



Maintaining inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment



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Orientation: The outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has pushed companies to reconsider and change how they operate. This article explores how leaders maintain inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment, which promotes employee well-being and inclusivity.

Research purpose: There is minimal literature on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected workplaces in how they operate. This study aims to explore how leaders maintain inclusive leadership in this new virtual work environment.

Motivation for the study: The effectiveness of a leader is enabled by their ability to influence their followers. The virtual work setup necessitates leaders to ensure the contribution of employees, and this can be achieved by an inclusive leader.

Research approach/design and method: A qualitative exploratory research method was followed. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted from semi-structured interviews. Fourteen middle- to senior-level managers from various financial institutions, insurance companies and government entities were interviewed.

Main findings: There is still a lack of trust by leaders, as they do not give staff freedom to fully make the decisions. Leaders are not adequately trained to adapt to managing virtual teams.

Practical/managerial implications: Leaders are expected to be the driving force of inclusive leadership, thereby contributing positively to employee well-being. Organisations need to fully equip managers by providing continuous training and development.

Contribution/value-add: Inclusion is a capability needed for leaders as they are expected to motivate employees in any organisation. Employees who feel included will positively contribute to the organisation, resulting in the organisation achieving their objectives.

Keywords: inclusion; inclusive leadership; virtual work environment; relational leadership; COVID-19.

Introduction

When employees feel included, they contribute positively to the organisation. Inclusion positively influences the impact on the employee's self-esteem, resulting in the development of trust between the leader and the employee. Leaders are expected to be the driving force of inclusive leadership, and they find themselves leading in a new context. They are also expected to adjust to this new phenomenon, which is the virtual environment.

The study's foundation is a relational leadership theory, which is an emerging concept (Fischer, 2019). The author further describes relational leadership as the coordination of two people through a social influence leadership process that builds and results in a relationship. Drawing from relational leadership theory and to further understand how leaders maintain inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment, the researcher used the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership. The LMX theory developed by Graen in 1975 is a social exchange approach that focuses on three dimensions: leader, follower and relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Several scholars have undertaken extensive studies on various styles of leadership, for example, servant leadership (Eva et al. (2019)), transformational leadership (Eisenberg et al. (2019)) and shared leadership (Zhu et al. (2018)). However, the study of inclusive leadership in a virtual work setup is minimal.

Employees who work in various locations, without meeting physically, are known as virtual working (Franken et al., 2021). The shift to virtual working has affected employees, and leaders have had to consider the well-being of employees. In spite of the virtual work environment being a new setup for leaders, the literature has revealed that organisations have adopted it well, despite early fears (Mawson, 2020). One of the challenges facing leaders is the ability to enable a supportive environment in a virtual setup. Other challenges to working virtually include physical spaces and technological issues (Chai & Park, 2022). A leader is recognised as the individual who has a significant factor that influences employees' experience of inclusion in the workplace. Leaders are expected to ensure that employees contribute positively to the workplace. Furthermore, one way of achieving this is for a leader to be inclusive (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2021). Sun et al. (2024) highlight the unique attributes and behaviours of an inclusive leader, such as self-awareness and the ability to recognise their own biases. The author further states that a leader's decision-making process includes being transparent and fair and proving commitment to equity.

An employee's psychological well-being can be impacted by a new environment in which they find themselves in, including working online (Chai & Park, 2022). Organisations where leaders and employees interact to meet organisational goals are also affected by the new phenomenon of working virtually. Organisations find themselves having to adapt to this big shift. The problem faced by organisations is the possibility of having leaders who might not be adequately prepared to adapt to a virtual working setup.

Research purpose and objectives

The study focused on the commitment of leaders in promoting and practising inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment. The aim was to improve the understanding of how the leaders maintain inclusivity in this setup, which is quite a new phenomenon to them.

Five questions were developed to meet the objectives of the study:

- How do leaders include employees in discussions and decisions in which their voices and perspectives might otherwise be absent?
- How do leaders encourage employees to discuss diverse viewpoints and perspectives in problem-solving?
- How have leaders enabled employees to have access to organisational resources, both tangible and intangible, which would facilitate employees to further promote and implement innovative ideas?
- How have leaders organised any activities outside working hours to create team bonding?
- Describe other communication avenues that leaders have set up to maintain connection with the team members?

Literature review

Fischer (2019) states that relational leadership is a concept that is newly developed. The author describes relational leadership as a coordination between two parties engaging in a leadership process of social influence that develops and produces a relationship. The author further states that relational leadership serves as a base framework to allow the consideration of leadership in any situation where leadership exists. Inclusive leadership is another type of relational leadership (Khan et al., 2020). The LMX theory of leadership is a form of relational relationship that was used to further understand how leaders maintain inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment.

Chamakiotis et al. (2021) state that leadership is a prerequisite for virtual teams that perform at a high level for a sustainable virtual team. Inclusiveness rests with organisational leaders at the supervisory level and needs to be cascaded down to the employee level (Rice et al., 2021). Inclusion is essential for employees in the workplace, concentrating on an employee's sense of belonging (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2021). Ashmawy (2023) defines inclusive leadership as what a leader does and says to acknowledge, appreciate and encourage others. The author further explains that inclusive leadership recognises and accepts employee differences, manages diversity and welcomes employee input. Inclusive leaders use the first-person plural pronouns, such as 'us', 'we' and 'our', instead of 'I', 'me' or 'mine' (Alang et al., 2022). The above-mentioned attributes are expected to be used by leaders in managing virtually. The next section will look closely at the hallmarks of inclusive leadership, which are important in determining how leaders manage inclusivity. These form the basis for the formulation of the research questions.

