



An employee wellness framework for a remote environment: The case of the JB Marks Local Municipality

KT MORAPEDI

 orcid.org/0000-0003-1291-7142

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Supervisor: Prof L Vermeulen

Co-supervisor: Prof EJ Nealer

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Keamogetse Morapedi (30215005), hereby declare that the dissertation entitled:

An employee wellness framework for a remote work environment: The case of the JB Marks Local Municipality

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree Master of Public Management and Governance at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University, is my own work and has never been submitted by me to any other University. I also declare that all the sources used have been acknowledged by means of complete in-text source referencing and List of sources.

I understand that copies of this dissertation submitted for examination will remain the property of the North-West University.

Signed by: Keamogetse Morapedi on 26th November 2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. Morapedi', written over a horizontal line.

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This has been a very challenging couple of years, but I am grateful to be at this point of my academic journey. However, throughout this whole process, I have been surrounded by people who have supported and encouraged me throughout the course of this journey. I would like to take this moment and share my appreciation of their support and encouragement. Firstly, I would like to take this moment and thank God for making this possible. I would like to thank God for blessing me with this opportunity as well as blessing me with the presence and guidance of the people I have been surrounded by throughout this journey. It is through Him that I had the drive, strength, focus and motivation to keep going, even when the going got tough. This journey would not have been possible without Him.

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ABSTRACT

The requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic present new challenges to public leadership regarding human resource management (HRM) processes and practices. In addition to prioritising which functions to automate, the development of new skills, as well as considering new job responsibilities and work processes, public leaders are required to manage the increasing transition to a remote work environment. One of the challenges faced in this context is the continued management and support of employee wellness.

Existing research revealed that employee wellness entails a holistic approach to the physical, psychological and social needs of employees. For public institutions to reap the benefits of employee wellness, it is necessary to establish and maintain an employee wellness programme that will hold long-term benefits for employees' health and wellness. Furthermore, the importance of, and need for employee health and wellness is underscored in the Constitution of South Africa, 1996, the supreme law of the country. The Bill of Rights enshrines certain rights that relate to the health and/or safety of employees in Chapter 2, Sections 9, 10, 24 (a) and 27 (a). It is therefore essential for the public service and public sectors to implement relevant interventions in ensuring that employee health and wellness are managed and supported, even when employees are increasingly working remotely. Given the context of 4IR, modern technology can assist with the structuring and application of these interventions.

In consideration of the aforementioned context, the following question was asked: *How should employee wellness be managed in the context of a remote work environment within a local municipality in the Republic of South Africa?* To address the research question, a qualitative theoretical and empirical investigation was conducted, with a descriptive and explanatory research design. Employee wellness promotion was expounded upon and explored, based on a theoretical framework that was established by means of the dimensions of wellness, as well as the Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory and the PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) Model. The statutory and regulatory framework for employee health, wellness and safety in South Africa has also been reviewed and was, in conjunction with the theoretical framework, considered in the development of recommendations for the Public Service in managing employee wellness in a remote work environment.

The research findings revealed that the significance of a holistic approach to employee wellness with interventions that consider all the dimensions that affect an employee's wellness. Furthermore, the necessary components are to be included in an employee wellness programme. Also, the relevant and practical virtual interventions that can be established and maintained in a remote work environment. In addition, the implementation of theoretical models to positively change health-related behaviours (Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory and the PERMA Model. Lastly, the responsibilities of organisational leadership.

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive and explanatory research design with the aim of conveying its findings in a narrative format. Data collection method was primarily conducted using semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling technique was utilised in this study, which included the Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, Senior Human Resource officials as well as one senior manager. With empirical investigation within the JB Marks Local Municipality, it is evident that the JB Marks Local Municipality does implement a wellness programme, however their employee wellness programme does not make provision for employees working remotely. This is because the municipality is not well equipped to afford its employees to conduct work remotely, as only the senior officials within the municipality are supported with resources. Furthermore, the municipality does not prioritise the health and wellness of the senior officials who work remotely. This is evident as there was no correspondence from the municipality regarding health or wellness to the senior officials who worked remotely. Therefore, this study will include recommendations to the JB Marks Local Municipality in terms of the implementation of an implementation framework to manage the wellness of employees working remotely.

Key terms: Employee wellness; Health Belief Model; PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) Model; Remote work environment; Social Cognitive Theory.

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ACRONYM LIST

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BaSSREC	Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
EAPA	Employee Assistance Professional Association
EHWSFPS	Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Management
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MHCA	Mental Health Care Act
NHA	National Health Act
OHSA	Occupational Health and Safety Act
PERMA	Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SBIP	Service Budget Implementation Plan
SHERQ	Safety, Health, Environment, Risk and Quality Management
TB	Tuberculosis
WHO	World Health Organisation

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The shift towards remote work, accelerated world-wide by the COVID-19 pandemic and recent technological advancements, has dramatically transformed the modern workplace. In response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, public institutions, including the JB Marks Local Municipality, adopted remote work arrangements to maintain operational continuity and enhance flexibility. However, this new work landscape has also introduced unique challenges concerning the health and wellness of employees.

Adisa, Antonacopoulou, Beauregard, Dickmann and Adekoya (2022:164) indicate that employees engaged in remote work often encounter issues such as isolation, burnout, and blurred boundaries between their professional and personal lives. These challenges can significantly compromise overall health and wellness, potentially leading to decreased productivity and job satisfaction. On the other hand, when remote work environments are thoughtfully designed and implemented, they can promote productivity, job satisfaction, and a better work-life balance.

This chapter serves as a foundational overview for novice readers, introducing key concepts and contextualizing the study's focus on remote work and employee wellness. It will outline the importance of understanding these dynamics within the JB Marks Local Municipality, emphasizing the significance of the research in contributing to existing knowledge. The chapter delineates the objectives of the study, the research questions it aims to answer, and the implications of the findings for public institutions navigating the complexities of remote work. By framing the discussion in this way, the chapter provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of the study's scope, relevance, and potential impact on public policy and practice related to employee wellness in remote work environments.

1.2 ORIENTATION / BACKGROUND

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic during early 2020 presented new challenges to public leadership regarding human resource management (HRM) processes and practices. Similarly, the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the need for public institutions to adapt to new technologies and digital and innovative ways to provide public services, equally present challenges regarding the HRM functions. In addition to prioritising which functions to

automate, the development of new skills, as well as considering new job responsibilities and work processes, public leaders are required to manage the increasing transition to a remote work environment. One of the challenges faced in this context is the continued management and support of employee wellness.

The importance of and need for employee wellness is underscored in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (hereafter referred to as the Constitution, 1996). The Bill of Rights in Chapter 2, sections 9, 10, 24 (a) and 27 (a) enshrine certain rights that relate to the health, safety and/or wellness of Public Service employees as well as Public Sector officials. It is therefore essential for the Public Service to prioritise and implement relevant interventions in ensuring compliance with the supreme law of the country. The Public Service is also obligated to comply with the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service (EHWSFPS), 2019 – 2024 (Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), 2023). The Framework outlines guidelines pertaining to employee wellness approaches and interventions, specifically in the context of the Republic of South Africa's Public Service.

Employee wellness is like the concept of wellness in general, but whereas *wellness* is a broader concept, placing the responsibility for the aforementioned aspects on the individual only, *employee wellness* includes a responsibility by the employer as well. Employee wellness entails a holistic approach from the employer to the physical, psychological, and social needs of employees (Van der Linde, 2018:18; Vermeulen, 2021:302) and not solely the absence of disease (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2014). Moreover, Meyer (2020:1) outlined that the South African Board for People Practice's (SABPP) (2014) definition of employee wellness is centred on the work environment and work performance; however, it does not disregard the health and safety of employees. Moreover, a strong sense of individual responsibility is required within employees for employee wellness to be attained (Thoughtfull, 2024: online). Furthermore, as contended by Makola and Tabane (2022:288), within the traditional African belief-system, good health and wholeness consider the surrounding environment, which includes people, animals, plants, and elements, as well as the universe. Therefore, being in good health involves more than just not being sick; it also involves being able to function in one's environment, whereas a decline in social interactions increases one's vulnerability (Makola & Tabane, 2022:288). Thus, maintaining a balance in one's physical, social, mental, familial, and spiritual spheres of life is essential for optimal health and wellness. This holistic approach requires that the wellness of a person in his or her totality is considered and accepts that various factors in a person's life contribute to their health and wellness (Vermeulen, 2021:302).

This study supports a holistic approach to employee wellness. In this respect, the study made use of the wellness dimensions developed by Bill Hettler in 1976, referring to wellness in the context of the physical dimension, social dimension, intellectual dimension, emotional dimension, occupational, and spiritual dimension (National Wellness Institute, 1976: online). A focused combination of the dimensions results in overall wellness of individuals (Kumar, De Bruyn, & Bushaney, 2020:3). With recent research conducted on employee wellness (Ghazali, Alwi, Aziz & Hazudin, 2020:56; Rehr & Regan, 2020:2; Lötter & Welthagen, 2020:3; Rehman, Syed, Hussain, Fraz & Shaikh, 2020:655; Olerich, Summers, Lewis, Stewart & Ryan, 2021:267), two more dimensions of wellness were established, viz., financial wellness and environmental wellness. Additionally, this study considered financial wellness and environmental wellness, established by the aforementioned scholars in its investigation on the nature and extent of public management of employee wellness in the context of a remote work environment and the development of an implementation framework in the Republic of South Africa.

The management of employee wellness was expounded upon and explored, based on a theoretical framework that was established by means of three theories: (1) Health Belief Model, (2) Social Cognitive Theory, and (3) the PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) Model, (hereafter referred to as the PERMA Model). The Health Belief Model is a rational framework for observing individuals who utilise a multidimensional approach to decision-making regarding whether to implement a health behaviour (Ritchie, Van den Broucke & Van Hal, 2020:482). Almuqrin and Mutambik (2021:5) referred to Social Cognitive Theory as “...a *psychological explanation for the initiation and maintenance of human behaviour*”, and is a framework utilised to promote health. The PERMA model is a theoretical model for improving wellness with a specific focus on positive emotions that inspire psychological wellness (Chisale & Phiri, 2022:21).

The need to ensure a work-life balance in an environment that simultaneously serves as an employee's home and office was considered as well. The literature review on the theoretical framework, as well as the statutory and regulatory framework were followed by an empirical investigation within the JB Marks Local Municipality, as a case study, which is part of the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District Municipality (see Figure 1):

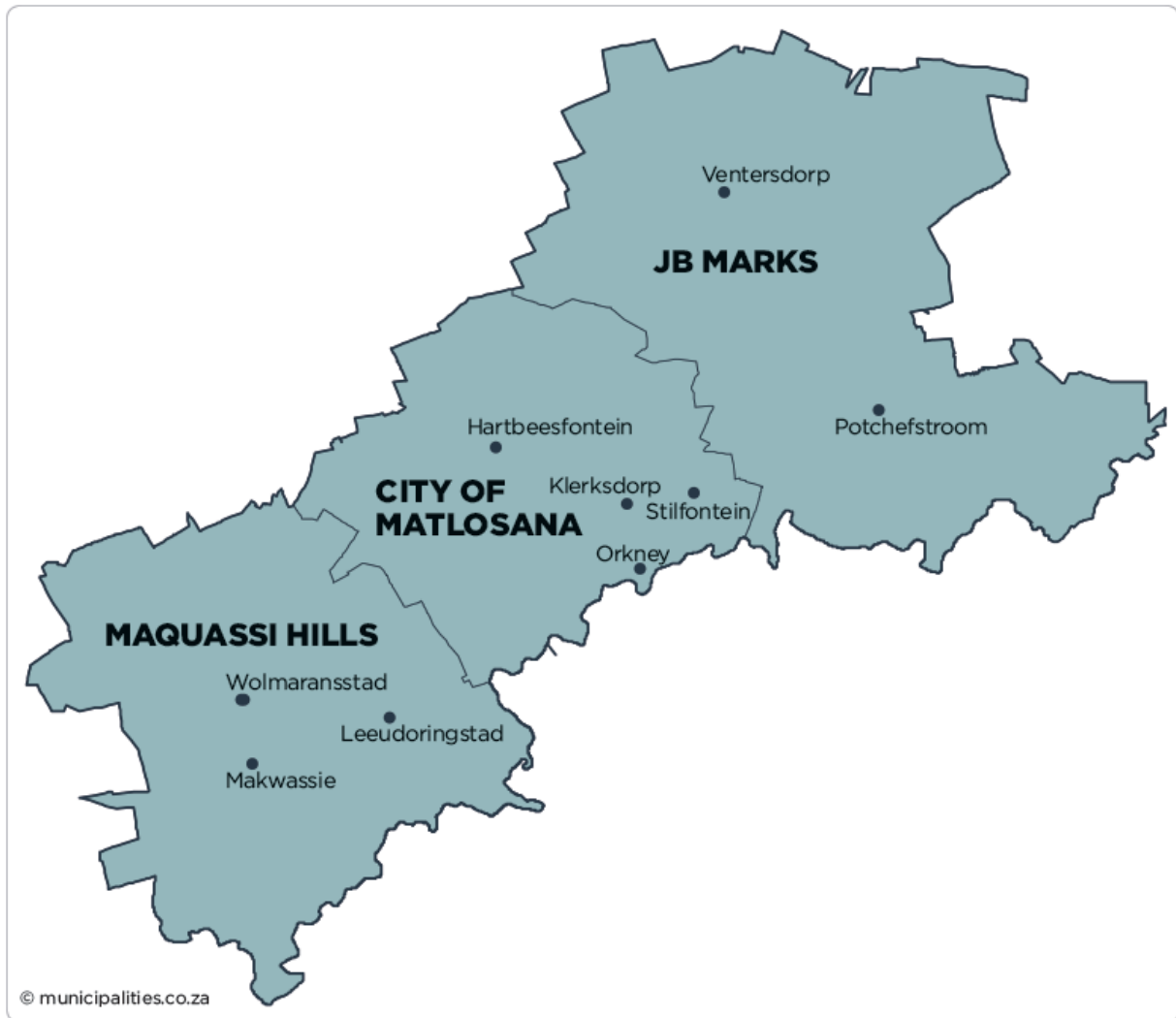


Figure 1: Dr Kenneth Kaunda District Municipality Map
(Source: Municipalities of South Africa, 2024).

The purpose of the empirical investigation had been to establish the influence of a remote work environment on employee wellness. It is envisaged that certain interventions in employee wellness will be derived from the results which will assist public leaders to manage in a more effective manner their employees' wellness in a remote work environment.

The office of the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District Municipality is located in Orkney. The three local municipality offices are located as follows:

- JB Marks Local Municipality in Potchefstroom.
- City of Matlosana Local Municipality in Klerksdorp.
- Maquassi Hills Local Municipality in Wolmaransstad.

As indicated by Virtanen (2020:1), remote work poses an ideal way of working within the increased digitised work environment, despite it not being a new concept. Derbyshire, Modgil, Grey and Pearce (2020:1) defined remote work as a circumstance in which an employee predominantly works from home and communicates with the organisation via digital means such as electronic mail (email), electronic meetings and online programs. Virtanen (2020:1) added that remote work entails working from another site than the organisation's offices.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Achieving employee wellness in a remote work environment presents distinct challenges, primarily due to the limited physical contact between employees (Derbyshire et al., 2020:1; Sull, Sull & Bersin, 2020:1). In Namibia's public sector, existing wellness challenges include infrequent employee wellness activities, a lack of interest by employees, excessive workloads, trust and confidentiality issues, and adverse employee attitudes toward implementing wellness programs. Maletzky (2017: iii - iv) argued that the shift to remote work is likely to exacerbate these pre-existing challenges. According to Mle and Ngumbela (2020:7), employee wellness is frequently overlooked within public institutions, which can hinder overall employee performance. When personal problems are not effectively managed, they can significantly impede the achievement of organizational goals, leading to decreased productivity. Thus, it is essential for managers to consider the potential benefits of implementing a proactive employee wellness program that focuses on sustaining both the mental and physical health of employees, regardless of whether they are working on-site or remotely.

Transitioning to remote work can also create hurdles, as employees must leave behind the structured office environment and established work culture (Virtanen, 2020:9; Prasad, Mangipudi, Vaidi, & Muralidhar, 2020:386). Adapting to this new social norm requires employees to possess an open mindset and a proactive attitude to confront challenges positively (Virtanen, 2020:10). Disruptions in the home environment may lead to a lack of privacy and workspace, increasing employee stress and negatively affecting their performance (Virtanen, 2020:10; Prasad *et al.*, 2020:386). This challenge makes it difficult for employees to delineate between work and home responsibilities and effectively manage their time (Flores, 2019:41; Prasad *et al.*, 2020:386).

Moreover, most existing employee wellness programs were not designed with remote work in mind (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021:4). This indicates that even successful wellness initiatives require adaptations to be effective in a remote work setting. As remote work environments become increasingly common, it is imperative to prioritize factors related to employee wellness, particularly mental health (Panchal, Kamal, Orgera, Cox, Garfield, Hamel, & Chidambaram 2021: online). The enforced isolation experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic has notably impacted the mental health of employees (Rothman, Grobler, Chambers & de Beer, 2020:1). For individuals with pre-existing mental health challenges, the pandemic has introduced new difficulties exacerbated by prolonged isolation (Panchal et al., 2021). If employee wellness is not effectively managed in the evolving digital workplace, the increase in remote work could lead to an increase in mental health issues. This situation raises concerns that the remote working model and associated isolation could contribute to a rise in mental health challenges (Santoki, Patel & Suratwala, 2020:612; Panchal et al., 2021). Consequently, as the 4IR progresses, wellness practitioners must devise innovative strategies to enhance employee wellness and avert similar challenges (Mathekga & Sekudu, 2019:37).

Given this context, the central research question guiding this study has been the following: How should employee wellness be managed in the context of a remote work environment within a local municipality in the Republic of South Africa? The primary problem this study seeks to address is the inadequacy of existing public sector wellness programs to effectively support the wellness of officials working remotely, leading to potential health, psychological, emotional, and social issues.

To explore this problem, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to ascertain the theoretical, statutory, and regulatory frameworks governing employee wellness within a municipality of the Republic of South Africa such as the JB Marks Local Municipality, as well as the challenges and benefits associated with remote work environments. Additionally, an empirical investigation was carried out within the municipality to make recommendations for an implementation framework for managing employee wellness in remote settings. The research objectives and questions formulated in this study aim to provide insights and practical solutions to address the identified research problem.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to realise the following objectives:

1.4.1 General research objectives

In consideration of the primary focus of the study and to investigate the research problem, the following general research objective guided the study:

- *to develop an implementation framework for the management of Public Sector official wellness in the context of a remote work environment in the JB Marks Local Municipality.*

1.4.2 Specific research objectives

To achieve the general research objectives, the following specific research objectives guided the study:

- 1.4.2.1 to establish the theoretical framework that underpins employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa (Chapter 2);
- 1.4.2.2 to explicate the phenomenon of a remote work environment and its influence on employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa (Chapter 3);
- 1.4.2.3 to establish the statutory and regulatory framework that regulates employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa (Chapter 4);
- 1.4.2.4 to reveal the influence of a remote work environment on official wellness in the JB Marks Local Municipality (Chapter 6); and
- 1.4.2.5 to make recommendations for an implementation framework for the management of official wellness in a remote work environment in the JB Marks Local Municipality (Chapter 7).

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1.5.1 General research questions

In consideration of the primary focus of the study and to investigate the research problem, the following general research question guided the study:

What should an implementation framework for the management of employee wellness in the context of a remote work environment constitute?

1.5.2 Specific research questions

To answer the general research question, the following specific research questions guided the study:

1.5.2.1 What are the theoretical frameworks that underpins employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa? (Chapter 2)

1.5.2.2 How can the phenomenon of a remote work environment and its influence on employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa be explicated? (Chapter 3)

1.5.2.3 What are the statutory and regulatory frameworks that regulate employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa? (Chapter 4)

1.5.2.4 What does the influence of a remote work environment on public sector official wellness in the JB Marks Local Municipality reveal? (Chapter 6)

1.5.2.5 What recommendations can be made for an implementation framework for the management of public sector official wellness in a remote work environment of JB Marks Local Municipality? (Chapter 7)

1.6 CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENTS

The subject Public Administration encompasses two pivotal attributes: (1) instrumental rationality and (2) value rationality. The evolution of Public Administration theories arises from the interplay and integration of these two essential dimensions (Dong, 2015:27– 29). From the perspective of instrumental rationality, Public Administration emphasizes rational self-interest, promotes defined managerial roles, and supports established principles and rules of organizational management. The primary aim within this framework is to achieve governmental goals through scientific and technological management, focusing on efficiency and actively contributing to the development of administrative science (Dong, 2015:24).

Conversely, value rationality embraces the concept of thoughtful selflessness. It engages with public affairs and provides public service in accordance with democratic principles, emphasizing

the development of public spirit, civic rights, social equity, and the broader philosophical underpinnings of administration (Dong, 2015:24).

While the significance of instrumental rationality is acknowledged, particularly in the context of effective employee wellness management in a remote environment, it is crucial to recognize its limitations. Key tenets of instrumental rationality — such as managerial and employee role definitions, organizational management, the application of scientific and technological tools, and a focus on efficiency (Dong, 2015:28) — primarily address systems, structures, and managerial processes. However, they do not adequately encompass the complexity of employee wellness, which includes not only physical needs but also psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

The inclusion of value rationality is essential as it shifts the focus toward employees as individuals with unique needs, thereby highlighting the employer's responsibility to address these needs. As articulated by Oakes (2003:39), value rationality embodies a "conscious belief in the unconditional intrinsic value" of actions, independent of their outcomes. This underscores the importance of integrating employee wellness initiatives into organizational practices as a constitutional and ethical obligation, regardless of the results.

Rindova and Martins (2018:325) further asserted that value rationality provides "*a unique 'standard'*" for evaluating the continuous flow of empirical events. This perspective is particularly relevant in this study as it posits that empirical findings must be interpreted to uncover their underlying values. In the realm of Public Administration, this entails evaluating government actions through the lens of perceived value by both employees (public servants) and citizens. Consequently, this study emphasizes the significance of employee wellness in a remote work context, as experienced by public sector officials in the JB Marks Local Municipality.

Both instrumental and value rationality align well with the interpretivist paradigm adopted in this research. Interpretivism challenges the positivist paradigm by focusing on understanding and explaining human and social realities (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:41; Al-Ababneh, 2020:80). This paradigm views reality as subjective and socially constructed, emphasizing the necessity of comprehending individual accounts, interpretations, and experiences within their social contexts (Nickerson, 2024). By leveraging value rationality, this study aims to interpret the subjective experiences and beliefs of employees regarding wellness in a remote work environment, thereby facilitating the construction of meaning. This alignment positions value rationality and the interpretivist approach within a constructivist ontology, as elaborated in Chapter 5. Guided

primarily by value rationality and, to a lesser extent, instrumental rationality, this study draws upon three key theoretical frameworks: the Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory, and the PERMA Model. These models will be thoroughly reviewed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The following section provides a concise overview of the research methodology employed in this study.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY BRIEF

The empirical research for this study adopted a qualitative approach, which is particularly effective for providing rich, detailed descriptions of complex phenomena. This study employed both descriptive and explanatory research designs to convey its findings in a narrative format, aiming to explain and explore concepts related to employee wellness in a remote work environment. The qualitative methodology aligns with a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, as the empirical data collected was constructed from the experiences of participants and subsequently interpreted to derive meaning.

Data collection was primarily conducted through semi-structured personal interviews, which allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' insights and experiences. A purposive sampling technique, also known as judgmental sampling, was employed to select participants. This technique relies on the researcher's judgment to identify respondents who possess relevant knowledge and experience regarding the subject matter (Sharma, 2017:751). In this study, participants included Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, Senior HR Managers as well as one senior manager from the JB Marks Local Municipality, chosen for their expertise and perspectives on employee wellness in the Public Sector of South Africa. This sampling method is particularly suitable for qualitative research, as noted by Taherdoost (2016:22), enhancing the depth and relevance of the data collected.

A more detailed account of the research methodology, including data collection and analysis procedures, is provided in Chapter 5.

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Oxford English Dictionary (2022: online) defines ethics as “*a system or set of moral principles*”. When conducting responsible research, guidelines provided by research ethics are essential. According to Nayak and Singh (2015:302), research ethics is crucial for ensuring that researchers adhere to high ethical standards throughout the research process. As noted by

Dooly, Moore, and Vallejo (2017:351), qualitative research often raises ethical questions, particularly given its focus on human subjects.

Plagiarism is a primary ethical concern that this study addressed, especially given its theoretical framework. Kumar, Priya, Musalaiah, and Nagasree (2014:194) characterized plagiarism as the theft of intellectual property, which involves the substantial copying of another's work. This includes the illegal use of theories or proprietary procedures. To avoid plagiarism, the researcher in this research study meticulously paraphrased and referenced all sources utilized in the literature review.

Additionally, fabrication and falsification of data are significant ethical issues in research. According to Stacey (2016:72), fabrication involves presenting or reporting data that is entirely fabricated or non-existent, while falsification refers to the intentional misrepresentation of data. Throughout the empirical investigation, the researcher ensured that all data were ethically collected and accurate, addressing these ethical concerns comprehensively.

The study also involved an empirical investigation, requiring careful consideration of the participants involved. Importantly, none of the participants faced any disadvantages during this process. The study was designed to pose no risk to participants or other individuals. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality were strictly adhered to. The Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) (2023) asserts that an informed consent process is vital for respondents participating in research studies. As articulated by the HRPP (2024), giving a participant enough information about the study, giving them enough time to weigh their options, answering their questions, making sure they understand it, getting their voluntary consent to participate, and continuing to provide information as needed by the subject or circumstance are all steps in the informed consent process. The researcher utilized the prescribed informed consent form from the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities (BaSSREC) at North-West University for participants involved in data collection. Participants were assured that their involvement in the study would remain anonymous and voluntary. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, regardless of whether they had initially provided informed consent.

In compliance with the requirements set forth by the Focus Area: Social Transformation and the Faculty of Humanities, the research proposal was submitted to BaSSREC for ethical clearance approval.

1.9 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

This study was specifically confined to the JB Marks Local Municipality due to time constraints and practical considerations, which serve to narrow the scope of the investigation. Consequently, the findings of this study may not be generalizable across other local municipalities. However, it is important to note that the circumstances and challenges faced by local municipalities tend to be similar, which may allow for some degree of generalization of the results within similar contexts.

The research was designed to elicit in-depth insights from selected respondents regarding how a remote work environment influences their wellness as employees. The effectiveness of this approach was contingent upon the availability and willingness of these individuals to participate in the interviews. Additionally, the researcher had no control over the information provided during the empirical investigation, which poses a limitation as it could potentially impact the overall findings of the study. To mitigate this concern, the researcher employed rigorous data collection instruments to ensure consistency and accuracy in the gathered data.

1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study extends both theoretically and practically. From a practical standpoint, the data results and the recommendations provided regarding an implementation framework in Chapter 7 are anticipated to provide valuable insights for the Republic of South Africa's Public Service regarding the management of employee wellness in a remote work environment. This study integrates theoretical perspectives, relevant legislation, and empirical findings to create an implementation framework tailored to enhance the wellness of Public Sector officials working remotely within a municipality.

In terms of theoretical contributions, employee wellness falls under the broader umbrella of Public Human Resources Management (HRM), which is a sub-discipline of Public Administration. As such, this study enriches the academic discourse within the field of Public Administration, providing new insights and understanding regarding the complexities of managing employee wellness in contemporary remote work settings.

1.11 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The structure of this dissertation is organized according to the following chapter layout:

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The first chapter introduces the study, providing context and delineating the research topic. It outlines the research problem, objectives, and guiding questions. Additionally, this chapter establishes the theoretical framework that supports the study and briefly describes the research methodology employed. Ethical considerations, along with the limitations and delimitations of the study, are also discussed, highlighting the significance of the research.

Chapter Two: Conceptualisation and Theoretical Frameworks for Employee Wellness

This chapter offers a comprehensive literature review on employee wellness, including its conceptualization and dimensions. It examines the essential components necessary for an effective implementation framework. A thorough analysis of key theoretical models is conducted, including (1) the Health Belief Model, (2) the Social Cognitive Theory, and (3) the PERMA Model, which guided the study and were instrumental in developing the implementation framework presented in Chapter 7. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings.

