A development framework for the implementation of a virtual workplace environment in the South African banking industry

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It all starts here ™

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ABSTRACT

The concept or idea of virtual work has evolved over the years, globally and locally. Many global companies have been able to implement it successfully, given the fact that they have sufficient resources, financial backing, infrastructure and technology in place to create a fully functional virtual workplace environment.

In the South African context, virtual work is a concept that employees are becoming more and more familiar with and based on the feedback from the questionnaires it is an avenue which employees in the SA Banking Industry are willing and keen to explore. Factors such as time spent in traffic, travelling cost, work-life balance and managing their own time act as motivation to partake in this new phenomenon.

In the South African Banking Industry, technology, financial resources and infrastructure are in place which could revolutionise the way of banking, not only for the employees but also for the customers. Certain roles such as sales, information technology and professional services, such as finance and marketing would be able to adapt to the new way of work far easier than the people who are employed in the operations areas, because operations areas are very agile and decisions are made in spur of the moment, which requires immediate changes to take place.

Recommendations towards future research regarding the practical implementation of virtual work in the South African Banking Industry that can easily be adopted were put forward.

Keywords

Virtual office, Virtual workers, Virtual Teams, Information Technology, Information Management, Virtual Teams, South African Banking

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IT- Information Technology

ASB- Asian Development Bank

HR- Human Resources

RB Jacobs- Online / Virtual Banking platform for customer interaction

FNB- First National Bank

GVT- Global Virtual Teams

ICT- Information & Communication Technology

HBR- Harvard Business Review

MBTI- Meyers Biggs Type Indicator

SLA- Service Level Agreement

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CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of virtual working systems is one that is currently trending in the HR world, especially given the fact that businesses would like to cut cost on workspaces but still have a performing and well-engaged workforce. The South African banking sector is regarded as world class, and from a business continuity perspective one can imagine how much value a virtual work place can add to the life of employees and the operational performance of the bank if managed correctly. Being able to access systems from everywhere to meet their clients' needs, from a customer perspective, will lead to better customer experience. There are a lot of success stories regarding virtual work from a staff engagement and work performance perspective especially for organisations such as Google, Microsoft etc. However, the biggest challenges come from a security perspective, IT risk and the performance management of these employees. A variety of uncertainties surrounds this concept which stems from the question if the South African industry and management are ready from a maturity, cultural and business perspective, to follow through on such an initiative. How does a manager feel about it and how will it impact the staff members from a performance perspective? Should the banks consider alternative performance management tools such as outcome based remuneration?

Managers in the 21st century are also faced with a number of challenges relating to organisational and individual performance. Some of the challenges include the management of cost, improvement of service and the attraction versus retention of a high performing workforce. In addition, the needs and demands of employees have also shifted with time as they have now became more interested in the need for a balanced work life in the sense where they can still meet the needs of their families and are also able to earn an income (Mthembu, 2016).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Virtual work is a concept that seems to relate to a work environment in which employees operate remotely from each other and from managers. Watson-Manheim and Belanger (2002:3) support this concept and describe it as and all around term representing work environments where employees are physically separated from their co-workers or their

work location some or majority of the time and where they perform their work activities interdependently without going to the actual office.

Virtual teams appear to be a bit different from conventional teams that normally consist of team members being physically located in an office. Having a virtual team is also associated with benefits such a reduced infrastructure cost, will lead to an increase in employee productivity and efficiency, faster response rate to task, increased collaboration across organisational boundaries, the creation of employment opportunities for disabled employees and best practices being shared. It is very important that South African organisations have clear guidelines and tools to determine the viability of using virtual teams (Vorster, 2003:4).

Taking into account the fact that virtual teams are new to the South African market, especially the South African banking industry, is it very important that the research is conducted in such a way that understanding is promoted and guidance provided on the practical implementation of such a concept.

The management of the productivity in a virtual work environment can be challenging. According to Venter (2011:3), the term productivity paradox implies that there is no correlation between the work performance of virtual teams from a productivity perspective and the actual investment from the company towards their information management systems. This can mean that the strategic objectives and the actual work performance is not aligned.

Virtual work arrangements refer to any arrangement between a manager and an employee in which the employee performs his or her work at a location other than his employer's workplace. The constant improvement in technology, leads to the replacement of the traditional office space and comes with a variety of benefits for the employer and employee. It includes factors such as improved productivity, better staffing flexibility and improved employee retention. (Ortlepp & Hloma, 2006:12).

On the other hand, organisations can leverage from this concept in the sense that they can develop an immediate feedback system with customers by identifying of needs and responding to them in record time. Virtual workforce will allow the organisation to compete globally and even better, meet customer needs.

The evolution from the industrial age to the current information and electronic era is starting to put a significant amount of pressure on businesses to become more dynamic in their operational activities and to adopt innovative approaches to survive in the current competitive market (Arniston & Miller, 2002:166-173). According to the implementation of virtual teams: a theoretical framework, the major challenge for South African organisations is their ability/capability to compete in an environment where advanced information technology and the power of digital networks have the potential for real time information availability.

The challenge is that traditional jobs have been office based, with close supervision over employees and their work performance. In the virtual workspace, managers might have a resistance towards the managing of the workforce because they do not know how to manage virtual workers off-site. Managers feel that managing a virtual workforce place those in a compromising position from a Basic Conditions of Employment Act perspective (Mthembu, 2016).

The virtual workforce also comprises of a diverse workforce distributed across geographic borders and between enterprises. A virtual workforce can span any department and role across and organisation, including front and back office, engineering and line of business workers. Essentially, virtual workers are those who don't spend their entire day, every day, working at the same office, on the same computer, in addition to non-permanent staff and those who might share or use resources on a limited basis.

The virtual worker could be a

- Remote or branch office employee – remote and branch offices range in size from substantial operations to small regional teams.
- Remote employee (mobile or teleworker) – remote employees consider their office to be anywhere they are currently located, whether it is at a customer site, at home, a lab or exam room, a factory floor or warehouse, a temporary project site, a hotel, a café, a retail store or a kiosk.
- Partner, independent worker or outsourced resources – a partner, consultant, contractor, temporary employee or an outsourced team - essentially any non-employee - who provides services to your company.

These workers must have access to all corporate desktops, applications and data needed to do their job efficiently but they are remotely based. They should also be able to avail themselves should a customer require face to face interaction.

The following are an expression of the type of virtual environment that South African organisations are facing:

- Competitors exploiting advanced information technologies to create faster-passed work flow with greater flexibility and less dependence on the traditional office concept.
- Modern e-workplaces using the benefits of teams to gain the market share (Arniston & Miller, 2002).

The key benefits of Virtual Work to the organisation (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d.)

- **A virtual workforce enables an organisation to:**
    - Reduce costs
    - Drive growth and better serve customers
    - Increase business productivity
    - Attract top talent and talent management

Reducing Cost

Virtual workforce enables organisations to shift labour costs to lower cost resources (Mthembu, 2016), slash travel and expense budgets and consolidate and reduce fixed facility costs. A virtual workforce gives organisations a greater degree of flexibility to take advantage of lower cost labour regardless of location and engage workers only when and where the business needs. For example, many workers sourced from outlying areas and offshore locations, such as China, India, the Philippines or even Eastern Europe have significantly lower wages than similarly qualified resources. Organisations also look to retain their best talent and avoid the costly loop of recruiting, hiring and training qualified replacements.

Drive Growth and better serve customers

Organisations must find new ways to do more with less - cut costs while, at the same time, better serve existing customers, expand offerings, broaden the customer base and enter new markets. A virtual workforce solution allows an organisation to open branch offices quickly and cost effectively as business growth demands, easily incorporate mergers and acquisitions and, when necessary, manage business contraction smoothly by providing the agility to quickly and easily move resources from less productive areas to new opportunities and initiatives. Especially in competitive markets, organisations must often move closer to the customer, offer more choice, immediate or real-time accurate responses and off-hour services to both avoid lost sales and build long-term relationships with customers. According to (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d.) “Many enterprises see a strategic opportunity to provide value at the branch, as the branch is often the closest point of contact to the customer”. IT organisations want to deliver resources to support branch office growth while keeping operational and management costs in check. A virtual workforce is key to an organisation’s ability to cost-effectively take advantage of opportunity anywhere it exists.

Increase business productivity

Fuelled by a move towards more mobility, the modern work force is being forced out of the traditional office model and is stepping into a new paradigm - in the field, at home, on a factory floor, at a customer site, from a partner, abroad, wherever. In this paradigm, organisations must ensure real-time access to company information to enable better decision making, to plan, monitor and track operations centrally and to drive improved business productivity with greater accuracy and at less cost.

Studies have shown that employees who telecommute have an average of 10-20% increased productivity than their office-based colleagues (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d). Teleworkers have higher employee satisfaction because teleworking fosters a better work-life balance while it also, reduces commuting costs and, at the same time, can provide a distraction-free environment where employees can be more productive.

Attracting top talent and talent management

To tap a broader labour pool and hiring skilled talent from anywhere when needed, organisations must meet growing technological expectations of the workforce. Many of today's virtual workers have grown up using technology and have integrated it into every aspect of their personal lives. These workers expect and demand leading-edge technology, including technology that allows a virtual work style (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d.).

The ability to support a virtual workforce with such technology enables organisations to attract, hire and retain trained and skilled talent regardless of location. Per Managementstudyguide.com, (n.d) 85% of companies indicate that teleworking has a moderate to highly favourable impact on employee retention.

There is currently a burning need for more space as the current working environment is over populated. The constant world of work is changing and in order to get maximum output from the existing staff we need to optimally use their skills by allowing them to create their own spaces of work. There is also a cost benefit involved for the organisation should they make use of virtual spaces, allowing the South African workforce to function on a global operations platform and still get maximum work performance.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study was to investigate the factors that would lead to an organisation implementing a virtual workplace arrangement as well as the advantages and disadvantages associated with this form of work. Special focus was given to manager and employee perspectives. The following sections could typically be included in this section.

1.3.1 Primary objective

The primary objective of this research was to develop a framework for the implementation of a virtual workplace environment in the South African Banking environment.