Hallmarks and the impact of inclusive leadership

Self-awareness, or the ability to recognise one's own prejudices; a dedication to diversity and inclusion; an openness to communication, cooperation and collaboration; employee empowerment and development and flexibility and adaptation are all hallmarks of inclusive leadership (Sharma et al., 2023). The impact of inclusive leadership includes psychological safety, psychological empowerment, employee self-esteem and the belongingness of employees.

While inclusive leaders need certain qualities, it is important to recognise that they may face challenges in unfamiliar environments. It is essential to first understand the nature of the virtual work environment and virtual teams before examining the challenges faced by leaders and employees.

Virtual work environment and team

Simran et al. (2021) define a virtual workplace as a workbench with essentials to complete a job, with workers connecting via the Internet. The objective is to enable employees to

conduct work from various locations. Whereas a virtual working employee is one who is self-managed and needs to structure and plan their days independently (Adamovic et al., 2022). The literature highlights advantages of working virtually, such as flexibility of the work, improved job satisfaction, work–family life balance and productivity. On the other hand, disadvantages of working virtually include less likelihood of promotions, reduced learning opportunities and social isolation (Adamovic et al., 2022). A collection of individuals who can conduct a task without the necessity of in-person communication is referred to as the virtual team (Chai & Park, 2022).

The requirements for a virtual team's performance include a combination of skills, that is, communication, relationship-building capability, consistency and trust (Moosa et al., 2023). Motivated employees drive innovation, and an inclusive leader should and can facilitate this. For employees to positively contribute to the success of the organisation, an inclusive leader must constantly inspire and support both individual and team performance.

Challenges of inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment

Having defined the virtual work environment, employee and team, it is essential to look at some of the challenges faced by leaders and employees.

A study on remote work and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic conducted by Bone (2023) in New Zealand revealed that executives were reluctant to permit remote work because of concerns about monitoring, decreased employee commitment, connection, communication issues and poor performance. Shore and Chung (2021) and Adamovic et al. (2022) state that inclusive leaders may encounter obstacles such as organisations that prioritise safeguarding their interests. For instance, Yahoo's CEO told all its tech employees to come back to work. According to the CEO, creating a great workplace requires teamwork and communication. Adding to the list of people who oppose working remotely is Netflix's co-chief executive, who stated that he does not see any benefit (Adamovic et al., 2022). This can lead to leaders experiencing challenges of reduced ability of enabling a supportive environment resulting in less opportunities for growth and development of staff (Birkinshaw et al., 2021). All these display leaders and organisations that are not interested in the well-being of employees and only focus on the bottom line.

Twitter gave permission to its employees to work from home indefinitely, while a French car manufacturer, Groupe PSA, also allowed its non-production staff to work virtually indefinitely (Mawson, 2020). Groupe SA has since merged with Fiat Chrysler, and the company had to review its policy.

It is not only leaders who face challenges but also employees do. Chai and Park (2022) highlight challenges such as physical space and technological issues. Kotowski et al. (2022) state that employees find themselves in bad ergonomic practices, that is, working in their lounges, bedrooms or even at their dining room tables. Franken et al. (2021) add issues such as isolation from colleagues, unfavourable working conditions from home as well as unpreparedness. Employees feel lonely and isolated, which could result in unmet social needs, as highlighted by Moosa et al. (2023). While Simran et al. (2021) highlight the challenge of employees not meeting organisational goals, Shaik and Makhecha (2019) also state the difficulty of interactions among team members.

Lastly, Adamovic et al. (2022) point out that employees might be reluctant to work in a virtual environment because of the fear of social exclusion, lack of visibility and opportunities for promotions in the workplace.

Contrary to the challenges experienced, there are opportunities in working virtually. Reduced distraction, higher immersion in the work, focus and dedication to the job can result in employees advancing in their careers (Shaik & Makhecha, 2019). Employees feel less stress and have a better work–life balance, job satisfaction, more flexibility and autonomy. With the advantages and disadvantages of a virtual work environment, leaders are expected to keep the balance, while, on the other hand, they need to have the capability of managing their own challenges that they face.

Research design

The following sections highlight the research approach, research strategy and research method employed in this study and discuss them under the relevant headings.

Research approach and strategy

A qualitative approach was selected for the study, based on an inductive-exploratory approach as the researcher was able to gain more insights on how leaders maintain inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment (Saunders et al., 2016). The researcher conducted a grounded approach, which assisted the researcher in the data processing in the context of business management (Saunders et al., 2016). The researcher used a cross-sectional study because of time limitations. The study aimed to explore and understand the maintenance of inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the explorative research.

Research method

The following section details the method used in researching this study.

Research setting, participants and sampling methods

Because of the enhancement of communication tools that organisations find themselves using, interviews were conducted through a virtual communication facility, that is, Microsoft Teams in a professional manner. The target population for this research was middle and senior leaders who work in large South African corporations, including government entities.

A purposive snowball sampling approach was adopted to ensure access to more leaders. The final sample of the research included fourteen leaders from various industries, including the financial sector, insurance and government entities. The level of management was a combination of middle and senior. The minimum number of direct reports for participants was three, with experience in leading teams that ranged from 3 years to 8 years.