Chapter Three: The phenomenon of a Remote Work Environment and its influence on Employee Wellness

In this chapter, the phenomenon of remote work is conceptualized and contextualized, focusing on its impact on employee wellness. Both the positive and negative effects of a remote work environment are examined. Additionally, best practices for promoting employee wellness in a remote setting are explored. The chapter concludes with recommendations for implementing a virtual employee awareness program and practical strategies to support remote employees' wellness.

Chapter Four: Statutory and Regulatory Framework for Employee Wellness in the South African Public Sector

Chapter Four provides a detailed review of the statutory and regulatory framework relevant to managing employee wellness within the Public Service of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa). It discusses pertinent legislation and policies that offer guidelines and directives for employee wellness management. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Chapter Five: Research Methodology

This chapter details the research methodology employed in the study. It outlines the nature and scope of the research conducted in the JB Marks Local Municipality, including information and empirical data collected through a comprehensive review of secondary sources and semi-structured interviews. This chapter lays the groundwork for the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Chapter Six: Empirical Study on the JB Marks Local Municipality

This chapter presents the investigation's nature and scope, interpreting secondary source information and empirical data collected from the JB Marks Local Municipality. The primary focus is on data gathered through semi-structured interviews with senior, experienced, and knowledgeable officials of the Municipality. The aim is to conduct a scientific analysis of the experiences and challenges faced by these individuals in managing employee wellness within a remote work environment.

Chapter Seven: Primary Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations on a Proposed Implementation Framework

As the concluding chapter, Chapter Seven summarizes the earlier chapters of the dissertation and presents recommendations for an implementation framework that the JB Marks Local Municipality should adopt to effectively manage employee wellness in a remote work environment.

1.12 CONCLUSION

The study's focus is encapsulated in the problem statement and the central research question: How should employee wellness be managed in the context of a remote work environment? The chapter outlined specific research objectives and questions aimed at investigating this issue comprehensively. Additionally, it established the theoretical framework that guided the research, detailing the methodology, research approach, design, and data collection methods employed. The qualitative nature of the study was emphasized, underscoring its theoretical and empirical dimensions. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the complexities surrounding employee wellness in a remote context. The next chapter will specifically review

employee wellness, exploring its dimensions, challenges, and best practices in the context of remote work environments.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALISATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of implementing employee wellness, particularly in the context of a remote work environment, was emphasized in the previous chapter. The COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa acted as a catalyst for adopting remote work practices, a trend likely to persist with the rise of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). This study seeks to highlight the critical need to prioritize employee wellness, even outside traditional office settings.

Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical frameworks relevant to employee wellness within the public sector of the Republic of South Africa (RSA), while the specific implications of the remote work environment will be explored in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, investing in employee wellness is crucial for fostering trust and loyalty within organizations (Alesso-Bendisch, 2020: online) and enhancing productivity (Baicker, Cutler & Song, 2015:304). This chapter will conceptualize and contextualize employee wellness specifically within the public sector.

Additionally, a comprehensive review of key theoretical models — namely, the Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory, and the PERMA Model — will be conducted as referenced in Chapter 1, Section 1.6. These models are pivotal in understanding health-related behaviours and will guide the effective implementation of employee wellness initiatives.

Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of key findings and insights, setting the foundation for the subsequent discussions on employee wellness in the context of remote work environments.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION AND CONTEXTUALISATION OF EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

In establishing a clear understanding of *employee wellness*, it is necessary to first define **wellness** as a root component of *employee wellness*. Solnet, Subramony, Golubovskaya, Snyder, Gray, Liberman and Verman (2020:1) contended that it is in ancient notions of mental and physical harmony that wellness is engrained, particularly as a human- as well as societal ideal. Wellness refers to a commitment to execute, rehearse and refine healthy habits

repeatedly and regularly to realise better physical and mental health with the purpose of flourishing, instead of merely enduring life, as well as to attain one's life goals (Republic of South Africa, 2019:48; Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2021; Physiopedia, 2021; Pfizer, 2021: online). The aspects of wellness that influence both a person's physical and mental health include several aspects in a person's lifestyle, such as social connectedness, exercise, nutrition, weight management, sleep and mindfulness (Stoewen, 2017:58; Pfizer, 2021: online). The practice of healthy and mindful choices will assist to reduce stress, experiencing positive social interactions and attain wellness (Pfizer, 2021: online).

As contended by Nataraj (2019:20), it was in the 1970s that the concept of wellness was recognised, and it became widespread in the 1980s. The change in the defining of health into a holistic view saw the arrival of the wellness concept which is concentrated on a healthy and progressive functioning (Kunte, 2016b:1). However, the early definition of wellness was limited to just a Human Resource element that was centred on psychological as well as physical health within the work environment (Nataraj, 2019:21). However, the then definition of wellness outlined by Reardon (1998) is like that of Stoewen (2017:861), Hong (2019:2) and Torres and Zhang (2021:1), that entailed that wellness is a holistic integration of various dimensions. Furthermore, several authors (Rakepa & Uys, 2013:25; Madikologa, 2014:13; Peterson, Steinmetz, Moonen & Stara, 2018:41; Qaisar, Mariam & Ahmed, 2018:105; Makhanya, 2021:20), have simply defined wellness as intentionally making choices as well as choosing a fulfilling and healthy lifestyle. However, the Wellness Management Policy's (Republic of South Africa, 2019a:3) definition of wellness is centred on the Republic of South Africa Public Service as well as the employee by means of making choices for a positive existence between the two.

2.2.1 Dimensions of wellness

The dimensions of a holistic approach to wellness were developed by Bill Hettler in 1976. These dimensions are the physical dimension, social dimension, intellectual dimension, emotional dimension, occupational dimension and spiritual dimension. Bill Hettler coined it as the "*six dimensions of wellness model*" (Wickramaratne, Phuoc & Tham, 2020:45). A focused combination of the dimensions results in overall wellness for individuals (Kumar *et al.*, 2020:3). The six dimensions of wellness are further expounded upon below:

2.2.1.1 Physical dimension

The **physical dimension** is focused on the physical wellness such as cardiovascular fitness, flexibility, and strength (National Wellness Institute, 1976; online; Nawarathna & Wickramarathne, 2021:102; Rhoads, Murphy, Doucette, Gentile & Rhoads, 2020:3). In addition, this dimension alludes to the more conservative characteristics of leading a healthy life like exercising and dieting (Meikassandra, Prabawa & Mertha, 2020:82; Strout, Ahmed, Sporer, Howard, Sassatelli & Mcfadden, 2018:3). The physical dimension of wellness (initially the sole focus of employee wellness) remains relevant in the consideration and management of employees' wellness. Providing in the physical dimension of employees' wellness will demand a commitment of the employer to provide a safe and healthy environment, health screening and health education (also see Section 2.2.1. below).

2.2.1.2 Social dimension

Social wellness comprises of a person's interaction with others, their community, their environment and nature (Meikassandra *et al.*, 2020:82; Strout *et al.*, 2018:3; Wickramarathne *et al.*, 2020:46). However, as cited by Bankimbhai (2019:39), social wellness is concentrated primarily on the individual's relation to other persons and the environment. This dimension involves the level of participation from the individual, particularly within the events from their community and environment (Bankimbhai, 2019:39; National Wellness Institute, 1976; online). Since employees also interact with others and the environment in the workplace, this dimension includes employees' social wellness in the work environment. It can be argued that an employee with good relations with his or her colleagues will feel more confident and content in the workplace. It is further argued that this applies to a work environment that provides support in terms of employee services such as the opportunity to take leave for family obligations. The leadership style of an organisation's management will also be a deciding factor in whether an employee experiences the work environment as socially supportive. In the context of a remote work environment (discussed in Chapter 3 of the study), effectively managing and providing in the social need of employees becomes challenging.

2.2.1.3 Intellectual (cognitive) dimension

The **intellectual (cognitive) dimension** is defined as *"the degree that one engages in creative and stimulating activities, as well as the use of resources to expand knowledge and focus on the acquisition, development, application, and articulation of critical thinking"* (Miller & Foster,

2010:15). This dimension highlights the gaining, progress, application and enunciation of critical thinking (Bankimbhai, 2019:40; Meikassandra *et al.*, 2020:82; National Wellness Institute: 1976; Strout *et al.*, 2018:3).

In the context of the work environment, it is argued that the leadership in an organisation should establish the intellectual needs of employees and ensure that they do not experience stagnancy or boredom. Considerations in this regard can include providing employees who need intellectual stimulation with more challenging work aiming to enrich their jobs.

2.2.1.4 Emotional dimension

Attitudes and beliefs concerning the self and life are at the centre of the **emotional dimension** of wellness (National Wellness Institute, 1976:2). As cited by Bankimbhai (2019:40), emotional wellness is defined as *“the awareness and acceptance of a range of feelings in the self and others, as well as one’s ability to constructively express, manage, and integrate feelings”*. This dimension signifies the awareness of safe self-identity and feelings (Meikassandra *et al.*, 2020:82; Solomon, 2014:30). Moreover, the emotional dimension of wellness refers to an individuals’ ability to control their emotions, feelings and reactions (Rhoads *et al.*, 2021:3; Strout *et al.*, 2018:3).

It is deducted that the ability to manage oneself (emotions, feelings and reactions), demands a certain level of emotional intelligence. In this respect, the employer can expose employees to workshops focusing on the development of emotional intelligence. The employer should therefore establish the emotional needs of employees and provide the necessary support. For example, should an employee experience challenges in his or her personal life that affect their work performance, he or she can be referred for counselling. The employer can also expose an employee to workshops focusing on personal financial management, should this be a challenge experienced by the employee.

2.2.1.5 Occupational (vocational) dimension

National Wellness Institute (1976) defined **occupational (vocational)** wellness as one’s level of satisfaction in the workplace, as well as the growth because of an employee’s work. Bankimbhai (2019:41) contended that the degree to which the employees’ occupations permit them to express their values contributes to occupational wellness. Furthermore, as cited by Strout and

Howard (2012:197), it is through the input of exclusive skills as well as talents that occupational wellness is reflected.

It is argued that the occupational dimension of wellness will demand the employer's attention to both physical, emotional and social aspects to ensure job satisfaction. The physical dimension will relate to aspects such as a safe and healthy work environment, as well as ergonomic factors, as indicated above (also see Section 2.2.2 below). Regarding the emotional environment, the employer will need to consider employees' personal challenges and the need for, among others, counselling and workshops, as alluded to above. Providing in an employee's need for social wellness will require an employer's attention to opportunities for interactivity among employees and team building. The occupational dimension will also necessitate attention to job satisfaction. In this respect, it is argued that the leadership of an organisation should invest in employees' growth and development through HRM practices such as talent management, career management and coaching and mentoring.

2.2.1.6 Spiritual dimension

Solomon (2014:29), Strout *et al.*, (2018:3) as well as Meikassandra *et al.*, (2020:82) affirmed that the **spiritual dimension** of wellness is focused on whether individuals have a purpose and meaning in life. Furthermore, Rhoads *et al.*, (2021:3) opined that this dimension alludes to the sense of being connected to a higher power than the self. However, Kitko (2001:310) and McDonough (2011:2) indicated that the spirituality of this dimension does not merely refer to religious beliefs, but that spirituality and religion are related – a person can add meaning to the practice of religion through the development of spirituality and similarly, the practice of religion can increase spirituality. The spiritual wellness of individuals involves a high level of faith, hope and commitment to their beliefs, values and principles (University of North Dakota, 2021). It refers to a person's willingness to seek meaning and purpose in human existence, to strive for harmony and to find balance between the self and the external world (Rhodes University, 2021).

In considering the spiritual dimension of employee wellness, organisations should view work as a spiritual path and an opportunity to grow and contribute to society in a meaningful way (Srivastana, 2018). It is argued that providing in the spiritual needs of employees can be accomplished through the provision of meditation time at the beginning of meetings, bereavement programs, servant leadership, leadership practices that support the growth and development of employees, and openly asking questions to assess whether the organisation's actions are aligned with a meaning and purpose. In the South African context, given the human

rights and public service delivery requirements enshrined in the Constitution, 1996, this meaning and purpose can relate to social justice.

2.2.1.7 Financial wellness

In addition to the six dimensions of wellness established by Hettler (1979) (National Wellness Institute, 1976), there are other aspects of wellness to consider. These include financial and environmental wellness. **Financial wellness** is a concept encompassing an individual's financial position (Stoewen, 2017:862; Ghazali et al., 2020:56; Rehr & Regan, 2020:2). It is usually achieved as individuals obtain some sense of power and become wiser when handling their personal finances to ensure financial resources to meet their needs (Lötter & Welthagen, 2020:3). Financial wellness can also be regarded as a component of the emotional dimension of employee wellness.

2.2.1.8 Environmental wellness

Environmental wellness encompasses an individual's regular environment such as the living environment as well as the work environment (Rehman, Syed, Hussain, Fraz & Shaikh, 2020:655). It involves inhabiting environments that are pleasing, encouraging and further support wellness by enabling access to resources required to attain the desired wellness (Olerich, Summers, Lewis, Stewart & Ryan, 2021:267). Environmental wellness can also be regarded as a sub-focus of the physical, emotional and vocational dimensions of employee wellness.

Based on the above review on the dimensions of employee wellness, it is evident that a great responsibility is entrusted to organisations to provide in all these dimensions of employees' wellness needs. It is argued that none of these dimensions are more important than the others. However, negligence of an organisation to provide in any of these dimensions may negatively affect employees' fulfilment in the workplace. It is therefore argued that careful attention should be given to each of these dimensions during the development and management of an employee wellness programme (discussed in Section 2.2.2 below).

Considering the work environment that becomes increasingly remote, employers may experience challenges in effectively providing for all these dimensions of employee wellness. The remote work environment as well as the influence it has on employee wellness receives attention in Chapter 3 of this study. In Chapter 7 of the study, recommendations for an

implementation framework are provided to effectively ensure that employee wellness is addressed for all the above dimensions within a remote work environment.

The dimensions of employee wellness can be used as a pathway or guide for organisations, as to which areas to address pertaining the wellness of employees. As explained in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, if organisations wish to reap long-term benefits for employees' wellness, they should establish and maintain employee wellness programs (Wentzel, 2020:53). Subsequently, the next section provides an understanding on the purpose and components of employee wellness programs.

2.2.2 Employee wellness programs

It is necessary to make a distinction between employee wellness programs and employee assistance programs. **Employee wellness programs** are initiatives and policies directed at chronic disease prevention and supporting healthy behaviours for employees (Rakepa & Uys, 2013: 25; Kunte, 2016a:334; Passey, Brown, Hammerback, Harris & Hannon, 2018:1789; Zhang, 2018:54; Harrison & Stephens, 2019:617; Radzi, Hasbollah, Saidi, Hashim & Ali, 2020:500). These programs therefore inspire and support employees to follow a healthy lifestyle (Kunte, 2016a:335). Employee wellness programs can include for example in-house gymnasiums, smoking cessation programs, or weight loss programs (Berna, 2019: online; De Novo HR Consulting, 2019: online). Employee wellness programs can be regarded as the beginning of healthcare interventions as its primary aim was to lessen health risk factors and promote healthy living (Kunte, 2016b:1).

Employee assistance programs are intervention programs that aid employees for personal problems they experience that could affect their work performance, such as depression, anxiety, legal difficulties, relationship challenges, and child or elder care (De Novo HR Consulting, 2019: online; Republic of South Africa, 2019:48; Ntinga OR Tambo Development Agency, 2021:2). Employee assistance programs are usually provided free of charge to employees with a view on short-term support and assists employees in steering specific challenges they experience (De Novo HR Consulting, 2019: online). Therefore, both these programs are work-based programs to enhance employee wellness.

Whereas employee wellness programs predominantly focus on the physical health and wellbeing of employees, employee assistance programs give attention to employees' emotional and psychological needs. In consideration of the need for a holistic approach to employee

wellness, it is evident that the joint offering of employee wellness programs and employee assistance programs is needed to effectively address all the wellness needs of employees (physical, emotional and psychological). This study therefore supports the implementation of both employee wellness programs and employee assistance programs in the workplace. However, to prevent confusion, the study collectively refers to employee wellness programs and employee assistance programs as **employee wellness programs**, implying that a reference to an employee wellness programme encompasses a consideration of physical, emotional and psychological wellness.

Vermeulen (2021:303) explained that employee wellness programs are primarily put in place to achieve two objectives, being: (1) to improve employee health and wellness; and (2) to lessen health expenses. Moreover, the nature of support provided to employees is rapidly changing due to employee wellness programs, particularly within the Public Service (Vermeulen, 2021:305). The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) defined an employee wellness programme as:

“a coordinated and comprehensive set of [health promotion and protection] strategies [implemented at the worksite] which include programs, policies, benefits, environmental supports, and links to the surrounding community designed to meet the health and safety needs of all employees.” (CDCP, 2016: online).

Employee wellness programs ought to comprise of the key components as outlined by Passey *et al.*, (2018:1791) and Berna (2019: online): (1) health education; (2) a supportive social and physical work environment; (3) integration of the wellness programme into the organisation’s structure; (4) a connection to related programs such as employee assistance programs; and (5) workplace screening. As argued by Mle and Ngumbela (2020:7), the importance of introducing functional employee wellness programs is necessary to address the psychological and physical wellness of employees; thereby avoiding unproductive employees who are burdened by personal issues.

In addition to the aspects such as therapy, leave for family obligations, overall employee services, dedicated management and encouragement from leadership assist in creating a **supportive social work environment** for employees (Sieberhagen, Pienaar & Els, 2011:1; Kunda & Lata, 2017:706; Phuong, Quynh & Hien, 2021:99), as also alluded to the social dimension of wellness in Section 2.2.1.2. above.

A healthy workplace requires that the employer gives attention to not only the physical work environment of the employee, but to also ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of employees in the psycho-social work environment (WHO, 2010:6). Therefore, the employer should include a focus on **psycho-social hazards** such as: work-life balance (flexible and caring employment practices); factors intrinsic to the job (lack of variety, repetitive or mundane tasks, and under-use of an employee's abilities); work time (inflexible working schedules); fatigue (burn-out); stress; and bullying (verbal, physical, social or psychological mistreatment) (International Labour Organisation, 1986; WHO, 2010:5; Vermeulen, 2021:314). All these psychological hazards are known to be connected to various health, psychological and sleep disorders (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016:2; International Labour Organisation, 2017: 49; WHO, 2020 online; Vermeulen, 2021:316-317). Psycho-social hazards relate to the emotional dimension of employee wellness.

As mentioned above, matters that relate to the **growth and self-development** of employees are also associated with employee wellness and should therefore be prioritised to ensure that employees can realise their abilities through training and development interventions (Forbes Coaches Council, 2017: online). **Human Resource Management practices** such as career management, talent management, effective performance management practices, as well as coaching and mentoring should also be reiterated as contributing factors to the overall wellness of employees, since these practices enhance employee morale and motivation and fosters a culture of continuous learning and development (Nokhwali-Mboyi, 2017:25). The implementation of HRM practices to enhance the wellness of employees relate predominantly to the intellectual and vocational dimensions of employee wellness.

Regarding the **physical work environment** (also see Section 2.2.1.1. above where the physical dimension of wellness is discussed), it is necessary to remember that occupational health and safety is a significant element of employee wellness (International Labour Organisation, 1981: online; WHO, 2010:6; United Nations, 2012: online). In this respect, the security of employees in the workplace should receive attention (Republic of South Africa, 1993:1; Machabe & Indermun, 2013:14). The employer should also be attentive to matters such as the improper height of a work surface, an uncomfortable chair and poorly designed tools that can all contribute to an increased risk of musculoskeletal disorders (Fasanya & Shofoluwe, 2019:385). It is also the responsibility of the employer to ensure information and training on proficient work techniques to employees (Athota & Malik, 2019:21; Kruger & Jacobs, 2019:186).

Health screening and health education are also considered important elements to include in an employee wellness programme (Passey *et al.*, 2018:1791; Berna, 2019: online). Berry, Mirabito and Baun (2020:4) explained that **health screenings** were essential in allowing an employer to identify information that can increase the participation in employee wellness programs, since it assists in understanding employees' health and wellness factors. Health screenings are an important tool for encouraging employee health and wellness, as well as fostering a positive work environment that prioritizes the health and wellness of its employees (Work Healthy Solutions, 2024: online). Health screening predominantly refers to the physical and emotional dimensions of employee wellness.

Furthermore, Kent State University (2021: online) stated that **health education** has three purposes. Firstly, to promote health and prevent disease, disability and untimely death through intentional behaviour changes. Secondly, to improve health knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. Lastly, to positively influence the health-related behaviour of individuals and communities, as well as the living and working conditions that influence their health and wellness. It is therefore argued that the knowledge acquired through health education will assist employees in making informed and mindful decisions to change their behaviour. In this manner employees will improve their health and wellness, transpiring in a better quality of life. As is the case with health screening, health education also predominantly relates to the physical and emotional dimensions of employee wellness.

Kunte (2016a:335) and Bromley (2019:3) denoted that **incentives** are a significant aspect to consider in employee wellness programs. As contended by Jenkins, Fakhoury, Richardson, Segar, Krupka and Kullgren (2019:880), incentives are offered with the aim of encouraging change in the behaviour of the employees. Incentives are also used to increase the participation of employees in wellness programs (Kunte, 2016a:335; Bromley, 2019:3; Jenkins *et al.*, 2019:881). The provision of incentives relates to the emotional dimension of employee wellness.

Employee wellness programs should further incorporate **health promotion activities**. These have a positive impact on employees, particularly on their emotional wellness (Hsu, Wang, Tzou, Pan & Tang, 2020:217). Phillips and Laslett (2021:5) argued that these activities can be achieved through (1) building health public policy, (2) creating a supportive environment, (3) strengthening community action, (4) developing personal skills and (5) reorienting health services. A focus on health promotion activities predominantly relates to the physical dimension of employee wellness.

As cited by Majid, Ramli, Badyalina, Roslan and Hashim (2020:192), **organisational culture** (including communication and connection) is an important aspect for the continued involvement of employees in wellness programs without resistance. A desired organisational culture can be shaped by being supportive of workplace policies, programs and activities that boost employee health, wellness and productivity (Williams, Chen-Bowers, Lankford & Wolff, 2019:1). Moreover, as contended by Zula (2014:787), communication methods ought to consist of various modes regarding the benefits, employee wellness programme, and its activities. Attention to an organisational culture relates to the emotional, social, vocational and spiritual dimensions of employee wellness.

Another aspect to consider within employee wellness programs is **organisational leadership** (Zula, 2014:787). Leaders within an organisation are important in influencing the health and wellness of employees (Williams *et al.*, 2019:1). As cited by Hoert, Herd and Hambrick (2018:1055), the significance of organisational leadership within employee wellness programs, particularly regarding remote sites, is imperative. Organisational leaders have the responsibility to determine the degree of support needed for employee wellness programs and are responsible for steering the process (Hoert *et al.*, 2018:1055). The role and style of organisational leadership predominantly relates to the social, emotional, vocational, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of employee wellness.

The context explains the important aspects to be included in functional employee wellness programs, which contain all the dimensions of employee wellness, reviewed in Section 2.2.1. above. However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges for Employee Wellness Practitioners as well as the functioning of employee wellness programs. The subsequent section details the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on public leaders, employee wellness and the work environment.

2.2.3 Employee wellness and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The emerging need for the use of the 4IR due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of South Africa presented public leadership with new challenges regarding HRM processes and practices (such as employee wellness). In addition, managing the transition to a remote work environment also became a challenge for public leadership. In the interest of protecting all citizens from contracting the virus, the President of the Republic of South Africa was necessitated towards the end of March 2020 to issue a directive for a phased lockdown on

different alert levels. The initial lockdown resulted in a period where all South Africans, except for essential workers, worked from home. During the lockdown levels, a phased-in approach was followed, where people increasingly returned to the workplace. However, it is argued that the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that working remotely is possible. This trend is likely to continue in consideration of the changes that will be brought about by the 4IR. (The context of a remote work environment will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this study).

In addition to the phenomena of managing employees working remotely, the COVID-19 pandemic also necessitated changes in the physical workplace itself (the office setting), as employees returned to work. Measures such as regular hand washing, sanitising, the wearing of face masks and keeping a social distance were put in place. All employees in the workplace were therefore mandated to comply with the COVID-19 protocols issued by the Government.

Additional to the measures, the WHO (2020: online) issued workplace protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic. In compliance with the directives of the WHO, the South African Government issued directives that comply with the international standards and requirements set by the WHO. The measures by the WHO (2020: online) and the South African Government (Republic of South Africa, 2020:7-15) necessitated that employers and organisational management had to conduct regular risk assessments. Moreover, employers had to provide training to employees in infection prevention and control practices. The measures tasked employees who had pre-existing medical conditions, were pregnant, or older than 60 years of age, with high-risk activities to be avoided. In addition, employees, employers and institutions had to collaborate with health authorities to prevent and control the virus. Employers, in consultation with employees and their representatives, had to plan and implement measures to prevent and mitigate COVID-19 at the workplace through engineering and administrative controls. Also, employers had to provide employees (at no cost to the employee) with personal protective equipment and clothing according to the risk assessment. Lastly, institutions had to develop action plans to prevent and mitigate COVID-19 as part of their institutional continuity plan (which should be regularly updated as circumstances change).

Although the aforementioned predominantly focused on the responsibilities of employers, the WHO (2020: online) also established responsibilities for employees in the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. These responsibilities stated that (WHO, 2020: online) employees had to comply with the measures for occupational health and safety and infection prevention and control, established in their workplace. Secondly, employees had to participate in training

provided by the employer. Lastly, employees had to report any circumstances that may present an imminent and serious danger to their life or health to their management.

Employees had the right to remove themselves from any work situation they had reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent and danger to their life or health and should be protected from any undue consequences because of exercising this right (WHO, 2020: online). In dealing with employee wellness during the pandemic, organisations could divide employees into groups and devise a schedule for which group goes to work on which day. The vulnerable employees were able to be excluded from the groups, and they could work remotely for the benefit of their health. In that manner, the work environment was not congested with employees, which further reduced the possibility of employees contracting the virus at work.

With reference to the rest of the World, the pandemic resulted in severe mental health matters for employees as well as the public (Cullen, Gulati & Kelly, 2020:311; Giorgi, Lecca, Alessio, Finstad, Bondanini, Lulli, Arcangeli & Mucci, 2020:3). Amerio, Brambilla, Morganti, Aguglia, Bianchi, Santi, Costantini, Odone, Costanza, Signorelli, Serafini, Amore and Capolongo (2020:2) found that employees experienced numerous mental health effects because of isolation, such as showing signs of depression and anxiety, irritability, restlessness, and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Cullen *et al.*, 2020:311), amongst others. Moreover, Amerio *et al.*, (2020:2) contended that some of the effects experienced by employees because of the pandemic could be long-term.

The increase in mental health challenges for employees during the COVID-19 pandemic reiterates the importance of including this aspect in an employee wellness programme. Should the trend of working remotely continue, attention to the mental health of employees should receive priority. The remote work environment and its influence on employee wellness (including mental health wellness) is reviewed in Chapter 3. Moreover, Chapter 3 aims to outline the best practices of remote work to assist employees who experience mental health challenges while working remotely.

In instances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a government or organisations would typically wish to change the behaviour of citizens or employees to prevent a disease from spreading. Certain theoretical models can be applied to accomplish such changed health behaviours. The next section explores the theoretical models, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section 1.6), to intervene and guide the health behaviour of employees.

2.3 THEORETICAL MODELS ON EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

Theories and models of health behaviour are significant, particularly in changing and predicting health behaviour. The theoretical models reviewed in this section are the Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory as well as the PERMA Model. Although all theoretical models have limitations, the Health Belief Model is regarded as relevant to this study since it emphasises the beliefs of individuals and their health (Louis, 2019:73). Further relevance of the theory within this study is its successful use to promote health (Louis, 2019:73). Moreover, the theory makes provision for a suitable framework for creating behaviour transformation strategies (Goodarzi, Heidarnia, Tavafian & Eslami, 2017:26). Social Cognitive Theory is significant to guide health behaviour interventions (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Adams & Magann, 2020:332). Social Cognitive Theory can also be used to develop an envisioned behaviour (Bashirian Seyedzadeh-Sabounchi, Shirahmadi, Karimi-Shahanjarini, Soltanian & Vahdatinia, 2021:192). The PERMA Model therefore addresses the shortfalls of both the Health Belief Model and Social Cognitive Theory to address mental and psychological health. This is because the PERMA Model is greatly associated with mental health (Madan & Rastogi, 2023:13; Turner Roberts, Proeve, & Chen 2023:21). Therefore, the theoretical models are instrumental in assisting public institutions to draft strategies to promote and improve health-related behaviour.

