performance Management	€ 24.87	€ 2,487.00
Installation of Service & onboarding to all employees	€ 8,800.00	€ 8,800.00
Ongoing training @ 60 hours per month	€ 31.00 per hour	€ 22,320.00
<b>Total:</b>		<b>€ 44,262.00</b>



Based on the comparison of the two HRIS systems in tables 3 and 4 above, the implementation of a new HRIS system into an organisation would start in the region of € 40,000 per annum. These figures have included a once-off installation charge, therefore, with this deducted, organisations would be looking at an annual fee in the region of € 35,000 to maintain and use these systems and this annual fee would include continuous training on the software.

When the researcher was conducting this cost analysis, it was important to include the estimated cost for ongoing training, as outlined above, HRIS systems are constantly evolving and as the period of 'The Great Resignation' continues, organisations continue to experience high turnover. As a result, ongoing training is a factor that needs to be considered, as there will be a constant stream of new joiners to an organisation requiring training on this system and its software.

As outlined throughout this research, organisations having an advanced HRIS system certainly comes with its benefits. The two HRIS system providers outlined above would offer major benefits in recording and reporting on HR activities such as, employee engagement, employee time and attendance, performance management and recruitment and selection. The introduction or the upgrade of a HRIS system will enable an organisation to become more effective and efficient whilst also being fully compliant under EU law.

The researcher, based on this research paper, recommends that organisations implement a HRIS system or upgrade their current system to not only increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their HR function but also to future proof their function, ensuring they are keeping up with digital transformation and meeting the needs of their employees in this hybrid and remote working world.

## Personal Learning Reflection

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on everyone both professionally and personally, with individuals and organisations still recovering in the post-pandemic era. Amongst employees, it is caused workers globally to reassess what is important to them. As a result, organisations now need to adapt to this new reality and assess the improvements that need to be made to ensure future sustainability and growth of their organisations.

Writing this dissertation has been a positive and rewarding experience. Not without its challenges, the writing of this research dissertation and delving into the area of digitalisation in HR has armed me with relevant insight and knowledge that I can bring to my role as a HR Generalist in my current organisation and throughout my career in future HR departments. This dissertation has given me the confidence to understand the number of factors and considerations that need to take place when undertaking digitalisation and the impact that this will have not only on employees but also the organisation itself.

## Chapter Nine: Appendices

### 9.1 Interview Schedule

#### ***Warm-up questions:***

1. Can you tell me a little about why and how you got into the HR profession?
  - a. What is your title within the industry?
2. How long have you been in HR?
  - a. In particular, how long have you been in your current role?
    - i. Have you worked in HR pre pandemic and post pandemic, and can you compare the two?
3. In your professional opinion, do you think the HR function has changed and developed much since you first went into it?

#### ***Remote Working:***

4. Can you tell me a little bit about remote working?
  - a. How do you personally feel about remote working?
  - b. How do think your Company feels about remote working?
  - c. Did your Company offer remote working prior to covid?
  - d. Will your Company continue to offer remote working or a hybrid policy into the future?
    - i. Do you feel the advantages of hybrid working way up the disadvantages?
    - ii. Do you think lines are blurred between work and home life for those working from home?
    - iii. Do you feel employees are working longer hours?

### ***Technology Tools:***

5. Can you tell me a little bit about what technology tools you currently use/ offer?
  - a. Did your Company have to implement new tools to successful enable employees to work remotely or was this a simple transition from working in the office to working from home for employees?
  - b. In your opinion, is there any other tools/ features you would like to see developed to assist with employees working from home?
  - c. In your opinion do you think the future of HR relies on digitalisation?

### ***Performance Management:***

6. In your opinion, has remote/ hybrid working had an impact on employee's performance?
  - a. Can you tell me a little bit about how you manage the performance of your employees?
    - i. Is there anything else you could be doing as a Company to ensure you are managing your employees to the level required?
  - b. And can you tell me how do you manage employee productivity?
    - i. Has productivity benefited from remote working, has it been an advantage or a disadvantage?

### ***Employee Engagement:***

7. How does your company engage with employees?
  - a. Does your HR functions employee engagement differ depending on working practices of its employees?
  - b. What does employee engagement look like with remote workers?
  - c. What does employee engagement look like with office-based workers?
  - d. What does employee engagement look like with hybrid workers?
  - e. Do you think remote working has impacted employee engagement positively or negatively?
    - i. In what way?

- f. If your Company offered remote prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, has the way you engage with your employees changed?

***The Future of HR:***

8. In your opinion, what do you see to be the biggest opportunities and challenges for digital in a HR setting in the next 3-5 years?
  - a. Will your company be investing in digital or continuing with traditional HR practices?
    - i. Why?

***Closing line:***

Thank you for all that valuable information, is there anything else you'd like to add before we end?

## 9.2 interview Consent Form



### **Information Sheet**

Thank you for considering participating in this research project. The purpose of this document is to explain to you what the work is about and what your participation would involve, so as to enable you to make an informed choice.

The purpose of this study is to examine An Examination of the Digital Transformation of Human Resources post Covid-19. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a semi-structured recorded interview lasting 30 - 45 minutes, which will include questions on your experience with technology in the HR function of your organization.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so you can refuse to answer specific questions or decide to withdraw from the study. All information you provide will be confidential and your anonymity will be protected throughout the study. IP addresses will not be collected at any point, meaning the data you provide cannot be traced back to you.

You maintain the right to withdraw from the study at any stage up to the completion of the interview. At this point your data will be collated and coded with that of other participants and can no longer be retracted.

Any data collected will be stored on the researcher's private laptop in a password protected file. The data will be stored for the duration of the study and will be kept for five years in line with NCI's ethics policy. The information you provide may contribute to the development of a student thesis. We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from participating in this study.

This study has obtained ethical approval from the NCI Ethics Research Ethics Committee. If you have any queries about this research, you can contact me at [x20168713@student.ncirl.ie](mailto:x20168713@student.ncirl.ie)

If you agree to take part in this study, please complete the consent form overleaf.

**Consent Form**

Do you consent to participate in this study?

Yes

No

### 9.3 Participation Email

Hi <Insert Name>,

I hope you are well.

I am currently undertaking my master's in human resource management and my thesis is around the impact digital has had on the HR function in a post covid era.

As part of my research, I will conduct 6 – 7 interviews with HR professionals through either in person or through Microsoft Teams. The interviews will take 30 - 40 minutes.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project.

I have attached an information sheet to this email explaining in more detail the interview process. If you would like to review this and let me know if you are happy to participate, I will forward over a consent form for you to review and sign prior to the interview taking place.

Please let me know if you have any questions at all, I would be happy to answer them.

Thank you in advance, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kindest regards,

Sinéad



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