Data collection methods

Data collection commenced only after ethical clearance approval was obtained from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) research ethics committee (Annexure A). The purpose of the ethical clearance is to ensure that all the institution's research is bound by specific ethical principles, such as the protection of participants, the preservation of the participant's rights and the protection of the interest of the researcher (GIBS green pages, 2024). The questions asked of the participants (see Table 1 for participants and Box 1 for research questions) were derived from the literature review (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

All 14 interviews were scheduled telephonically, via the WhatsApp platform or by e-mail. The interviews were conducted through the Microsoft Teams platform. Permission to record the interview was requested from each participant, and the interview process and confidentiality were confirmed with each participant prior to the commencement of the interview. The researcher informed each participant about the purpose of the study. The researcher provided the interview guide to the participants prior to the interview. The researcher excluded the themes from each question. The researcher communicated the themes while asking each question. The researcher used open-ended questions to encourage the participants to answer the questions and provide more insights. If the answer was not clear, the researcher probed further to get clarification.

Data recording

Microsoft Teams was the platform used to record the interviews. The researcher ensured that errors in the transcripts were corrected as Microsoft Teams cannot always be 100% accurate. Even though the Microsoft Teams platform displayed the full names of participants, because of its nature of configuration, participants were identified in numerical order when reporting to promote confidentiality.

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

To ensure reliability and validity, the researcher used a list of interview questions that formed the basis and guidelines for the interview. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview without penalty. This is evident in the consent form that was sent to the participants prior to participating in the interview (see sample in Annexure B). The population was limited to middle and senior leaders, with a minimum of three direct reports. The researcher ensured that all interviews were recorded to confirm the dependability, and transcripts were obtained from the Microsoft Teams recordings (see sample on Annexure C). To ensure credibility, open-ended questions were asked, and the researcher used a neutral questioning technique. Participants were asked to elaborate to ensure understanding of the answers, and the researcher would repeat the responses to ensure understanding from the participants when applicable.

Data analysis

The researcher conducted a thematic approach to analyse the data, with the aid of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) ATLAS-ti. Using the inductive approach, the researcher selected keywords and coded the data with 146 first-order codes, 15 categories and five themes. The researcher further used Microsoft Excel as well as Microsoft Word and grouped the first-order codes into categories using Microsoft Word, created a table and sorted the codes into categories and used ATLAS.ti to generate themes. Constant referral to the categories was necessary to ensure that the researcher does not lose the meaning of the research.

TABLE 1: Research study participants.

Participants	Industry	Managerial level	Number of direct reports	Gender
Participant 1	Financial institution	Middle	11	Male
Participant 2	Government	Senior or executive	3	Male
Participant 3	Insurance	Middle	10	Female
Participant 4	Government	Middle	4	Female
Participant 5	Government	Middle or senior	6	Female
Participant 6	Financial institution	Middle or senior	6	Female
Participant 7	Government	Senior or executive	6	Female
Participant 8	Insurance	Middle	10	Female
Participant 9	Government	Middle	11	Female
Participant 10	Government	Middle	12	Female
Participant 11	Financial institution	Senior	6	Female
Participant 12	Financial institution	Middle	12	Female
Participant 13	Financial institution	Senior	3	Male
Participant 14	Financial institution	Senior	15	Female

BOX 1: Research questions.

The research questions formed from the literature review are as follows:

- How do leaders include employees in discussions and decisions in which their voices and perspectives might otherwise be absent?
- How do leaders encourage employees to discuss diverse viewpoints and perspectives to problem-solving?
- How have leaders enabled employees to have access to organisational resources, both tangible and intangible, which would facilitate employees to further promote and implement innovative ideas?
- How have leaders organised any activities outside working hours to create team bonding?
- Describe other communication avenues that leaders have set up to maintain connection with the team members?

TABLE 2: Analysis of data.

Classification	Number
First-order code	146
Categories	15
Themes	7

Thematic analysis

Various themes were formulated from the results that were relevant to the research questions. The findings revealed that in general, leaders have the willingness to include employees in decision-making; however, there is a lack of trust from the leaders' point of view when it comes to the final decision-making. The findings, verbatim from the respondents, further revealed that a virtual team setup can bring challenges to open communication. If employees do not have the right tools, then the organisation will not be able to change or implement anything new because they will always be stuck in one way of doing things and unable to innovate. As leaders seem to be struggling with online interaction, they have a tendency to steer employees to have a face-to-face interaction. Overall, there is a huge room for improvement for leaders to be more involved in implementing inclusive leadership in the different sectors within the country.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Pretoria Gordon Institute of Business Science Ethics Committee.

Results

The main research question is how leaders maintain inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment. The sub-questions related to the primary research question were discussed in detail in chapter three, together with the relevant themes. The study's conclusions provided more information about how leaders might continue to practice inclusive leadership in a virtual setting.

Research question 1

How do leaders include employees in discussions and decisions in which their voices and perspectives might otherwise be absent?

Theme one: Flexibility and adaptability

'Everything is discussed with the employees to get their buy in. With the years of experience with the teams, it is easier when everybody is involved. And you make sure that we look at how the impact of whatever decision that we take on everyone so. We discuss it and get proposals. Before making the final decision, the final decision lies with me.' (Participant 1, Middle, 11, Male)

'There is always that whole you know blocker or constraint where your organisational processes might limit you as a manager or depending on where you are in the structure. So, you find that your intent might be well meaning to give you know your subordinates, those open doors or make them be able to

collaborate with other teams and things like that. But sometimes the restriction is on corporate processes and corporate restrictions.' (Participant 4, Middle, 4, Female)

'For instance, if ever I get a request from my HOD [*Head of Department*] head of our department and I need to now filter it down to the rest of the team, I will do the research I will do the groundwork and then when I go to the team with a solid plan to see this is how we are going to execute this campaign, this project and then what are your suggestions? Do you think that this could work? Do you think it cannot work? But I do not give it all to them to say, OK, fine. What are your thoughts? I need to do the structure the strategy first before I take it to them and then they will then add.' (Participant 5, Middle/Senior, 6, Female)