1.3.2 Secondary objectives

- To determine the South African readiness for a virtual workforce.
- To determine a framework for organisations that wish to implement the virtual office to do so effectively.
- To determine how managers can manage the virtual workforce.
- To determine how managers can control the virtual workforce.
- To determine how managers can improve communication with the virtual workforce.
- To determine the factors that drive employers toward the implementation of a virtual work arrangement.
- To explore the potential advantages and disadvantages experienced by both managers and employees.
- To explore the people management challenges relating to virtual work.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN / METHODOLOGY

1.4.1 Literature and theoretical review

A literature and theoretical survey was done on the areas of virtual working systems, virtual work force in the banking industry, the management of virtual teams and the actual implementation of such a workforce in the South African Banking environment. Special attention was given to IT tools, performance management and delivery on objectives.

1.4.2 Empirical research

In order to achieve the research objectives of this study, an empirical research was conducted among different IT houses in a banking franchise in South Africa. All Business Units/Franchises (6 in total) were approached to participate in this study. A request was sent out to all the business units mentioned above to establish that the target audience was a combination of people in managerial positions and non-managerial positions in IT departments, Sales departments and operations departments.

Primary data was then collected in the form of results from quantitative and qualitative questionnaires sent out to the target group at participating institutions. The questionnaires

were formulated as to receive independent responses from the individuals that took part in this survey.

Data from the survey was then analysed to establish whether or not it would be feasible for the South African Banking industry to actually implement a virtual workforce and what framework would then be required or should be explored if they decided to explore this option.

1.5 LIMITATIONS

1.5.1 Sources

The literature and theoretical review were restricted to sources that were freely available on the Internet at the time of the research, as well as the publications that were freely available in libraries in South Africa until 30 October 2016.

1.5.2 Research

The research objective of this research was limited to:

- the South African Banking Industry (6 franchises of a particular bank); and
- managerial and non-managerial staff in IT, Operations and Sales departments.

1.6 LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

Chapter breakdown

Chapter one:

Introduction; problem statement, participants, research plan/design and empirical research.

Chapter two:

Literature study (an In-depth study on each variable was included in the literature study).

Chapter three:

Research methodology

Chapter four:

Findings of the empirical study and the statistical analysis regarding the findings; conclusion and recommendations.

1.7 CONCLUSION

With all the technology changes that are currently taking place in the world of banking, everything seems to be moving to a less customer facing environment and more to an online banking platform. The question that generally arises is who will attend to customers when the virtual concept becomes the new operational strategy of the organisation.

The development of a framework for virtual work does have its benefits to the employee, for example it can promote flexibility and save on travelling cost to work. The organisation might save on office space, travelling cost, telephone cost and infrastructure cost if correctly introduced. The introduction to such a platform will open a debate around the management of staff who are part of the virtual workforce, communication and performance management, how to control the workforce, but most importantly how to operationalise the concept with a detailed and practical implementation framework.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to develop a framework for the implementation of a virtual workplace environment in the South African Banking industry. Factors such as the benefits of virtual work which include the reduction of cost, better talent management in the organisation, a drive to better customer service and to ultimately increase productivity were investigated.

In addition to the abovementioned factors such as the management of a virtual workforce, its advantages and disadvantages as well as the actual framework for the virtual office were identified and are further explored in Chapter two.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research was to develop a framework for the implementation of a virtual work environment in the South African Banking Industry. A variety of theoretical models regarding the effectiveness as well as the practical implementation of virtual working need to be explored to identify the benefits, opportunities, challenges and critical success factors of such a workforce.

Virtual teams can be regarded as a relatively new concept and a number of studies were done in South Africa that related to virtual work arrangements and leadership in virtual teams and relevant as well as constructive learnings came from it. None of the before mentioned studies were about the development of an actual framework that solely focused on the operational part of how to implement virtual teams in the South African Banking industry.

Vorster (2003:4) is of the opinion that the term virtual is used interchangeably in literature with a temporary and permanent virtual organisations, teleporting, hot desk, virtual offices, home based working are all characteristics used to define or describe virtual work. The virtual world is a concept that is mostly used to describe certain aspects within an Information Technology environment and a variety of virtual work designs are used relating to business concepts. A factor that is mostly associated with virtual work is the usage of information technology that enables geographically scattered work activities to be carried out and more dynamic organisational structures and new flexible working arrangements will come to life.

The management guide to virtual team states that any organisation can make use of virtual teams to reduce operational costs, improve faster problem solving and innovate. It is dependent on the chronological distribution, lifespan, objective and roles of team members (ManagementStudyGuide.com, n.d.).

The virtual team can be seen as the team that is made up of people based in different physical locations. As companies expand geographically and as telecommuting

becomes more of common practice, work groups often span wide-ranging offices, shared workspaces, private homes and hotel rooms (Vorster, 2003:10)

The appeal of forming virtual teams is clear and very attractive. Employees can manage their work and personal lives more flexibly and they have the opportunity to interact with colleagues around the world. Companies can use the best and lowest-cost global talent and significantly reduce their real/rental estate costs.

The virtual workforce enables organisations to shift labour cost to lower cost resources, cut travel expenses as well as budgets relating to the last mentioned and consolidate and reduce fix facility cost associated with people. A virtual workforce gives organisations a greater degree of flexibility to take advantage of lower labour cost, regardless of a location. It also engages workers only when required and as business needs arise. For example, many workers from outlying areas and offshore locations such as China, India and the Philippines have significantly lower wages than similarly qualified resources in a different area. Organisations also look to retain their best talent to and avoid the cost associated with recruitment and training for the potential identified replacements In the South African environment the opportunity to be able to take part in virtual work can be seen as an employee benefit (Baard & Thomas, 2016) .

In the current economic environment it might be more viable for companies to consider moving into the virtual space. Banks are moving with the technological area to become a technological shop that happens to have a banking license. This means that their strategy has an impact on the people, jobs, operations and future (Mthembu, 2016). The challenges of teams today are very different from those of five to ten years ago. Today many teams are geographically dispersed and may also come from different disciplines, departments and even organisations (acting as stakeholders). They consist of factors such as cultural diversity and customer relationships and these are impacted by technology, the marketplace and strategic collaboration (Bellingham, 2001:3-7).

With the implementation of a virtual workplace framework it needs to be established whether we do have access to the right resources, framework, structures and support systems to implement and effectively manage a virtual workplace in the South African Banking Industry.

The advantage of virtual teams is that there are no geographic or organisational boundaries. By using modern communication technology, virtual teams can bring the best and brightest individuals together and cut the travel cost, relocation cost etc.

Teams today need to develop trust and collaborate in a virtual world, but trust and collaboration are difficult when people are physically separated for long periods of time. The essential elements of high performing teams need to be developed among people all over the world, who may not know each other and who may work together on a team only for a few months. Creating a high performing team therefore not only requires a solid foundation on the basics of teamwork, but also requires enabling technologies to accelerate and secure sustainable progress (Vorster, 2003:17).

There are three criteria's that need to be adhered to before a group can be considered a team (Vorster, 2003:17):

- all members of the group must possess of shared goals and objectives;
- all members of the group needs to have a defined identity; and
- all members must have roles that are dependent on each other.

A team becomes virtual when any of the following conditions apply (Vorster, 2003:18):

- the members of a virtual team work from different geographical locations across the world;
- virtual team members are a representation of different organisations or units of the same organisation;
- virtual team members work together/collectively as a team for different periods of time depending on nature of project; and
- virtual team members use technology supported communication more frequently as an alternative for face-to-face communication in order to perform their duties.

It is important that individuals have an understanding of above mentioned to ensure that there is cohesion to drive team dynamics more.

In the conventional way of doing business (traditional/ conventional way), the virtual team do work across different dimensions, time and boundaries set by the organisation from a

communication and technology perspective. Team work can be described as fixed in traditional teams, while in a virtual team, environment memberships are continuously improved and reworked to test and improve effectiveness and efficiency. People that are part of a virtual team do tend to belong to more than one team, as they have relationships with various stakeholders and decisions are influenced based on experience, versus being in a more traditional team, the team is managed by a single manager and operations might tend to be different (Vorster, 2003:18).

2.2 CHALLENGES RELATING TO VIRTUAL TEAMS

"Virtual team management is the ability to organise and coordinate with effect a group whose members are not in the same location or time zone, and may not even work for the organisation. The predictor of success is always clarity and purpose. But group participation in achieving that is more important than ever in order to compensate for lost context. It can be said that the virtual team management requires deeper understanding of people, process, technology and recognition that trust might be perceived as a challenge due to the lack of face to face interactions" (Serrat, 2009).

When managing a virtual team, it is imperative that the rational of such a team is communicated and special focus must be given to factors such as competitive advantages, for example cost leadership, differentiation and focus (Serrat, 2009).

Given the fact that virtual teams and virtual working environment are new to the South African business environment, especially banking, the following can be seen as challenges to the management of these organisations. Setting up a virtual team comes with a variety of challenges from a management perspective, hence it is vital that virtual teams benefit from the same critical foundations as the normal "face-2-face" teams. According to an article by Olivier Serrat from the Asian Development Bank (Serrat, 2009), the following challenges are included but are not limited to.

2.2.1 Management challenges

By managing a virtual team, management is exposed to a variety of challenges and events that have an impact on a variety of factors as discussed below.

- **Human resource management:** the establishment of a virtual workforce in modern organisations can be challenging, which also requires that HR need to relate to the virtual workforce and virtual knowledge workers in the sense that they need to get the same benefits treatment as the normal employees from a career development. A lack of belonging can have an impact on retention and the moral of the team.
- **Learning and development:** the same learning and development opportunities that are available for the rest of the normal employees should also be granted to the virtual teams. Organisations need to commit to make learning and development resources available to all. If not, it will impact the moral and performance of the virtual team.
- **Organisational culture:** virtual working tools are becoming the new way of work and it is imperative that leadership should start recognising it. This includes rewarding, promoting and recognising virtual team members the same way as normal employees. Detailed change management needs to take place in order for this transition to be deemed as successful.
- **Information management systems:** new management and new control systems need to be designed and implemented in order to track activities such as workload because it will be different to the conventional methods and tools that were previously in place. Information now needs to be more visible and the workflow, workload and systems used to perform tasks must be based on all activities that the team performs. If not properly managed and tracked, it might not be a true reflection of the actual work performance and output levels of these teams.
- **Electronic communication and collaboration technologies:** for a virtual team to be able to work effectively, the team members from the various locations need access to a standard set of electronic communication tools in order for them to perform their tasks and communicate with each other.
- **Leadership:** the recognition of virtual teams by senior management is imperative because it is gradually becoming the new world of work. Challenges that arise in virtual teams must be dealt with accordingly to avoid instances where issues will infiltrate other teams and might have an impact on output levels and team dynamics. According to an article by Serrat (2009), the following challenges are included.