2.3.1 Health Belief Model

The Health Belief Model is one of the health theoretical frameworks used to explain and predict health behaviour (Rosenstock, 1974:354; Sulat, Prabandari, Sanusi, Hapsari & Santoso, 2018:500; Luquis & Kensinger, 2019:38; Wu, Feng, Sun, 2020:24; Carico, Sheppard & Thomas, 2021:1984; Daragmeh, Sagi & Zeman, 2021:3). As cited by Rosenstock (1974:354), Kasl and Cobb defined health behaviour as *"any activity undertaken by a person who believes himself to be healthy for the purpose of preventing disease or detecting disease in an asymptomatic stage"*. The Health Belief Model was initially developed in the 1950s by social psychologists (Godfrey Hochbaum, Irwin Rosenstock and Stephen Regels) for adoption in the USA (Jones, Smith & Llewellyn, 2014:254; Emmanuel, 2015:30; Skinner, Tiro & Champion, 2015:75; Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:3; Louis, 2019:73), however, the model has been effectively modified to fit various cultural and relevant contexts (Jones, Jensen, Scherr, Brown, Christy & Weaver, 2015:567; Huang, Dai & Xu, 2020:2).

Moreover, it is in public health research that the model serves as a theoretical guideline for health behaviour (Barakat & Kasemy, 2020:2). The Health Belief Model is a psychological and

health behaviour change model primarily to the acceptance of health services (Siddiqui, Ghazal, Bibi, Ahmed & Sajjad, 2016). In addition, in behavioural health research, the Health Belief Model has been widely utilised as a theoretical framework for developing interventions as well as predicting changes in health behaviour (Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:3; Sulat *et al.*, 2018:500). Several authors (Roden, 2004:3; Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:2; Sripad, Kirk, Adoyi, Dempsey, Ishaku & Waren, 2019:2; Tong, Chen, Yu & Wu, 2020:1206; Zampetakis & Melas, 2021:470) referred to the Health Belief Model as a value-expectancy theory. This is because of its belief that a health-related action can prevent and assist in avoiding disease. Moreover, the model is further regarded as an archetypal pattern, meaning it is not regarded as a formal theory, but, as a model utilised to assess and encourage behavioural changes (Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:2).

The Health Belief Model is a social cognition model and one of the most robust psychosociological models, regularly used in assessing the beliefs, values and attitudes of people towards a broad spectrum of health-related behaviours (Razmara, Aghamolaei, Madani, Hosseini & Zare, 2018; online; Daragmeh *et al.*, 2021:3). Moreover, the model opines that a person's health behaviour is established through two cognitive processes, particularly when responding to a threat, namely: (1) threat appraisal (*"how severe one assesses the consequences of a threat to be"*) and (2) coping appraisal (*"how efficient and feasible a protection behaviour is"*) (Walrave, Waeterloos & Ponnet, 2020:2).

Moreover, the Health Belief Model is founded on the premise of Skinner (1938), theorising that *"behaviour is determined by its consequences or reinforcements"* (Skinner *et al.*, 2015:76). Therefore, the knowledge of a reward following a behaviour is an adequate reason to increase the likelihood that the behaviour would be recurrent (Skinner *et al.*, 2015:76). In the context of this study, it implies that the probability of changing a health-related or wellness-related behaviour is high, should it be believed that it would lead to a reward such as a prolonged life, improved health or being disease-free.

The Health Belief Model studies behaviour at an individual and group level (Carico *et al.*, 2021:1985). In order to understand what would make people behave in a particular manner concerning their health, six constructs have been developed as part of the model (Skinner *et al.*, 2015:76-77; Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:3; Goodarzi *et al.*, 2017:26; Nobiling & Maykrantz, 2017:307; Razmara *et al.*, 2018: online; Louis, 2019:73; Barakat & Kasemy, 2020:2; Wong, Alias, Wong, Lee & AbuBakar, 2020:2205; Vermeulen, 2021:298; Al-Sabbagh, Al-Ani, Mafrachi, Siyam, Isleem, Massad, Alsabbagh & Abufaraj, 2022:216). The six constructs encompassed within the Health Belief Model are centred on distinct beliefs regarding health conditions that

predict personal health-associated behaviours (Vermeulen, 2021:298). The six aspects forecasting health behaviour include the following: perceived susceptibility; perceived risk severity; perceived benefits; perceived barriers to action; cues to action; and self-efficacy (Glanz, Rimer & Viswanath 2008:47; Vermeulen, 2021:298). The constructs work interdependently to form a better understanding of the phenomenon of interest with the purpose of explaining and/or predicting health behaviour (Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:2). These constructs are elaborated upon below.

As cited by Tarkang and Zotor (2015:3), **perceived susceptibility** is regarded as the first concept within the Health Belief Model. Perceived susceptibility forms part of the threat appraisal, which is one of the cognitive processes as mentioned above (Walrave *et al.*, 2020:2). The model generally denotes the apparent danger to sickness or disease (Wong *et al.*, 2020:2204). It further refers to a subjective view pertaining to the possibility of contracting the illness or disease (Roden, 2004:2; Barakat & Kasemy, 2020:2). Moreover, as cited by Sulat *et al.*, (2018:505), perceived susceptibility opines that individuals tend to undertake healthy behaviour when they are concerned about their health. Furthermore, the Health Belief Model declares that individuals, however, will not participate in healthy behaviour if they believe they are not susceptible to an illness or disease (Jones *et al.*, 2015:567; Sulat *et al.*, 2018:505).

Burns (1992:33) was of the notion that **perceived severity** implies the belief of concern. As cited by Sulat *et al.*, (2018:505), perceived susceptibility and perceived severity as a combination are branded as perceived threat. Perceived severity refers to perceptions regarding the severity of contracting an illness or disease and the likely consequences, including physical consequences (e.g., death, disability and pain) and social consequences (e.g., stigmatisation and the ability to work) (Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:5; Sulat *et al.*, 2018:505; Tong *et al.*, 2020:1206; Shmueli, 2021:3). Moreover, Zampetakis and Melas (2021:470) denoted that perceived severity further alludes to the individual's belief that the consequences for contracting the illness or disease might be severe for others as well apart from themselves. According to the Health Belief Model, persons who perceive a particular disease or illness as serious are likely to engage in behaviours to prevent the disease or illness (Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:5). Furthermore, Emmanuel (2015:30) contended that medical information or knowledge serve as a function to individuals concerning a disease to understand its severeness.

Perceived benefits imply the probable benefits of health behaviour action (Zampetakis & Melas, 2021:470). It further refers to the certainty of the effectiveness and importance of behaviour adjustments to lessen the risk of disease or sickness (Emmanuel, 2015:30; Sulat *et*

al., 2018:505; Tong *et al.*, 2020:1206). Moreover, the effectiveness and availability of undertaking action to lessen the threat of illness or disease can be regarded as perceived benefits (Roden, 2004:2; Jones *et al.*, 2014:254; Jones *et al.*, 2015:567). Furthermore, as contended by Walrave *et al.*, (2020:2), perceived benefits determine the behavioural intention of individuals. It denotes that individuals recognize the value and practicality of changing behaviour to lessen the threat of contracting an illness or disease and are likely to undertake new behaviours based on their beliefs about the benefits in lessening the risks (Barakat & Kasemy, 2020:2). Although the individual observes personal vulnerability to a severe health illness (perceived threat), whether this awareness leads to / precedes a behaviour shift will be swayed by the individuals' views concerning supposed advantages of the numerous existing actions for lessening the disease risk.

Barakat and Kasemy (2020:2) stated that the **perceived barriers** construct is the most powerful within the Health Belief Model. Perceived barriers allude to the perception regarding the tangible as well as the psychological costs of the proposed desired behaviour (Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:5; Sulat *et al.*, 2018:505; Tong *et al.*, 2020:1206). Moreover, perceived barriers refer to the action pertaining to views on the difficulties to carry out a changed health behaviour (Emmanuel, 2015:30; Barakat & Kasemy, 2020:2). For example, the possible negative attributes of a distinct health plan may play a role in embarking on proposed behaviours (Jones *et al.*, 2014:254; Shmueli, 2021:3). Razmara *et al.*, (2018: online) and Barakat and Kasemy (2020:2) further explained that even when persons perceive a disease or illness as threatening (perceived severity) and believes that certain behaviour will effectively reduce the threat (perceived benefits), barriers may prevent the persons from participating in the health-promoting behaviour. However, persons are likely to conduct a cost-benefit analysis by deliberating the benefits against the perceived barriers before undertaking new behaviour (Roden, 2004:2; Sulat *et al.*, 2018:505).

As cited by Shmueli (2021:3), **cues to action** as a construct was proposed as the last predictor in the original Health Belief Model as it finalises behavioural change. Cues to action alludes to factors that encourage behaviour change, as well as the momentum required to initiate the decision-making procedure to make the changes in health behaviour (Burns, 1992:33). Furthermore, Skinner *et al.*, (2015:77) explained that Hochbaum (1958) believed that willingness to act (perceived susceptibility and perceived benefits) were only relevant when activated by other factors, *viz.* cues to action. The construct consists of both internal and external incentives which serve as motivation for individuals to engage in healthy behaviour (Yuen, Li, Ma & Wang, 2020:4; Shmueli, 2021:3). Furthermore, Walrave *et al.*, (2020:2)

contended that as opposed to the perceived barriers construct, the cues to action construct encourages individuals to partake in healthy behaviour. This is because cues to action as a construct provides the signal that prompts the recommended action (Tong *et al.*, 2020:1206; Yuen *et al.*, 2020:4).

Self-efficacy was not initially included in the Health Belief Model but was later added to explain individual differences in health behaviours (Rosenstock, Strecher, & Becker, 1988:179; Wu *et al.*, 2020:25). The addition of self-efficacy to the Health Belief Model was proposed by the HBM scholars (Jones *et al.*, 2015:568). Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in his/her ability to efficiently implement a behaviour (Tarkang & Zotor, 2015:5; Walrave *et al.*, 2020:2; Wu *et al.*, 2020:25). Moreover, Emmanuel (2015:32) contended that various aspects (e.g., verbal persuasion from health care professionals, peer counsellors, personal achievement etc.) can influence self-efficacy.

Furthermore, based on the above constructs it can be inferred that, in regards to change health-related behaviour, people will only comply with health processes and procedures if they believe that they are susceptible to contract a disease or illness; believe that the disease or illness is severe; believe that their preventative behaviour is effective in lowering their risk to contract the disease or illness; do not experience challenges in taking the preventative action; and believe that they can affect and carry through the preventative behaviour. In a study conducted by Nwogwugwu, Hossain, Bronner and Ogbolu (2019:18), the constructs of the Health Belief Model served as predictor risk factors for the use of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis – the first approved medication for the purpose of preventing HIV infection. The results of the study revealed that younger women from low socio-economic environments, who experienced high levels of barriers and high levels of perceived susceptibility, were willing to take the medication (Nwogwugwu *et al.*, 2019:18). These results held noteworthy implications for public health policy and practice, as well as the development of interventions that increasingly include self-efficacy in the use of the medication.

As indicated in Section 2.2.3 above, during the COVID-19 pandemic, measures such as regular hand washing, sanitising, the wearing of face masks and keeping a social distance were put in place. People had to change their behaviour to protect themselves from contracting the virus. The health-related behaviour change is therefore in line with the constructs of the Health Belief Model. However, it is interesting to note that not everyone demonstrates changed health behaviour. Although people are concerned about their health and the severity of the coronavirus, their behaviour is not always in line with their concern. In addition, it was observed

that there was widespread hesitancy and uncertainty among people concerning COVID-19 vaccination. This was evident as the South African Government started issuing vaccination certificates to encourage citizens to get the vaccination to curb the spread of the virus.

The aforementioned lack of compliance with the COVID-19 regulations or receiving the vaccination, may have been due to people's perceptions - they may have not believed they are at risk if they have not been in contact with others who have contracted the coronavirus, they may have underestimated the virus, or they may have believed they were able to perform the protective behaviours (Van der Broucke, 2020:182). It was also reported that, in some instances, people refrained from being vaccinated, based on religious or health reasons (e.g., such as a concern for infertility, perceived to be caused by the vaccination).

The Health Belief Model is primarily focused on changing health and wellness *behaviour* to enhance a person's health and wellness. In the context of improving employee wellness in the Public Service, the model can serve as a tool to the study and predict employee's behaviour, based on their beliefs on wellness and the effects of their behaviour on their wellness. The model can therefore be of great assistance as it further outlines which aspects can predict human behaviour and thus assist in the development of an implementation framework for the management of wellness for employees that work remotely. The subsequent section expounds upon the Social Cognitive Theory and its relevance in this study.

2.3.2 Social Cognitive Theory

Research conducted by Bandura, as cited by Devi, Khandelwal and Das (2017:722), had a complete twist as his studies leaned towards providing a much more thorough overview of human cognition within the context of social learning. However, Bandura regarded the "learning" concept too narrow and felt that it did not describe numerous aspects of his theory (Beauchamp, Crawford & Jackson, 2019:110), and developed the Social Cognitive Theory in 1986 (Thojampa & Sarnkhaowkhom, 2019:1251; Lin & Chang, 2018:772) which was derived and expanded from the social learning theory (Rosenstock *et al.*, 1988:176; Devi *et al.*, 2017:722; Motl, Pekmezi & Wingo, 2018:2; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020:2). The Social Cognitive Theory, as opposed to the Social Learning Theory, includes determinants of learning and cognitive elements which are crucial to the learning process (Middleton, Hall & Raeside, 2019:928). As cited by Taherdoost (2018:963), the development of the Social Cognitive Theory was inspired by social psychology. Moreover, the theory serves as a framework for understanding health behaviour and behaviour change (Mahdizadeh, Peymam, Taghipour,

Esmaily & Mahdizadeh, 2013:91; Devi *et al.*, 2017:722; Silveira & Motl, 2019:1; Wang, Hung & Huang, 2019:79).

The research and theorisation conducted by Miller and Dollard (1941) as well as Rotter (1954) served as a building block for Social Cognitive Theory (O'Kelley, 2019:38). It was in the 1970s/1980s that theory was developed further by Bandura (O'Kelley, 2019:38). However, it was with the integration of concepts from Cognitive Psychology that the theory was rebranded as Social Cognitive Theory (Martin *et al.*, 2020:332; O'Kelley, 2019:38; Thojampa & Sarnkhaowkhom, 2019:1251). To explain health behaviour, Social Cognitive Theory also draws deeply from health psychology (Van Cappellen, Rice, Catalino & Fredrickson, 2018:86; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020:1). Models based on Social Cognitive Theory provide a basis to enlighten the growth of behavioural mediations, intended to predict as well as promote health behaviour (Bashirian *et al.*, 2019:192; Vermeulen, 2021:299). Health promoting efforts significantly rely on personal perceptions and social cognitive aspects within the workplace (Vermeulen, 2021:299).

As cited by Taherdoost (2018:963), Social Cognitive Theory was centred on three key aspects, namely: (1) behaviour, (2) personal, as well as (3) environment to predict group as well as individual behaviour. Moreover, Beauchamp *et al.*, (2019:110) contended that the Social Cognitive Theory is arranged as a theory of human behaviour with consolidative principles of wide-ranging applicability. This is because within Social Cognitive Theory, behaviour is described in an effective as well as reciprocal model wherein personal aspects, the environment as well as the behaviour itself all interact to produce a behaviour (Mahdizadeh *et al.*, 2013:91; Pope, Zeng, Zhang, Lee & Gao, 2018:2; Joseph, Ainsworth, Mathis, Hooker & Keller, 2019:2; Shamizadeh, Jahangiry, Sarbakhsh & Ponnet, 2019:2; Aliakbari, Alipour, Tavassoli & Sedehi, 2020:2). The interplay between personal aspects, the environment as well as the behaviour itself is called the triadic reciprocal determinism (Devi *et al.*, 2017:722; Motl *et al.*, 2018:3; Silveira & Motl, 2019:1; Lim, Choe, Zhang & Noh, 2020:2; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020:2). Moreover, as cited by Burns, Martin and Collie (2018:57), the triadic reciprocal determinism describes the aspects that affect human agency, particularly within the Social Cognitive Theory.

Social Cognitive Theory emphasises that it is through planning that human motivation and behaviour are broadly controlled (Lin & Chang, 2018:772; Dawkins, Hasking & Boyes, 2021:428; Wang *et al.*, 2019:79). Moreover, Rosenstock *et al.*, (1988:176) opined that within the Social Cognitive Theory, behaviour is determined by expectancies and incentives. Furthermore, a fundamental set of determinants that influence behaviour are identified by Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2004:144; Smith, Williams, O'Donnell & McKechnie, 2019:256; Thojampa &

Sarnkhaowkhom, 2019:1252), including self-efficacy, behaviour, outcome expectations, goals and perceived impediments (Bandura, 2004:144; Bashirian *et al.*, 2019:193; Motl *et al.*, 2018:3; Smith *et al.*, 2019:256; Martin *et al.*, 2020:332). The determinants of the Social Cognitive Theory are further reviewed below.

Self-efficacy is the first factor that influences **behaviour** (Bandura, 2004:145; Silveira & Motl, 2019:1). As cited by Bagherniya, Taghipour, Sharma, Sahebkar, Contento, Keshavarz, Darani and Safarian (2018:27), self-efficacy is regarded as the key determinant within Social Cognitive Theory. This is because for behaviour change to be possible, self-efficacy is a necessity (Shamizadeh, Jahangiry, Sarbakhsh & Ponnet, 2019:2). Self-efficacy focuses on peoples' beliefs as well as their abilities to carry out a particular action necessary to accomplish preferred results (Ozyilmaz, Erdogan & Karaeminogullari, 2017:4; Dawkins *et al.*, 2021:428; Martin *et al.*, 2020:332). Moreover, the self-efficacy determinant is defined as an individual's confidence to take control and undertake specific behaviour (Bagherniya *et al.*, 2018:27; Allegrante, Wells & Peterson, 2019:130). Self-efficacy is considered the main determinant in changing health related behaviour as it directly influences the other determinants identified by the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2004:145; Lee, Park, Lee, Kim & Park, 2018:974; Martin *et al.*, 2020:332).

Outcome expectations is one of the major cognitive forces, alongside self-efficacy, which guides the behaviour of individuals (Lin & Chang, 2018:771). Outcome expectations focus on people's beliefs regarding the probable outcomes of their behaviours (Dawkins *et al.*, 2021:428; Martin *et al.*, 2020:332; Milaković, 2020:3). Outcome expectations as a determinant are concerned with the anticipated expenses as well as benefits for various health behaviours (Bandura, 2004:144; Lee *et al.*, 2018:974; Lin & Chang, 2018:771). Moreover, Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020:4) contended that motivational outcomes can be maintained by means of outcome expectations over time as individuals trust that their behaviours will deliver success eventually.

In addition, the other determinant of the Social Cognitive Theory is **goals (behaviour outcome)**. Goals are the definite strategies as well as approaches for the health behaviour of individuals and serve as predictors of behaviour (Motl *et al.*, 2018:3). Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020:2) were of the notion that Social Cognitive Theory predicts that goals can strengthen and guide motivational outcomes. As cited by Bagherniya *et al.*, (2018:27), goals can be achieved because of positive outcome expectations as well as self-efficacy. Luszczynska and Schwarzer (2005:131) further denoted that goals need to be formulated by persons prior to adopting a

preferred behaviour. Goals provide motivations as well as lead to health behaviours (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2005:131). However, as contended by Lee *et al.*, (2018:974), in addition to directly influencing behaviour, goals are likewise anticipated to reconcile the influence of all the other determinants. This is because self-regulation is enhanced through goal setting, which has an influence on self-efficacy (Shamizadeh *et al.*, 2019:2).

Moreover, the establishing of goals is dependent on **perceived impediments** (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2005:131). This is because numerous impediments and facilitators are incorporated within the socio-structural factors which are anticipated to indirectly affect behaviour through goal setting (Lee *et al.*, 2018:974). However, as cited by Bandura (2011:34), with regards to social and personal change, there are various impediments which have an influence on self-motivation. As theorised by Bandura, the various impediments that ought to be overcome to reach meaningful behavioural change are personal, social, economic, as well as environmental (Beauchamp *et al.*, 2019:110). Bandura (2004:146) contended that the determinants of Social Cognitive Theory provide structural paths of influence wherein perceived self-efficacy affects health habits both directly and through its impact on goals. It also affects outcome expectations, and perception of socio-structural facilitators and impediments to health-promoting behaviour (Bandura, 2004:146).

The determinants of Social Cognitive Theory, discussed above, provide structural paths of influence wherein perceived self-efficacy affects health habits both directly and through its impact on goals. It also affects outcome expectations, and perception of socio-structural facilitators and impediments to health-promoting behaviour (Bandura, 2004:146). Social Cognitive Theory is relevant to this study due to its application to health and wellness promotion. The theory serves as a guide in understanding human behaviour and applying the required technique to improve human behaviour relating to health and wellness. It is primarily focused on human behaviour within a collective (group) which can be applied to a work environment. The theory is further relevant to the study because it explains how health and wellness behaviours can be initiated, adopted and maintained, which can assist in the development of an implementation framework for the wellness of employees working remotely.

2.3.3 PERMA Model

The PERMA model was developed by Martin Seligman in 2011. The model refers to wellness as well-being, however as cited by Moç (2023:49), wellness and well-being can be used interchangeably as they cover a “*body-mind-spirit-emotion*” combination which alludes to holistic health. The model views wellness of humans as a multi-factorial construct (Friedrich & Mason, 2018:374). However, as declared by Umashankar and Charitra (2021:91), Seligman’s PERMA model is centred on spreading the significance of positive psychology. As the underlying foundation of the PERMA Model, positive psychology is an approach that addresses positive emotions (Yedidia & Roman, 2019:269). As a framework, positive psychology promotes a state of “*flourishing*” which is primarily focused on addressing mental health (Turner *et al.*, 2023:20). As cited by Umashankar and Charitra (2021:91), the psychological perspective was not aimed at addressing the results of psychological aberration, but rather to assist in evading psychological or emotional defects. Positive psychology highlights the importance of understanding the elements that lead to optimal functioning with flourishing psychological health.

The PERMA Model further defines wellness as an integration of two perspectives, namely: (1) hedonic and (2) eudaimonia (D’raven & Pash-Zaida, 2016:907; Wibowo, Setiawati & Ayriza, 2021:761; Heshmati, Uysal, Kim, Oravec & Donaldson, 2023:2242; Kovich, Simpson, Foli, Hass, & Phillips, 2023:3). The hedonic perspective distinguishes wellness as attaining pleasure and enjoyment (de Carvalho, Aquino & Natividade, 2023:1828; Heshmati *et al.*, 2023:2242) by observing positive emotions and sustaining needs (Waterworth, Raphael, Gott, Arroll, Benipal & Jarden, 2019:2). In contrast, de Carvalho *et al.*, (2023:1828) contended that the eudaimonia perspective determines a varied set of occurrences through which individuals attain psychological growth and pursue meaning in their lives. The incorporation of both perspectives is significant for the PERMA Model because as cited by Carlton and Wong (2023:600), wellness fundamentally stems from the optimization of pleasure as well as the fulfilment of personal meaning.

There are five elements in which the PERMA Model is built upon which align with both the hedonic and eudaimonia perspectives. As stated by Friedrich and Mason (2018:374) as well as Ružić (2019:5), the five elements are defined based on the common properties they possess which enables them to be considered as elements; “*firstly, they contribute to well-being. Secondly, they are pursued for their own sake and not with the purpose of gaining another element; and finally, they are measured and defined independently of other elements*”. The five elements make up the PERMA acronym namely, Positive Emotions (P), Engagement (E),

Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A). The elements are expounded upon below:

2.3.3.1 Positive emotions

As stated by Tansey, Smedema, Umucu, Iwanaga, Wu, Cardoso and Strauser (2018:32), it is crucial for wellness to experience positive emotions. Emphasizing positive feelings involves self-reflection and interpreting situations with hope, optimism, and positivity, and influencing one's experience of positive emotions (Madan & Rastogi, 2023:13). According to Kern (2020:5) and Eckloff (2021:12), positive emotions represent the hedonic aspects of wellness, showing the value of seeking enjoyment and avoiding discomfort. Moreover, this idea extends beyond just happiness and includes various positive emotions like gratitude, hope, optimism, and compassion (Eckloff, 2021:12).

2.3.3.2 Engagement

The concept of engagement in the PERMA theory relates to the state of '*flow*' (Ružić, 2019:6; Eckloff, 2021:13; Matherne, 2022:285; Turner *et al.*, 2023:21). Engagement is when a person is fully immersed in an activity to the point where they are unaware of their surroundings or themselves (Leimkötter, 2017:5). Additionally, this pertains to the connection, focus, and degree of interest in activities like recreation, hobbies, or even employment (Kun, Balogh & Krasz, 2016:57). Meaning, knowledge, improved performance, as well as positive emotions are all outcomes of the connection between people and their experiences (Lambert, D'raven & Pasha-Zaida, 2016:908).

2.3.3.3 Relationships

According to Madan and Rastogi (2023:13), connectedness is extremely important in today's social landscape because humans have an inherent inclination to engage in social activities and maintain interpersonal relationships. Having strong and healthy relationships is connected to the best possible operation of both the body and mind (Madan & Rastogi, 2023:13). Additionally, Matherne (2022:285) argued that 'relationships' within the PERMA theory are primarily concentrated on positive relationships established with both individuals as well as social groups. This consists of feeling connected to society or a community, feeling supported by loved ones, and being content with one's social connections (Tansey *et al.*, 2018:132; de Carvalho *et al.*, 2023:1828).

2.3.3.4 Meaning

The quest for meaning is inherent in humans and is seen as the path to experiencing happiness and a healthy life (Madan & Rastogi, 2023:13). Tansey *et al.*, (2018:133) discovered a positive connection between a greater sense of meaning in relation to both life satisfaction and positive affect. This suggests that individuals desire a sense of meaning in life, which is attained through dedicating oneself to a cause larger than their own self (Leimkötter, 2017:5). Meaning seeks to address the purpose of our existence on this planet and aims to answer the question “*why are we on this earth?*” (Ružić, 2019:7). Furthermore, Tansey *et al.*, (2018:133) argued that individuals seek purpose in life as it provides them with satisfaction and makes their life meaningful.

2.3.3.5 Accomplishment

According to Turner *et al.*, (2023:21), accomplishment (also referred to as achievement) is the last component of the PERMA model and involves the feeling of mastery or reaching accomplishments. This refers to achieving success, reaching victory, accomplishing a goal, or working towards a specific goal within a specific field (Leimkötter, 2017:5). Accomplishment involves setting goals and aspirations in life that enable us to accomplish tasks that bring a feeling of achievement (Chisale & Phiri, 2022:22). It implies that individuals frequently seek victory, accomplishment, and prosperity purely for themselves, regardless of any lack of positive connections, emotions, or significance.

The elements that constitute the model cannot be regarded separately as they relate and influence each other (Khalid, Senom & Muhamad, 2023:426) to inspire positive emotions. The elements collectively contribute to wellness, however, as contended by Kovich *et al.*, (2023:3), they are independently defined and measured (Kern, 2020:10). Moreover, Seligman posited that combining the elements encourages flourishing, which is the ideal functioning of individuals, groups or even society all together (Kovich *et al.*, 2023:3).

Flourishing occurs when there are factors that provide protection against the risk of depression and other physical and psychological issues, while also enhancing productivity and relational skills (Giangrasso, 2021:1176). Research indicates that actively seeking out all aspects of the PERMA Model is associated with improved wellness, as demonstrated in an intervention study that found a link between focusing on each PERMA dimension and increased wellness

(Wagner, Gander, Proyer & Ruch, 2020:309). However, according to Goh, Goh, Jeevanandam, Nyolczas, Watanabe, Noro, Wang, and Jiang (2020:633), there is a scarcity of studies examining the collective impact of all five components in PERMA on promoting positive wellness outcomes among employees. Nevertheless, the PERMA elements serve as a significant measure of subjective wellness, indicating that the PERMA model is not a separate form of wellness but rather a comparable measure of it (Birch, McGran & Riby, 2019:24).