'In most, I will ask them for their inputs. For certain decisions, obviously we want them to provide input, but not in everything. I have a discussion with them. I will brief them on the expectation and then I will also provide some guidance and will let them go and let them work on something, let them submit it and then you know have a discussion with them to understand you know the response and also you, know to provide my inputs into the final document, and then once we have reached consensus on what we have discussed and agreed upon, then I will communicate the document.' (Participant 7, Senior/Executive, 6, Female)

'Everyone is the leader, and we lead where we are and everyone's voice is important, it is valuable. So, when we make decisions, especially in my role, especially in the accounts payable, when fixed assets operational I need to actually include my staff before I make a decision, not in everything, obviously, but because they are the ones that are involved in the details, in the processes in the operational processes is very important that I include them in decisions. Even if you know, I provide direction and the guidance, but it will be guided by engagement and collaboration. So, we believe in collaboration with lower-level staff. And it is not always possible to involve the other staff.' (Participant 8, Middle, 10, Female)

'So, the way the team is setup or the construct as a solution owner and the reports of the direct reports to me are either analysts or the SMES [*small and medium enterprises*] which are subject matter experts. So, I do include them in some of the decisions that we make or the discussions. So, I better understand what there thinking is and sometimes if it must be around a solution or something that we do better. They also had or have had input. So, they buy into the change a lot better as well". Inclusive means that you give everyone a voice, and whatever they say does matter, and it obviously contributes towards the organisational success of the journey and whatever you are trying to achieve.' (Participant 11, Senior, 6, Female)

'I have an open-door policy. So whatever decisions especially that is going to impact on my people, we discuss. I will be open with them and then I will make an environment conducive for them to be able to voice their own perspective. And then then we will take it from there ... But at the end of the day, we need to align and meet each other halfway while we are wearing the company's heads. So, whatever is good for the company would be good for us.' (Participant 14, Senior, 15, Female)

Research question 2

How do leaders encourage employees to discuss diverse viewpoints and perspectives in problem-solving?

Theme two: Collaboration

'So, the way the team is setup or the construct as a solution owner and the reports of the direct reports to me are either analysts or the SMES [*small and medium enterprises*] which are subject matter experts. So, I do include them in some of the decisions that we make or the discussions. So, I better understand what their thinking is and sometimes if it must be around a solution or something that we do better. They also had or have had input. So, they buy into the change a lot better as well. Inclusive means that you give everyone a voice, and whatever they say does matter, and it obviously contributes towards the organisational success of the journey and whatever you are trying to achieve.' (Participant 11, Senior, 6, Female)

'Because the way my leadership style is one where I encourage my employees to voice their opinions or even discuss those diverse viewpoints and perspective to try and produce the solution, cause, we would be amazed with what different viewpoints can bring into the table towards the solution that. You are trying to solve for. So, I do encourage that environment.' (Participant 7, Senior/Executive, 6, Female)

'And one way of doing that is by encouraging them to question the status quo so that they have different views in terms of how they can solve a specific problem.' (Participant 12, Middle, 12, Female)

'There are people that have been in that team for more than 10 years or more than 15 years, so, I value their input. They know more, more than me in terms of how the organisation has been doing things and they have more knowledge in terms of the organisation itself ... I might bring in more a different view of how to do things. Every voice counts, no one is an island, and I am not always right, I value their input.' (Participant 5, Middle/Senior, 6, Female)

'We have the global leadership summit is annual event that we have around October, November. And then the following year, it just does not end there, we take the theme for that year, and we run it with our team. And I believe that during those sessions, that's when people open and discuss issues. So, you know, it fosters transparency, and it encourages leaders to actively listen to their staff. And you know, we are trying to build up a culture where we create a safe space for everyone to speak up, you know, and then we follow up with feedback and then we implement, you know, based on staff feedback. For example, I think this year when we had those sessions it was about, it was about seven sessions that we had once a month.' (Participant 7, Senior/Executive, 6, Female)

Research question 3

How have leaders enabled employees to have access to organisational resources, both tangible and intangible, which would facilitate employees to further promote and implement new ideas?

Theme three: Continuous learning

'I always look for encourage them to go on to LinkedIn. There are various courses that you can do and get certificates. Visual courses that you can do on LinkedIn. I always encourage them to do that. There is also at my company there are various virtual courses that we can do that they always do, and they get certificates for because it is particularly important. Then there are articles that we get on fraud that we get from various sources. I share with the employees.

So those things help us learn, even if we are not in one room together, but when we go through these webinars, we see what is happening out there. During working hours when you do not have a meeting, you can join these webinars just to empower, so that they keep themselves, their mental toolbox, always improving. Right to make sure that it is going to help them with innovative ideas from a fraud perspective, we always need to be on aware. So that also helps in terms of them being active on it.' (Participant 6, Middle/Senior, 6, Female)

'Since we COVID, we all have laptops. We all have access to Internet. Sometimes our company there's sites where they would not allow us to access, but you can access if you ask for permission so Website TikTok on company's website but if an employee can say you know, there is an idea that I saw in TikTok. I want to show everyone in the office. Then you would somehow support that as an example. For me, I would support that because I always say to my team remember the fact that I am your manager does not mean that I know everything. We are here to learn from one another, and I think most of the time I try to put the ball in their court.' (Participant 3, Middle, 10, Female)