2.2.2 Team challenges

A team and the team performance is extremely important when managing or establishing a virtual team. Factors such as team dynamics and engagement need to always be considered. Below is an indication of the challenges teams might face.

Building trust in virtual teams

The author is of opinion that building trust among virtual teams is one of the most challenging parts of the concept.

It has been concluded that trust could be built virtually and does not require face-to-face interaction. Based on how the virtual teams grow through team member reliability, consistency and responsiveness when dealing with teammates and customers, or what is known as ability-based or task-based trust.

Kirkman (2002:69) states that building trust requires rapid responses to electronic communications from team members, reliable performance and consistent follow-through. Unlike face-to-face teams, virtual team members establish trust based on predictable performance. Accordingly, team leaders should coach virtual team members to avoid long lags in responding, unilateral priority shifts and failure to follow up on commitments.

Feelings of isolations and detachment associated with virtual teams

The major disadvantage of virtual teams is the lack of physical interaction and a level of social interaction which lead to isolation and de- attachment among team members in a virtual working space. In a separate article, Kurland and Egan (cited by Kirkman, 2002:72) said, “Employees' primary reluctance about telecommuting rests on concerns about isolation”. The author would like to agree with last mentioned statement because a lack of interaction might create feelings of detachment and possibly result into a lack of engagement from team members.

Kirkman (2002:72) further states that virtual team members will be less productive and satisfied than people working face-to-face, due to feelings of isolation and detachment. Thus, a specific challenge for virtual team leaders that does not confront face-to-face

team leaders is overcoming feelings of isolation. He also states that team leaders use team-building activities like ropes courses, bowling nights, or barbeques to solidify team cohesion and spirit. In virtual teams, most of these possibilities are lost.

Technical and Interpersonal skills among team members

According to Kirkman (2002:74), since face-to-face interaction is minimal, some managers assume that interpersonal skills for virtual team members are less important than for face-to-face teams. For example, managers should “select people who are comfortable sharing information and working with computers” (Kirkman, 2002: 74).

Training to maintain technical proficiency will be an important component of any virtual team member's continuing education program. It is of the utmost importance that virtual team members also have strong interpersonal skills on the same level as employees that operate in the conventional way. Strong communication skills, coordination and technical skills are requirements. If not, the virtual team member will not be able to deliver at the required expectation. In the South African work context in order to gain full potential of employees, not only from a performance perspective but also from a development and talent management perspective it is important to invest in their technical and interpersonal skills in order to get the most out of these employees.

Assessment and recognition of virtual team performance

To manage a team that you cannot see is very challenging, per Kirkman (2002:74), because you do not physically have access to their performance, cannot view tasks and it will be difficult to assist if you do not have an understanding as to where the employee struggles.

It was recommended to follow a balanced scorecard approach when managing such a team. The scorecard will be done individually and consists of:

- Growth (share of the market)
- Profitability (costs versus revenue generated for each travel booking)
- Process improvement (cycle time, or the time required to order and install customer hardware)
- Customer satisfaction (assessed with survey data collected from actual customers).

2.2.3 Individual challenges

Since the introduction of the virtual team, some individuals found it difficult to adapt to the new way of work, some might still prefer working collectively as a team in the organisation and not remotely. Below are some of the challenges individuals are faced with:

Lack of direction and priorities

Technology has made provision for interaction among team members but, it still does not make up for the face-to-face interaction, but rather sometimes leads to miss-interpretation and a feeling of isolation.

The effect of isolation and the lack of social interaction may be more serious than one perceive it to be. The reference also states that most members of the team may feel inadequate and demotivated to work at their best, therefore making them less effective. They may not even see how their contribution fits into the bigger picture so they miss out what it's like to do teamwork.

Difficulty establishing trust

Building trust can be a challenge and it stems out from the lack of collaboration between team members, for example if one do not hear from his/her teammates in a particular period of time, it breeds doubt and eventually distrust. This may be more challenging for members who work on different time zones and group cooperation becomes laborious, if not impossible.

Lack of face-to-face interaction

It is easy to entrench a specific goal among teams, but to maintain it is where the actual challenge begins. To maintain it and keep everyone focused on that goal is the hardest part. When the team is geographically spread, time zone troubled and has a diverse skillset, abilities and priorities, keeping everyone synchronised around the objective and goal could be tricky. A virtual team may work well together but that doesn't necessarily mean they are able to generate good results. Not being able to have face-to-face interaction, does influence individual work performance and delivery, (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d.).

2.3 THE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF VIRTUAL WORKFORCE

The advantages and disadvantages of virtual teams can be examined from three levels, namely individual, organisational and societal. These advantages will be experienced fully in an area where virtual work operations are successfully implemented.

2.3.1 The advantages of virtual teams

The advantages of a virtual team are:

Cost savings

The biggest advantage of a virtual team that any organisation can benefit from is associated with cost savings. It is believed that the organisation can cut all its huge expenses on real estate, office spaces, utilities bills such as gas, electricity, water, facility management, maintenance etc. Many organisations outsource their operations to the low-cost regions. Due to this, the production cost also seems to decrease with the reduced raw material cost, operational costs and lower wages of the employees in these geographic locations (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d.).

Leverage of global talent

Virtual teams allow and enable organisations to look for talent globally and by following this method they compress together experts and specialists from across the globe to work together on the project. It also leads to an increase in knowledge sharing and greater innovation happens as all employees share their understanding of global and local markets as well as best business practices which can contribute to best practice methods being implemented and new industry benchmarks being created (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d).

Increased productivity & higher profits

In a virtual team, there tends to be a higher focus on the task at hand and as part of this practice the virtual team supports and flatter organisational structure. The members of

virtual teams do not have to deal with the official/conventional procedure which slows down the decision making and has an impact on profits. This enhances the productivity which shows as higher profits (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d.).

Reduced time to market

Since the team members in a virtual team work in different time zones, there could be different team working on the same project simultaneously, so when one member sleeps/or is absent, there will be another one somewhere else who would start work where the former had left. This reduces the product development time and contributes to faster/quicker response time to meet the demands both globally and locally.

Fresh opportunities

Virtual teams have created newer opportunities for people who are less mobile and hesitant or resistant to relocate due to e.g. family responsibility to name only one. Virtual work enables the organisation and employee to support and complete any task that does not require the physical presence of a person and which can be done through various communication tools and can create opportunities for more candidates (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d).

2.3.2 The disadvantages of virtual teams

The idea of a virtual team comes with a variety of challenges that might have an impact on the implementation of the concept and consist of the following factors that need to be considered.

- ***Cost of technology***

In order for virtual teams to work and operate successfully, it needs to be supported by the efficient/effective and world-class technology. It will require the use of multiple communication technologies, such as instant messaging, emails and video-conferencing, among others. The cost associated with this installation and maintenance tools can become expensive, but it is still cheaper than the traditional way of operations.

- ***Conflicts, lack of trust & collaboration***

Given the fact that people from diverse backgrounds, cultures and history work together in a virtual team, there will be challenges such as cultural differences between the members of virtual teams which give rise to a number of conflicts. These challenges can be due to the absence of non-verbal cues intrinsic to face-to-face interactions (Managementstudyguide.com ,n.d.).

- ***Social isolation***

By being part of a virtual team, social interaction is limited and leads to social isolation. Team members of virtual teams are adversely affected by the lack of physical interactions due to the fact that most of the communication in virtual environment is task-oriented.

2.4 DETERMINE HOW MANAGERS CAN MANAGE THE VIRTUAL WORKFORCE

Every manager has a different management style or approach in terms of leading and providing guidance to those that report to them. However, in a virtual team there are basic rules that need to be adhered to when managing a team.

According to Vorster (2003:18), there are three types of virtual teams and each team has a different way or method to be managed. It consists of the following:

1. Co-located, cross-organisational teams
2. Distributed teams
3. Distributed cross-organisational teams

2.4.1 The co-located cross-organisational team

This team is built out of a cross-functional group of experts and stakeholders who come together to solve a specific problem within the organisation. Even though the team members might come from different organisations, they do come together at the same venue to work on the specific project within the required time frame. This can also be seen as a project type team.

2.4.2 Distributed teams

This is a team of people in the same organisation who work in different locations (for example regions, departments). It is safe to say that virtual teams in the same organisation execute a specific function or purpose. Members in this team may vary from time to time and can be done or established based on a need, time frame or dimension, for example call centre/RB Jacobs which is a dedicated customer interaction platform for First National Bank offers a 24-hour service across all time zones to meet customer needs from a service orientated perspective (Vorster, 2003:18).

2.4.3 Distributed cross organisational teams

This team can be described as a team that consists of different organisations who work/is based in different places and/ or time zones but is synchronised and interacts as a team at the same time. Gibson and Cohen (2003:222) refer to the skills in these teams are composed of cross-functional members who have come together to share their skills and knowledge on a specific issue or topic. In networked teams, new members are added as and when required and existing members are separated whenever their roles are completed. The duration of a networked virtual team is dependent on how much time is required to resolve the issue. The networked teams disband with the completion of the project that they have been assigned to. Networked teams are extensively used in consulting firms and technology companies (Gibson & Cohen 2003:212.4.5).

Parallel teams

Parallel teams are generally formed by members from the same organisation. When working and delivering on their primary assigned role within their organisation, they take on additional added responsibility, hence the term parallel team. Generally, this team is formed to review a process or a problem at hand and make recommendations based on their knowledge and expertise. This form of a team can be seen as very effective in multinational organisations where a global perspective is required. In the Banking Industry, it would be ABSA, Standard Bank and FNB that have operations outside South Africa.

2.4.4 Project or product development teams

Project teams are the classic virtual teams which were developed as early as the 1990s. These were actually the teams that led the way in the development of virtual teams. The project or product development virtual teams are built of subject matter experts brought together from diverse parts of the world to work on a clearly outlined and defined task involving development of a new product, system or process, with specific and measurable deliverables (Managementstudyguide.com , n.d).