Furthermore, it is evident that with both the Health Belief Model and Social Cognitive Theory *self-efficacy* (a person's belief in their own ability and their ability to change a certain behaviour), is central to affecting changed health behaviour. It is argued that this implies that, in a work environment, the leadership of an organisation should give specific attention to increasing the self-efficacy of employees that portray a low level of belief in their own abilities. This requires good leadership that will be able to observe a lack of self-efficacy and make a concerted effort to develop an employee's self-efficacy through targeted development interventions and motivational techniques. It is also evident that both the Health Belief Model and Social Cognitive Theory are based on the notion that people will only comply with health processes and procedures or change their health-related behaviour if they believe that their preventative behaviour will be effective in lowering their risk to contract a disease or illness and that it will yield the desired outcomes intended by the behaviour. The need for goal setting is also illustrated in increasing the likelihood of overcoming challenges experienced in taking the preventative action/changing the health behaviour. It is argued that the inferences underline the need for organisational leadership to take an active role when implementing a health model, aimed at changing health-related behaviour in the workplace.

The Health Belief Model and Social Cognitive Theory are devoid of constructs or elements that address the psychological or emotional dimensions of wellness, hence the relevance of the PERMA model within this study. Chisale and Phiri (2022:21) stated that the PERMA model is a theoretical model for improving wellness with a specific focus on psychological wellness. The model is of the notion that a combination of the PERMA elements leads to positive emotions which in turn lead to better psychological wellness. In addition to promoting and influencing wellness, the PERMA model can be used to measure wellness (Kovich *et al.*, 2023:1).

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter conceptualised and contextualised employee wellness with the aim of establishing what constitutes the holistic wellness of employees. However, through the literature reviewed on wellness, it was established that wellness is a wide-ranging concept which constitutes various dimensions which are all significant to holistic wellness. The dimensions of wellness explored were the physical dimension, social dimension, intellectual dimension, emotional dimension, occupational dimension and spiritual dimension which were developed by Bill Hettler (1976). However, in addition to those core dimensions, the financial dimension as well as the environmental dimension were reviewed as they are instrumental regarding the holistic wellness of employees.

Subsequently, an understanding on the purpose and components of employee wellness programs was provided. The section further distinguished between employee wellness programs as well as employee assistance programs. However, to prevent confusion, the study collectively referred to employee wellness programs and employee assistance programs as employee wellness programs, implying that a reference to an employee wellness programme encompasses a consideration of physical, emotional and psychological wellness. Moreover, it was revealed through the literature review that employee wellness programs are aimed at improving employee health and wellness. The components required to develop and implement a functional employee wellness programs were outlined and are (1) health education; (2) a supportive social and physical work environment; (3) integration of the wellness programme into the organisation's structure; (4) a connection to related programs such as employee assistance programs; and (5) workplace screening. In addition, the importance of employee wellness programs during the COVID-19 pandemic was provided.

Moreover, this chapter established theoretical models to guide the study, namely: Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory, and the PERMA Model. The importance and relevance of the models within the study were outlined. These are in line with the aim of the assignment which is to provide recommendations on how to guide, change and predict behaviour and further promoting wellness. Moreover, the subsequent chapter will focus on another primary variable of the study – a remote work environment.

CHAPTER 3: THE PHENOMENON OF REMOTE WORK AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the theoretical frameworks on employee wellness were reviewed, highlighting the significant factors, theories and models to be considered in the development of an employee wellness programme. Furthermore, both the preceding chapters emphasised that a remote work environment poses certain challenges to the effective management of employee wellness. Thus, following on the groundwork conducted in the previous chapters, this chapter explicates the phenomenon of a remote work environment with a particular focus on its influence on employee wellness.

The chapter commences with a conceptualisation of remote work. Attention is also given to the different types of remote work, with a view to establish the most suitable opportunities in this regard to the public sector. In addition, the influence of remote work on employee wellness, which speaks to the primary focus of this study is explicated. In this respect, both positive and negative influences of a remote work environment on employee wellness are considered. To address the negative influences of a remote work environment on employee's wellness, strategies are recommended by means of the best practices of remote work. These are aimed at ensuring the public sector can prioritise employee wellness even with employees conducting work remotely.

3.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF REMOTE WORK

Remote work has become an ideal means of conducting work all over the world (Virtanen, 2020:1). It can be contended the COVID-19 pandemic placed remote work environments at the forefront. In addition, it was stated from the onset of this study (Chapter 1, Section 1.2), that the requirements of the 4IR also present new challenges to public leadership regarding HRM processes and practices, including the management of employee wellness in an increasingly remote work environment.

However, remote work is not a new concept or phenomenon (Bowen, 2020:379; Hamza, 2020:1194; Virtanen, 2020:2). Moreover, as contended by Overturff (2021:2), remote work does not have a univeRepublic of South Africallly apt definition. The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2017: online) referred to remote work as telework and defined it as work conducted with

the help of information and communications technology (ICT) to connect to the primary place of work (Charalampous, Grant, Tromontano & Michailidis, 2019:52; Nikander, 2021:11).

Although telecommuting was the initial term used to refer to remote work (Henke *et al.*, 2016:604; Charalampous *et al.*, 2019:52;), different terms are often used to refer to remote work such as telework or telecommuting (Leščevica & Kreituze, 2018:174; Raišiene, Rapuano & Varkuleviciute, 2021:2). Putro and Riyanto (2020:486) further denoted that utilising ICT tools to substitute the travelling to and from work can be defined as telecommuting. As cited by Allo and Ådnanes (2021:15), a sensible definition of "remote work" can be the following: "*a flexible arrangement where workers have no personal contact with colleagues, the workplace is not the office or the usual facilities, and technology is used to communicate*".

According to Charalampous *et al.*, (2019:52), remote work in Europe is referred to as *remote e-work*. It is a term employed to describe work undertaken at any place and at any time with the help of technology (Charalampous *et al.*, 2019:52; Bowen, 2020:379; Como, Hambley, & Domene, 2021:49). The practice of remote work is based on understanding that work does not have to be conducted in a specific location to accomplish the job's objectives and responsibilities (Prasad *et al.*, 2020:374; Rebordao, 2020:16). Thus, remote work refers to the occurrence of conducting work by means of technology, outside the regular office location (Leščevica & Kreituze, 2018:174). Overturff (2021:2) further added that remote work is undertaken in three ways: (1) from home, at least several times per month; (2) at least several time per week in two or more locations, other than the employer's primary location and (3) less frequently or at more locations than the aforementioned two options. In the context of the circumstances posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the first option was the most descriptive of the then situation in South Africa. The other two options of remote work, however, remain relevant, since institutions may have various sites from which employees can work and therefore need not to conduct all their responsibilities from a primary workplace. The tools provided through the rapid development of digital means opened up the opportunity for employees to work from any place and conduct meetings, programs, training and the like synchronously via electronic means.

In addition, various practicable substitute work preparations exist that offer flexibility within the locational as well as temporal definition of work that vary in space as well as structure (Kim, Lee & Choi, 2021:1). In some instances, remote work will demand a major restructuring of numerous occupations and positions (Narbarte, Balila, Gayoba, Laberinto & Rellis, 2020:6). In other instances, strategies for overall action may be required, whereas work-at-home can be

executed on a personal basis by means of individual arrangements (Narbarte *et al.*, 2020:6). It is argued that organisations have the responsibility to support employees that work remotely through arrangements, structures, processes and equipment, to name a few. One can argue that employees who are, for instance, well-equipped to work from home can demonstrate the same, or even higher, levels of productivity than what would have been the case in the traditional office-setting. It should further be noted that the increasing trend to work remotely will force employers to rather focus on the output and outcomes of employees' work, as opposed to the number of hours present at the office.

The literature review on remote work revealed that there are mainly four remote work options namely: (1) satellite work centres, (2) neighbourhood work centres, (3) flexible work arrangements, and (4) work-at-home (Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma & Nwokorie, 2020:51; Leščevica & Kreituze, 2018:175):

3.2.1 Satellite work centres

Employees at satellite work centres are physically repositioned to conduct their work duties in an organisational site outside the office setting (Suarlan, 2017:102). In this instance, the importance is placed on the geographical position of the employees and in consideration of suitable traveling distances, with the sole purpose to lighten the commuting time of employees (Beno, 2018:166; Suarlan, 2017:101). Satellite work centres only accommodate employees from a specific organisation (Hofma, Avital & Jensen, 2017:34).

Thus, with this option of remote work, employees conduct work in a place that is suitable to them. However, problems can tend to arise, with the most significant usually which section of the employees can be moved to a satellite work centre (Kim *et al.*, 2021:1). However, it is argued that the rationale for geographical location can be used to mitigate this problem.

3.2.2 Neighbourhood work centres

An alternative option to satellite work centres is neighbourhood work centres. However, as contended by Kojo and Nenomen (2017:166), this type of remote work is more dynamic and has been executed in numerous ways. Neighbourhood work centres are located near the employees' homes, where they share the space with employees from other organisations (Beno, 2018:166; Hofma *et al.*, 2017:34; Tavares, Santos, Diogo & Ratten, 2020:4). Therefore, any closely occupied area might have neighbourhood work centres financially maintained by the

organisations whose employees utilise them (Kojo & Nenomen, 2017:165). Neighbourhood work centres depend on the utilisation of ICT networks for the organisation and management thereof (Hofma *et al.*, 2017:34). All the organisations whose employees are housed at the centre share the lease of the office building and keep separate office areas for employees from each organisation (Beno, 2018:166).

It is evident that neighbourhood work centres were not a suitable option during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the increased possibility of spreading the virus. However, now that the virus is something of the past, these types of centres can be considered as an alternate workspace for employees to limit travel expenses and prevent lengthy commutes. It should be mentioned, however, that the inclusion of employees in one workspace with employees from different organisations, may cause additional challenges due to, for example, different work cultures.

3.2.3 Flexible work arrangements

Through the implementation of flexible work arrangements, employees are offered more freedom within their scheduling and place of work. In these instances, an institution's management should recognise the importance and necessity to provide devices and equipment for employees to enable them to complete their duties. Austin-Egole *et al.*, (2020:50) further declared that there is a necessity for flexible work arrangements, particularly for professional and managerial employees.

The ability employees must have to alter their workdays from start to end, is referred to as flexible working hours (Riva, Lucchini, den Dulk & Ollier-Malaterre, 2018:128). With this option of remote work, employees are afforded some degree of control which can be beneficial to maintaining a work-life balance (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017:1053; Riva *et al.*, 2018:128). In contrast to the regular work arrangement, this option is regarded as an alternative work schedule (Idowu, 2020:24). Through the literature review conducted on flexible working hours, countless advantages were put forward, such as (1) lessening work-family conflict; (2) permitting work to be aligned with life circumstances that avert regular work; (3) independence; (4) enhanced productivity; (5) and increased quality of life as well as work life (Kłopotek, 2017:43; Lehdonvirta, 2018:15).

This option allows employees working remotely to have independence in their schedule. As denoted in Section 3.3.2.1 below, independence is one of the positive influences of remote work on employee wellness. It is also an advantage of this remote work option, which contributes to

employees having a high job satisfaction, high performance as well as creativity (discussed further below, Section 3.3.2.1).

3.2.4 Work-at-Home

Given the global experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, which compelled organisations to allow employees to work from home, this was arguably the most known and preferred method of remote work. The practice to work from home can range from a few days per week to nearly full time (Beno, 2018:166). Nikander (2021:6) argued that with this option remote supervision is crucial. It can therefore be argued that organisations should establish procedures and practices to ensure the effective monitoring and evaluation of employees working from home. Monitoring employees working remotely through the swift extended use of videoconferencing permits virtual sight lines which are considered to invade privacy and further heighten stress levels (Kniffin, Narayanan, Anseel, Antonakis & Ashford, 2021:66). However, Wang, Liu, Qian and Parker (2020:29) asserted that appropriate ways of monitoring employees working remotely includes regular check-in and clocking in/out through applications like Ding Talk. This is a primary option which is relevant to this study and the advantages are focused on the employee as well as the work arrangement. This is because this work arrangement detaches employees from distractions encountered at the office and allows them to focus on the duties in sight without disruptions which in turn results in higher levels of productivity (Narbarte, Balila, Gayoba, Laberinto & Rellis, 2020:7). In contrast, working from home further provides additional benefits. These include (1) an environment that allows employees to draft their own schedules; (2) limited disruptions and stress; (3) proximity to family; (4) no commuting; (5) improved health and work-life balance; and (6) enhanced productivity (Narbarte *et al.*, 2020:7; Purwanto, Asbari, Fahlevi, Mufid, Agistiawati, Cahyono & Suryani, 2020:6240). Moreover, Narbarte *et al.*, (2020:7) declared that the benefit of this option serves both the employees and the employers.

As opposed to satellite offices or neighbourhood work centres, employees working from home are not exposed to social interaction (Beno, 2018:166; Kojo & Nenonen, 2017:166; Tavares *et al.*, 2020:4). Virtual employee wellness programs should be established to provide employees' need for social interaction. As denoted in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, the social dimension of wellness emphasises the importance of social interaction. This is necessary because it allows employees to have a sense of belonging and a well-balanced life outside of work. For employees working remotely, virtual employee wellness programs can provide support for overwhelmed, anxious and stressed employees.

As indicated in the introductory paragraph of this type of remote work, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees within the public sector worked solely from home during the initial lockdowns, and it later lightened to dividing time between the office and home. It is argued that the implemented lockdowns during the pandemic illustrated the potential and advantages of working from home, especially in consideration of the advancement of digital means that make this possible. Furthermore, in the context of the 4IR (Fourth Industrial Revolution), the trend of working from home may also increase.

This option of remote work is and has been the most suitable, particularly within the Republic of South Africa Public Service. This is because it is and was convenient at the surge of the pandemic. It also provided employees and employers with some level of safety against the coronavirus which could have been easily contracted at a satellite work office or in neighbourhood work centres. Nevertheless, this option is still suitable and convenient post the pandemic because it provides a level of independence that other options of work do not. This option is beneficial for both the employees and employers as mentioned above.

3.3 THE INFLUENCE OF REMOTE WORK ON EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

As emphasised from the onset of this study and encapsulated in the problem statement (Chapter 1, Section 1.2), the Public Service implements employee wellness with various degrees of success, although its employee wellness programs are not designed to manage and support the wellness of employees working remotely. This situation causes a negligence regarding employee wellness that can lead to multiple physiological, psychological, emotional, and social problems among employees. These problems are likely to negatively affect employee performance, which, if not appropriately managed, can affect the accomplishment of organisational goals due to unproductivity (Mle & Ngumbela, 2020:7). This situation implies that even successful employee wellness programs will need amendments to make it suitable for a remote work environment.

Maletzky (2017:iii - iv) argued that implementing employee wellness remotely will undoubtedly exacerbate the aforementioned challenges. Managers therefore need to prioritise the benefits of an employee wellness programme that is concentrated on proactively encouraging and sustaining the mental and physical wellness of employees through effective employee wellness programs, irrespective whether employees are working on site or remotely. The following sections therefore elaborate on the negative influences that remote work has on employees' wellness. However, attention is also given to the positive influences of remote work on

employees' wellness, with a view to establishing the most suitable methods for the wellness of employees working remotely.

3.3.1 Negative influence of remote work on employee wellness

Remote working tends to leave some employees overworked as they would spend extensive hours on work that they normally undertake during office hours (Matli, 2020:1239; Como *et al.*, 2021:49). As a result, it is essential for managers to not only prioritise the productivity of employees working remotely, but to also ensure that employees are physically, emotionally and mentally fit. As cited by Matli (2020:1239), one of the issues that influence the wellness of employees that work remotely is the pressure of displaying productivity through remote work as well as adjusting to their new work environment.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Grant, Wallace, Spurgeon, Tramontano, and Charalampous (2019) illustrated the influence remote working has on employees. The study revealed that most employees experience a decline in their mental health while working remotely due to work-life balance interference. Furthermore, Gigauri (2020:8) added that it is usually the overthinking that leads to the declining mental health of employees working remotely. Felstead and Henseke (2017) similarly conducted a study in the United Kingdom (UK). The findings of this study revealed that employees that conduct remote work find it hard to switch off from work and tend to experience work intensification (Felstead & Henseke, 2017:207). However, the study also discovered that some employees became more enthusiastic about their work and experienced greater job satisfaction through remote work (Felstead & Henseke, 2017:207).

As continuously alluded to, globally all organisational operations have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic since early 2020. Due to the pandemic, most employees had to adjust and adapt to a new work pattern, which revolves around remote working. During this adjustment, employees have been affected by the pandemic and remote work in various ways, including effects such as anxiety, stress, depression and mental health issues (Matli, 2020:1239; Zhi, Ismail & Nasuredin 2021:4). Gigauri (2020:3) concurred with the aforementioned, stating that the stress caused by remote work interfered with the personal lives of employees through the diminishment of boundaries between their work and personal lives, typically affecting their mental health. Moreover, the continuance of these mental health effects on employees can eventually lead to burn out (Gigauri, 2020:3; Prasad *et al.*, 2020:386). A further effect of remote work on employees' health is social isolation and lack of communication that may result in employees feeling demotivated and unsettled (Prasad *et al.*, 2020: 286; Larson, Vroman &

Makarius, 2020:2:3; Zhi *et al.*, 2021:4). Ly (2020:1) argued that the primary challenges encountered with remote work are: (1) work-life balance; (2) communication; and (3) isolation, explicated below:

3.3.1.1 Work-life balance

For employees working remotely, the first challenge often is the establishment of a firm frontier between their work-lives and personal lives (Flores, 2019:41; Gigauri, 2020:8; Matli, 2020:1249). Determining a boundary and being able to maintain it takes discipline which is often difficult for employees working remotely for the first time (Bowen, 2020:378). Maintaining a regular schedule to meet deadlines becomes harder as employees have too much freedom and no supervision on sight to monitor them (Larson *et al.*, 2020:2). As a result, employees working remotely tend to be either overloaded with work or slack off due to irregular work schedules (Gigauri, 2020:8). Furthermore, employees working remotely tend to work long hours as there is not a definite end to the workday (Bazorova, 2020:11). It is therefore evident that not all employees find a remote work environment pleasant and that some experience numerous challenges in adjusting to this environment, causing either mental health problems or decreased productivity.

3.3.1.2 Communication

The second challenge identified by Ly (2020:21) regarding remote work is communication. Communication is essential between employers and employees while working in different locations (Kaur & Shah, 2021:44). Yet, the lack of personal and physical communication poses one of the greatest challenges to employees working remotely (Bočková & Lajčin, 2021:101). Furthermore, communication through the utilisation of technology is not equally easy for all employees to use (Flores, 2019:44; Bazorova, 2020:11; Hamza, 2020:1202). Prasad *et al.*, (2020:386) added that communication issues could often be exacerbated by internet glitches. Ly (2020:22) further denoted that employees working remotely feel secluded and unseen within the work environment due to the lack of communication and/or supervision. Information must be communicated via electronic means which involve both asynchronous and synchronous communication (Larson *et al.*, 2020:2). Moreover, electronic communication is limited as opposed to the social interaction that is experienced within the conventional office setting (Larson *et al.*, 2020:2).

The challenges pertaining to communication while working remotely emphasises the need for clear and regular communication to employees from their line managers. It is argued that organisations should provide training in electronic communication to those employees who may need it to effectively communicate while working remotely. It is also argued that organisations should find means to increase the interactivity between employees that work remotely as part of their employee wellness programs.

3.3.1.3 Isolation

The final challenge in regard to remote work identified by Ly (2020:21) is isolation. Whenever encouragement and interaction are omitted, whether it be from an employee's colleagues or managers, they tend to feel isolated (Gigauri, 2020:8; Prasad et.al, 2020:386; Bočková & Lajčín, 2021:101). A situation where employees working remotely experience disengaged feelings from their colleagues is regarded as isolation perceptions (Ly, 2020:22; Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022:610). In such instances, employees often lack knowledge of where to get advice or assistance (Ly, 2020:22). These perceptions are reasonable as employees working remotely forfeit opportunities for social and emotional connections with their colleagues which they would regularly have within the conventional office-setting (Larson *et al.*, 2020:3). Moreover, as contended by Bazorova (2020:11), employees working remotely often feel isolated because of the absence of communication. As indicated in the previous paragraph, a lack of clear and regular communication is a matter that should be addressed by the line managers of employees, as well as the employee wellness programme.

As cited by Ly (2020:23), through asynchronous methods, remote working poses further challenges for employees. Employees might feel invisible due to little or no physical interactions with colleagues or their employer (Ly, 2020:23; Taskin, Klinksiek & Ajzen, 2024:144). Therefore, employees working remotely may feel that their absence from the traditional office setting is a hinderance to their contributions to the organisation's triumphs (Prasad *et al.*, 2020:386). Moreover, employees working remotely tend to feel that they are required to work harder than their conventional colleagues to be recognised, since they are not at the office where their work can be physically observed (Ly, 2020:22). Furthermore, if remote supervision is not a practice, employees working remotely tend to have trouble obtaining information (Larson *et al.*, 2020:2). Consequently, employees working remotely can easily feel isolated or that their work is not valued, which can lower productivity levels.

The literature review on the above primary challenges encountered with remote work environment (work-life balance, communication and isolation) revealed that not all employees adjust equally well to a remote work environment. However, as discussed in Section 3.3.2 below, some employees do find more benefit from remote work than a traditional office-setting. It is therefore argued that it would be ideal for public institutions to follow a hybrid model, where employees who are able to be productive in a remote work environment are given the opportunity to use this option (provided that their physical presence at the office is not necessary to fulfil their duties), but that those employees who find a remote work environment challenging be allowed to work from the office.

3.3.2 Positive influence of remote work on employee wellness

Whereas the preceding section focused on the negative consequences of a remote work environment on employee wellness, this section highlights the positive consequences that are brought about by remote work. Various authors (Flores, 2019:41; Ly, 2020:17; Bočková & Lajčín, 2021:98; Nikander, 2021:14) found that employees who are positively influenced by remote work have a low rate of absenteeism and experience higher job satisfaction than their counterparts who do not enjoy a remote work environment. Furthermore, some of the benefits of remote work, such as job independence, flexible work and the absence of daily commute provide a better sense of work-life balance (Ly, 2020:19). The primary advantages and positive influences of a remote work environment are: (1) independence, (2) no commuting, and (3) the creation of your own work environment (Ly, 2020:17; Bočková & Lajčín, 2021:98; Nikander, 2021:43), as discussed below:

3.3.2.1 Independence

Independence is regarded as the biggest advantage of a remote work environment (Bočková & Lajčín, 2021:98). Due to the flexible work hours provided by a remote environment and the ability of employees personally scheduling their work in line with their needs, a significant level of independence is typically experienced (Flores, 2019:44; Prasad *et al.*, 2020:386; Bočková & Lajčín, 2021:98). Moreover, when employees have the liberty to create their own schedules, they are not pre-occupied as is often the case at the office (Ly, 2020:18).

As a result, employees working remotely can spend more time with their families (Ly, 2020:18; Bočková & Lajčín, 2021:98). As contended by Ly (2020:18), this can be one of the reasons that some employees working remotely experience higher job satisfaction than they did in the

conventional office-setting. It is argued that allowing employees to have independence over their working schedules boosts productivity, performance as well as the quality of their work. This is because independence signifies trust from the employer to the employees (Bowen, 2020:379; Nikander, 2021:15; Bočková & Lajčín, 2021:98).

3.3.2.2 No commuting

Another advantage for employees working remotely is the absence of daily commutes to and from work (Ly, 2020:18; Matli, 2020:1247; Prasad *et al.*, 2020:374; Bočková & Lajčín, 2021:98). Regardless of the transport mode, commuting is generally regarded as a negative experience as it takes a substantial amount of time and money (Nikander, 2021:15). A strenuous commute is a common reason why employees working in the conventional office-setting are often late for work (Ly, 2020:19). In contrast, increased job satisfaction and better mental health is linked to brief commutes (Ly, 2020:19). Consequently, little to no commuting entails that employees have more time, additional money and improved wellness which are regarded as the basics for a healthier work-life balance (Ly, 2020:19; Nikander, 2021:63).

3.3.2.3 Creating own environment

The independence brought about by a remote working environment allows employees the freedom to establish “*where*”, as well as “*how*” their work duties are conducted (Ly, 2020:18; Popovici & Popovici, 2020:470), thus creating their own work environment. However, it is the responsibility of the employee to ensure the quality of their performance and to meet set deadlines (Taveres, 2017:32). Employees working remotely are free to convert their workstation into a manner that appeals to them and function in a manner that works for them (Beno, 2018:166). Since different people function better at different times of the day and in different circumstances, this is a significant benefit for some employees (Ranjitha, Riasudeen, Mohammed & Armstrongdoss, 2021:718). Furthermore, a remote work environment limits distractions that would have occurred at the office and eliminates the protocol that is present at the organisation’s premise as they can regulate their working environment (Ly, 2020:18; Bočková & Lajčín, 2021:98). As a result, they can be productive as they can dedicate more time to key duties.

As mentioned, work-life balance is the most significant result and direct benefits of remote work are improved levels of the employee’s job satisfaction (Ly, 2020:19). Employees tend to experience a great deal of trust, a vital aspect for any work environment, from supervisors when

they are working remotely (Bowen, 2020:379; Nikander, 2021:15; Bočková & Lajčin, 2021:98), since they are awarded the liberty to conduct their basic duties remotely and make decisions, they deem advantageous to the organisation (Ly, 2020:19). Employees also tend to feel more valued when they are trusted and in return demonstrate enhanced participation in their duties (Ly, 2020:19). However, it is only when employees fulfil their employment duties and personal desires that they can experience such trust and value (Ly, 2020:19).

Through the positive influences of remote work on employee wellness, it is evident that the positive influences are related to work performance and job satisfaction. Moreover, it is apparent that organisations/employers also benefit from the positive influences which are mainly for employees working remotely. With independence and the option of creating their own working environment, the quality of work produced by employees working remotely is bound to improve. Moreover, little to no commuting ensures that employees working remotely save money on transport which may increase financial wellness as denoted in Chapter 2 (see section 2.2.1.7). The next section expounds on best remote work practices with the aim of providing recommendations on the implementation of an implementation framework for employee wellness in a remote work environment.

3.4 REMOTE WORK BEST PRACTICES

The 4IR has made remote work possible through new digital technologies. As cited by Chai, Lim, Judy, Hwang and Chia (2019:275), with the 4IR, the nature of work is bound to change, and employees are at the risk of new wellness perils. This is primarily due to the introductions of technology-based-human machine interaction, the utilisation of smart technologies and progressed digitalisation (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020:1). Moreover, the rapid upsurge of the 4IR will result in new occupational risks from the technologies utilised to conduct work (Chai *et al.*, 2019:276). As cited by Mathekga and Sekudu (2019:36), the harsh reality of the 4IR is eminent and cannot be avoided by employee wellness practitioners. It is argued that the reality of the 4IR implies the use of emerging technologies to develop remote work practices which can assist in maintaining the wellness of employees.

To develop best practices for remote work, the influences of the 4IR on employees, as well as on the organisation should be considered. A study conducted by Matli (2020) outlined the effects of remote work on employees that are new to the arrangements of remote work or do not prefer it. The study further focused on the internal and external features that may have an influence on employee wellness and affect productivity in a remote work environment (Matli,

2020). For remote work practices regarding employee wellness to be effective, organisations and employers are advised to implement a virtual employee wellness programme. The strategy is elaborated upon in the section below.

3.4.1 Virtual employee wellness programs

The importance of employee wellness programs has been denoted in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, and throughout Chapter 2. The study furthermore specifically focused on employee wellness within the context of a remote environment. However, the majority of employee wellness programs were not developed to function remotely (Maletzky, 2017: iii-iv). Virtual wellness programs essentially became relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in the widespread practice of remote work (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:219). Consequently, within the wellness sphere, numerous innovations have been taking place, particularly with the improvement of technology (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2019:219). The embracement of technology and a merge thereof within the already existing employee wellness programs may be beneficial for future purposes, since it can familiarise itself to any conditions and changes (Mathekga & Sekudu, 2019:36). Thus, as denoted by Chaturvedi and Rathore (2021:219), the advancement of technology ought to assist with the wellness of employees through various digital wellness platforms.

Chaturvedi and Rathore (2021:219) further outlined methods in which virtual employee wellness programs can be approached as one of the ways to develop and manage the wellness of employees remotely. For instance, virtual fitness classes, webinars, and mindfulness workouts can be applied for employees working remotely (Chaturvedi & Rathore 2021:219). Furthermore, the use of these methods in a virtual employee wellness programme encourages employers to utilise added mobile applications and platforms that make provision for employee wellness (Chaturvedi & Rathore 2021:219).