'So that also helps in terms of them being active on it. And then there's also element of making sure that they use the tools and the technology available in terms of the online meetings or the training and even things that are intangible, like tech support or mentorship. In our company we have various tools in terms of ideas, learning resources. So, we have platforms created, so we do encourage formally for them to sign up on this to learn more.' (Participant 11, Senior, 6, Female)

'I had to make sure that the team has access has data that they need because I think. Our role requires us to do research or just to try and understand what other organisations are doing. And I think the basic ones, things like laptops and headphones, those are the resources that are always ensure that the team must do what they need to do.' (Participant 10, Middle, 12, Female)

'I think also access to the Internet is quite important because as we say that if you have to do research and people do not have the right tools, then you won't be able to change or implement anything new because you'll always be stuck in one process.' (Participant 12, Middle, 12, Female)

'I made them aware of the development opportunities that are available, and I also provide instances some support on you know for them to excel within their career. So normally when we have our performance review discussions, we will have a discussion on where you see yourself. You know, are you still fine? Where you are? Or do you want to progress somewhere else? And then we must put plans in place.' (Participant 9, Middle, 11, Female)

'There are even incentives for employees who will come up with innovative ideas and new ways of doing work. So, it always encourages for the employees to come up with those innovative ideas and they are incentivised for that. So, the environment is very conducive for employees who thinking those innovative ideas on the table.' (Participant 7, Senior/Executive, 6, Female)

'Every year there is someone that is registered for a management programme. The group has what we call the junior leadership programme, Senior Leadership Programme, and middle management programmes. So, every year, you know about one or two people are enrolled for those programmes. Instead of sponsoring one person or getting one person. I think, you know studying, is it not possible to just take that and spread it within everyone for them to do... Small courses, you know, six months

courses, three months courses. Especially innovative courses. Because of that where we are moving, you know technology. Digitalisation, you know, so we look, we look at things like that. We discuss that as a team. We also recognise superior performance, we celebrate, encouraging stuff to do more personally in their work. We also have. inspirational sessions, weekly inspirational session sets. It encourages people to find their purpose.' (Participant 8, Middle, 10, Female)

'Things like LinkedIn Learning and all of that would actually come in handy to say how do we then make sure it has always been critical to give them guidance in terms of what is out there in the market to learn in in terms of solutioning and specifically the agile way of doing things, as well as what the organisation offers so that they can use all the tools that they have and also know sort of directing them to the right people that they can engage them. That is where the intangible comes in.' (Participant 13, Senior, 3, Male)

'I ensure that everyone they have access to, all the tools they need to perform their duties.' (Participant 14, Senior, 15, Female)

Research question 4

How have leaders organised any activities outside working hours to create team bonding?

Theme four: Informal communication

'On a Friday and then let us switch on our cameras. Let us have fun. Those who want to have a drink have drinks.' (Participant 1, Middle, 11, Male)

'No, we have never engaged on any virtual kind of activities for us, but whenever we engage virtually, it is purely on work issues where we have meetings around work related issues. The activities that we did was within the company working hours where it will be a team building and then we will decide on which day, and we will be leaving from the office... Every quarter we go out the whole, branch, or the whole sector. We go out on the weekend away on a Friday and then we play games.' (Participant 2, Senior/Executive, 03, Male)

'That has been carved out for team collaboration and improvement. This helps the team understand each other and I think just given. So, I will say it is outside of the work environment or on teams, given that it might be virtual. And what is also strange about this team bonding activities now that you speak about the diversity and inclusion everyone in the team does not like the same things.' (Participant 11, Senior, 6, Female)

'You know these activities where you only do team building and we're trying to we're doing a facade where we are ticking a box to say we've done you know team building and that should now change culture, and it should change people behaviours. I do not believe in that.' (Participant 4, Middle, 4, Female)

'Oh, and the reason I have not. It is because. Any waking hours outside waking hours for me, it is reserved for family. We spend quite a lot of time in the office or working at home, where most of the time, based on the nature of the work, it is stressful. Sometimes we wake late. Sometimes we knock off and close our laptops after 8:00, so I think for me I did not see the need for us to even take the extra hours that the team had. Away from their family to still be with the team. So, the reason we I did not, or I have not really set aside time outside working hours for the team to bond is because I really wanted the team to use that time to be there with their family. To be quite honest, there is no wake life

balance it. There is not anymore. It is always work, work. So, any little time it should be reserved for family, and that is what I have decided that I am going to do. I prefer to have one-on-one chats with the team, with my team. That is where and the one-on-one the rule that we I have is the one-on-one is not about work. We do have monthly meetings, weekly meetings to catch up on the work where they are struggling, where they need my help. But when we have that one-on-one catch up, it is about them, their family and anything that it is happening in their life. Besides work, so that is the time that I used to try to understand what they what is happening with them outside work. So, I use that time which is time that I use during working hours.' (Participant 12, Middle, 12, Female)

'Plus, camera. Also, it was we decided to do a year end function on camera wherever you are. We decided that we are going to choose a space in wherever we are that time we are still in the hard lockdown. We were at home. So, we needed to choose a space in our House where we will setup a table the way you want to set it up, like for lunch. And then you prepare your own menu, whatever that you want to eat and then over set it up or whatever you want to set it up. We all put on cameras; we were all sharing.' (Participant 10, Middle, 12, Female)

'We do a cohesion, team building outside the office. If someone's birthday will come to the office, celebrate the birthday just for that team coaching to ensure that is maintained even though we are still virtual. So, we do that. Two weeks ago, I took my team to Saint. In hotel where we just discussed everything about my leadership style, how they feel, what concerns them. You know, I decided to take them out outside the office environment. For them to be free and had a loose discussions which helped the organisation or even the team to perform better and contribute meaningfully to the achievement of the organisation's objectives.' (Participant 7, Senior/Executive, 6, Female)