2.4.5 Work, production or functional teams

These teams are formed when members of one role come together to perform a single type of ongoing day-to-day work. Members have clearly defined roles and work well independently. All of the members' work are combined together to give the desired/required end solution. The South African Banking environment utilize this form of work in their operational teams.

2.4.6 Service teams

Service virtual teams have members across difference time zones. Therefore, when one member in Asia goes to sleep, the other member in America wakes up to answer queries. This is the basic model of service teams which is formed by members who are spread across widely distinct geographic locations and who works independently. However, they together perform work in continuation. It is like a relay race where one takes the stick from the other and run the race. These teams can be seen as effective in a technical and customer support environment especially in the banking industry where they have to attend to customer needs, queries and complaints.

2.4.7 Action teams

Action teams can be described as the ad-hoc teams which are formed for a very short duration of time. The members of action teams are brought together to provide immediate response to a problem and they dissolve as soon as the problem/project is resolved/ completed. This type of team can be used in on a special project for a bank and still operate virtually making use of platforms such as open-source.

2. 4.8 Management teams

Management teams are formed by managers of an organisation who work from different cities or countries. These members largely get together to discuss strategies and activities. These are applicable to almost every organisation that has an office in more than one location nationally and internationally (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d).

2.5 ROLE OF VIRTUAL TEAM MEMBERS

With a Global Virtual Team, the work structure is quick and extremely emerging due to the workplace conditions in networked organisations. Global Virtual Teams (GVT) are generally described as the work groups where members are located at different global locations and communicate mainly through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Which are able to perform their task making use of virtual platforms.

For an effective virtual team, role coordination is very important. Role coordination is defined as managing the interdependent tasks of virtual team members. Role coordination among the members of a virtual team can be viewed as a challenge because of the following three main reasons:

1. Virtual teams is in support of a flatter organisational structure. Due to the shortage of traditional hierarchies, it becomes difficult to reinforce the reporting levels.
2. Virtual project teams are formed for a short duration of time and the membership is also fluid. The resultant evolving structure of virtual teams leads to role ambiguity among its members.
3. It is extremely difficult to manage interdependent tasks due to time zone differences and cultural influences.

Role in the context of a team is defined as the part played or expected to be played by an individual member. According to the Role Theory, the actions of each individual are guided by his place in social structure. Every member holds a standard to which they expect a standard set of behaviour from themselves and others in this social setting. Here it is important to realise that, in a group, each individual reveals two types of behaviour - task-related as well as socio-emotional behaviour.

In a virtual team, members play three types of roles:

1. **Task-oriented or functional roles**: the function here is to enable a team to achieve its project base objectives and to stick to the reason why the group was formed in first place. This is generally related to their expertise in a field such as a product design engineer, business analyst, project manager, java developer, process engineer.
2. **Socio-emotional roles**: the function of this role is to help the team to build trust, collaborate and work effectively towards its common goal. These are generally taken up by members informally owing to their preferences and personalities. For example, some members are able to motivate others, resolve conflicts or help release tension.
3. **Individual roles:** can be described as the type of roles which is related to the personal needs of a team member such as desire for recognition or control. These roles are considered to have adverse effects on trust and collaboration.

Global virtual teams rely on ICT tools for any form of interaction among its members. The members of these teams can use various ICT tools for three levels of communication.

- Impersonal communication: This involves minimal level of interaction and is concerned with pre-determined/ pre- defined tasks or actions which each member is required to perform. This is usually done through pre-established formal action plans and procedures.
- Personal communication: This method involves one-on-one interaction among two members of the team. This is done by using vertical and horizontal communication channels.
- Group communication involves interaction among all the members of the team. This makes use of the team meetings using webinars, videoconferencing etc. (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d.)

Having a look at the above mentioned, it seems as if communication would be the golden thread. Meaning if each person in the team fulfils his/her function and constantly communicate clearly, it will be easier to accomplish the goals and objectives of the team.

The role of the virtual team leader is to reduce role ambiguity by clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of each member as well as to improve role coordination by providing effective communication mechanisms in place and encouraging communication at all three the levels.

When both the phases are complete, it is best to launch the virtual team by means of an introductory meeting (Vorster, 2003:45). All the team members should be involved and the use of real-time media is most suitable for this purpose. All the documents such as the team directory, process flow, task, interdependencies, media plan etc. should be made available to all the members. It is recommended that, before closing the kick-off meeting, a quick review of current and existing process should be done in order to identify the future way of work collectively.

2.5.1 Implementation of a virtual team

When setting up a virtual team it is very important that the practical part of such a project is considered. In other words, the what, how, why and when need to be explored and broken down to an operational level. In the Banking sector, factors such as systems, processes, infrastructure and cost need to be considered before implementation. Ideally it will start out as a proof of concept and based on performance and success rates it might grow bigger.

The beginning or initiation phase of development of a virtual team is crucial for its success. As much as the foundation defines the strength of the building, the steps involved in establishing a virtual team go a long way in contributing to its successful functioning in later stages. There are two basic questions which gives structure and definition to this phase - '*what does the team stand for*' and '*how will the team achieve its goal*'. The objective here is to measure in greater detail and provide practical insights to the team leaders or managers who might be tasked or required to set up a virtual team.

Firstly, an answer to the question of '**what does the team stand for**' should be found. According to the Managementstudyguide.com (n.d.), with the establishment of such a team we need to do the following:

- **Give a name to the team;** it would be advisable to give a formal label that clearly describes the function of the team. This gives an identity to the team both inside and outside the organisation. A short-abbreviated name for internal conversation purposes can be considered to create a more informal environment.
- **Describe the purpose of the team:** it is of great importance to reaffirm the reason and purpose of the team to the team in a more tangible form to the team members. This always needs to relate back to the strategy of the organisation and of the team. It should be explicitly put across to each team member so that all of them are on the same page and equally motivated and committed to this purpose and achieve the desired goals or the team.
- **Put together a team directory:** to communicate and interact with other colleagues, one needs to know their contact details. Hence the reason why, you should create a catalogue with information on each team member's location, time zone and the contact details of the communication media they would use, example emails, phone numbers, instant messaging. This should be shared with all the members and security should be in place to avoid hacking and viruses.

The second phase involves answering the question of '**how will the team achieve its goal**'. This involves action planning to align the team on how to meet their assigned tasks effectively. According to the (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d), a well-defined and understood action plan needs to be in place in order to guide the team into the desired direction:

- **Lay down process flow with task interdependencies:** break down the vision and mission statement into tangible and achievable goals and further into simple tasks with key result areas that are easily measurable. It is best to make use of a flow diagram to explain this along with representing interdependencies in this. This provide a clear definition of how to reach the goal.
- **Scheduling timelines:** it will be more productive to track team performance against time. An estimated deadline of the timeframe for each task must be given.
- **Clear roles & accountability:** clear roles and responsibilities need to be explained to each team member. A matrix which shows which members will be involved in each of the task will be beneficial. A matrix will address issues such as role ambiguity and will help with time management.

- **Team reporting structure:** virtual teams have flatter structures but in order to have better workflow it is required to outline the task and processes both vertically and horizontally. Team members will know who to liaise with at which point in time. (managementstudyguide.com (n.d)

According to Ferrazzi (2014:), from the Harvard Business Review, managers can follow a simple high-return practice for the virtual team:

- ***The right team***

Team structure should be part of the initiation phase. There will be no movement if the correct recruitment of people suited to virtual teamwork is not taking place, putting them into groups of the right size and dividing the labour/ task appropriately.

- ***People***

Successful virtual team players have the following characteristics in common: good communication skills, high emotional intelligence, an ability to work independently and cultural sensitivity to other cultures. When recruiting for such a team, it is important to look at characteristics by means of an interview and psychometric assessments such as the MBTI test to screen for required qualities from the team members. The MBTI is a personality questionnaire that is used to determine the ways and preferences of individuals. It also gives an indication on individual judgement, perceptions, and decision making skills (Ferrazzi, 2014).

- ***Size***

Teams have been getting larger and larger, sometimes even exceeding 100 people for complex projects. An ideal team should be between 8 and 10 members maximum (Anon, 2016). To optimise the group's performance, too many players/members shouldn't be assembled.

2.6 IMPROVE THE COMMUNICATION OF THE VIRTUAL WORKFORCE

Communication forms a very important part towards the execution of strategy, goals and purposes of a virtual team. Management must always look for the best ways to improve

communication to secure that team results are achieved. Based on research done by the Harvard Business review (Ferrazi, 2014), in order to get a virtual team right, the right technology is required for communication. It consists of the following:

The right touch points

Virtual teams should come together in person at certain times to establish goals, targets etc. This step is most likely to be very critical to drive the correct behaviour and communication. Some refer to it as touch base sessions.

Kick-off

An initial meeting, face-to-face if possible and using video if not, will go a long way towards introducing teammates, setting expectations for trust and candour and clarifying team goals and behavioural guidelines. At this stage, factors such as team dynamics and work to bridge specific gaps are being assessed.

Milestones

Virtual team leaders need to continually motivate members to deliver their best, but e-mail updates and weekly conference calls are not enough to sustain momentum. In the absence of visual cues and body language, misunderstandings often arise, especially on larger teams.

The right technology

Based on the research that has been done by Ferrazzi (2014), Harvard Business Review, they state that even organisations who has the most-talented workers, the finest leadership and frequent touch points/interaction, can be impacted by poor technology. It is recommended to use platforms that integrate all types of communication and include these key components listed below:

Conference calling

Based on Ferrazzi's research (2014) Keith- HBR it is recommended to look for systems for conference calling facilities that don't require access codes but do record automatically or with a single click and facilitate or automate transcription. The best

systems even help monitor the time that each individual spends talking versus listening. One-on-one and group videoconferencing should also be considered, since visual cues help establish empathy and trust.

Direct calling and text messaging/WhatsApp groups/Skype

These tools are recommended as they support real-time conversation between two remote participants. Direct calls are one of the simplest and most powerful tools in the arsenal and as teenagers know, texting is a surprisingly effective way to maintain personal relationships.