There are various ways in which virtual employee wellness programs can be achieved. With the momentum that remote work has gained during the COVID-19 pandemic and maintaining its current prominence, virtual wellness programs are becoming a fundamental element in assisting with the wellness of employees (Chaturvedi & Rathore 2021:220). The methods to achieve employee wellness virtually, relevant to this study are: virtual fitness programs; home office makeover; holding of motivational workshops; inspirational quotes; virtual nutrition workshops; mindfulness; and virtual counselling. These seven methods to address employee wellness virtually have been prioritised due to the nature of these methods, addressing the negative

influences of remote work on employee wellness. These seven methods are subsequently reviewed below:

3.4.1.1 Virtual fitness classes

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the involvement of virtual fitness classes as a way to address the physical health of employees, has been on the rise (Baena-Arroyo, Fernandes, Ruiz, & Puyana, 2020:1). Virtual fitness classes are a workout made available through the internet to employees' personal devices (DeSimone, 2020:3). These classes encourage individuals to keep healthy anywhere and anytime and is essential in assisting employees with their work-life balance, despite working remotely (Baena-Arroyo *et al.*, 2020:1). By attending and participating in these virtual fitness classes, employees get into a routine to look after their physical health (DeSimone, 2020:3).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1.1, one of the dimensions of wellness is physical wellness. Virtual fitness classes are a way of ensuring that wellness is centred on the physical dimension of employee wellness which is at the core of wellness. This ensures that employees maintain good physical health and wellness.

3.4.1.2 Home office makeover

According to Chaturvedi and Rathore (2021:219), the physical environment, including the work environment has a direct influence on a person's senses as a less-than-ideal work environment can hinder productivity and an employee's level of job satisfaction (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:219). Moreover, a home office makeover, can assist employees to reach a work-life balance, since it assists in creating a barrier between personal life and work life (Haralayya, 2021:245). Creating a space at home that is strictly for work purposes encourages employees to shift their focus on work when they are within that environment (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:219). This way, employees have some way of separating their work-lives and personal lives.

Within the surge of remote working, it would be of great help if employee wellness programs provide employees with guidelines or/and workshops on how to do an office makeover. This is to ensure that employees can easily transition from work life to personal life from the comfort of their homes. In addition, this aspect allows employees working remotely to have some boundaries between work hours and personal time. Moreover, it further allows employees

working remotely to create their own working environment, which is one of the positive influences of remote working on employee wellness (see Section 3.3.2.3).

As denoted in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, emotional wellness, vocational wellness and environmental wellness are crucial to holistic wellness. This feature addresses all three dimensions, particularly vocational wellness and environmental wellness, as it ensures that employees working remotely have a working environment that is suitable to them. This in turn ensures that employees are in high spirits and boosts their emotional wellness as they are deprived of any sort of office politics.

3.4.1.3 Hold motivational workshops

Addressing the concerns of the employees, as well as strengthening the positive connections among employees, has been significant, particularly amid the pandemic and since employees have been working remotely (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:220). This is further significant because social isolation causes most employees to lack motivation (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:220). Therefore, motivational workshops can encourage employees to be hopeful amidst a breakdown in social interaction (Singh, 2017:4). Virtual outlets such as Microsoft Teams can be utilised to conduct workshops, as the platform can permit communication from various employees working remotely (Sudhir, Mascarenhasi, Isaac, Alfroufk & Rahuman, 2020:4). As signified in Section 3.3.1.3, isolation is regarded as one of the negative influences of remote work particularly on employee wellness.

Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, highlighted the importance of attaining wellness through all various dimensions. Motivational workshops could ensure that emotional and social dimensions of wellness are addressed. Through virtual workshops employees working remotely are enabled to socialise with their colleagues and be inspired through motivation.

3.4.1.4 Inspirational quotes

According to Chaturvedi and Rathore, (2021:219), sharing motivational quotes is one of the simplest free virtual wellness actions to do with employees. This method can be used to address the issue of employees feeling invisible within the working environment because of remote work. Moreover, the quotes can be incorporated within the organisation's communications, for instance, announcements and internal emails (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:219). However, to attain extreme efficacy, quotes should be shared often (Chaturvedi &

Rathore, 2021:219). Furthermore, it may also be effective if the sharing of inspirational quotes is collaborative where employees share quotes on a rotating basis (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:219).

3.4.1.5 Virtual Nutrition workshop

The aim of a virtual nutrition workshop was to improve the knowledge of employees with regards to the importance of diet (Zuniga, Parma, Muñoz, Spaniol, Wargovich & Ramirez, 2019:146). This method is aligned with the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, as it intends on changing the behaviour of employees by means of what they consume and further promote healthy behaviour. However, with employees working remotely, the nutrition workshop ought to be transmitted to an online platform.

3.4.1.6 Mindfulness

Mindfulness as a concept is related to life aspects like health and wellness (Pattnaik & Jena, 2020:876). Johnson, Park and Chaudhuri (2019:312) contended that mental and physical conditions have been benefitting from mindfulness applications. This is because its practices have a positive influence on the brain and mind to encourage psychological as well as physical wellness (Johnson *et al.*, 2019:312). It is within the workplace that the practices of mindfulness have recently extended to other fields (Johnson *et al.*, 2019:312). However, within the organisation, the purpose of practicing mindfulness related techniques is to better employee wellness as well as job performance (Johnson *et al.*, 2019:312). Moreover, Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt (2021:190) contended that mindfulness methods can be practiced through numerous means, however participating in a specific method to cultivate mindfulness is not required. Meditation is one way of achieving mindfulness (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021:191), particularly for employees working remotely. Mindfulness is the preferred meditation as it is a kind of awareness meditation (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021:191).

3.4.1.7 Virtual counselling

As cited by Margevica-Grinberga and Smitina (2021:1066), all guidance activities had to be transmitted to a virtual environment because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is further evident with this method, as counsellors had to implement remote services entirely or partly (Margevica-Grinberga & Smitina, 2021:1062). This was possible because counselling sessions require communication and can be enabled through an online platform (Sudhir *et al.*, 2020:4). Chapter

2, Section 2.2.1, explained the importance of emotional and social wellness. Virtual counselling can be vital in ensuring that the emotional and social wellness dimensions are addressed as employees working remotely can socially interact with counsellors. The transmission of counselling activities and sessions to virtual or online platform was vital amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Reese and Lewis (2019:54) contended that counselling is linked to holistic wellness.

The virtual employee wellness programme is the strategy organisations/employers can utilise to attain the desired wellness levels for employees working remotely. The methods can be beneficial for employee wellness practitioners as well as managers who are new to managing employees remotely. The methods include ways in which some of the dimensions of wellness can be addressed remotely. Moreover, every method addresses a particular wellness dimension mentioned in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1. Therefore, it is evident that the virtual employee wellness programme encompassing these methods is aimed at ensuring holistic wellness for employees working remotely.

3.5 CONCLUSION

Through the conducted literature review, it was revealed that the concept does not have a universally apt definition. In addition, it was revealed that the concept is labelled differently throughout the world. However, it was further established through the literature review that there are three ways to conduct work remotely, namely: (1) from home, at least several times per month; (2) at least several time per week in two or more locations, other than the employer's primary location and (3) less frequently or at more locations than the two options. However, the first option was deemed the most descriptive of the situation in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the literature review revealed that there are four types of remote work options. These include (1) satellite work centres, (2) neighbourhood work centres, (3) flexible work arrangements, and (4) work-at-home. Subsequently, the chapter outlined the influences of remote work on employee wellness. The influences outlined captured both the negative and positive influences. The influences for both, positive and negative, were the commonly experienced ones by employees working remotely. The primary challenges experienced by employees working remotely were (1) work-life balance; (2) isolation; and (3) communication. These challenges influenced employees working remotely negatively and revealed that not all employees adjust equally well to a remote work environment. Moreover, the primary advantages and positive influences of a remote work environment outlined are (1) independence, (2) no commuting, and (3) the creation of one's own work environment. The positive influences of remote work on employee wellness indicate that the positive influences

are related to work performance as well as job satisfaction. The chapter also provided the best practices of remote work. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic it required virtual employee wellness programs to be implemented. The chapter further provided methods to achieve employee wellness through virtual employee wellness programs. The methods provided include (1) virtual fitness programs; (2) home office makeover; (3) holding motivational workshops; (4) inspirational quotes; (5) virtual nutrition workshops; (6) mindfulness; and (7) virtual counselling. These methods were provided and prioritised due to their nature. Based on the components of functional and effective employee wellness programs reviewed in Chapter 2, the best practices of remote work were provided in Chapter 3. The next chapter will provide the statutory and regulatory frameworks for employee wellness.

CHAPTER 4: STATUTORY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR WELLNESS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SECTOR

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters focused on employee wellness with the aim of establishing what constitutes the holistic wellness of employees. This was conducted by conceptualising and contextualising employee wellness and understanding the components of employee wellness programs. Moreover, a distinction between employee wellness programs as well as employee assistance programs was made through definitions. In this chapter, the statutory and regulatory framework for employee wellness in the Public Service of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) are reviewed with the intention of guiding and directing public institutions to effectively implement employee wellness. It is also necessary to understand and appreciate the statutory and regulatory framework that guides the implementation of employee wellness in the Public Service. Subsequently, the following section provides a review of the statutory and regulatory framework, regulating employee wellness in the Public Service of South Africa.

4.2 STATUTORY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS FOR EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

The statutory and regulatory frameworks for employee wellness (including employee health) have been put in place to guide public institutions in developing strategies, plans, programs and procedures to effectively manage employee wellness (Vermeulen, 2016:238). As per the Constitution, 1996, institutions (including the Public Service) are required to ensure practices such as employee safety, health and wellness to provide the health, safety and wellness needs of employees. Also relevant to this study, the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service, 2023, was developed to empower the national and provincial departments to develop strategies, plans and interventions to achieve employee wellness within the Public Service specifically (Vermeulen, 2021:243).

In addition to the Constitution, 1996, and the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service, 2023, other relevant acts to this study are the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993, the Mental Health Care Act 17 of 2002, and the National Health Act 61 of 2003. The review on the statutory and regulatory framework for employee wellness commences in the next section with an overview of the directives relating to employee health and wellness enshrined in the Constitution, 1996. Thereafter, the acts are reviewed in the

order in which they were promulgated, where-after the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service, 2023, is reviewed.

4.2.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

The Constitution, 1996, is regarded as the supreme law of the country (Republic of South Africa, 1996:3). As a result, any law opposing the Constitution is considered invalid (Republic of South Africa, 1996:3). Aside from the Constitution, 1996, being the footing of democracy in South Africa, it further outlines the need for “*human rights, employment, labour relations and good practice*” (Kruger & Jacob, 2019:189). The supremacy of the Constitution, 1996, implies that all other legislation and policies, relating to any aspect of the South African environment and the lives of citizens, should derive from the constitutional directives. The function of the Constitution, 1996, is to warrant a working environment that is not harmful to the health and wellness of employees (Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), 2018: online; Kruger & Jacob, 2019:189). In this case, it implies that all legislation and policy relating to employee health and wellness should be aligned to the constitutional prescripts and cannot contradict it.

Section 195 in Chapter 10 of the Constitution outlines the basic values and principles required for good governance in the public sector. Section 195 (h) specifically refers to the requirement of “good human resource management practices”. As indicated in Chapter 1, Section 1.1, employee safety, health and wellness resort under the umbrella of HRM. In addition, Chapter 2 of the Constitution, 1996, encapsulates the Bill of Rights, considered as the cornerstone of the South African democracy. The Bill of Right provides for the democratic human rights of all citizens (Republic of South Africa, 1996:5). Several sections in the Bill of Rights make provision for employee health and safety, including the following:

- Section 9 refers to the equality of all citizens by law, the right to equal protection and equal benefits from the law for all citizens. The concept of equality refers to all aspects in the lives of citizens, including health and safety measures in general, as well as in the workplace. This right implies that each employee should receive equal services about health, wellness and safety in the workplace.
- Section 10 refers to the right of dignity and having one’s dignity respected and protected. In relation to this study, this right implies that the dignity of an employee should be considered in the workplace, including instances when an employee suffers a physical or mental illness. The right further implies that the workplace should have measures and

services in place that protect the dignity of an employee that experiences health challenges.

- Section 24(a) refers to the right of an environment that is not harmful to a person's health or wellbeing. This includes the work environment and therefore implies that employers have a responsibility to provide a safe and healthy environment to all employees in the workplace.
- Section 27(a) refers to the right to have access to health care services, including health care in the workplace. This right implies a responsibility of the employer to provide services that relates to an employee's health, whether it be physical or mental.

The sections in Chapter 2 of the Constitution, 1996, underline the need for programs, processes and practices in the workplace that provides in the health, safety and wellness needs of employees. It is evident that employee safety, health and wellness are prioritised in the supreme law of the country, providing for the protection by law from unfair, unsafe and unhealthy work environments. It is also apparent that the constitutional directives denote not only health measure or safety in the context of physical environment but includes that attention should also be given to emotional and mental wellness.

4.2.2 Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993

The connection between work, wellness and health is the main concern within the discipline and practice of Occupational Health (Machabe & Indermun, 2013:14). In this respect, the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993, hereafter referred to as the Occupational Health and Safety (OHSA), 1993, was developed for the following three purposes (Republic of South Africa, 1993:1). Firstly, to make provision for the health and safety of employees in the workplace. Secondly, to protect employees at work against risks to their health and safety occurring as a result of the activities at work. Thirdly, to establish an advisory council for occupational health and safety. Lastly, to make provision for all matters related to health and safety in the workplace. As much as the Act is aimed at employers to ensure that their employees are working in a safe and healthy environment, employees also have responsibilities to ensure a safe and healthy working environment (Republic of South Africa, 1993:1). For example, employees are required to report unsafe or unhealthy conditions to their employers or health and safety councils (Republic of South Africa, 1993:1).

According to Ncube and Kanda (2018:365), services regarding the obligation of occupational safety and health have long been a global concern. This is determined within the international

community by the Convention No. 161 of 1985 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) as well as the 2008 - 2017 Global Plan for Action by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Ncube & Kanda, 2018:365). The Occupational Health and Safety (OHSA), 1993, dictates that employees have a constitutional right to a safe and healthy working environment (Mojapelo, Mafini & Dhurup, 2016:107) which is to be implemented and sustained by the employer (Pilusa & Mogotlane, 2018:1; Kruger & Jacobs, 2019:190). Moreover, as cited by Mudenha, Chadyiwa and Naicker (2018:173), the Occupational Health and Safety (OHSA), 1993, is directed by the Department of Labour (DoL). To comply with Section 8 of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHSA), 1993, as contended by Mudenha *et al.*, (2018:173), organisations offer health and safety training for employees to improve awareness.

Moreover, it is argued that the OHSA (1993) was not developed for remote working and is more applicable to a conventional office setting. However, a remote working environment can, in a manner, ensure that institutions protect the health and safety of their employees. Remote work, for example, greatly reduced employees' exposure to the coronavirus during the peak of the pandemic. Institutions, however, do not have control over the safety precautions that employees take when working from home, which makes it close to impossible to monitor and manage a safe remote work environment. Public institutions can, however, still provide guidelines for employees to follow regarding safety. Regarding health and other employee wellness aspects, it is argued that organisations have the responsibility to implement virtual employee wellness programs to provide employees working remotely.

4.2.3 Mental Health Care Act 17 of 2002

The Mental Health Care Act 17 of 2002, hereafter referred to as the Mental Health Care Act (MHCA), 2002, provides minimal consideration to health promotion, disease prevention and treatment qualities of care. Rather, the execution of the MHCA, 2002, speaks to the political and ethical responsibilities of a government to all its citizens (Ramlall, 2012:407). The Health Professions Council of South Africa (2018) stated that the function of the Mental Health Care Act (MHCA), 2002, is to define and outline the processes for the managing of mental conditions. The World Health Organization (WHO) identified ten principles for mental health care legislation (WHO, 1996: online). Moreover, the Mental Health Care Act (MHCA), 2002, was guided and founded on the ten principles identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Szabo & Kaliski, 2017:69). Lund, Stein, Flisher and Mehtar (2007:1) contended that the Mental Health Care Act (MHCA), 2002, is crucial for refining the quality of care as well as protecting the human

rights of persons with mental disorders as well as monitoring mental health services, through compliance with the law.

The objectives of the MHCA, 2002, are outlined in Chapter 2 of the Act. The objectives most relevant to this study is the provision for the regulation of mental health treatment and therapy sessions that are accessible to the citizens (Republic of South Africa, 2002:7). As explained in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, it is necessary to include these services in the workplace in the form of an employee wellness programme to provide in the social, emotional and mental wellness of employees.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3, employees experienced numerous mental health effects because of isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, while working remotely. These include signs of depression and anxiety, irritability, restlessness and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Cullen *et al.*, 2020:311). As also alluded to in Section 2.2.3, should the trend of working remotely continue, attention to the mental health of employees should receive priority. It is also argued that the mental health challenges experienced by employees were not only associated with a remote work environment, but they could have also been related to the continuance and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, services, such as therapy, are likely to continue being a priority for the public sector. Furthermore, mental health challenges have always been a reality, irrespective of the pandemic, therefore necessitating the provision of mental health services in the workplace and stressing its importance as a significant factor to be included in an employee wellness programme.

However, neither the MHCA, 2002 or current employee wellness programs were developed with a remote work environment in mind. As much as the Act aims to ensure that mental health issues are attended to, with instructions to self-isolate during the pandemic it became harder to achieve. Therefore, one could argue that employers and/or institutions are left with the responsibility of implementing virtual employee wellness programs, as alluded to in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2. As mentioned, the remote work environment and its consequences received attention in Chapter 3 of the study, and the best practices of a remote work environment were highlighted.

4.2.4 National Health Act 61 of 2003

Regarding the health care delivery in South Africa, the National Health Act 61 of 2003, hereafter referred to as the National Health Act (NHA), 2003, is regarded as the most significant law for

health care delivery in South Africa. Making provision for a framework for an organised consistent health system is one of the reasons the Act was introduced (Republic of South Africa, 2003:2). The act aims to unify the diverse components of the national health system within a shared objective to actively encourage and develop the national health system, thereby providing in the health needs of all citizens (Republic of South Africa, 2003:2). The National Health Act (NHA), 2003, has one main function which is to make provision for the occupational health and safety services (HPCSA, 2018).

Moreover, the National Health Act (NHA), 2003, provides impact as well as content to the right to attain health care services as stipulated in the Constitution, 1996 (South African Human Rights Commission, 2013:5). However, the importance of this Act is illustrated in the National Development Plan: Vision for 2030 (2011), highlighting the public health care sector as one of the prominent challenges experienced in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2011:3). Although the NHA, 2003, is focused on a national health system and does not make specific reference to the management of health in the workplace, its mere existence underlines the importance of health care as a service, including health care services in the workplace. Also, considering the prioritisation of health in the Bill of Rights (Section 24 [a], Chapter 2, Constitution, 1996), the provision of health support services in the workplace is essential.

4.2.5 The Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service, 2019

In addressing employee health and wellness within the Public Service, DPSA introduced a unified, focused, participative, and all-inclusive framework, the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service (EHWSFPS), 2019. The primary goal of the EHWSFPS (2019) is to provide unified strategic direction to national and provincial departments to adhere to when drafting operational policies on the principles and practices of employee health and wellness (Republic of South Africa, 2019:3). The framework acknowledges the significance of concerning personal health, security, wellness, organisational wellness, environmental sustainability, quality management as well as enhanced service delivery results (Republic of South Africa, 2012:3).

In addition to the aforementioned, the EHWSFPS (2019) applies to all employees in the Public Service and aims to promote and protect the human rights and dignity of all employees (Republic of South Africa, 2019:27). Furthermore, the framework underlines the importance of putting the necessary infrastructure in place to enhance the accessibility of employee health

and wellness services and to promote the operational effectiveness and efficiency of employee wellness programs (Republic of South Africa, 2019:30-31). The capacity building initiatives set out in the framework include: (1) to promote the competence development of employee health and wellness practitioners; (2) to improve the capacity development of supporting functions such as organisational development, HRM, industrial relations and skills development and change management to assist with the advancement of employee wellness at an organisational level; (3) to establish e-health and wellness information systems; and (4) to provide physical resources and facilities that support employee health and wellness (Republic of South Africa, 2019:31).

The framework comprises of four pillars: (1) HIV, TB and STIs Management; (2) Health Productivity Management; (3) Safety, Health, Environment, Risk and Quality Management (SHERQ) Management; and (4) Wellness Management (Republic of South Africa, 2019:3). The relevance of these functional pillars to this study is reviewed below:

4.2.5.1 HIV, Tuberculosis and Sexually Transmitted Diseases Management

HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis (TB) are significant causes of death to South African citizens (Republic of South Africa, 2019:33). In consideration of the fact that employees in the Public Service are not exempted from these diseases, the framework includes HIV and AIDS, TB and sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) management as one of its pillars. In this respect, the framework places focus on primary prevention strategies to address the social and structural drivers of these diseases in a multi-sectoral manner (Republic of South Africa, 2019:34).

The EHWSFPS (2019) is aligned to other national strategies, such as the National Strategic Plan for HIV, TB and STIs 2017-2022, the HIV & AIDS, STI and TB Strategic Plan for South Africa 2017 – 2022 and the Stop TB National Plan, 2018-2022, based on international standards for TB Care (Republic of South Africa, 2019:33-34). All these plans are aimed at structural and social drivers that accelerate these diseases and to prevent or reduce these infections (Republic of South Africa, 2019:34). It is evident that support to employees that suffer extensive infections such as HIV and AIDS, TB and STIs should be included in an employee wellness programme and dealt with according to the guidelines provided by the EHWSFPS (2019). It is argued that in the context of an increasingly remote work environment, the Public Service needs to adjust its employee wellness programs to be virtually accessible as well.

4.2.5.2 Health and Productivity Management

The EHWSFPS (2019) views the Health and Productivity Management in the workplace from two perspectives. Firstly, integrated management of employees' health risks in relation to chronic illnesses and occupational injuries and diseases (non-communicable diseases), as well as mental diseases and disability. Secondly, the strengthening and improvement of the efficiency of current services and infrastructure relating to employee health and productivity (Republic of South Africa, 2019:38). The integrated management approach is aimed to reduce employees' health-related costs, unnecessary absence from work, and a decline in work performance (Republic of South Africa, 2019:38).

In addition to the seriousness of communicable diseases (e.g., HIV and Aids and TB), non-communicable diseases (e.g., cancer, chronic illness and workplace injuries and diseases) cause severe effects and illnesses that could influence the wellness of an employee (Republic of South Africa, 2019:33). These comprise of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory conditions, cancer, mental disorders, oral diseases, eye diseases, kidney disease and muscular-skeletal conditions (Republic of South Africa, 2019:38). Thus, the framework's pillar on Health and Productivity Management focuses on activities that aim to promote and maintain the general health and wellness of employees "through prevention, intervention, awareness, education, risk assessment, referral and support, in an attempt to mitigate the influence and effect of communicable and non-communicable diseases and injuries on the productivity and quality of life of employees" (Republic of South Africa, 2019:38).

Information from areas of health promotion, disease prevention, care management, occupational health, disability management, as well as organisational dynamics are merged in the Health and Productivity Management pillar of the framework (Republic of South Africa, 2019:38). The implementation of this pillar of EHWSFPS, 2019, was, for example, relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, trying to manage the spread of the coronavirus (communicable disease), the implementation of remote work was one of the ways to keep employees from contracting the disease within a working environment and accelerate the spreading thereof. It is also evident that this pillar of the EHWSFPS (2019) is related to the directives included in the OHSA (1993) regarding limiting or preventing occupational injuries and diseases.

4.2.5.3 Safety, Health, Environment, Risk and Quality management (SHERQ)

The EHWSFPS (2019) denotes that tangible and intangible aspects such as safety, health, environment, risks, and quality management (SHERQ) affect the optimal occupational health and safety of employees (Republic of South Africa, 2019:41). The framework further indicates that the implementation of both the tangible and intangible aspects of SHERQ should be guided by a human rights culture that positively influences the safety, health and wellness environment in the Public Service (Republic of South Africa, 2019:41). The EHWSFPS (2019) also promotes the application of quantitative measurement sciences to manage the risks associated with employee wellness and to ensure quality management.

The SHERQ pillar offers structures and mechanisms that provide for the increased responsibility of the political and executive leadership to ensure that government departments conduct their employee wellness programs in an accountable, responsible, transparent and sustainable manner to promote the safety, health and wellness of their employees (Republic of South Africa, 2019:41). The environmental component of the pillar provides for structures and designs to promote optimal safety, health, wellness and productivity of public employees (Republic of South Africa, 2019:42). Furthermore, the quality management component of the pillar is based on a process model to enhance the control function of employee safety, health and wellness in the Public Service (Republic of South Africa, 2019:42). From the aforementioned, it is evident that the SHERQ pillar of the EHWSFPS (2019) provides guidelines for the establishment of structures, processes and mechanisms to ensure the effective functioning, monitoring, control and quality management of employees' safety, health and wellness in the workplace.

4.5.2.4 Wellness management

Individual and organisational wellness is represented by this pillar. As explained in Section 2.2.1, individual wellness is the promotion of the physical, social, emotional, occupational, spiritual, intellectual, financial and environmental wellness of individuals (Kumar, 2020:3). Some of the significant factors in addressing the dimensions of wellness and thereby attaining individual and organisational wellness is the creation of an organisational culture, the comprehensive identification of psycho-social health risks and the establishment of work-life balance (also see Section 2.2.1) (Republic of South Africa, 2019:46).

The EHWSFPS (2019) proposes the SOLVE programme as the ideal approach for the implementation of employee wellness in the Public Service (Republic of South Africa, 2019:47).

The SOLVE programme was established by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2011 as an interactive educational programme, intended to aid with the development of policies and actions relating to occupational safety, health and wellness (ILO, 2011). The educational platform focuses on: (1) psycho-social aspects; (2) workplace stress; (3) economic stressors; (4) stress and sleep deprivation; (5) physical and psychological violence; (6) HIV and AIDS in the workplace; (7) tobacco free workplaces; and (8) nutrition, exercise and healthy lifestyles in a cohesive manner (ILO, 2011). The application of the SOLVE programme in the EHWSFPS (2019) is grounded in the acknowledgement of mutually dependent relations among the aspects (Republic of South Africa, 2019:14).

This pillar further encompasses several sub-objectives namely: (1) Individual Wellness (Physical Wellness), (2) Individual Wellness (Psycho-Social issues), (3) Organisational Wellness and (4) Work-Life Balance (Republic of South Africa, 2019:48). The outlined sub-objectives further contain constituent elements which shape the essence of the relevant focus areas. This pillar of the EHWSFPS (2019) relates to the core of the study: the attainment and management of employee wellness in the Public Service, in consideration of all the dimensions of employee wellness, specifically in a remote work environment. Although the framework does not explicitly include a focus on employee wellness in a remote work environment, it is argued that the fourth objective (Work-Life Balance) is to some extent/ in some aspect especially relevant within this context as a work-life balance becomes exceedingly difficult while working from home. As alluded to in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, aspects such as remote school teaching and learning implemented during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in a challenge for parents to be involved in home schooling, while continuing with their own work tasks; furthermore, also resulting in a lack of space and work privacy for parents (Virtanen, 2020:10). In addition, it is argued that the lack of office hours when working remotely can often result in working longer hours, since the workday does not have a definite beginning and end.

As cited by Kruger and Jacobs (2019:191), the EHWSFPS (2019) undertakes a consolidative approach. This is evident because of the pillars of the framework. The first pillar, HIV, TB and STIs Management, is aligned to other national strategies which are aimed at structural and social drivers that accelerate these diseases and to prevent or reduce these infections. It strives to manage chronic as well as infectious diseases. This is done by executing preventions programs to advance productivity and further promote health. The second pillar, Health Productivity Management, focuses on managing the health and productivity of employees within the workplace. It aims to reduce employees' health-related costs and a decline in work performance. The third pillar, the safety, health, environment, risk and quality (SHERQ) place its

focus on the safety and health of employees. It ensures that the work environment employees are exposed to is healthy and safe to conduct their duties. Wellness management was the last pillar referenced in the study. It is the most pragmatic pillar as it promotes wellness with the focus being on physical, social, emotional, occupational as well as intellectual wellness of the individual. Furthermore, the pillars within the framework all include interventions to ensure the wellness of employees in all aspects (Kruger & Jacobs, 2019:191).