'Yeah, so I tried to look back at this recently in terms of the two to three years. That has not really happened. Quite often there has been instances where we are forced to meet, maybe because of the social demands where you need to support one another. From my perspective, we have lunches with our team during the week where we would then have a day set. There have been very few instances beyond just the lunches. In fact, today there has not been any besides the lunches where we just say let us spend half a day on a Saturday going elsewhere. no, we do not. It would be nice to also do that, at a family level or people putting their spouses, getting to know that family, their families as well. But it is not something that we have done.' (Participant 13, Senior, 3, Male)

'As the leader I need to know and understand my people. The level that it also contributes to their behaviour. It can be even during working hours where we say so I what I do on a weekly basis every week, every Thursday. So, saying before an hour to say let us have laptops closed. Everything else let us do games or something, something that will make us laugh and stimulate us and switch off from the work and that is that is recharging for us. We also have team buildings that might not be in the same environment where go somewhere else where we switch off and just have fun and just say let us be human and just entertain the child that is in us. That is what we do.' (Participant 14, Senior, 15, Female)

Theme five: Social support

'And team lunches. We have dinners as well, like when we know it is a day that we come from the office. After the office day, we

go out for dinner as a team to make sure that we you also check on people in the team.’ (Participant 6, Middle/Senior, 6, Female)

‘The WhatsApp group with my team, which is where we celebrate each other. That is where we communicate things that are not even work related.’ (Participant 12, Middle, 12, Female)

‘We have a member that does not even have a WhatsApp profile. He is my two IC [*second-in-charge*], but I said to him you are you are missing. on these things. On WhatsApp, I do not know if it is a religion thing. I try to ask him what is the, you know, why is it that he does not want access to because he has a search phone, so he has a phone from the company, but he is not active. So yes, so as much as I say to him, we are discussing things during meetings.’ (Participant 9, Middle, 11, Female)

Theme six: Professional relationship

‘The culture of the organisation is. It is not a good culture in terms of, OK. Let us have team buildings. If you get team buildings, it is something that nobody is interested in, right? t yes, they do not see any value to it. Also, you know, and you find that this the executives they find will say, OK, let us have a team building. They will say okay fine. If you want to have a team building it out of your pockets and then you get a situation where you find in your team someone cannot afford. Now to have this, so there are whole lot of dynamics that come with having a team building, you know and so that is my restriction, but it is something that I would love to have I would love. If I were able to have it and to pay it out of my pocket, I would have, but you know, an organisation we should be enabled. You know to just say, okay, fine, your team can go on a team building, it is on your department’s call centre, you know, so that it creates that we can engage I mean, with each other outside the work environment formal setup.’ (Participant 5, Middle/Senior, 6, Female)

Research question 5

Describe other communication avenues that leaders have set up to maintain connection with the team members?

Theme seven: Other communication avenues

‘Yes, other than the virtual, like your Ms. team zoom, we do have WhatsApp groups where we communicate things on WhatsApp on daily basis. They can just get onto the call. I mean on to the WhatsApp and just say whatever the issues are. The communication is there and is very much open and anytime of the day, a person can just drop in a WhatsApp. Even if it is no work related, sometimes we do check on each other’s health. Yes, it is just to check if everyone is still OK’. We check each other’s work via WhatsApp, and we do call each other even now and then. I do most of the things on my phone. I can sign documents on the phone’. I can have meetings on the phone.’ (Participant 2, Senior/Executive, 03, Male)

‘It is the social media we have WhatsApp, and this is not for work because again it is just to create that team morale where we share information like if there is something that we saw funny or something around teamwork or an article that.’ (Participant 11, Senior, 6, Female)

‘The WhatsApp also it’s an assumption to say everybody’s fine with it.’ (Participant 5, Middle/Senior, 6, Female)

‘Yeah. So, what I have done I created what do we call on WhatsApp.’ (Participant 3, Middle, 10, Female)

‘Choose that we use to collaborate and communicate that, and we also have one step, one other tool that the world uses, right the WhatsApp, we keep in contact we communicate to celebrate each other, say somebody birthday on a Saturday.’ (Participant 14, Senior, 15, Female)

‘And the thing is, the challenge that also when I came in that I experienced is it was the culture. There are no policy or strict guidelines to say, OK, we allowed to use WhatsApp, but we do use WhatsApp.’ (Participant 5, Middle/Senior, 6, Female)

‘You find somebody is on lunch and they are not on teams, and you need that person. You send a message via WhatsApp.’ (Participant 5, Middle/Senior, 6, Female)

‘You know the popular one, the WhatsApp group. Right where they can call and talk about any financial issues, any medical issues, family issues and all that. Right where they can call and talk about any financial issues, any medical issues, family issues and all that. You send them something. Make them smile. Make them laugh, right? So, we have a WhatsApp group that we discuss work, and it is strictly professional, but we have a WhatsApp group where we can just let it let it out like, you know, have fun on. That was a group. We do emojis. You see something on TikTok that reminds you of someone you send it to the group they love. You know, we joke about it and yes, we connect and that way you can see when someone is not responding, you check with them on the side.’ (Participant 6, Middle/Senior, 6, Female)

‘And then again technology is really advanced in such a way that the social media and social media don’t mean where you know you are in Facebook or whatever the case might be, but you keep connection whether it’s by communicating on WhatsApp or communicating now as we do me and you on.’ (Participant 4, Middle, 4, Female)