2.7 FRAMEWORK FOR ORGANISATIONS TO IMPLEMENT A VIRTUAL OFFICE EFFECTIVELY

A virtual team is the new reality of the 21st century workplace. A large number of HR practitioners in well-known corporates and banks as well as organisational leaders has acknowledged this as a fact and it is totally different to the traditional teams. For the purpose of this study, a variety of models around virtual teams had to be explored which assisted in the development of a virtual framework for the South African Banking Industry.

Lipnack and Stamps (2008:116) developed the Four-dimensional model of virtual teams as illustrated and discussed below next.

This model illustrates and provides detail around the four aspects of a virtual team which is build out of purpose, people, link and time and which govern the dynamics of virtual teams.

Figure 2.1 demonstrates the Four-Dimensional Model of Virtual Teams.

According to Lipnack and Stamps (2008:116), the Four-Dimensional Model of Virtual Teams illustrates that, in virtual teams, everything is correlated through a general purpose over time. The success or failure and challenges of the virtual team originate from the interaction among the below four dimensions:

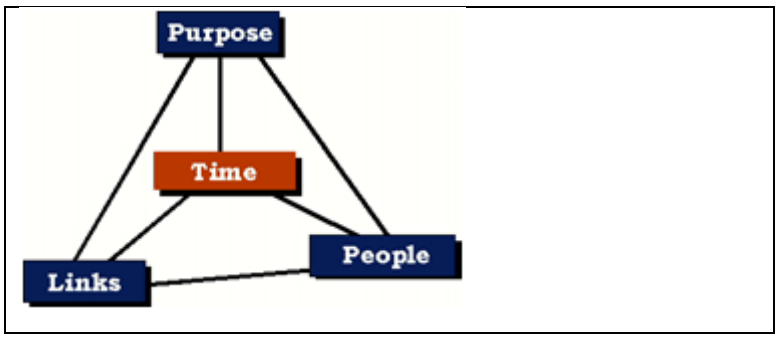

Figure 2.1: Four-Dimensional Model of Virtual Teams (Lipnack and Stamps, 2008:116)

Each of these four dimensions can be further analysed in the light of three systems of input, processes and results. This produces a total of 12 elements which together define any virtual team.

This is illustrated and broken down in Table 2.1 below where the elements are indicated.

Table 2. 1: The Elements of Virtual Teams (Lipnack, and Stamps, 2008:116)

	Inputs	**Processes**	**Outputs**
Purpose	Goals	Task	Results
People	Members	Leadership	Levels
Links	Media	Interactions	Relationships
Time	Calendar	Projects	Life Cycles

Each of the dimensions with its three elements is discussed in greater detail below:

Purpose

Purpose performs the task of a binding force for a virtual team. The commitment of the members to a shared common purpose guides them in their day-to-day tasks. A clear purpose results into more specific tasks, roles and responsibilities of each member. Each member has both independent and interdependent sets of tasks that they have to perform and be measured on. As all the tasks are delivered accurately, the team achieves its final output which is measurable. Clear goals, independent and interdependent tasks and measurable results guide the team to work towards the desired direction as aligned to the strategy.

People

Virtual teams should be seen as more than just technology. It is about how members of the virtual team relate to both the internal as well as the external environment and *vice versa*. Members of a virtual team are required to work at two organisational levels - internal which involves working independently and working with other members of the same team and external which involves working in coordination. A productive virtual team demands integration at both internal and external levels under the shared leadership which will enable them to perform even better.

Links

Given the fact that the team is virtual, the virtual team members are linked through the multi-media tools such as emails, videoconferencing and instant messaging etc. in order for them to continuously interact with each other. Interactions through the various tools or platforms reduce the boundaries/walls between them and facilitate work processes and aid decision making. Due to the lack of physical interactions, the interactions supported by multi-media build workplace relationships and do contribute to the development of trust among the virtual team members and form bonds necessary to perform efficiently and effectively.

Time

In a virtual team, opportunities for leadership to call team members together at the same time and place to discuss particular issues are not provided and this encourages an effort or challenge for engagement. It demands collaboration of efforts to match each member's work calendar to schedule meetings and discussions for tracking projects. In order for a virtual team to essentially operate successfully it is of crucial importance that ground rules or governance rules are established during the forming stages. Factors such as time management, meetings and targets can be discussed on this platform. This leaves little room for any confusion and conflicts later during the performance stage (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d.).

2.8 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF VIRTUAL TEAMS

In order for any team to be successful it is important that the factors of success need to be identified and used as a guideline when implementing such a project.

According to a study that was conducted by the (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d) , the researchers are of the opinion that more organisations are realizing the higher return on investment that is associated with the virtual work environment and virtual teams are scoring over traditional teams. It states that the business case for virtual teams refers to savings, leveraging global talent, increase in productivity and higher profits.

2.8.1 Nine critical success factors for a virtual team

1. **Clear Definition of Success:** the first requirement is that the objective of a virtual team should be clearly defined and understood by all. The manner in which success will be measured through performance tools and objectives needs to be communicated clearly to all. A project list and charter can be seen as a driver of performance and measurement that will help the team achieve success and it provides a sense of direction to all the members.
2. **Availability of technology:** it is recommended that companies should invest in the purchasing of world class technological tools that will support collaboration. All the team members should have access to the tools, which should include videoconferencing and instant messaging. Technical support will be required for members located in different time zones.
3. **Selection of team members:** given the fact that the virtual team involves unique challenges and risks, the team members should possess of a specific knowledge, skills and abilities to work productively and effectively in it. They should also have the expertise to make use of the technology available.
4. **Principles of engagement:** in order to be successful in such a team, it requires engagement and commitment from all team members. To ensure such it requires regular feedback, open door communication and a platform where members can give their opinion and use it as part of decision making.
5. **Strong trust & social ties:** the knowledge and intellectual property exchange between members are required to deliver project tasks. It will be built on the strong foundation of trust and social ties among the virtual team members. When people

feel comfortable and confident about each other, they demonstrate constructive individual behaviour which positively contributes to the success of virtual teams.

6. **Supportive top management:** the senior or executive management of the organisation should support the virtual team by giving them the required flexibility and freedom to perform their duties. Virtual teams perform best in a flatter structure where decisions are made and implemented easier.
7. **Encouraging HR policies:** the HR policies and legislation applicable in virtual teams should be designed around the complexity and challenges associated with the work environment. Fair promotion and career development opportunities should be extended to employees in virtual teams as well. A recognition program should appreciate collaborative efforts along with the pre-defined performance metric. Training & Development programs should be made accessible to virtual team members and the same benefits should apply to virtual employees as they do to office based employees.
8. **Hand-on & networked leadership style:** the leader is the binding force in a virtual team environment. Team members should seek for guidance from the leader in any situation. Virtual team leaders should have prior expertise and experience in handling virtual teams or at least be provided extensive training to understand its dynamics. They should be experts in providing resources for efficient working by team members, managing conflicts, cross cultural issues as well as keeping the enthusiasm and engagement levels high.
9. **Positive internal branding:** though it is true that organisations recognise virtual teams as a boost to their competitive advantage, many employees still perceive that working in a virtual environment will hinder their career progression because infrequent face-to-face interactions with supervisors will lower their chances for promotions etc. It is important to design a strong internal communication strategy that changes this perception and presents working in a virtual team environment as a chance to showcase the versatility of the workforce. As per the previous success factor, it was advised that the HR policies should be amended to accommodate and treat virtual employees fairly.

2.9 CONCLUSION

The title of this research is around the Development of a Framework for the implementation of a virtual workplace environment in the South African Banking Industry. The rationale behind this study was to establish how feasible and practical it was for people who were employed by a bank to work in a virtual space. Various factors such as technology, change management, advantages and disadvantages had to be considered before the actual implementation could take place. Factors such as communication tools and performance management need to get special attention because it will impact the success of a virtual working environment.

South African banking does have the platforms and infrastructure to allow such a work dynamic, but the question is if the management skills, legislative requirements and performance management abilities are strong enough to manage such a team even if the framework is ready. The researcher believes that, with implementation of such a framework, buy in is required from top management all the way through to the operations area where this will be implemented.

With all the technology, we have to our disposal, it is highly recommend for organisations, especially banks to become more agile and start exploring more options that will make them more globally competitive, starting with the management of their Human Capital Resource.

Theoretical framework for the SA banking industry

Based on theory from this study the below virtual work framework was derived for the South African Banking Industry.

1. Latest updates and notifications
2. Current Queues and workflow distribution
3. Employee Details
4. Performance Targets and Reward Categories
5. Chat rooms

The proposal is that for the working environment the above mentioned should be seen as the standard pillars in order for the model to be successful. More detail below.

Step 1: Updates and notifications

1. Updates and notifications must go out daily, and be managed by team leaders and managers.
2. When logging onto the bank system virtually staff members are required to read and acknowledge the updates before the system allows them access to proceed.

Step 2: Current queues & workflow distribution

1. Pending Transactions/Deals/Task
2. Approved/Declined/Reworks
3. SLA

The system should distribute work that is assigned to employees based on what is in the queues for them, taking into account the alignment to service level agreements, targets and deadlines. Each employee should have access to his/her queues to perform the task accordingly. Employees should receive a notification when deals are about to fall out of SLA and each milestone should have a status and timer next to it to keep employees informed about the status of their work.

Step 3 & 4: Employee details & performance categories

1. Employee individual and team targets
2. Leave details
3. Performance targets

All employee details such as individual targets and team targets should be visible. Details such as when someone is on leave, should be known to the rest of the team. Performance targets should also be visible to all and will be seen as a motivation to all. This will drive transparency, especially in a sales, credit and operations environment.

Step 4: Chat rooms

Online live chat groups should be available where teams can interact with each other to ask questions, ask for help and get instant assistance, be it with regard to work tasks, IT systems or any tools of trade related to activities that might impact their productivity.

Virtual Banking Workflow System

1. Latest updates and notifications
2. Current Queues and workflow distribution
3. Employee Details
4. Performance Targets and Reward Categories
5. Chat rooms

Proposal is that for the working environment the above mentioned should be seen as the standard pillars in order for the model to be successful. More detail below.

Step 1: Updates and Notifications

1. Updates and notifications must go out daily, and be managed by team leaders and managers. When logging onto the bank system virtually staff is required to read and acknowledge the updates before the system allow them access to proceed. Should challenges be experienced go back to step 1.