4.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the statutory and regulatory frameworks pertaining to wellness were reviewed. These included the Constitution, 1996, as well as the Employee Health and Wellness Strategies for the Public Service, 2019. With the Constitution, 1996, the focus was on the basic human rights which are enshrined in the Bill of Rights. Moreover, the study reviewed several Acts of the Republic of South Africa drafted in compliance of the Constitution, 1996, which intend to promote the wellness of employees by law. These Acts include the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993, Mental Health Care Act 17 of 2002 and National Health Act 61 of 2003. Lastly, the Employee Health and Wellness Strategies for the Public Service, 2019, included the four important pillars for Public Service wellness within the workplace.

Moreover, with the focus of this chapter being the statutory and regulatory framework for employee wellness, the subsequent chapter focuses on the research methodology undertaken within this study.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this chapter is to comprehensively detail and outline the methodology undertaken within this study. In so doing, this chapter aims to outline the research approach followed by the researcher and the research design utilised as well as the relevance to the study. Moreover, the data collection methods utilised to obtain the necessary data within the study are outlined as well as the relevance and importance in assisting the researcher answering the research questions and realising the research objectives.

5.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Sarantakos (2013:25), there are three primary approaches that guide social research, namely: (1) ontology; (2) epistemology; and (3) methodology. These approaches can be applied to investigate and understand social phenomena within a research process (Al-Ababneh, 2020:76). Moreover, Sarantakos (2013:25) declared that the three approaches are ranked in a hierarchical order by making the following statement, “...*ontology constructs the logic of epistemology, epistemology structures the nature of methodology, and methodology prescribes the appropriate types of research methods, designs and instruments*”.

The “*study of being*” is defined as ontology (Sarantakos, 2013:474; Berryman, 2019:272). Ontology demarcates what can be known and deals with the nature of reality (Sarantakos, 2013:29; Berryman, 2019:272; Al-Ababneh, 2020:82). Moreover, ontology focuses on what exists and questions the type of things that exist and make up the world (Willig, 2019:187). As cited by Al-Ababneh (2020:77), Crotty (1998:3) defined epistemology as “*the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology*”. Sarantakos (2013:29) and Willig (2019:187) contended that epistemology places its focus on the nature of knowledge. Since constructivism aligns with an interpretivist epistemology, the objectivist view that knowledge emerges from the senses alone is rejected. This central step in social research is followed by methodology which is subsequently discussed.

According to Kothari (2004:8), resolving a research problem in a way that is systematic can be referred to as research methodology. Furthermore, it can be comprehended as a science of reviewing the way in which research is done methodically. Nayak and Singh (2015:1) further described research methodology as a research tactic that interprets ontological as well as

epistemological values into procedures that illustrate the way research is to be steered. Encompassed in research methodology, the research approach, the research design, literature review, the data collection instruments, the population and sampling for the study, and the data analysis processes will be discussed.

5.2.1 Research approach

There are two primary types of research approaches namely: qualitative and quantitative. This study employed a qualitative research approach, aligned to a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology. Kumar (2019:16) defined qualitative research as an approach that follows an open, flexible, and unstructured method. The approach is effective in giving vivid descriptions of intricate phenomena. Interpretivism is a philosophical perspective that emerged in contradiction to positivism to understand and explain human and social reality (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:41; Al-Ababneh, 2020:80). Interpretivism posits that the situations within organisations are unique (Al-Ababneh, 2020:80). Constructivism, as cited by Sarantakos (2012:37), argues that there is neither an objective reality nor objective truth. It asserts that individuals construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences (Adom, Yeboah & Ankrah, 2016:2). According to Schwandt (1994:222), both the interpretivism and constructivism paradigms, assert that to understand the world one must interpret it. Both paradigms are relevant to this study because the empirical data that was collected was constructed by the participants from their experiences and subsequently interpreted to construct meaning.

A qualitative research approach has been suitable for this study since it assisted with discovering and understanding concepts related to the study, as well as highlighted the descriptions and practices related to employee wellness in a remote work environment. The qualitative research approach within this study focused on the descriptions and communicated its findings in a narrative manner. The approach was applied in the study with the intention to explain and provide answers to the outlined research questions.

5.2.2 Research design

According to Kumar (2019:485), a procedural strategy that is undertaken by the researcher to answer the research questions is accurately referred to as a research design. Consequently, a research design addresses questions that observe the route the researcher is intent on taking within their research journey (Kumar, 2019:485). Pandey and Pandey (2015:18) explained that

a research design is the basis or plot for a study that is utilised for information gathering. It provides an applied indication of the vital problems tangled within the design of social and economic research (Hakim, 2000:2). This study made use of a descriptive and explanatory research design.

A descriptive research design (typically aligned to a qualitative research approach) focuses on defining the prevailing phenomena as accurately as possible (Atmowardoyo, 2018:198). Studies within the descriptive research design are concentrated on describing the aspects of a specific person, or of a collective, circumstances or method (Kothari, 2004:37). It is focused on shaping cautious explanations and comprehensive credentials of a phenomenon of interest. These explanations should be grounded in a scientific methodology (Nayak & Singh, 2015:9). In this study, a descriptive research design was used to describe employee wellness, its dimensions, the theoretical models relevant to employee wellness and a remote work environment. This is relevant and suitable to study because, as cited by Bradshaw, Atkinson and Doody (2017:1), qualitative descriptive studies are undertaken when information is required directly from those experiencing the phenomenon under investigation and where time and resources are limited.

According to Nayak and Singh (2015:9), an explanatory research design pursues descriptions of detected phenomena, difficulties, and behaviours. Whereas the descriptive research designs observe the “*what*”, “*where*”, and “*when*” of phenomena, the explanatory research design pursues responses to the “*why*” and “*how*” questions, relating to the phenomena under study (Nayak & Singh, 2015:9; Kumar, 2018:477). Through an explanatory research design, the importance, value, and relevance of employee wellness will be explained. In addition, the implications and challenges of implementing employee wellness programs for employees working remotely were also explicated through an explanatory research design.

5.2.3 Literature study

A literature review is an essential part of the research process and makes a valuable contribution to almost every operational step (Kumar, 2019:58; Snyder, 2019:334). Rowley and Slack (2004:31) described a literature review as a summary of a theme area that encourages the recognition of detailed research enquiries. According to Randolph (2009:2), one way of indicating the researcher’s knowledge regarding a certain area of study is through reviewing literature.

Furthermore, a literature review is vital in supporting the identification of a research theme and research question (Rowley & Slack, 2004:31; Paul & Criado, 2020:1). A literature review is pivotal in assisting with identifying the literature to which the research will contribute as well as contextualising the research within existing literature (Kraus, Mahto & Walsh, 2021:3). The literature review can moreover build a consideration of hypothetical perceptions as well as terminology (Rowley & Slack, 2004:31). In addition, a literature review recommends research strategies that may be valuable in dissecting and translating results that can emerge from the review (Snyder, 2019:334).

5.2.4 Data collection method

There are various methods that can be used by researchers to collect data. Kumar (2019:215) contended that methods vary based on the nature of the study. Kothari (2004:95) concurred and further declared that the methods depend on whether the study requires primary or secondary sources. As mentioned above, this study utilised both primary and secondary sources. Thus, the method that was deployed to gather primary data was interviews, expounded upon below.

5.2.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are presentations of verbal questions and responses (Kothari, 2004:97; Pandey & Pandey, 2015:60). Personal interviews in Public Administration research are typically carried out in a semi-structured manner. Semi-structured interviews follow a sequence of questions that have already been predetermined, but also provide flexibility to further probe a respondent (Ragab & Arisha, 2018:12; Barclay, 2018:2; Kumar, 2019:220). One of the greatest advantages of semi-structured interviews is that respondents can share their views, opinions, experiences and attitudes regarding a particular topic in their own words (Barclay, 2018:2). This method of data collection corresponds with the constructivist ontological approach in which meaning is constructed by means of the views, opinions, experiences and attitudes of respondents. An interpretivist approach to epistemology further provides the opportunity to interpret the respondents' experiences, views and opinions to construct meaning on the nature, demands and challenges experienced regarding employee wellness in a remote work environment. Personal interviews were conducted with the Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, Senior Human Resource (HR) managers and the senior manager of the JB Marks Local Municipality. The purpose of undertaking these interviews has been to allow the researcher to collect detailed information about the participants' experiences, opinions, and attitudes on

employee wellness in a remote work environment in their own words to provide richer understanding on the research study.

5.2.4.2 *Sampling and population*

According to Kumar (2019:292), the respondents from which a researcher selects their sample is referred to as the study's population. The population is the basis from which researchers select their sample to incorporate within their study for investigation (Majid, 2018:3). Several authors (Sharma, 2017:749; Bhardwaj, 2019:158; Kumar, 2019:292) contend that the procedure of choosing respondents from a population to serve as data sources is referred to as sampling. Sampling is prominent within research because of the limitations of resources that make it impractical for researchers to gather data from the whole population (Taherdoost, 2016:18; Sharma, 2017:749; Ragab & Arisha, 2018:10). Thus, sampling provides a feasible and efficient alternative which permits the execution of research strategies which are limited by time as well as budget (Ragab & Arisha, 2018:10). Although a sample is a sub-group (Kumar, 2019:292), it is significant in research because it represents the population of interest (Sharma, 2017:749).

Sampling techniques are divided into two categories, namely: probability (random) sampling; and non-probability (non-random) sampling (Taherdoost, 2016:18; Ragab & Arisha, 2018:10; Bhardwaj, 2019:158; Kumar, 2019:296). This study utilised non-probability sampling which followed a purposive (judgemental) technique. According to Ragab and Arisha, (2018:10), non-probability sampling involves the selection of respondents from a population that is controlled by the researcher and is not conducted randomly. As cited by Sharma (2017:751), the purposive sampling technique, also referred to as the judgemental sampling technique, is reliant on the researcher's judgement of selecting the respondents to serve as data sources. The participants that were purposely selected are Employee Wellness Professionals, due to their knowledge and experience with the topic and the HRM officials in the JB Marks Local Municipality due to their experiences, views and attitudes towards employee wellness. This sampling technique has been relevant to this study adventure because, as declared by Taherdoost (2016:22), it is related to a qualitative research approach, which this study followed.

The total population of the EHW professionals at the JB Marks Local Municipality was two (2). The sample number that was selected was two (2) EHW Professionals. In addition, three (3) senior HRM officials were selected from a total population of four (4). Additionally, one (1) senior manager at the JB Marks Municipality was interviewed from a total population of six (6). According to Sarantakos (2013:168), the use of samples within research is essential and

effective as they provide comprehensive information, since selecting a sample is based on thorough criteria that aids researchers to evade errors, prejudice and/or falsifications.

Table 5.1: Total Population and Sample size

Source: (Researcher's own work)

	Employee health and wellness Professionals	Senior HR Officials	Senior managers
Population Size	2	4	6
Sample Size	2	3	1
Total	2	3	1

Patel, Doku and Tennakoon (2003:229) explained the recruitment of participants as the discourse between the researcher and possible respondents before the inception of the consent procedure, which commences with identifying, targeting, and enrolling respondents. The recruitment of the respondents was conducted by the researcher.

According to Connelly (2020:125), it is important to ensure that the inclusion and exclusion criteria within the study are balanced so that the findings within the study can be useful. This is because the inclusion and exclusion criteria map out which respondents can be a participant within a researcher's study (Hornberger & Rangu, 2020:2). The inclusion criteria within this study were based on the occupations held by the participants and their subsequent knowledge and experience with the management of employee wellness in the JB Marks Local Municipality.

Gatekeeper approval was also sought. The gatekeeper at the JB Marks Local Municipality is the Municipal Manager. McFadyen and Rankin (2016:82) defined a gatekeeper as an individual within an institution or organisation who controls the researcher's access to participants. Gatekeepers limit access and their authorisation is often required ahead of external research taking place within institutions or organisations (Christian, Johnstone, Larkins & Wright, 2022:317).

5.2.4.3 Data analysis

Calzon (2022: online) defined data analysis as *"the process of collecting, modelling and analysing data to extract insights that support decision-making"*. Data analysis as a step in the research process consists of several activities within itself, like the (1) grouping of data; (2) the organising of data; and (3) the presenting of data (Globalstats Academic, 2021: online). Data

analysis in qualitative research consists of data that is presented in various forms (verbal, textual or multi-focus format) with the intentions of converting and interpreting the data in a scholarly way (Sarantakos, 2013:365). However, the data collected in this study adventure was not manipulated to achieve the research objectives. Ethics were adhered to when conducting the research in the Municipality as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.8 of this dissertation.

Content analysis was employed as data analysis strategy for the collected data. Kleinheksel, Winston, Tawfik and Wyatt (2020:127) explained content analysis as a data analysis method that is advanced in its management of textual data. Moreover, content analysis is predominantly effective with large amounts of textual data that is unanalysed (Kleinheksel *et al.*, 2020:127). This was relevant within this study because, as cited by Stemler (2001:1), content analysis allows researchers to sort through substantial quantities of data with relative ease in a systematic manner. Furthermore, the content analysis method was suitable in this study because it enables researchers to make conclusions which can be validated by utilising other methods of data collection. Moreover, themes also developed within the study. This is significant because Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016:101) contended that themes are the primary aspect of data analysis as they yield practical findings within a field of study. This suits the study because themes can be used as descriptors as they arrange a group of recurring of ideas (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2016:101).

5.2.4.4. *Validity and reliability*

In contrast to qualitative research studies, Coleman (2022:2042) argued that validity and reliability are typically linked to quantitative research studies. They are regarded as "*the two best-known relevant*" quality criteria for research (Vu, 2021:1), as they are essential to all research inquiries (Cypress, 2017:254). However, depending on the research approach used for the study, there are significant variations in how these concepts are operationally defined and applied (Coleman, 2022:2042). The significance of guaranteeing validity and reliability from a qualitative perspective is elaborated in the section that follows.

In general, validity is the degree to which research measures what it claims to measure (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019:440). Nonetheless, validity in qualitative research refers to how "*appropriate*" the methods, procedures, and data are (Leung, 2015:325). There are several different terminologies used in qualitative research to describe validity (Golafshani, 2003:602). According to Lueng (2015:325), validity is assessed by determining whether the selected methodology is appropriate for addressing the set research question, the design for the

methodology, the sampling and data analysis, as well as the findings and conclusions for the sample and context.

Consequently, there are similarities between the qualitative and quantitative conceptions of validity (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019:440). This is a result of their emphasis on achieving legitimate outcomes. As outlined by Collingridge and Gantt, (2019:440), validity is important in qualitative research for three reasons: (a) to accurately describe intangible constructs like experience; (b) to adequately access constructs through effective interviewing and observation techniques; and (c) to yield results that are consistent with other measures of the same phenomenon.

Coleman (2021:2043) stated that "*consistency*" is often used to refer to reliability in qualitative research studies. The reason for this is that consistency appears to be a shared trait of reliability (Vu, 2021:4). Reliability is essentially a method that researchers employ to ensure that the measurements they employ are error-free and yield consistent outcomes when repeated (Sadik, 2019:146). Within qualitative research, reliability is utilised to increase the trustworthiness of the research (Sadik, 2019:146). However, in contrast to the usual quantitative definition, this concept of reliability focuses on establishing constant resemblance in the quality of the outcomes rather than repeatedly obtaining the same results (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019:440).

Moreover, there are two common strategies utilised in research studies to guarantee validity and reliability, namely, triangulation and member checking. Rose and Johnson (2020:10) argued that triangulation entails acknowledging the variety and coexistence of cultural perspectives, offering a range of methods to ensure an accurate depiction and representation of a particular situation. Nonetheless, multiple authors (Renz, Carrington & Badger, 2018:827; Natow, 2020:161-162; Donkoh & Mensah, 2023:7-8; Morgan, 2024:1846) have indicated that four distinct forms of triangulation exist – data triangulation, investigation triangulation, theory triangulation, as well as method triangulation. This study utilised the data triangulation approach to guarantee the validity and reliability of the findings.

Data triangulation involves utilising various types of data that work together to study a phenomenon (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023:8). This involves utilising a variety of data sources, such as information gathered by simultaneously interviewing different groups of individuals (Morgan, 2024:1845). However, it is important to note that data triangulation is not the same as methodological triangulation. This confusion can be clarified by considering data triangulation from various perspectives (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023:8). Researchers can identify a

phenomenon more accurately by examining it from various angles, as suggested by Rose and Johnson (2020:10). This approach is important and appropriate as it can enhance the credibility and reliability of a qualitative research study by enabling researchers to gain a more thorough and holistic insight into the context and the individuals involved (Morgan, 2024:1846). Moreover, employing triangulation in research not only enhances credibility and validity (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021:1) but also reduces researcher bias and offers various perspectives on the phenomenon being studied (Renz *et al.*, 2018:827).

5.2 CONCLUSION

This chapter primarily focused on the methodology utilised within this study. The qualitative research approach was employed in this study which followed a constructionism ontological perspective and an interpretivism epistemological perspective. This allowed the participants to provide information that is constructed from their experiences with a remote working environment. Moreover, this allowed the researcher to interpret the information and be able to analyse the data. In addition, this study made use of a descriptive as well as explanatory research design. These systems were relevant to the study as it allowed for the issues to be described and explained in a narrative manner. Furthermore, the study made use of a purposive sampling technique which is also referred to as judgemental sampling. The data collection method employed in this study was semi-structured interviews with the Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, Senior HR officials as well as one senior manager within the JB Marks Local Municipality. Also, content analysis was the selected method of analysing the collected data. The validity and reliability of the research methods have been explained, and its relevance has been justified to ensure trustworthiness within this research study by means of triangulation. The suitability, relevance as well as the importance of all the chosen strategies and methods employed in this study were explained. The next chapter aims to reveal the influence of a remote work environment on employee wellness through an empirical investigation. Thus, the data collected will be presented, analysed and discussed.

CHAPTER 6: EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE JB MARKS LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the empirical study conducted in the JB Marks Local Municipality, grounded in the theoretical frameworks, and outlined in chapter 1, 2, and 4 of this dissertation. The investigation involved an analysis of existing secondary source information and the collection of primary empirical data through semi-structured interviews. This approach aimed to uncover the influence of a remote work environment on employee wellness within a municipality in the Republic of South Africa (RSA)'s geographic area of responsibility.

The findings of this study identify key insights into employee wellness and highlight logical conclusions along with SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) recommendations for enhancing public service delivery in and by a local government sphere located municipality in the developing Republic of South Africa. These insights will subsequently inform the recommendations of an implementation framework to manage employee wellness effectively in a remote work context of the JB Marks Local Municipality (as discussed in Chapter 7).

The sections that follow will address several critical aspects of the study, including the following:

- **Empirical data collection:** An account will be given on the methodologies and rationale for choosing semi-structured interviews as a data collection method.
- **Data analysis:** A thorough examination, analysis and interpretation of the information and insights derived from the gathered data will be realized.
- **Concluding remarks:** A summary of the findings and their implications will be presented.

By systematically addressing the aforementioned critical research aspects, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the empirical research conducted within the JB Marks Local Municipality and its implications for public sector management in the Republic of South Africa. The subsequent section analyses the data collected through the empirical investigation.

6.2 RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS

This section outlines the results gathered from the semi-structured interviews held with Employee Health and Wellness Professionals as well as the Senior HR Officials in the JB Marks Local Municipality. Due to their experience with and knowledge about employee wellness within a remote work environment, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, valuable information and data was gathered. The main purpose of the interviews was to reveal the influence of a remote work environment on employee wellness in a municipality context. The interview schedule was comprised of two sections:

- Section A (Consent form of the participants)
- Section B (Remote work environment on employee wellness)

The consent form, **Section A**, was signed by the participants within this study. **Section B** of the interview schedule consisted of questions associated with employee wellness within a remote work environment in the JB Marks Local Municipality. The subsequent section discusses the results obtained from the Employee Health and Wellness Professionals which will be followed by the results obtained from the Senior HR Officials.

6.2.1 Employee Health and Wellness professionals

The interview schedule consisted of six open-ended questions on various aspects of the employee wellness program implemented within the JB Marks Local Municipality. In the section that follows, the results of the interviews are presented, interpreted and analysed.

6.2.1.1 Does the Municipality comply with the legislative and policy requirements for the management of employee wellness?

The first question of the interview was posed to establish whether the employee wellness programme implemented complies with the legislative and policy requirements. The interviewees were also requested to indicate to what extent/how it is implemented or to explain whether (and how) they intend to do this.

Interviewee A indicated that the employee wellness programme within the JB Marks Local Municipality does comply with the legislative and policy requirements for the management of employee wellness, particularly with the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service (see Section 4.5.2). However, interviewee A further indicated that due to the lack of human capital within the municipality, the focus is not on all four of the pillars of the

framework. The focus is placed on two pillars, namely, wellness management (see Section 4.5.2.4) and health and productivity management (see Section 4.5.2.2). Moreover, the participant explained that the Safety, Health, Environment, Risk and Quality Management (SHERQ) Management pillar (see Section 4.2.5.3) is not regarded/considered within their programme as it is a different sub-unit within the municipality.

Interviewee B likewise indicated that the employee wellness programme within the municipality does comply with the legislative and policy requirements for the management of employee wellness as it is mainly guided by the Constitution (see Section 4.2.1) and the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service (see Section 4.5.2). However, the participant indicated that there are challenges regarding the approval of policies within the municipality. It is for this reason that some policies are not affected within the municipality.

Both interviewees indicated that their employee wellness programme within the municipality does comply with the legislative regulations, however it is not guided by all four pillars as outlined in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.5. This transpires because the Safety, Health, Environment, Risk and Quality Management (SHERQ) Management pillar (see Section 4.5.2.3) is a different sub-unit in the municipality. The HIV, Tuberculosis and Sexually Transmitted Diseases Management pillar (see Section 4.5.2.1) is not considered at all, as the focus of the employee wellness programme is placed on two pillars only, namely, (1) wellness management and (2) health and productivity management.

6.2.1.2 Does your employee wellness programme make provision for a remote work environment?

The purpose of the second question of the interview was to determine whether the employee wellness program implemented within the JB Marks Local Municipality makes provision for employees working remotely. In addition, the interviewees were requested to indicate to what extent/how it is implemented or to provide estimations/explanations of how they intend to address the matter if it is not provided.

Interviewee A outlined that the employee wellness programme within the municipality does not make provision for a remote work environment due to the lack of available resources. This opinion was further supported by the experiences of the participants during the Covid-19 pandemic as they had to review their processes and policies regarding the employee wellness programme in the municipality. Moreover, interviewee A indicated that although HR policies

likewise need to be reviewed, getting policies approved in the municipality has proven to be a challenge.

Interview B explained that their employee wellness programme does not make provision for a remote work environment. The participant explained that the reason is that the municipality is a public service provider, and working remotely takes away from the duties of the municipal workers who have to provide services to the public. Moreover, the participant outlined that a further reason is that the municipality does not have the necessary resources to provide an employee wellness programme for employees working remotely.

Both interviewees indicated that the wellness programme within the municipality does not make provision for a remote work environment, mainly due to the lack of available resources. The provision of the employee wellness programme in a remote work environment would only benefit the senior management officials as they have the necessary resources.

6.2.1.3 What are the challenges that you currently experience in terms of managing the wellness of your employees and how do you foresee these challenges being exacerbated in a remote work environment?

This question of the interview was aimed to identify what challenges are experienced within the JB Marks Local Municipality regarding managing the wellness of their employees. Furthermore, based on the knowledge and experience of the participants, they were requested to expand on how the challenges they experience would be exacerbated in a remote work environment.

Interviewee A revealed that institutions at large need policies and guidelines to manage their human capital. However, within the JB Marks Local Municipality, the biggest challenge is getting policies approved, especially the HR policies. This results in them solely being guided by the existing legislative regulations to manage the wellness of their employees. Furthermore, interviewee A emphasised that they face struggles such as managing ill-health as well as incapacity of their employees because of a relevant policy not being in place. In addition, interviewee A stated that the pillars encompassed in the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service, 2023 (see Section 4.5.2), need to be adjusted to suit the municipality. This is because they face challenges that are unique compared to other spheres of government.

Interviewee B indicated that the main challenge they encounter is compliance. The employees within the municipality do not comply with the working hours as they ought to. Secondly, absenteeism is another challenge within the municipality. The participant explained that employees tend to miss work without a valid reason and without an explanation to their line managers. Moreover, interviewee B expanded that with absenteeism being a challenge within the municipality, a remote work environment would worsen the productivity levels as employees will be without supervision.

From the abovementioned results, it is evident that the biggest challenges they experience are the approval of policies, compliance from the municipality employees as well as absenteeism. The lengthy process of getting policies approved delays the process of implementing the policies. This leads to the municipality not having necessary and relevant policies in place to aid the employees.

6.2.1.4 Does the Municipality include the key components of an employee wellness programme, namely, (1) health education; (2) a supportive social and physical work environment; (3) integration of the wellness programme into the organisation's structure; (4) a connection to related programmes such as employee assistance programmes, and (5) workplace screening in its employee wellness programme?

The purpose of the question was to determine whether the employee wellness program implemented within the JB Marks Local Municipality consists of the key components of a wellness program as outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1. In addition, the interviewees were requested to comment on their successes and challenges, to comment on the reasons therefor.

Interviewee A indicated that health education (see Section 2.2.2) is one component included in their employee wellness programme. The participant further alluded to what they refer to as the Service Budget Implementation Plan (hereafter referred to as SBIP), which is their annual plan. It is within this plan that the directorate plans and indicates the key performance activity areas within the municipality. Furthermore, it is within the SBIP that they organise, and plan four awareness campaigns a year with each awareness campaign placing a specific focus on a particular wellness dimension. Workplace screening (see Section 2.2.2) is one component that is not part of the employee wellness programme, however, it is undertaken during wellness day events or awareness campaigns within the municipality as stated by interviewee A.

Moreover, interviewee A indicated that the wellness programme within the municipality includes a supportive social and physical work environment as well as psychosocial support (see Section 2.2.2) as a sub-division within their unit. However, the other components are not included within the employee wellness programme within the municipality. Interviewee A further reiterated that the wellness programme within the municipality is guided by the standards and principles outlined and provided by the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) of South Africa.

Interviewee B indicated that the employee wellness programme in the municipality does not directly include any of the key components outlined Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, as they are mainly guided by the four pillars outlined in the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service, 2023 (see Section 4.5.2). Likewise, interviewee B explained that the SHERQ Management pillar (see Section 4.5.2.4) is not considered in the employee wellness programme in the municipality as it is a different sub-unit. However, interviewee B outlined that the wellness programme in the municipality does include a supportive physical work environment (see Section 2.2.2). Interviewee B explained that some of the components like health education and workplace screening (see Section 2.2.2), are outsourced from the health department from time to time but are not included within the wellness programme.

From the above results, it is evident that the employee wellness programme within the municipality does not consider all five key components of a functional and effective employee wellness programme. As outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2 of this dissertation, employee wellness programmes ought to comprise of all the abovementioned key components to ensure that employees are productive and not burdened by personal matters. In addition, this will further ensure that the programme aligns with the institution's structure.

6.2.1.5. Did the municipality develop its current employee wellness programme, based on the tenets of any recognised theoretical model such as the Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory or the PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) Model?

This question in the interview was posed to establish whether the wellness programme within the JB Marks Local Municipality made use of the theoretical models. The interviewees were further requested to comment on the successes and challenges, and, to comment on the reasons therefor.

Interviewee A indicated that they are not familiar with the abovementioned models. However, the participant alluded to their answer to the previous question that the wellness programme within the municipality is guided by the standards and principles provided by the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) of South Africa.

Interviewee B stated that the wellness programmes within the municipality does not specifically make use of the abovementioned theoretical frameworks. However, the programmes are developed based on the trends from the employee's health conditions or behaviours. Thus, the model or approach to their programme is determined by what is prevalent with regard to the wellness of employees in that period.

Both interviewees indicated that the wellness programme within the municipality is not developed on the tenets of the theoretical models outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.3. The main guide, separate from the legislative requirements, are the standards and principles provided by the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) of South Africa as well as the trends in the health and behaviour of employees. As highlighted in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, these models can be vital in assisting with promoting health, changing health behaviour as well as addressing psychological and mental health.

6.2.1.6 What are the primary aspects you believe to be included in an employee wellness programme for employees working remotely. Please provide reasons for regarding these aspects to be priorities.

This question was posed to determine the key aspect to be prioritised within an employee wellness programme, particularly for employees working remotely. The participants were also requested to expand on why they deem those aspects to be priorities.

Interviewee A indicated that an employee wellness programme for employees working remotely is “a far-fetched idea” within the municipality. This was due to the fact that the participant could not provide aspects to be prioritised. Also, the reasoning of the participant of the idea being far-fetched is due to the lack of available resources. Interviewee A further outlined that for the idea to materialise, the municipality would have to prioritise being resourced first.