‘So, we yes, we always use. We have a WhatsApp group with all the team members and that is what we are using to ensure that we always know what is happening amongst us. If someone is sick, they will just post. On the team chat and say guys I am not feeling well, and we know that. You know, there is a team member that we now need to. Cover their work or send them flowers or things like that. So, we always engage or communicate with each other. And I think WhatsApp. It is working very well. cause I think most of the time are always on our mobile. Then probably using emails in in other communication methods. So, WhatsApp? It is working for us because most of our times we can say a WhatsApp messages are coming through again that WhatsApp message our group is not also to discuss with related matters is for us to discuss things that are pertaining to us as people human beings.’ (Participant 12, Middle, 12, Female)

‘In the space that we operate in, we are all required to have cell phones which is provided by the company and obviously in there we have the WhatsApp groups that we obviously communicate’. An instant communication like that way we just talk freely on the WhatsApp.’ (Participant 10, Middle, 12, Female)

‘So, we would have WhatsApp call, you know where we switch on the camera. And then zoom.

We will then use zoom just to you know, to be in contact with other people, with the with each other to say how. How are you doing? Are you, you know, family wise and so.’ (Participant 9, Middle, 11, Female)

‘So, but here we are more into teams and obviously emails, which has worked effectively, I must say cause at the beginning I was sceptical to say guys, why are we not having a WhatsApp

group for the team to do for ease of communication and life, you know. The copy to someone to update. We can do it concurrently in the same portal. So, teams have worked effectively for communication, so I do not really see a need for the WhatsApp group now.' (Participant 7, Senior/Executive, 6, Female)

'We mostly use WhatsApp, so WhatsApp is not necessarily business tool. We use WhatsApp all the time. And whether we do phone calls or video calls, depending on what we want to achieve.' (Participant 13, Senior, 3, Male)

Discussion

The following is the discussion of the connection between the results from the interviews conducted.

Theme: Flexibility and adaptability

The first question that the participants were asked was how they included staff in discussions and decisions in which their voices might otherwise be absent. The intention was to understand how flexible the leaders are when making decisions and how adaptable they are to inclusivity in the workplace. An inclusive leader encourages employees to provide their opinions and views, which equates to respecting employees' self-value (Khan et al., 2020). Based on the responses from the participants, leaders demonstrate an understanding of what being inclusive means. They can define inclusiveness as giving every employee a voice, and what they say matters. Leaders are for the idea of including employees in decision-making as they acknowledge that employees are the core of the business. This contributes towards organisational success and whatever else organisations are trying to achieve, stated one of the participants. One of the leaders said that they promote inclusivity by having an open-door policy; therefore, any decisions, especially those that are going to impact employees, are discussed with them. This contributes positively to the hallmarks of inclusive leadership as stated by Khan et al. (2020), which, when leadership is open, encourages employees to achieve job outcomes. The findings further highlight that leaders consider employees' opinions before deciding; however, leaders still make the final decision, as stated by one of the participants. Mawson (2020) highlights the disadvantages of working virtually, such as employees' limited interaction with one another. This could be one of the reasons leaders somehow limit the decision-making of employees. Two participants, one of whom works for a government institution, cited a challenge in terms of stringent processes within the organisation, which block them from effectively implementing inclusive decision-making. Another participant mentioned that they do not always include everyone in decision-making, and they also consider the type of decision they include their staff in, depending on the level of the decision that must be made.

Discussion: Flexibility and adaptability

Leaders have the willingness to include employees in decision-making; however, there is a lack of trust from the leaders regarding the final decision-making. One

participant stated that they include employees in some of the decisions they make. Another participant stated that they will do the research and the groundwork, and then they go to the team with a solid plan to show this is how they are going to execute the project. Only then do they ask what the employees' suggestions are. Another participant stated that they include the employees in decision-making, but not all. They will ask them for their input for certain decisions. Obviously, they want them to provide input, but not in everything. This somehow affects the employee's belongingness. Shore and Chung (2021) state that the need for belongingness can be satisfied by the degree to which employees perceive themselves as being esteemed members of a workgroup. Self-esteem is another hallmark of inclusiveness that needs consideration. Rice et al. (2021) state that inclusion has a positive influence and impact on the employees' self-esteem. The result would be employees feeling included, as well as developing trust towards the leader and the organisation. When employees feel included from the leader, the resulting outcomes include psychological safety, empowerment and identification with a workgroup (Shore & Chung, 2021). Kuknor and Bhattacharya (2021) stress that inclusion needs support by top management, who are the leaders in an organisation and are important contributors to an inclusive culture.

Contrary to this, one of the participants raised a constraint or a blocker where organisational processes might limit them as leaders, depending on where they are in the structure. A leader who subscribes to people-oriented principles supports differences of opinions, interacts with employees, takes into consideration the contributions and opinions of employees and is flexible and adaptable (Gupta et al., 2022).

Theme: Collaboration

The question that was asked of the participants under this theme was how they encourage employees to discuss diverse viewpoints and perspectives in problem-solving. The aim was to establish whether the leaders are open to communication, thereby encouraging staff to freely express themselves, share ideas and ask questions. The findings revealed that a virtual team setup can bring challenges to open communication. The absence of face-to-face or direct contact can result in a lower sense of cohesion and personal rapport among members (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). One of the participants stated that they have their weekly sessions, where the team provides updates on projects that are underway.