Step 2: Current Queues & Workflow distribution

1. Pending Transactions/Deals/Tasks
2. Approved/ Declined/ Reworks
3. SLA

The system should distributed work that is assigned to employees based on what is in the queues for them, taking into account the alignment to service level agreements, targets and deadlines. Each employee should have access to his/ her queues to perform the task according. Should receive a notification when deals are about to fall out of SLA, and each milestone should have a status and timer next to it to keep employee informed around the status of their work. Should challenges be experienced go back to step 1.

Step 3 & 4: Employee Details & Performance Categories

1. Employee individual and team targets
2. Leave details
3. Performance targets

All employee details such as individual targets and team targets should be visible. Leave details with reference to the fact that if someone is on leave the rest of the team will know. Performance targets should also be visible to all and will be seen as a motivation to all. Driving transparency especially in a sales, credit and operations environment. Should challenges be experienced go back to step 1.

Step 4: Chat Rooms

Online life chat groups should be available where teams can interact with each other to ask questions, ask for help and get instant assistance be it with regards to work task, IT systems or any tool of trade related activity that might impact their productivity. Should challenges be experienced go back to step 1.

Chapter summary

In Chapter two, more research has been done regarding the challenges that accompany the virtual team environment. The challenges range from management challenges, individual and team challenges. Most of the challenges are about how communication should be managed. Further investigations were done around the advantages and disadvantages - advantages that include cost savings and an increase in productivity. The framework for organisations to implement a virtual office was investigated and a proposed framework for the South African banking industry was developed as per page 43 and 44.

CHAPTER THREE: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review in Chapter 2 of this study provided an overview of the virtual working environment as well as the proposed framework for the implementation of a virtual workplace environment in the South African Banking Industry. Special focus was on the advantages and disadvantages of such a framework as well as the implementation and operational readiness thereof. The rationale behind this study was to establish how feasible and practical it would be for people who were employed by a bank in South Africa, to work in a virtual work space. A variety of factors such as technology, change management, practicality and advantages / disadvantages need to be considered before implementation can take place.

The focus of this chapter was on the research methodology followed to assist in meeting the research objectives as defined in Chapter 1 and 2. The investigation procedures, data analyses as well as the results are described in this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

According Welman *et al.* (2005:299), the research design can be described as the plan of or process on how the researcher will get participants to participate and to collect data.

Furthermore, a case study regarding research design is described as a form of empirical inquiry design that focuses on a real-life context and scenarios.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

For the purpose of this study a qualitative research method was used. According to Cocharn and Patton Quinn (2002:2), qualitative research can be described as a form of scientific research that seeks for answers to certain questions, collects evidence, produces evidence that has not been previously determined and produces findings that will be applicable even if the study is deemed as completed.

Qualitative research can be viewed as very useful when used to obtain cultural specific information regarding opinions, values and opinions of the identified population **(**Guest *et al.*, 2011:(1).

3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUES

There are a variety of methods and techniques that can be used to complete a qualitative research study. The three most commonly used methods are focus groups, participant observation and in-depth interviews. Firstly, focus groups are very useful and effective when prompting for more information regarding data on different views and issues. Secondly the participant observation technique can be seen as relevant and appropriate when collecting data on naturally occurring behaviours in their natural context or environment. Lastly, in-depth interviews can be viewed as ideal when collecting data from individuals on their individual perspectives, views and experiences, especially when sensitive and rather unconventional topics are explored **(**Guest, *et al.*, 2011:51).

The in depth interviews method was followed for this study because each Head of IT, Sales Manager and Operations Team member work in one location, but also have the flexibility and option to work remotely. The Sales team works remotely but have to come to the office certain days, while Sales Managers are office bound and the feedback from them is helpful since they can provide insight on the management of a virtual team. The Head of IT can provide insight on the practical implementation of such a framework as virtual working in the current banking environment.

3.5 DATA COLLECTING METHODS

3.5.1 Sampling

In a qualitative study, only a sample of an identified population is selected for the particular study. The research objectives determine the size of the sample and how many people should be selected. The author argued that it would be practically impossible to conduct the research on the entire population identified for the study and resorted into using a smaller group, (Guest, *et al.,* 2011: 5).

The calculation of a sample size is important to ensure that scientific and statistically significant results are available during the qualitative research process. However, it would be unmanageable and not practically feasible to get all the employees of the Banking Institutions in South Africa to participate in the study. A probability sample was not necessary as the author wished to perform exploratory qualitative research to achieve its objectives and it was assumed that all the targeted employees, being in managerial roles, would have been knowledgeable about the virtual working environment and its advantages, disadvantages and practicality thereof the convenient method was more useful.

3.5.2 Sample size, type and technique

A total group of potential participants in a research study to whom a researcher would want to generalise the results of an empirical study is called the population (Welman, *et al.*, 2010:55).

For the purpose of this study the population was Heads of IT (4), Sales Managers (5) and Operations staff (5) - 14 in total - in the Banking industry of South Africa, known to the author.

The calculation of a sample size is important to ensure scientific and statistically significant results during the qualitative research process; however, it would be unwieldy and not practically feasible to get all the employees of the Banking Institutions in South Africa to participate in the study. As previously stated, a probability sample was not necessary as the author wished to perform exploratory qualitative research to achieve its objectives and it was assumed that all the targeted employees, being in managerial roles

would have been knowledgeable about the virtual working environment and the advantages, disadvantages and practicality thereof.

3.5.3 Interviews

For the purpose of this research, one on one interviews were conducted with the 14 participants that took part in the study. They were divided into Sales, Operations and Information Technology teams. Questionnaires were used in the interview.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

There are a variety of methods to analyse qualitative data that are built out of the in-depth method and thematic and descriptive approach (Cochran and Patton Quinn, 2000:5). This ties up with the convenient method used to provide more in-depth detail from what was captured within the questionnaires.

For the purpose of this study, the author was of the opinion that the thematic approach would be sufficient as it had a holistic view regarding the data, identified common themes and summarised all the views and opinions to come up with a conclusion. According to Cochran and Patton Quinn (2002:3), there are three stages in the thematic approach which include the reading and annotation of scripts, the identification of themes and the development of a coding scheme. This supplied the author with more information around the detail, context and opinion from the participants. Thereafter, themes could be identified and conclusions could be brought forward.

3.6 VALIDITY AND REALIABILITY

According to best practice, (Cochran and Patton Quinn (2002:5) state that, in order to maximise the validity of the research, the researcher needs to ensure that all conclusions are based on supporting evidence which include an analysis with sufficient context to enable the reader to fully understand the researcher’s/author’s interpretation.

Reliability can be seen as the consistent repetition of findings and trends In order to maximise the reliability of the study or findings it is important to analyse the entire set of data that has been identified and to also use more than one coder. This will support the study and secure a more consistent and transparent interpretation of results.

During this study, data was collected, assessed and interpreted and content was reviewed by the author and supervisor to ensure consistency and alignment to the objectives identified in Chapter two of this study.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Cochran and Patton Quinn (2002:5) state that the two most important ethical considerations in any survey, research or project are consent and confidentiality towards the participants. The reason for this is to create a platform for participants to provide honest feedback and still feel free and safe to do so.

Consent: all participants of the research or study should freely participate in the study without being pressurised.

Confidentiality: it is of utmost importance that the confidentiality of participants as well as the information collected from them are protected and never be left unattended.

3.8 FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to do research around how to create a development framework for the implementation of a virtual work environment in the South African Banking Industry.

The first two chapters of this dissertation offered an introduction to the concept surrounding virtual work and a detailed overview of literature on virtual work, starting with advantages, disadvantages, performance management and technology surrounding the virtual work environment. A methodological design and process was utilised during this research.

In this section of the research, the findings that emerged from the data collected and analysed, using the conceptual framework that was constructed for this study on virtual work, are presented.

A qualitative study, making use of interviews and questionnaires was conducted to obtain an understanding of the participants' views on the primary objective of the study (Yin, 2011:94).

As part of the questionnaire, on the first page, reference is made to the fact that the confidentiality of all participants will be kept and will remain protected.

The participants of the study were divided into 3 groups within a banking industry to get a wider definition of the operational readiness of the employees in these departments, as the three departments work inter-dependently and need each other in order to perform their task, both virtually and currently.

Number of candidates per department:

- IT-5
- OPERATIONS-4
- SALES-5

All the participants of this study were qualified and had some form of formal qualification. The minimum or lowest qualification of the participants was a Matric certificate and the highest was a Master's Degree.

In the Information Technology department, participants all had qualifications ranging from a Diploma to a Master's degree. The most experienced participant was the Chief Information Officer, who was in possession of a Master's degree and had 10 years' experience within the organisation and 20 years in the Information Technology Industry. Operations had participants with Grade 12 through to Masters and Sales, Grade 12 through to a degree. Participants from the Sales and Operations area's qualifications were lower than those of the Information Technology space, but with regard to the concept of virtual work, there was a similar understanding around the concept, its benefits and its challenges.

The findings and themes for the study are presented in this section. All findings presented serve to answer the following research questions as identified in the primary and secondary objectives of the study.

Table 3.1

Themes that emerged from the completed questionnaires:

Category	**Question**
Communication	For a virtual team to be successful, do you think that communication plays a huge role, and why?
Cost	What do you think are the advantages for the managers that manage virtual teams? Do you think it will cost more money to manage or will it save the bank money? If so please give examples.
Flexibility	What would motivate employees to partake in virtual teams? What do you think are the advantages of virtual work for the employees? What do you think are the advantages for the managers that manage virtual teams?
Trust	Would you say that trust plays an important role in being part of a virtual team, please discuss?

The primary objective was to develop a framework for the implementation of a virtual workplace environment in the South African Banking environment.

It was further aimed to determine the South African Banking environment's readiness and to explore the potential advantages and disadvantages that would be experienced by both line managers and employees.

Research question 1: Theme: Communication

What is your understanding of virtual work?

*Twelve of the fourteen participants in this study had a basic and similar understanding of what virtual work entailed. Their definition was more or less the same as described by Vorster (2003:4) in the literature study, stating that "*Virtual work arrangements refer to any arrangement between a manager and an employee in which the employee performs his or her work at a location other than his employer's workplace." The remaining two participants from the operations space were not completely familiar with the concept and what it entailed. They had a very poor understanding of what it meant and the relevance thereof. Given the fact that twelve out of the fourteen understood the concept provided the author with confidence that the topic was familiar to the target audience and that it was something that the population was open to discuss and provide feedback on to the author.