Interviewee B outlined that remote work within the JB Marks Local Municipality is “close to impossible” due to the lack of resources. The participant explained that the provision of resources would have to be a priority if the employee wellness programme was to be available

to employees working remotely. Interviewee B further explicated that a remote work setting would only be possible for Senior Managers and directors as they have the necessary resources. It is, however, close to impossible for the other employees.

From the above results, it is evident that a remote work environment within the municipality is close to impossible for most employees as they do not have the necessary resources to fully put it into effect. Even with the rise of technological advances, both interviewees deemed remote work within the JB Marks Local Municipality as “*far-fetched*” and “*impossible*”. The sole reason for these comments were based on the lack of resources within the municipality.

Therefore, for remote work to be feasible within the JB Marks Local Municipality, resources would have to be prioritised first. The comments were supported by referencing the struggles that emerged within the municipality during the Covid-19 pandemic.

6.2.2 Senior HR Officials and Senior Managers

The interview schedule for the Senior HR Officials consisted of five questions pertaining to the employees’ experience with remote work as well as the accessibility of the wellness programme for remote workers in the JB Marks Local Municipality. In the section that follows, the results of the interviews are presented, interpreted and analysed.

6.2.2.1 How has remote work influenced your wellness and productivity? If positive, please indicate how and to what extent. If not, please provide reasons.

The purpose of this question is to reveal the influence remote work has on the wellness and work-life balance of the employees within the JB Marks Local Municipality. As indicated in Chapter 3, Section 3.3 of this dissertation, remote work has both positive and negative influences on the wellness of employees.

Interviewee A stated that remote work had a significant influence on their productivity and work-life balance (see Section 3.3.1.1). In addition, the whole institution was impacted as indicated by the participant. However, the interviewee indicated that the positive side to remote working for them was that there were no distractions and unnecessary office visits which resulted in higher productivity levels. Moreover, working from home provided a safe environment which aided in ensuring that the participants reached their target timeously.

Furthermore, interviewee A indicated that remote work had a negative influence as well. The participant stated that *“from the negative point of view, it was sometimes very straining as I was sitting working for long hours to ensure that the municipality runs effectively. By doing all of this, it resulted in fatigue that affected my health, and I ended up in theatre with a major operation in May 2022. Another challenge was when I was experiencing network difficulties”*. As indicated in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1.1 as well as Section 3.3.1.2, work-life balance and communication are among the negative influences of remote work on employee wellness. This is evident as both participants experienced the negative influences.

Interviewee B indicated that remote work has an impact on both their wellness and productivity. Regarding productivity, this was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic as stated by interviewee B. This was because work agendas were divided amongst the team members and some team members did not meet their weekly deadlines. Moreover, wellness was influenced as interviewee B explained that they experienced a lot of stress and fatigue due to long hours of work.

Interviewee D explained that her only experience with remote work was during the pandemic and that she does not work remotely anymore. However, interviewee D indicated that remote work had a positive influence on her wellness holistically. Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2.1, highlighted independence as one of the positive influences of remote work on employee wellness. The independence that came because of remote work improved the wellness of interviewee D as she could spend time with her loved ones. However, interviewee D also explained that remote work negatively influenced her work productivity. She explained that her attention was divided between various other commitments which resulted in her work productivity suffering.

From the results above, it is evident that remote work had a positive and negative impact on the wellness and productivity of employees within the JB Marks Local municipality. Work-life balance, as outlined on Chapter 3, section 3.1.1.1, is one of the common dilemmas of remote work which was a common thread among all four participants.

6.2.2.2 How has remote work affected your communication and collaboration with team members? If positive, please indicate how and to what extent. If not, please provide reasons.

Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1 of this dissertation outlines that employees working remotely may feel isolated due to the lack of communication with fellow employees. Moreover, with the lack of

interaction due to a remote setting, collaboration with team members may be affected. This question was posed to determine the extent to which communication and collaboration among team members was affected within the JB Marks Local Municipality.

Interviewee A indicated that during the Covid-19 pandemic, communication was challenging as colleagues would not reply to emails or even answer their phones. This resulted in little to no communication within the municipality. In addition, interviewee A stated that “*working remotely requires a very disciplined and trustworthy workforce as some employees will use the employer’s time for their own benefits*”. In Section 6.2.1.3, Participant 2 identified absenteeism as a challenge within the municipality. Interviewee A further referenced that within a conventional work environment, employees can be monitored to ensure that they are fulfilling their duties as opposed to when they are working remotely.

Interviewee B indicated that the communication was challenging as it was not as promptly as it needed to be. Interviewee B further indicated that there was little to no communication as colleagues would not reply to emails which hindered collaboration with team members. Moreover, as stated by interviewee B, the lack of proper communication further exaggerated the productivity levels within the municipality.

Interviewee C explained that communication and collaboration with team members were not entirely challenged while undertaking remote work. The reason being that within the municipality, there was a schedule of who undertakes remote work at a certain week and who comes into the office at a certain week as explained by interviewee C. Therefore, it was easier for team members to communicate.

Interviewee D indicated that communication and collaboration with team members were impacted due to remote work. Moreover, interviewee D explained that remote work assisted with developing new ways to communicate on different platforms and further equipped the employees with new knowledge regarding technology. However, interviewee D outlined that communicating online was also challenging because one was already accustomed to the in-person communication. In addition, the digital form of communication is open to misinterpretation due to the language barriers amongst the various employees within the municipality as explained by interviewee D.

From the interview results above, it is evident that remote work affected communication and collaboration amongst team members within the JB Marks Local municipality. Chapter 3, section

3.1.1.2, outlines communication as one of the negative outcomes of remote work on employee wellness. The digital methods of communication were challenging for employees, particularly for the low-level employees who were not provided with resources to undertake remote work. The lack of provision of resources to employees exacerbated the communication challenge which was experienced by three of the four participants.

6.2.2.3 Do you feel supported by the municipality while working remotely? If yes, please indicate how (and to what extent) and if no, please provide reasons.

This question was asked to determine whether officials feel supported by the municipality while undertaking remote work. The participants were further requested to indicate how (and to what extent) and to indicate the challenges they encounter.

Interviewee A indicated that enough support was provided to employees who worked remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly regarding equipment to conduct the work. Interviewee A stated that *“collaborative software was installed in my laptop as well as a reliable Wi-Fi/Router was provided so that I did not lose touch with all the necessary correspondence that needed my attention at that time. Again, during that period, the municipality ensured that one received counselling to prepare employees psychologically to deal with fear of the Pandemic. There were virtual workshops that assisted us on how to plan your time during the day while working from home”*.

Interviewee B outlined that they felt supported by the municipality while working remotely. This was because resources were provided to the senior officials to ensure that they could work remotely. However, the resources provided were not adequate as it was challenging for remote workers to access the necessary platforms due to the lack of internet connection which was not provided to all employees.

Interviewee C explained that although there was support for remote workers within the JB Marks Local municipality more could have been done. This was because proper resources and working equipment were not provided to most employees which hindered/constrained employees to fulfil some of their responsibilities as explained by interviewee C. Furthermore, interviewee C explained that the information technology (IT) department also faced challenges with the increased number of employees working remotely during the pandemic.

Interviewee D explained that there was a great amount of support shown to them as senior managers within the municipality when working remotely. All the necessary resources needed to conduct work were provided to them as explained by interviewee D. However, interviewee D also stated that the provision of resources to conduct work remotely was not provided to all employees, but only to more senior level management employees.

From the interview results above, it is evident that only the senior level employees within the JB Marks Local Municipality were supported for remote work. However, it is evident that the support was solely by providing the necessary working equipment and not by addressing the health and wellness needs of employees working remotely. Therefore, it is evident that the health and wellness of remote workers within the municipality was not prioritised as remote workers were not supported in that regard.

6.2.2.4 How is health and wellness promoted for remote workers within the municipality?

Chapter 2, Section 2.3 outlines the three theoretical models which can be utilised to assist with changing health behaviour, promoting health as well as measuring health. This question was posed to establish the nature and extent of measures put in place to motivate remote workers to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Interviewee A indicated that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Health and Wellness unit introduced programmes within the municipality to ensure that employees are kept abreast on how to manage stress and how to balance work and everyday life. Moreover, interviewee A explained that circulars were issued daily to update employees on matters related to the pandemic. In addition, virtual meetings were held to encourage employees to take the necessary steps to stay safe.

Interviewee B indicated that there is an employee wellness programme within the municipality, although they have not used its services. However, interviewee B stated that they have subordinates who have used these services and that the subordinates found out about them through facing challenges in the work environment.

Interviewee C declared that there is no promotion of health and wellness at all for remote workers within the municipality. Even with employees working remotely during the pandemic,

interviewee C stated that health and wellness were not promoted within the JB Marks Local municipality.

Interviewee D also indicated that health and wellness were not promoted for remote workers at the time of the pandemic. Furthermore, interviewee D indicated that there was no correspondence from the Employee Health and Wellness department within the municipality regarding the health and wellness promotion of remote workers. At the height of the pandemic, the measures put in place were solely to combat the spread of the coronavirus and not to address the health and wellness of employees holistically, particularly those working remotely. Interviewee D stated that remote workers were left to their own devices/strategies regarding managing their health and wellness.

From the interview results above, it is evident that there is no health and wellness promotion for remote workers within the JB Marks Local Municipality. This is evident from the responses of the participants which indicated that measures were primarily put in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus and not address the health and wellness of remote workers holistically.

6.2.2.5 Have you faced any barriers accessing the wellness programme while working remotely? If yes, please indicate how and to what extent. If no, please provide reasons.

This question was posed to determine whether the challenges that employees working remotely encounter, are accessed by the wellness programme within the JB Marks Local municipality.

Interviewee A indicated that the challenge accessing the wellness programme in the municipality was the lack of personnel coming to work when there was a need to consult, especially during total shutdown. This is because the wellness programme did not function remotely.

Interviewee B stated that they did not encounter any challenges in terms of access to the programme while working remotely. The only incident with the programme was during the pandemic when interviewee B tested positive for Covid-19. Furthermore, interviewee B stated that the Employee health and wellness professionals were supportive during that period and regularly did check-ups to monitor the recovery of the employee which was monitored electronically.

Interviewee C stated that there were at all no wellness programmes for remote workers within the municipality, even during the Covid-19 pandemic. Apart from posters regarding the washing of hands as well as to sanitize, the municipality did not prioritise the wellness programme for remote workers during the pandemic and afterwards.

Interviewee D indicated that they never attempted to access the wellness programme while working remotely. However, interviewee D stated that there was no communication on the type of programmes available to employees working remotely. In addition, interviewee D explained that due to the lack of resources provided to lower-level employees, accessing the programme while working remotely posed a great challenge. Interviewee D also indicated that wellness overall within the municipality, particularly for remote workers, was not prioritised.

From the interview results above, it is evident that none of the participants made use of the employee wellness programme within the municipality while undertaking remote working. Also, the wellness programme was not accessible for remote workers as employees had to go into the office to consult. Moreover, with resources not provided to lower-level employees, accessing the wellness programme working remotely would have been close to impossible. The subsequent section outlines the primary findings of the interview results with the Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, Senior HR officials as well as the senior manager.

6.3 PRIMARY FINDINGS OF THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

This section outlines the most significant results gathered from semi-structured interviews with the Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, Senior HR Officials and the senior manager of the JB Marks Local Municipality. From the empirical investigation, the primary findings were as follows:

- From the interview results with the Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, it is evident that the employee wellness programme does comply with legislative and regulatory requirements. However, two of the four pillars are not considered within the programme.
- Moreover, the employee wellness programme within the JB Marks Local Municipality does not make provision for a remote work environment due to the lack of resources.
- The challenges currently experienced in terms of managing the wellness of the employees are the issues of getting policies approved as well as compliance from employees within the municipality.

- From the five (5) key components needed to have a functional and effective employee wellness programme, as outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, the municipality only incorporates one component within their wellness programme.
- The municipality does not develop their wellness programme based on the tenets of the theoretical model outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.3. The programme within the municipality is developed based on the EAPA standards and principles.
- Remote work is not feasible within the municipality. Before, the wellness programme can make provision for a remote work environment, it should first be prioritised for being resourced.
- From the interviews with the Senior HR officials and senior manager, it is evident that remote work influenced the wellness of employees working remotely, both negatively and positively. Moreover, due to remote work, some employees experienced a drop in productivity levels, while some experienced a rise.
- Furthermore, communication was a challenge particularly with lower-level employees as they were not equipped with the necessary resources to work remotely.
- What was evident through the results was the fact that only senior employees were supported to do remote work within the JB Marks Local Municipality. However, the support was limited to the provision of resources and not addressing the health and wellness needs of the employees working remotely.
- It is thus evident that there is/was no promotion of health and wellness for remote workers within the Municipality.
- Lastly, the participants within the study did not attempt to access the wellness programme while working remotely. However, the participants declared that no communication was provided regarding the services and programme available to remote workers.

Based on the above findings, it is apparent that the JB Marks Local Municipality does implement an employee wellness programme. However, the wellness programme does not make provision for the employees working remotely. Moreover, two of the four pillars within the Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service, 2023, are not considered within the development and implementation of the employee wellness programme in the municipality. Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, explicated the five key components to be included in employee wellness programmes. However, within the JB Marks Local Municipality only one component has been included, namely, a supportive social and physical environment.

In addition, it is evident that remote work influenced the wellness and productivity of employees within the JB Marks Local Municipality. The influence of remote work on the wellness

experienced by the employees were both negative and positive and this in turn affected the productivity of the employees. Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.3, identified that communication is regarded as one of the negative influences of remote work on employee wellness. This is evident within the JB Marks Local Municipality, particularly with lower-level employees due to the lack of resources to be able to work remotely. This illustrates that support was not provided to lower-level employees working remotely. However, the support provided to senior employees working remotely within the municipality was limited to the provision of resources and not the improvement of their health and wellness. The municipality made no attempt to promote health and wellness for employees working remotely. This was evident as there was no correspondence regarding the programmes and services available for remote workers within the municipality. Therefore, recommendations for an implementation framework for managing the wellness of employees working remotely are provided in Chapter Seven of this study.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the empirical investigation that was undertaken at the JB Marks Local Municipality. The empirical investigation was based on the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) as well as the guidelines and directives provided in the statutory and regulatory frameworks (Chapter 4). The results obtained through the semi-structured interviews held with the Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, the Senior HR Officials and the senior manager within the JB Marks Local Municipality, were presented, analysed and interpreted in this chapter.

From this chapter, it was established that the JB Marks Local Municipality does implement an employee wellness programme, which however, does not make provision for employees working remotely. This is because the municipality is not financially equipped to afford its employees to conduct work remotely, as only the senior officials within the municipality are supported with resources. Furthermore, the municipality does not prioritise the health and wellness of the senior officials who work remotely. This is evident as there was no correspondence from the municipality regarding health or wellness to the senior officials who worked remotely. Chapter Seven will therefore include recommendations to the JB Marks Local Municipality in terms of the enactment/execution of an implementation framework to manage the wellness of employees in a more positive and rewarding manner. A summary of the preceding chapters and an illustration of the attainment of the research objectives will also be outlined.

CHAPTER 7: PRIMARY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON A PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study has been to establish how to manage in a more effective, efficient and cost-effective manner the wellness of Public Sector officials in a municipality of the Republic of South Africa by means of working remotely. The requirements of the 4IR and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated this focus on an increasingly remote work environment, since these incidences presented new challenges to public leadership regarding HRM processes and practices, including the remote management and support of the local government sphere of official wellness. The following research objectives were set to be achieved through the study:

- **General research objective**
 - *to develop an implementation framework for the management of employee wellness in the context of a remote work environment.*
- **Specific research objectives:**
 - to establish the theoretical frameworks that underpins employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa (Chapter 2);
 - to explicate the phenomenon of a remote work environment and its influence on employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa (Chapter 3);
 - to establish the statutory and regulatory frameworks that regulate employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa (Chapter 4);
 - to reveal the influence of a remote work environment on official wellness in the JB Marks Local Municipality (Chapter 6); and
 - to make recommendations on the implementation of an implementation framework for official wellness in a remote work environment in the JB Marks Local Municipality (Chapter 7).

Consequently, the theoretical chapters of the study (chapters 2 & 4) focused on the theoretical, statutory and regulatory framework of employee (local government sphere officials) wellness in the public sector and the phenomenon of a remote work environment (Chapter 3) respectively.

Furthermore, an empirical investigation was conducted to reveal the influence of a remote work environment on the wellness of officials within the JB Marks Local Municipality (Chapter 6). Through the theoretical chapters as well as the empirical chapter, the targeted research objectives were obtained, and the research questions were answered. Subsequently, a summary of the preceding chapters is provided within this chapter (Chapter 7), illustrating the attainment of the first four objectives. In addition, the fifth objective is reached within this chapter by providing recommendations on an implementation framework for the management of employee wellness of officials in a remote work environment of the JB Marks Local Municipality. The recommendations will be followed by a conclusion to the study.

7.2 SUMMARY AND PRIMARY FINDINGS OF STUDY

A background and an orientation of the study were provided in **Chapter 1** of the research study. Within this chapter, the contemporary context of the Public Sector in the Republic of South Africa – the advent of the 4IR and the incidence of the COVID-19 pandemic – as well as the consequences thereof, were provided in this context. In addition, it was established that challenges such as the infrequency of employee wellness activities, lack of employee interest, excessive workloads, issues of trust and confidentiality, and employee attitudes in successfully implementing employee wellness programs are prominent in the Public Service of the Republic of South Africa, thereby affecting the implementation of employee wellness programs – also applicable to the Public Sector officials working in municipalities. Although various levels of success have been attained with the implementation of employee wellness programs, it was argued that a remote work environment will further exacerbate the aforementioned challenges. With most employee wellness programs not being developed for a remote workforce, it is hence required to amend these programs to accommodate a remote work environment. It was further stated that employees may have trouble adjusting to their new work environment as they are already used to a particular work culture and will therefore need assistance in adjusting to a remote work environment. To address these challenges, the study set out to establish the theoretical tenets of employee wellness, such as the dimensions of wellness, Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory, and the PERMA Model, as well as the statutory and regulatory framework for employee wellness to establish guidelines in promoting the management of employee wellness in the Republic of South Africa's Public Service as well as the Public Sector. Since the particular focus of the study is on the wellness of employees working remotely, it necessitated a focus on the nature, challenges and benefits of a remote work environment and, specifically, how such an environment influences the wellness of employees.

Given the aforementioned context, the problem statement was defined as: *While the Public Service already implements employee wellness programs with various degrees of success and are currently experiencing challenges in effectively implementing these programs, its employee wellness programs are not designed to manage and support the wellness of employees working remotely, causing a negligence regarding employee wellness that can lead to multiple health, psychological, emotional, and social problems among employees.*

In addressing the research problem, the research objectives (stated in the preceding section), as well as the research questions are outlined in this chapter. In alignment to the research problem and research objectives, the following research questions were established to be obtained:

- **General research question**

- *What should an implementation framework for the management of employee wellness in the context of a remote work environment constitute?*

- **Specific research questions**

- What are the theoretical frameworks that underpins employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa? (Chapter 2)
- How can the phenomenon of a remote work environment and its influence on employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa be explicated? (Chapter 3)
- What are the statutory and regulatory frameworks that regulate employee wellness in the Public Sector of the Republic of South Africa? (Chapter 4)
- What does the influence of a remote work environment on public sector official wellness in the JB Marks Local Municipality reveal? (Chapter 6)
- What recommendations can be made for an implementation framework for the management of public sector official wellness in a remote work environment of JB Marks Local Municipality? (Chapter 7)

A literature review was conducted and presented in **Chapter 2** of this research study. In this chapter, employee wellness was conceptualised and contextualised with the aim of establishing what constitutes the holistic approach to employee wellness and how employee wellness should be conducted in the Public Service. Through the literature review on employee wellness, it was

established that wellness is a wide-ranging concept that encompasses various dimensions that are all significant in the successful management and support of employee wellness. The dimensions of wellness explored were the physical dimension, social dimension, intellectual dimension, emotional dimension, occupational dimension and spiritual dimension which were developed by Bill Hettler in 1976. In addition, the financial dimension as well as the environmental dimension were also reviewed.

Subsequently, an understanding on the purpose and components of employee wellness programs were provided. The section further distinguished between employee wellness programs as well as employee assistance programs. To prevent confusion, the study collectively referred to employee wellness programs and employee assistance programs as *employee wellness programs*, implying that a reference to an employee wellness programme encompasses a consideration of physical, emotional and psychological wellness. Moreover, it was revealed through the literature review that employee wellness programs are aimed at improving employee health and wellness. The components required to develop and implement a functional employee wellness programs were outlined and are (1) health education; (2) a supportive social and physical work environment; (3) integration of the wellness programme into the organisation's structure; (4) a connection to related programs such as employee assistance programs, and (5) workplace screening. In addition, the importance of employee wellness programs during the COVID-19 pandemic was provided.

Furthermore, this chapter reviewed theoretical models to guide the study, namely: (1) Health Belief Model; (2) Social Cognitive Theory; and (3) the PERMA Model. The importance and relevance of these three models within the study were explicated. The Health Belief Model as well as Social Cognitive Theory, focus on changing health behaviour, whereas the PERMA model has a specific focus on the psychological and mental pillars of health and wellness. With both the Health Belief Model and Social Cognitive Theory, *self-efficacy* is central to affecting changed health behaviour. It was argued that this implies that, in a work environment, the leadership of an institution should give specific attention to increasing the self-efficacy of employees that portray a low level of belief in their own abilities. This requires good leadership that will be able to observe a lack of self-efficacy and make a concerted effort to develop an employee / official's self-efficacy through targeted development interventions and motivational techniques.

It was also established that both the Health Belief Model and Social Cognitive Theory are based on the notion that people will only comply with health processes and procedures or change their

health-related behaviour if they believe that their preventative behaviour will be effective in lowering their risk to contract a disease or illness and that it will yield the desired outcomes intended by the behaviour. The need for goal setting was also illustrated in increasing the likelihood of overcoming challenges experienced in taking the preventative action/changing the health behaviour. It was argued that the aforementioned inferences underline the need for organisational leadership to take an active role when implementing a health model, aimed at changing health-related behaviour in the workplace. The PERMA model, as stated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.6), is of the notion that a combination of the PERMA elements leads to positive emotions which in turn lead to better psychological wellness.

The above summary on Chapter 2 illustrates the achievement of the first research objective: *to establish the theoretical framework that underpins employee wellness*. With the establishment of the theoretical frameworks that underpin employee wellness in Chapter 2, providing guidelines on improving and measuring the health and wellness of employees, a focus on a remote work environment as another primary variable of the study was also necessary. Subsequently, in **Chapter 3** of the study, the phenomenon of a remote work environment was the focus of the literature review, and particularly, the influence thereof on employee wellness. The literature review revealed that various practicable substitute work preparations exist that offer flexibility within the locational as well as temporal definition of work that vary in space as well as structure. It was argued that institutions have the responsibility to support employees / officials that work remotely through arrangements, structures, processes and equipment. It was also argued that the increasing trend to work remotely will force employers to rather focus on the output and outcomes of the work of employees / officials, as opposed to the number of hours present at the office.

Furthermore, Chapter 3 highlighted the influence (positive and negative) remote work has on employee wellness. The literature review on the primary challenges encountered in a remote work environment (work-life balance, communication and isolation) revealed that not all employees / officials adjust equally well to a remote work environment. It was therefore argued that it would be ideal for public institutions to follow a hybrid model, where employees / officials who are able to be productive in a remote work environment are given the opportunity to use this option (provided that their physical presence at the office is not necessary to fulfil their duties), but that those employees / officials who find a remote work environment challenging be allowed to work from the office.

The literature review further revealed that the positive influences of a remote work environment on employee wellness are related to independence, enhanced work-life balance, better performance and increased job satisfaction. Moreover, it became apparent that institutions / employers also benefit from the positive influences of a remote work environment on employee wellness. With independence and the option of creating their own working environment, the quality of work produced by employees / officials working remotely is bound to improve. Moreover, little to no commuting ensures that employees / officials working remotely save money on transport which may result in increased financial wellness.

In addition, the best practices on remote work to achieve employee wellness were also established in Chapter 3. These include (1) virtual fitness programs; (2) home office makeover; (3) holding motivational workshops; (4) inspirational quotes; (5) virtual nutrition workshops; (6) mindfulness, and (7) virtual counselling. It was revealed that virtual employee wellness programs are an ideal strategy that institutions / employers can use to implement and manage wellness for employees working remotely. It was stated that all the best practices reviewed in the chapter can be implemented via an online platform, which makes it broadly accessible to employees / officials who need these services. Moreover, every practice addresses a particular wellness dimension.

The above summary on Chapter 3 illustrates the achievement of the second research objective: *to explicate the phenomenon of a remote work environment and its influence on employee wellness*. Based on the theoretical frameworks on employee wellness (reviewed in Chapter 2), as well as the best practices on remote work to manage employee wellness effectively (reviewed in Chapter 3), the statutory and regulatory framework pertaining to wellness were also reviewed in **Chapter 4** of the study. These included, most importantly, the Constitution, 1996, and the EHWSFPS, 2019, among others. With the Constitution, 1996, the focus was on the basic human rights which are enshrined in the Bill of Rights. The EHWSFPS, 2019, is central to all government departments in managing employee wellness through the four pillars of employee wellness in the workplace. Further to the Constitution, 1996 and the EHWSFPS, 2019, the study reviewed several acts drafted in compliance of the Constitution, 1996, intended to promote the wellness of employees. These acts include the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993, Mental Health Care Act 17 of 2002 and National Health Act 61 of 2003.

The above summary on Chapter 4 illustrates the achievement of the third research objective: *to establish the statutory and regulatory framework for employee wellness in the Public Service*. With the establishment of the statutory and regulatory framework for employee wellness in

Chapter 4, the research methodology followed in the study was comprehensively reviewed In **Chapter 5**. It was explicated that the study is qualitative, theoretical and empirical in nature, with the use of a research design that is both descriptive and explanatory. The qualitative research approach and theoretical investigation (literature study) provided a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical foundations and tenets of employee wellness and a remote work environment, and further provided answers to the first three research questions. This study utilised semi-structured interviews as the only data collection instrument for the empirical investigation. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with two Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, three Senior HR Managers as well as one senior manager from the JB Marks Local Municipality. Furthermore, this study utilised non-probability sampling which followed a purposive (judgemental) technique. This implies a selection of respondents from a population that was controlled by the researcher and was not conducted randomly. The participants were selected intentionally due to their knowledge and experience with the topic and their views and attitudes towards employee wellness. The data collected through semi-structured interviews was presented, examined and interpreted in Chapter 5.

Furthermore, the empirical investigation was undertaken to reveal the influence of a remote work environment on employee wellness in the JB Marks Local Municipality in **Chapter 6**, which ensured that the fourth research question was answered. Through a qualitative research approach, all the dimensions of employee wellness were explained, patterns and best practices were identified, and deductions could be derived in order to provide recommendations for an implementation framework for managing employee wellness in a remote work environment. The descriptive research design was used to describe employee wellness, its dimensions, the theoretical models relevant to employee wellness, remote work environment as well as the experiences of the participants within the study. Through an explanatory research design, the implications and challenges of implementing employee wellness programs for employees/officials working remotely were explicated. Through the empirical investigation, the most significant results include the following:

- From the interview results with the Employee Health and Wellness Professionals, it is evident that the employee wellness programme does comply with legislative and regulatory requirements, although two of the four pillars are not considered within their programme.
- Moreover, the employee wellness programme within the JB Marks Local Municipality does not make provision for a remote work environment due to the lack of resources.

- The challenges currently experienced in terms of managing the wellness of the employees are the issue of getting policies approved as well as compliance from employees within the municipality.
- From the five (5) key components needed to have a functional and effective employee wellness programme, as outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, the municipality ~~only~~ incorporates only one component within their wellness programme.
- The municipality does not develop its wellness programme based on the tenets of the theoretical model outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.3. The programme within the municipality is developed based on the EAPA standards and principles.
- Remote work is not feasible within the municipality. Before, the wellness programme can make provision for a remote work environment, they should first prioritise being resourced.
- From the interviews with the Senior HR officials and senior manager, it is evident that remote work influenced both negatively and positively, the wellness of employees working remotely. Moreover, due to remote work, some employees experienced a drop in productivity levels, while some experienced a rise.
- Furthermore, communication was a challenge particularly with lower-level employees as they were not provided with the necessary resources to work remotely.
- Also, it is evident through the results that only senior employees were supported through remote work within the JB Marks Local municipality. However, the support was limited to the provision of resources, not addressing the health and wellness needs of employees working remotely.
- It is further evident that there is/was no promotion of health and wellness for remote workers within the municipality.
- Lastly, the participants within the study did not attempt to access the wellness programme while working remotely. However, the participants declared that no communication was provided regarding the services and programme available to remote workers.