Research question 3, 4 & 5: Theme: Communication, trust, cost

Do you think your organisation is ready for this framework?

Eight out of the fourteen participants were confident in the fact that their organisation was ready for the virtual work environment. They believed that the right infrastructure, technology and support were in place to implement such a work structure as the virtual work environment. Four out of the fourteen participants did not believe that their organisation was ready for such a framework, especially from an operations perspective. One can say that the four participants could also be those who did not fully understand the concept and the requirements that needed to be in place to declare a business ready for such a framework, as the eight participants who were confident that the business was ready to implement a virtual workplace were also those who had a better understanding of the concept and the split was between the sales and IT workforce. Two of the fourteen participants were unsure of the readiness and they also were those participants who were not familiar with the concept.

Do you think the SA work force is ready?

Six of the fourteen participants were of the belief that the South African workforce was not ready to partake in virtual work due to infrastructure, technology and financial restrictions. Some of them also believed that the emotional intelligence and maturity levels of some of the workforce were not at the desired level.

Two of the fourteen believed that the SA workforce was ready due to the millennials that were entering the job market and who were geared up around technology and were also easily adapting to changes versus the older generation. It was clear that some still preferred to physically be at work and have face to face interaction. The other participants were of the opinion that, due to economic reasons such as petrol and transport cost, the South African Labour force should strongly consider implementing the virtual work place concept.

Six of the fourteen were not sure. According to the participants, levels of work needed to be considered as virtual work would be better in sales, IT and professional services environment as opposed to an operations space. Change management needed to be done through the entire process and they deemed South Africans as resistant to change.

This finding is particularly interesting given the fact that in question, eleven of the participants were confident in the fact that they were ready to partake in this journey.

Reasons why they thought that the SA workforce was not ready, were built on the fact that the maturity levels of the SA work force were not to be desired; legislation did not allow this, especially for the junior employees. Infrastructure and technology did not support it. The author concluded that the participants who were employed in the banking industry and who had sufficient technological resources at their disposal, believed that virtual work arrangements could work in the banking industry and not necessarily in other industries that were not as technologically established as the banks.

Eleven of the fourteen participants believed that they were ready to partake in a journey to explore the virtual workplace. The remaining three were not comfortable as yet because they preferred to be at work as they believed that feelings of social isolation and poor communication might hinder their productivity to perform.

Research Question 8: Theme: Communication and trust

For a virtual team to be successful, do you think that communication plays a huge role and why?

Based on the statistics and questionnaire results, all fourteen of the participants were of the belief that communication played an important role in a virtual workplace as it was

very important when they had to delegate duties, perform tasks and eliminate confusion between the teams, individuals and line managers. As per chapter two it is in full accordance with the theory.

According to the theory, Ferrazzi, (2014) states that communication forms a very important part towards the execution of strategy, goals and purposes of a virtual team. Management must always look for the best ways to improve communication to secure that team results are achieved. This statement confirms what was expressed by the participants in the questionnaire.

Research Question 9: Theme: Flexibility

What would motivate employees to take part in a virtual team?

*As per the questionnaire, all participants had similar views on what would act as a form of motivation to them when participating in a virtual team. Factors that came through very strong were the fact that they would have a lot of flexibility, save on traveling cost, would be able to manage their own time and prioritise work accordingly and the strongest factor was less travelling. Based on the theory in Chapter two, as the study was conducted by Managementstudyguide.com, (n.d) which had similar factors such as cost containment listed, it states that "*The biggest advantage of a virtual team that any organisation can benefit from is associated with cost savings. It is believed that the organisation can cut all its huge expenses on real estate, office spaces, utilities bills such as gas, electricity, water, facility management, maintenance etc." Due to the correlation between what was established in theory and the questionnaire, it is safe to say that cost management is a definite win for the employee

Research Question 11 & 12: Theme: Cost

What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages for both managers and employees?

*Advantages based on the theory for managers would be the fact that they could help the organisation and their different departments save money. In Chapter two it states that "*The biggest advantage of a virtual team that any organisation can benefit from is associated with cost savings. It is believed that the organisation can cut all its huge

expenses on real estate, office spaces, utilities bills such as gas, electricity, water, facility management, maintenance etc." Based on the questionnaire, there is a correlation as all shares the same or similar sentiment. Another advantage for managers is the fact that they will be able to leverage on a global talent base. This is also discussed in the theory and supported by the questionnaire that was completed.

A disadvantage that was identified by managers was the fact that it would be challenging for them to manage non-performers virtually and that miscommunication was a risk of a virtual work space. In Chapter two the disadvantages were critically discussed and supported by the questionnaire.

Research Question 15: Theme: Cost

Do you think that it will cost more money to manage or will it save the bank money? If so please give examples.

Based on the questionnaire, thirteen of the fourteen participants were of the belief that the creation of a virtual working environment would save the organisation money. Participants believed strongly that organisation would save cost on travelling, travel claims and the day to day operations and maintenance of office space. In Chapter two, theories supported the outcome of the questionnaire. Some of the participants were more experienced in the technological space, more qualified and had better knowledge to believe that, during the initial set up, it would cost the organisation or bank a substantial amount of money to set the infrastructure up, but in the long run it would save the bank money. Theory supports this statement by stating that "In order for virtual teams to work and operate successfully, it needs to be supported by the efficient/effective and world-class technology. It will require the use of multiple communication technologies, such as instant messaging, emails and video-conferencing, among others. The cost associated with this installation and maintenance tools can become expensive, but it is still cheaper than the traditional way of operations"

Research Question 16: Theme: Trust

Would you say that trust plays an important role in being part of a virtual team, please discuss why?

Fourteen out of fourteen participants believed strongly that trust would play an important factor in the success of the implementation of a virtual working environment, for both managers and employees. In Chapter two, the critical success factors of a virtual team were fully discussed and trust was also seen as an important role player. It was stated that:

"Strong trust & social ties are required because the knowledge exchange and collaboration required to deliver project tasks are built on the strong foundation of trust and social ties among the virtual team members. When people feel comfortable and confident about each other, they demonstrate constructive individual behaviour which positively contributes to the success of virtual teams. Based on the correlation between theory and feedback based on the questionnaire, the theme of trust in a virtual environment fulfils an important function" (Managementstudyguide.com, n.d.).

3.9 CONCLUSION

Based on the theory and the feedback received from the participants, the author is comfortable to state that the concept of virtual work is not entirely new to the South African Banking environment. Participants were quite familiar with what it entailed, they could identify the pros and cons of this concept and even break it down to determine what would be the benefits to the organisation and vice versa.

Regarding the themes one could see a golden thread throughout the theory of Chapter two and the answers provided in the questionnaires that communication, trust, flexibility and cost came through often. That being said, it is safe to say that, should the Banking Industry decide to implement or create a virtual work place, they should give special focus to the mentioned themes and build the implementation based on the mentioned themes.

A factors that stood out for the researcher was the fact that the participants felt that the South African workforce was not ready to partake in virtual work, but when asked if they would consider themselves operationally ready, the response was more positive. It can be said that, given the strong IT infrastructure and financial backup of the SA Banking industry, to implement a virtual environment is definitely possible, but it should be restricted to certain roles such as IT and Sales as they have a better understanding and are not actually required to be office bonded. Other areas might require more education around the concept and the operationalising of it.

3.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Chapter 3 a detailed investigation was done by means of interviews and questionnaires about people's perceptions and views of virtual work. The population size was 14 and a specific banking division was identified. A variety of people were involved from different levels, areas of expertise and backgrounds. Information Technology, Sales and Operations teams were represented in this study and consisted of Executive, Senior, Middle and Junior levels in the organisation.

Based on the questionnaire, it was evident that most the participants were familiar with the concept and shared a similar understanding. They described it as a work arrangement between a line manager and employee in which the employee performed their work at any other location than their normal workplace. They did make mention of technology, the cost and the infrastructure that needed to be in place to support this concept.

What came through very strong was the importance of communication and trust. Participants believed that, in order for a virtual workplace to be successful, proper communication tools, technology and practices needed to be in place to support the initiative. From a trust perspective, they did felt that team trust and managerial trust were something that would require development, especially when it came to work performance and when it was done remotely.

In Chapter two, a theoretical framework for the virtual workflow system in the South African Banking industry was designed and having the proposed framework implemented will possibly act as a solution to communication in a virtual work environment.

Teams felt that overall the SA banking industry is ready to partake in the virtual work environment journey because of the technological infrastructure and solid financial systems. With the implementation of the virtual work concept in the SA Banking Industry, it would be wise to start in areas such as Sales, Information Technology and Professional Services such as Finance and Marketing. The Operations team did not think that it would be feasible in their space due to the fact that work priorities changed by the day and they needed physical attendance to ensure that change take place.

In closing, based on the outcome of the questionnaire and interviews, the participants were familiar with the concept, willing and eager to part take in it and acknowledged the fact that not all roles were suitable to work in a virtual environment. The similarities based on the literature in Chapter two and the findings from the questionnaire in Chapter three support each other on a variety of levels, especially from the advantages and disadvantages for both managers and staff, which are important to consider should the bank decide to implement the virtual work environment in a South African context.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS & RECOMMNDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the concept of virtual work and how to develop a framework for the implementation of a virtual work place in the South African Banking Industry. A qualitative study, making use of questionnaires and interviews was used to seek an answer for the research questions aligned to the primary objective of the study.

The primary objective was to develop a framework for the implementation of a virtual workplace environment in the South African Banking Industry. A questionnaire was designed about the primary and secondary objectives in order to determine the operational readiness, advantages, disadvantages and critical success factors of a virtual working environment.

The secondary objective essentially set the framework for the study and was built on the following:

- To determine the South African readiness for a virtual workforce.
- To determine a framework for organisations that wish to implement the virtual office to do so effectively.
- To determine how managers can manage the virtual workforce.
- To determine how managers can control the virtual workforce.
- To determine how managers can improve communication with the virtual workforce.
- To determine the factors that drive employers towards the implementation of a virtual work arrangement.
- To explore the potential advantages and disadvantages experienced by both managers and employees.
- To explore the people management challenges relating to virtual work.

To provide an answer to the above secondary objectives, data was collected at a bank. Different business units and franchises of the particular bank participated and were divided into 3 clusters, namely Sales, Operations and Information Technology. These divisions were used to participate and interviews were conducted and compiled through questionnaires.

On the questionnaire, participants were informed that their identities would remain anonymous. All 14 of the questionnaires were completed and the data was then collected and transcribed into an Excel spreadsheet to categorise all the questions and answers. This was done in order to do an analysis with the attention focused on the identified themes from the study.

This final chapter critically explains and gives detail to the comprehensive lessons and new realisations as a result of this study. The remaining sections of this chapter gives a summary of the findings, addresses and gives attention to the implications and identifies and makes recommendations for future research are also being addressed in this chapter.

4.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on the theory and the answers compiled by means of questionnaires, it was interesting to find that most the participants were aware of the concept, had a basic understanding and was quite excited. What was interesting was the fact that employees in the SA Banking Industry were of the belief that the Banking Industry was ready to be part of this breakthrough, and they deemed themselves ready to be part of it, which was a positive response. On the contrary, they were of the opinion that the South African work force was not ready to partake, due to technology and infrastructure and some even made mention of maturity. Comparing these two findings, it would be safe to say that they believe that the Banking Industry is mature, equipped and resourceful and has the infrastructure and technology to drive this.

Based on the theory, which is supported by the feedback based on the questionnaire, there are management challenges that follow virtual work. The below three are directly correlated between the research that was done at the bank and the theory:

- **Organisational culture:** virtual working tools are becoming the new way of work and it is imperative that leadership should start recognising it. These include rewarding, promoting and recognising virtual team members the same way as normal employees. Detailed change management needs to take place in order for this transition to be deemed as successful.

  Based on the feedback received by means of interviews and questionnaires from the participants of the study, they believe that detailed change management would be required should the virtual workplace be implemented in the South African banking arena. Special focus needs to be given to generation X that prefers to come to an office and have face to face interaction versus the millennials that prefer a more virtual environment and will come to an office for meetings only when required. Cultural changes need to take place especially depending on roles, experience and the expertise of the identified workforce.

- **Information management systems:** new management and new control systems need to be designed and implemented in order to track activities such as workload because it will be different to the conventional methods and tools that are in place. Information now needs to be more visible and the workflow, workload and systems used to perform tasks must be based on all activities that the team performs. If not properly managed and tracked, it might not be a true reflection of the actual work performance and output levels of these teams.

  In Chapter two the author proposed a workflow system that could possibly be considered for the virtual workplace. Infrastructure, technology and cost can be seen as the core of this study as it provides a platform to bring the concept into a reality and is practically implementable in the South African Banking Industry.

- **Electronic communication and collaboration technologies:** for a virtual team to be able to work effectively, the team members from the various locations need access to a standard set of electronic communication tools in order for them to perform their tasks and communicate with each other.

From an implementation point of view, the cost associated with virtual work would be an expensive exercise during the start-up phase, but would save the organisation money on

the long run. Communication was identified as one of the strongest success factors to make a success of this initiative by the participants that took part in the study.

Based on the literature review and the feedback from participants, the most important factor that needs to be considered and paid extra attention to is the building of trust among team members and management.

It has been concluded that trust could be built virtually and does not require face-to-face interaction. This is based on how the virtual teams grow through team member reliability, consistency and responsiveness when dealing with teammates and customers, or what is known as ability-based or task-based trust.

Literature form Chapter two states that, in order to build trust in a virtual team, quick responses to electronic communications from team members, reliable performance and consistent follow-through are required. An interesting fact is that participants felt that clear communication and delivering on actions as agreed would contribute to a better trust relationship. Unlike face-to-face teams, virtual team members establish trust based on predictable performance. Some of the participants felt that face-to-face interaction was required in operations roles due to the daily rapid changes.

According to the literature study done in Chapter two, a disadvantage of virtual teams is the lack of physical interaction and a level of social interaction which leads to isolation and de-attachment among team members in a virtual working space. This statement was supported by some of the participants in the study, being in the operations space which constantly had to adapt to changes in real time.

The biggest advantage of a virtual team that any organisation can benefit from is associated with cost savings. Based on the literature it is believed that the organisation can cut all its expenses on real estate, office spaces, utilities bills such as gas, electricity, water, facility management, maintenance etc. Many organisations outsource their operations to the low-cost regions. With reference to the feedback from the participants they share a similar view. What resonated mostly with them was the fact that they were able to cut travelling cost, spend less time in traffic and ultimately have a better work life balance. Some described it as a cost benefit to both the organisation and the employee.

4.3 LIMITATIONS

A limitation to this study was the fact that the population size was too small. It is the opinion of the researcher that, in future, a quantitative study should be done about the concept of virtual work and the employee and organisational readiness and willingness to partake.

4.4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the research, literature and questionnaires that were conducted, the author is of the belief that virtual work is a concept that the participants are very familiar with and an avenue that employees in the banking industry would consider taking on due to the strong IT infrastructure and financial back-up.

With the findings, it is clear that not every role in the banking environment would be eligible to partake in this journey, but mostly sales and professional supporting roles such as finance, marketing and information technology areas. Operations roles still require or prefer having day to day interaction since work changes rapidly and changes must be applied in real time.

The author would like to recommend that future research should be done on how to practically implement a virtual working place in the Banking Industry. The focus must be on a step-by-step approach. The potential roles that would be impacted could be identified and case studies should be developed around the practical implementation.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the findings of the literature review as well as the questionnaire that were used, were summarised and conclusions and recommendations were made on the development framework for the implementation of a virtual workplace environment in the South African Banking Industry.

Recommendations for the implementation of a practical guide in terms of how to create a virtual working environment and the identification of certain roles that should be considered to partake in this journey were made.

Limitations and implications for future were discussed at length and suggestions were made towards further studies.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONAIRE

Welcome

The concept of virtual work, virtual working systems, virtual employees is a concept that is currently trending in the South African Labour market. With this concept comes a variety of questions, challenges and opportunity, not only for the organisation, but for the employee as well. The South African Banking industry is known for its world class systems and infrastructure and from a business continuity perspective on can imagine how much value a virtual workplace can add to life of the employees and the operational performance of the bank if managed correctly. The question untimely remains, is the South African Banking industry ready for this shift, and what frameworks is required to support this initiative.

I am currently enrolled for a Master's in Business Administration at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Business School, and I have to write a research article on the development framework for the implementation of a virtual workplace environment in the South African Banking Industry in order to meet all the requirements to obtain the MBA degree.
Therefore, thank you so much for your willingness to assist, your opinions and views is appreciated.

How to complete the questionnaire:

- Please give as much possible detail
- Please base your answers on how you most recently felt (± the last 12 months), unless the question asked you to do otherwise

All information will be regarded as confidential and your **privacy** will be guaranteed. The information assembled from your participation in this project will be used for no other reason than the purpose of this study.

For further enquiries, please feel free to contact:

Student: Geronomow Frans

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Section 1

Biographical Questionnaire

1. Gender

☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Race

☐ White ☐ African ☐ Coloured
☐ Indian ☐ Other

3. How old are you?

Years

4. How long have you been working for this organisation?

_____

5. Do you have line manager responsibilities?

☐ Yes ☐ No

6. How are you employed?

	Temporay
	PermanenT
	Fixed term

7. Marital status

	Single		Married
	Widow/widower		Remarried

☐ Divorced

8. Number of children

☐

9. Home language

Afrikaans	
English	
Sepedi	
IsiZulu	
Sesotho	
Setswana	
IsiXhosa	
IsiTsonga	
Tshivenda	
IsiSwati	
Other	

10. Please indicate your **highest level of education / qualifications**

Matric / Grade 12	
Diploma	
Degree	
Honours degree	
Master's degree	
Doctorate degree	
Other (not included in the options above)	

11. Please indicate your area of expertise at your work place

Sales	
Operations	
IT	

SECTION 2

The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain valuable and qualitative information from you regarding virtual work.

1. What is your understanding of the concept virtual work

2. Would you say it is a new concept to you , or are you familiar with it

3. Do you think your organisation is ready for such a framework and why

4. Do you think that the South African Work force is ready for virtual work and why

5. Are you ready to be part of such a work force and why?

6. How do managers manage virtual employees?

7. How should managers manage virtual employees?

8. For a virtual team to be successful, do you think that communication plays a huge role, and why?

9. What would motivate employees to part–take in virtual teams?

10. What do you think is the advantages of virtual work for the employees?

11. What do you think is the advantages for the managers that manage virtual teams?

12. What do you think is the disadvantages experienced by employees that is part of a virtual team?

13. What do you think is the disadvantages experienced by managers that manage virtual teams?

14. Do you think that the way the banking industry is currently operating, virtual work would be something worthwhile to consider?

15. Do you think it will cost more money to manage or will it save the bank money, if so please give examples?

16. Would you say that trust play an important role in being part of a virtual team, please discuss?

Please provide your comments on below challenges that might be experienced by the management, team and individuals that will be part of a virtual team:

<u>Management challenges</u>

Please provide your input on the following challenges experienced by managers:

- HR Management

- Learning and Development

- Organisational culture

- Information management and systems

- Leadership

Team challenges

Please provide your input on the following challenges that might be experienced by members of a virtual team:

- Building trust with team members- discuss

- Feelings of isolation- discuss

- Technical and Interpersonal skills in team- discuss

- Target and Team performance management

Individual challenges

Please provide your insight on the challenges individuals might experience when part of the virtual work environment:

- Lack of direction and priorities

- Difficulty establishing trust

- Lack of Face - to - Face interaction

In your opinion would you regard the following as advantages of virtual teams, and why:

- Cost savings

- Leveraging on global talent

- Increased productivity and higher profits

- Fresh opportunities

In your opinion would you regard the following as disadvantages of virtual teams, and why

- Cost of technology

- Conflict between teams and management

- Social isolation

What would you consider is the most important role a virtual team member has to fulfil?

Do you think that performance management is important when being part of a virtual team, and why?

How do you think performance should be managed?

What methods would you say is important to look at when managing a virtual team?

Do you think that it is important to have touch base sessions as a team, if yes how often?

Do you think Service Level Agreements are important in a virtual team?

What would you like to see in the performance categories that you will be managed on?

Will chat rooms be beneficial to discuss work, and why?

THE END