The above summary on illustrates the achievement of the fourth research objective: *to reveal the influence of a remote work environment on employee wellness in the JB Marks Local Municipality*. The subsequent section aims to achieve the last research objective for this study: *to make recommendations for an implementation framework for the management of official wellness in a remote work environment in the JB Marks Local Municipality*.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FRAMEWORK FOR EMPLOYEE WELLNESS IN A REMOTE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Based on the theoretical frameworks that underpin employee wellness (Chapter 2), the best practices on remote work to manage employee wellness effectively (Chapter 3), the guidelines and directives provided within the statutory and regulatory frameworks (Chapter 4), and the empirical investigation conducted to reveal the influence of a remote work environment on the wellness of municipality officials in the JB Marks Local Municipality (Chapter 6), this chapter aims to provide **recommendations** on the implementation of an implementation framework for employee wellness in a remote work environment.

- **Recommendation one:** Employee wellness should be managed holistically.
 - **Recommendation two:** The relevant components should be included in an employee wellness programme.
 - **Recommendation three:** Theoretical models can be used to manage employee wellness.
 - **Recommendation four:** The wellness of employees working remotely should be managed through virtual wellness programmes.
 - **Recommendation five:** Organisational leadership should fulfil certain responsibilities.
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- **Recommendation one: Employee wellness should be managed holistically**

From the onset of this study (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2), it was explicated that the effective management of employee wellness entails a holistic approach from the employer. This necessitates the JB Marks Local Municipality to consider all the *dimensions of wellness*; thereby, regarding the wellness of an employee in his or her totality and comprehending that various factors in a person's life contribute to their wellness (Vermeulen, 2021:302). Consequently, the Public Sector should ensure the inclusion of methods that will ensure the management of all these dimensions in an officials' wellness programme. These wellness dimensions, as well as the importance thereof, were established in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, viz.: physical dimension; social dimension; intellectual dimension; emotional dimension; occupational dimension; spiritual dimension; financial dimension; and environmental dimension. It is recommended that careful attention is given to each of these dimensions during the development and management of an employee wellness programme for the following reasons:

- Providing in the **physical dimension** (see Section 2.2.1.1) of employee wellness will demand a commitment of the Public Service to provide a safe and healthy environment; thereby, complying with the statutory and regulatory requirements for all employers in South Africa. Attention to the physical environment will include conducting health screening and providing health education. In addition, the security of employees in the workplace should receive attention. The Public Service should also be attentive to matters such as the improper height of a work surface, an uncomfortable chair and poorly designed tools that can all contribute to an increased risk of musculoskeletal disorders (Fasanya & Shofoluwe, 2019:385). It is also the responsibility of the employer to ensure information and training on proficient work techniques to employees (Athota & Malik, 2019:21; Kruger & Jacobs, 2019:186). In providing a safe and healthy physical environment to employees, the Public Service will ensure compliance with the OHSA, 1993 (see Section 4.2.2), that makes provision for all matters related to the health and safety of employees in the workplace and to protect employees at work against risks to their health and safety occurring as a result of the activities at work (Republic of South Africa, 1993:1).
- The **social dimension** (see Section 2.2.1.2) of wellness implies the promotion of good work relations among employees. Therefore, opportunities for employees to socially liaise with each other should be provided. These can be accomplished through methods such as, *inter alia*, the provision of tea rooms and team-building exercises. However, once an employee is working remotely, team-building activities should be offered virtually. In addition, virtual gatherings can be arranged (not only meetings which are more formal) where employees get the opportunity for interactivity to get in touch with each other and renew communications. Providing in the social dimension of employees' wellness also entails that the Public Service as well as the Public Sector (e.g., municipalities) should provide support in terms of employee services such as the opportunity to take leave for family obligations. The leadership style of an institution's management will also be a deciding factor in whether an employee experiences the work environment as socially supportive.
- In providing in the **intellectual wellness** (see Section 2.2.1.3) of employees, the leadership in public institutions should establish the intellectual needs of employees to ensure that they do not experience stagnancy or boredom. Considerations in this regard can include providing employees who need intellectual stimulation with more challenging work aiming to enrich their jobs. It may also include the opportunity to exceptionally performing employees to attend conferences related to their work responsibilities; thereby being exposed to new trends and cutting-edge work methods.
- Regarding the **emotional wellness** (see Section 2.2.1.4) of employees, it was established that the ability to manage oneself (emotions, feelings and reactions), demands a certain

level of emotional intelligence. In this respect, the employer can expose employees to workshops focusing on the development of emotional intelligence. Workshops on, for example, Self-Management can also be provided. Furthermore, should an employee experience challenges in his or her personal life that affect their work performance, he or she can be referred for counselling. The employer should therefore establish the emotional needs of employees and provide the necessary support. In providing for employees working remotely, these workshops can be provided virtually. When the Public Service places a focus on the emotional wellness of employees through the provision of, for instance, counselling services and workshops, it ensures compliance with the MHCA (2002) (see Section 4.2.3), that includes a directive for mental health treatment and therapy sessions that are accessible to citizens (Republic of South Africa, 2002:7), including employees in the workplace.

- In ensuring attention is given to the **occupational wellness** (see Section 2.2.1.5) of employees, the employer's focus should be on the physical, emotional and social aspects that ensure job satisfaction (outlined above). The occupational dimension will therefore necessitate attention to job satisfaction. In this respect, it is argued that the leadership of an organisation should invest in the growth and development of employees through HRM practices such as talent management, career management and coaching and mentoring.
- In considering the **spiritual dimension** (see Section 2.2.1.6) of employee wellness, the Public Service should view work as a spiritual path and an opportunity to grow and contribute to society in a meaningful way. This notion is especially relevant in the context of the Public Service, considering the focus of the Constitution, 1996 (see Section 4.2.1), on human rights, service delivery and social justice. Furthermore, providing in the spiritual needs of employees can be accomplished through the provision of meditation time at the beginning of meetings, bereavement programmes, servant leadership, leadership practices that support the growth and development of employees, and openly asking questions to assess whether the organisation's actions are aligned with a meaning and purpose.
- In giving attention to the **financial wellness** (see Section 2.2.1.7) of employees, the Public Service can provide workshops (including virtual workshops) on the management of personal finances and investments; thereby, assisting employees to effectively plan their spending and financial welfare.
- A focus on employee **environmental wellness** (see Section 2.2.1.8) in the workplace encompasses the provision of an environment that is pleasing and encouraging, as well as support employee wellness by enabling access to resources required to attain the desired wellness (Olerich *et al.*, 2021:267). In providing in the environmental wellness of employees,

it necessitates a focus on the physical, emotional and social environments in the workplace, outlined above.

The omission of the Public Sector to provide in any of the aforementioned dimensions may negatively affect employees in the workplace. It is therefore argued that careful attention should be given to each of these dimensions during the development and management of an employee wellness programme.

- **Recommendation two: The relevant components should be included in an employee wellness programme**

In Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, the various components required to ensure that employee wellness programmes are functional, were reviewed. The components include (1) health education; (2) a supportive social and physical work environment; (3) integration of the wellness programme into the organisation's structure; (4) a connection to related programmes such as employee assistance programmes; and (5) workplace health screening. It is recommended in this study that the Public Service ensures that their employee wellness programmes include the aforementioned five components for the following reasons:

- The purposes of **health education** are: (1) to promote health and to prevent disease, disability and untimely death through intentional behaviour changes; (2) to improve health knowledge, attitudes and behaviour; and (3) to positively influence the health-related behaviour of individuals and communities, as well as the living and working conditions that influence their health and wellness (Kent State University, 2021). It is therefore argued that the knowledge acquired through health education will assist employees in making informed and mindful decisions to change their behaviour; thereby improving their health and wellness.
- In regard to a **supportive social and physical work environment**, both these dimensions of employee wellness were already highlighted under Recommendation one. In addition, it can be stated that the Public Service should include a focus on *psycho-social hazards* such as work-life balance (flexible and caring employment practices); factors intrinsic to the job (lack of variety, repetitive or mundane tasks, and under-use of an employee's abilities); work time (inflexible working schedules); fatigue (burn-out); stress; and bullying (verbal, physical, social or psychological mistreatment) in its employee wellness programmes. All of these psychological hazards are known to be connected to various health, psychological and

sleep disorders (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016; International Labour Organisation, 2017:49; WHO, 2020: online; Vermeulen, 2021:316-317). In addition, matters that relate to the *growth and self-development* of employees are also associated with a supportive social work environment and employee wellness and should therefore be prioritised to ensure that employees can realise their abilities through training and development interventions. As alluded to under Recommendation one, HRM practices such as career management, talent management, effective performance management practices, as well as coaching and mentoring should also be reiterated as contributing factors to the overall wellness of employees, since these practices enhance employee morale and motivation and fosters a culture of continuous learning and development (Nokhwali-Mboyi, 2017:25). The implementation of HRM practices to enhance the wellness of employees relate predominantly to the intellectual and vocational dimensions of employee wellness.

- In consideration of **the integration of the wellness programme into the organisation's structure**, two factors in particular play a role: (1) organisational culture (including communication); and (2) organisational leadership. *Organisational culture* is an important aspect for the continued involvement, without resistance of employees in wellness programmes. A desired organisational culture can be shaped by being supportive of workplace policies, programmes and activities that boost employee health, wellness and productivity. In the development, implementation and monitoring of policies, programmes and activities, *organisational leadership* should take the lead. Organisational leaders have the responsibility to determine the degree of support needed for employee wellness programmes and are responsible for steering the process. Communication is a significant responsibility of organisational leadership and should consist of various modes regarding the benefits of employee wellness programme and its activities.
- When consideration is given **to a connection to related programmes such as employee assistance programmes**, the primary purpose of both employee wellness programmes and employee assistance programmes should be taken into consideration by the Public Service. Although these were collectively referred to as employee wellness programmes in this study, each of these types of programmes conventionally has a different aim. As explicated in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, *employee wellness programmes* are initiatives and policies directed at chronic disease prevention and supporting healthy behaviours for employees (Passey *et al.*, 2018:1789). Employee wellness programmes can include, for example, in-house gymnasiums, smoking cessation programmes, or weight loss programmes. *Employee Assistance Programmes* are intervention programmes that provide assistance to employees

for personal problems they experience that could affect their work performance, such as depression, anxiety, legal difficulties, relationship challenges, and child or elder care (De Novo HR Consulting, 2019; Republic of South Africa, 2019a OR 2019b). Both these programmes are work-based programmes to enhance employee wellness. However, whereas employee wellness programmes predominantly focus on the physical health and wellbeing of employees, employee assistance programmes give attention to the emotional and psychological needs of employees. In consideration of the need for a holistic approach to employee wellness, it is evident that the joint offering of employee wellness programmes and employee assistance programmes is needed to effectively address all the wellness needs of employees (physical, emotional and psychological).

- **Health screenings** are essential in allowing an employer to identify information that can increase the participation in employee wellness programs, since they assist in understanding employees' health and wellness factors (Berry *et al.*, 2020:4) Health screenings are an important tool for encouraging employee health and wellness, as well as fostering a positive work environment that prioritizes the health and wellness of its employees (Work Healthy Solutions, 2024: online). In consideration of the role of health screening in the physical wellness of employees, it should therefore be included in an employee wellness programme.
- In providing a functional employee wellness programme to employees, it is recommended that the Public Service should ensure that each of the five aforementioned components are included in an employee wellness programme. In this respect, public organisations can also follow guidelines provided in the EHWSFPS, 2019-2024. As reviewed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.5, the EHWSFPS (2019) proposes the SOLVE programme as the ideal approach for the implementation of employee wellness in the Public Service (Republic of South Africa, 2019a OR 2019b). The SOLVE programme was established by the ILO in 2011 as an interactive educational programme, intended to aid with the development of policies and actions relating to occupational safety, health and wellness (ILO, 2011). The educational platform focuses on: (1) psycho-social aspects; (2) workplace stress; (3) economic stressors; (4) stress and sleep deprivation; (5) physical and psychological violence; (6) HIV and AIDS in the workplace; (7) tobacco free workplaces; and (8) nutrition, exercise and healthy lifestyles in a cohesive manner (ILO, 2011) – also see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.5. The application of the SOLVE programme in the EHWSFPS, 2019-2024, is grounded in the acknowledgement of mutually dependent relations among the aforementioned aspects (Republic of South Africa, 2019a OR 2019b:14). It is therefore evident that the SOLVE programme makes provision for the inclusion of, not only aspects concerned with the physical wellness of employees (sleep

deprivation; physical and psychological violence; HIV and AIDS; tobacco free workplaces; and nutrition, exercise and healthy lifestyles) in an employee awareness programme, but also focuses on aspects relating to their emotional and psychological wellness (psycho-social aspects; workplace stress; and economic stressors). Furthermore, the SOLVE programme includes particular aspects that illustrate the significance of giving attention to the safety and health of Public Service employees; thereby complying with directives provided in the Constitution, 1996, and the OHSA, 1993.

- **Recommendation three: Theoretical models can be used to manage employee wellness**

Theoretical models such as (1) the Health Belief Model and (2) Social Cognitive Theory and (3) the PERMA Model have been established to change health behaviour positively. The models comprise various phases/steps experienced, or aspects considered by a person towards changed health behaviour. These models (as well as their respective phases/aspects) are based on the notion that people will only comply with health processes and procedures or change their health-related behaviour if they believe that their preventative behaviour will be effective in lowering their risk to contract a disease or illness and that it will yield the desired outcomes intended by the behaviour. The need for goal setting is also illustrated in increasing the likelihood of overcoming challenges experienced in taking preventative action/changing the health behaviour. The aforementioned underline the need for organisational leadership to take an active role with the implementation of a health model, aimed at changing health-related behaviour in the workplace.

With both the Health Belief Model and Health Promotion by Social Cognitive Theory, *self-efficacy* is central to affecting changed health behaviour. Thus, the managers in public institutions should give specific attention to increasing the self-efficacy of employees that portray a low level of belief in their own abilities. This requires good leadership that will be able to observe a lack of self-efficacy and make a concerted effort to develop an employee's self-efficacy through targeted development interventions and motivational techniques.

The PERMA model is a theoretical model for improving wellness with a specific focus on psychological wellness. The model is of the notion that a combination of the PERMA elements leads to positive emotions which in turn lead to better psychological wellness. In addition to promoting and influencing wellness, the PERMA model can be used to measure wellness as explicated in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.

The three theoretical models can be implemented and its progress carefully monitored to cultivate changed health-related behaviour among Public Service employees in a positive manner. The implementation of either model should go hand-in-hand with health education (covered under Recommendation 1), to ensure employees are well-informed on diseases and illnesses, as well as how their changed health behaviour can protect them from contracting these diseases and illnesses.

- **Recommendation four: The wellness of employees working remotely should be managed through virtual wellness programmes**

As indicated in Chapter 1, Section 1.2 and Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1.), the majority of employee wellness programmes were not developed to provide for employees working remotely. Therefore, employee wellness practitioners should develop and put measures in place to ensure that the employee wellness programmes can function remotely. As alluded in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1, there are various methods that can be used to develop and implement a virtual employee wellness programme. The various methods specifically focus on promoting and ensuring the wellness of employees working remotely. These methods, also expounded upon in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1 include: (1) virtual fitness programmes; (2) home office makeover; (3) motivational workshops; (4) inspirational quotes; (5) virtual nutrition workshops; (6) mindfulness; and (7) virtual counselling. Several activities that can be offered as part of a virtual employee wellness programme have been highlighted under Recommendation one, including virtual team-building activities, virtual gatherings where employees get the opportunity for interactivity, and virtual workshops (for various purposes). In addition, it is recommended that the Public Service should consider the following activities to be included in a virtual employee wellness programme, specifically targeted for employees working remotely:

- **Virtual fitness classes** (see Section 3.4.1.1) refer to a workout made available through the internet to the personal devices of employees. (DeSimone, 2020:3). It is a means of ensuring an employee wellness programme includes a focus on the physical dimension (see Section 2.2.1.1) of employee wellness which is at the core of wellness as a whole and ensures that employees maintain good physical health and wellness.
- As indicated in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, as well as under Recommendation 1, the physical work environment has a direct influence on an employee's job satisfaction. A less-than-ideal work environment can hinder not only an employee's job satisfaction, but also his or her productivity (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:219). In consideration of the current and

anticipated surge of remote work environments, employee wellness programmes can provide employees with guidelines or/and workshops on how to conduct a home **office makeover** (see Section 3.4.1.2) to ensure that employees can easily transition from work life to personal life in the comfort of their homes. In addition, this aspect allows employees working remotely to have some boundaries between work hours and personal time. Moreover, it further allows employees working remotely to create their own working environment, which is one of the positive influences of remote working on employee wellness (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2).

- Motivating employees is imperative since social isolation causes most employees to lack motivation (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:220). Therefore, **motivational workshops** (see Section 3.4.1.3) can encourage employees to be hopeful amidst a breakdown in social interaction. Virtual outlets such as *Zoom* or *Microsoft Teams* can be utilised to conduct workshops as these platforms permit communication between various employees working remotely. Through motivational workshops, the feeling of being isolated can be minimised and employees can experience a sense of belonging (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1.3).
- **Inspirational quotes** (see Section 3.4.1.4) are one of the simplest free virtual wellness actions to connect with employees (Chaturvedi & Rathore, 2021:219). The quotes can be incorporated within the organisation's communications, for instance, announcements and internal emails. To attain optimal efficacy, it is advised that quotes should be shared often. Furthermore, it may also be effective if the sharing of inspirational quotes is collaborative where employees share quotes on a rotating basis.
- The aim of a **nutrition workshop** (see Section 3.4.1.5) is to provide nutrition education through the improvement of employees' knowledge on the importance of diet (Zuniga *et al.*, 2019:146). Nutrition workshops intend to change the behaviour of employees by means of changing what they consume; thereby promoting healthy behaviour.
- Research has shown that mental and physical conditions have been improved through **mindfulness** (see Section 3.4.1.6) applications (Johnson *et al.*, 2019:312). This improvement is attributed to the fact that mindfulness practices have a positive influence on the brain and mind which encourages psychological and physical wellness (Johnson *et al.*, 2019:312). Mindfulness methods can be practiced through numerous means (e.g., meditation), although participating in a specific method to cultivate mindfulness should not be required.
- **Virtual counselling** (see Section 3.4.1.7) can also be conducted since it is possible for an employee and counsellor to communicate through an online platform. Virtual counselling can be vital in ensuring that the emotional wellness dimension of employees working remotely is addressed.

- **Recommendation five: Organisational leadership should fulfil certain responsibilities**

The leadership style of an organisation's management is a deciding factor in effectively managing the wellness of employees working remotely, as well as whether an employee will experience the work environment as supportive. As highlighted in the preceding recommendations, the leadership in public organisations should ensure the development, implementation and monitoring of policies, procedures and activities that promote employee wellness. In addition, the organisation's leadership should ensure compliance with the statutory and regulatory directives, such as the EHWSFPS, 2019-2024.

As alluded to under Recommendation one, the line managers should establish the intellectual needs of employees. In this respect, guidelines, expectations and anticipated outcomes should be provided by the organisational leadership. Also, attention to aspects such as a supportive physical, emotional and social environment, although operationalised by health and wellness practitioners, should be guided by policies and procedures, approved and supported by the organisational leadership as they remain accountable for their departments. Thus, the leadership of a public organisation should fulfil their oversight role.

The organisation's leadership should also play a role in the choice, implementation and monitoring of a theoretical model to positively change the health-related behaviour in the workplace (as indicated under Recommendation three). As specified under Recommendation one and Recommendation two, HRM practices such as career management, talent management, effective performance management practices, as well as coaching and mentoring should be acknowledged and implemented as contributing factors to the overall wellness of employees. In this respect, the organisational leadership should exercise oversight over the organisation's HRM Unit, as well as line managers.

In addition it can be stated that the various responsibilities of line managers, such as: (1) providing support to employees that work remotely through arrangements, structures, processes and equipment; (2) a focus on the output and outcomes of employees' work, as opposed to the number of hours present at the office; and (3) providing employees that are productive in a remote work environment the opportunity to work remotely, should be conducted under the guidance of the organisational leadership.

It is thus evident that the role of the organisational leadership is pivotal in effectively implementing, managing and monitoring the wellness of employees. Moreover, the role of organisational leadership becomes progressively more important within the increased implementation of a remote work environment due to the context of novel incidences such as the 4IR and the COVID-19 pandemic.

7.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As denoted in Chapter 1, Section 1.10, the study has both theoretical and practical significance. Practically, the results and the recommendations provided for an implementation framework (Chapter 7) within the research study, will be valuable to the Public Service as well as the Public Sector of South Africa with regard to the management of employee wellness in a remote work environment. The study has triangulated the theory, legislation and policies and empirical results to recommendations for an implementation framework for the management of employee wellness in a remote work environment.

In terms of a theoretical contribution, employee wellness resides under the umbrella of Public HRM, a sub-discipline of Public Administration as an academic discipline. Thus, the study contributes to the scholarly knowledge of the discipline of Public Administration.

7.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

This study highlighted the significance of considering wellness as a priority for officials working remotely within the Public Sector. It was further highlighted that wellness comprises of various dimensions and that employee wellness programmes ought to ensure that they are developed and implemented to address each dimension. Also, the study highlighted another primary variable in the study, namely remote work, as well as its influence on municipality official wellness. Due to the limited scope of a master's dissertation, this study could only assess the influence remote work has on employee wellness at the local sphere of government in a particular municipality of South Africa. A future study can include a cross-cultural aspect which investigates the impact of cultural differences on remote worker wellness at a provincial, as well as a national sphere of government.

7.6 CONCLUSION

The requirements of the 4IR and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic present new challenges to public leadership in regard to HRM processes and practices, including the management of employee wellness in a remote work environment. Although the Public Service is implementing employee wellness programmes, various levels of success can be observed, and several challenges are experienced. Furthermore, the employee awareness programmes currently implemented in the Public Sector were not designed for a remote work environment. This incidence necessitates a review of these programmes and an amendment to make provision for an increasingly remote work environment.

In consideration of the above, the following question was asked in this study: How should employee wellness be managed in the context of a remote work environment within a local municipality in the Republic of South Africa? To address the research question, a qualitative theoretical and empirical study was conducted, with a descriptive and explanatory research design. Employee wellness promotion was expounded upon and explored, based on a theoretical framework that was established by means of the dimensions of wellness, as well as the Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory and the PERMA model. The statutory and regulatory framework for employee health, wellness and safety in South Africa has also been reviewed and was, in conjunction with the theoretical framework, considered in providing recommendations for an implementation framework for the Public Sector in managing employee wellness in a remote work environment.

The findings revealed: (1) the significance of a holistic approach to employee wellness with interventions that consider all the dimensions that affect an employee's wellness (the physical, social, intellectual, emotional, occupational, spiritual, financial and environmental dimensions); (2) the necessary components to be included in an employee wellness programme (health education; a supportive social and physical work environment; integration of the wellness programme into the organisation's structure; a connection to related programmes such as employee assistance programmes; and workplace screening); (3) relevant and practical virtual interventions that can be established and maintained in a remote work environment (virtual fitness programmes; home office makeover; motivational workshops; inspirational quotes; virtual nutrition workshops; mindfulness; and virtual counselling); (4) the implementation of theoretical models to positively change health-related behaviours (Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory and the PERMA model), and (5) the responsibilities of organisational leadership.

Consequently, recommendations were made to assist public leaders in suitably managing employee wellness in a remote work environment.

LIST OF SOURCES

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Declaration by participant

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in a research study entitled: “*Employee wellness in the context of a remote work environment: The case of JB Marks Local Municipality*”.

I declare that:

- I provide *informed consent*.
 - Thus, I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
 - Thus, I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I provide *voluntary consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
 - Thus, I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
 - Thus, I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
- I provide *specific consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publicly and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____ 20 _____

Signature of participant

Signature of witness

- You may contact me again
- I would like a summary of the findings of this research

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

- I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname: _____

Postal Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Cell Phone Number: _____

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
JB MARKS LOCAL MUNICIPALITY:
Employee Health and Wellness professionals

1. Does the Municipality comply with the legislative and policy requirements for the management of employee wellness? For instance, the prescripts of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, and the guidelines provided in the Employee Health and Wellness Framework for the Public Service, 2023.
 - If yes, please indicate to what extent.
 - If no, please provide reasons and explain whether (and how) you intend to initiate this.
2. Does your employee wellness programme make provision for a remote work environment?
 - If yes, please indicate to what extent/how is it implemented?
 - If no, please provide reasons and explain whether (and how) you intend to do this.
3. What are the challenges that you currently experience in terms of managing the wellness of your employees and how do you foresee these challenges being exacerbated in a remote work environment?
4. Does the Municipality include the key components of an employee wellness programme, namely, (1) health education; (2) a supportive social and physical work environment; (3) integration of the wellness programme into the organisation's structure; (4) a connection to related programmes such as employee assistance programmes; and (5) workplace screening in its employee wellness programme?
 - If yes, please comment on the success and challenges.
 - If no, please comment on the reasons.
5. Did the municipality develop its current employee wellness programme based on the tenets of any recognised theoretical model such as the Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory or the PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) Model?

- If yes, please comment on the successes and challenges.
 - If no, please comment on the reasons.
6. What are the primary aspects you believe to be included in an employee wellness programme for employees working remotely? Please provide reasons for why you regard these aspects to be priorities.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

JB MARKS LOCAL MUNICIPALITY:

Senior Human Resources Officials and Senior Management

1. How has remote work influenced your wellness and productivity? If positive, please indicate how and to what extent. If not, please provide reasons.
2. How has remote work affected your communication and collaboration with team members? If positive, please indicate how and to what extent. If not, please provide reasons.
3. Do you feel supported by the municipality while working remotely? If yes, please indicate how (and to what extent) and if no, please provide reasons.
4. How is health and wellness promoted for remote workers within the municipality?
5. Have you faced any barriers accessing the wellness programme while working remotely? If yes, please indicate how and to what extent. If no, please provide reasons.

ANNEXURE D

School of Government Studies

Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299 1625 / 082 373 1589 Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Email: Luni.Vermeulen@nwu.ac.za

Date: 24 January 2023

Ms ME Ntaopane

Manager: Employee Wellness Programme

JB Marks Local Municipality

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE JB MARKS LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Dear Ms Ntaopane

Permission is hereby requested to conduct research for a master's dissertation under my supervision. Mr Keamogetsu Morapedi (student number: 30215005), is enrolled for the MA degree in Public Management and Governance at the North-West University (NWU). His dissertation is titled, *Employee wellness in the context of a remote work environment: The case of the JB Marks Local Municipality*.

As part of Mr Morapedi's study an empirical investigation should be conducted. To collect adequate research data for the study, he wishes to interview officials that are tasked with employee health and wellness. This includes senior managers that are involved in policy implementation in this respect. He also wishes to distribute a questionnaire among municipal employees to obtain their input on employee wellness matters. It is believed that the information acquired through the interviews and questionnaire will provide valuable insight in the consideration and development of an employee wellness approach for a remote work environment.

Mr Morapedi will comply with the ethical requirements as determined by both the NWU and the JB Marks Local Municipality. The privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will

be prioritised to ensure that no person will be identified in the study. The data gathered through the empirical investigation will be used for the purpose of Mr Morapedi's research only. Should it be requested, a copy of the dissertation can be provided to the JB Marks Local Municipality upon the completion of the study.

It would be greatly appreciated if permission can be granted to Mr Morapedi to conduct his empirical research at the JB Marks Local Municipality. Please do not hesitate to contact me, should you need any additional clarification or information.

Sincerely

Professor Luni Vermeulen

CERTIFICATION

21 November 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This Certificate serves to inform that the dissertation

Employee wellness in the context of a remote environment: The case of JB Marks Local Municipality

was submitted to me by Mr Keamoetsi MORAPEDI for proofreading, linguistic editing and academic writing treatment. Through the use of Track Changes in the Review Function on WORD, inter alia, identified and indicated typing-, language- and linguistic shortcomings and through comments, I suggested changes and improvements to be considered and affected to the final document.

Yours faithfully

Mrs S Stanley
Language EDITOR
Cell: 066 2414 555
E-mail: markstanley969@gmail.com
SATI registration NO: 1000981