Another participant stated that, as a leader, she encourages an environment that is open and free. This enables the team to produce different viewpoints, which can bring diverse solutions, helping the entire team. Another participant stated that one way of doing it is by encouraging employees to question the status quo so that they have different views in solving a specific problem. Lastly, another participant echoed that every voice counts, no one is an island and as leaders,

they are not always right, so they value the employees' input. An advantage of working virtually is that it enables employees to create meaningful communication by using text-based tools that enable employees to take their time while asking a question or responding to one (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

Discussion: Collaboration

Leaders do their best to be open regarding employees being included in voicing their viewpoints. They understand that if they do not encourage staff to voice their opinions and express their viewpoints, they run a risk of any idea being rejected by employees. Unintended consequences could happen when leading a team virtually because of the distance created by the environment. It is, however, not clear how leaders motivate employees to share and discuss varied thoughts and opinions on issue solving. There is no step-by-step process guide on how they need to do this.

Theme: Continuous learning

The question asked of the participants was how they have enabled employees to have access to organisational resources, both tangible and intangible, which would facilitate employees in further promoting and implementing new ideas. The aim was to establish whether leaders encourage and promote continuous learning. Leadership plays a vital role and could affect the creativity and innovation of employees within an organisation (Guo et al., 2022). One participant stated that during working hours, when they do not have scheduled meetings, the employees are encouraged to join webinars that are planned by their organisation. This is to empower them and keep their mental toolbox up to date. Another participant mentioned that their company does not allow access to certain Internet sites, such as TikTok. However, when an employee has an innovative idea, which they might have seen on the site, access to the site can be arranged as an exception and can be shown to everyone in the office.

There is a need for leadership methods to change as individuals and organisations also advance and adapt to new conditions (Mawson, 2020). Mawson's statement is supported by how leaders have responded to the question, such as seeing the importance of access to the Internet because employees need to do research. If employees do not have the right tools, then the organisation will not be able to change or implement anything new because they will always be stuck in one process. Other tangible resources mentioned by the participants include things such as data, laptops and headphones. One of the participants advised that their company has incentives for employees who produce innovative ideas and new ways of doing work. Another participant mentioned that every year there is someone who registers for a management programme. Lastly, one of the participants mentioned that there is also an element of making sure that the employees use the tools and the technology available in terms of online meetings or the

training and even things that are intangible, like tech support or mentorship.

Discussion: Continuous learning

Leaders see the need and the importance for employees to have access to organisational resources. The main thing is connectivity, followed by learning. With companies faced with the virtual working setup, leaders realise that it is not conducive to go to a physical training site. They have enabled platforms such as LinkedIn Learning to ensure continuous learning. One of the participants mentioned that they were even willing to support the amendment of company policy in terms of sites that the staff can access, that is, TikTok. This would be in support of continuous learning and improvement. Innovation leads to team cohesion, that is, the sharing of innovative ideas, discussing problems and making suggestions for any improvement (Ye et al., 2019). Motivated staff drive innovation, and above that, an inclusive leader should enable this. A leader needs to always motivate and encourage employees, which will result in employees positively contributing to the organisation's success. Performance and growth are the basis for the ability of a leader to influence followers, with the aim of achieving organisational goals (Sharma et al., 2023). The responses indicate that leaders support and encourage continuous learning, thereby promoting innovation. The leaders ensure that employees have access to resources, both formal and informal training. Leaders ensure that they provide basic tools such as access to the Internet, laptops and any other relevant working tools. More importantly, they offer intangible support such as mentorship.

Theme: Informal communication

The question for this theme is how leaders have organised any activities outside working hours to create team bonding. It is essential for an inclusive leader to dedicate their time to developing an equal and inclusive culture, instead of focusing on the achievement of figures (Sun et al., 2024). If leaders do this, they create a sense of belongingness and inclusiveness. Leading virtually comes with its own challenges, such as ensuring that employees are motivated, and there is clear communication and continuous development of employees. This indicates that virtual leadership requires competencies for effective communication of a leader, possessing social communication skills, building teams and being able to demonstrate the ability to use technology (Tuschner et al., 2022). The responses from the participants revealed that leaders prefer to have activities during working hours rather than outside working hours. Although the leaders see the benefit of knowing employees better through team building, the general idea is to give employees time to spend with their families rather than to have activities outside working hours.

Discussion: Informal communication

Participants showed that it is possible to connect virtually and keep the team connected even when not meeting

face to face. Other participants showed an element of bias, which speaks to self-awareness as a leader. The leaders do not see the need for employees to have team bonding and decided on behalf of the team not to have any activities, without consulting the team. During the hard lockdown, most leaders did not think of connecting with their teams virtually. They were working all the time, with no time for connecting on a social basis.

Theme: Social support

This theme came under question four of how leaders have organised any activities outside working hours to create team bonding. The participants' responses revealed that leaders use the WhatsApp platform to connect with team members as a means of staying connected, which somehow showed as a way of social support. Other participants try to have lunch outside the office to connect informally with employees. Leaders try to connect with employees socially and try to be as accommodating as possible.

Discussion: Social support

Overall, social support was one of the challenges that the participants found to be useful to connect with employees. Based on the literature review, Franken et al. (2021) highlight issues such as isolation from colleagues, unfavourable working conditions from home and unpreparedness. Employees may feel lonely and isolated, which could result in unmet social needs, as highlighted by Moosa et al. (2023).

Theme: Professional relationship

The theme emanated from question four, which was new compared to the initial themes that were initially formulated by the researcher. The participants feel that it is not only about work but also about the well-being of the employees, and that they should be supporting the employees in this regard. The participants understand the importance of a healthy mind regarding the delivery of goals for organisations. Leaders prefer having team-bonding activities during working hours, rather than after working hours. Others prefer to provide individual support instead of a group setup. Only two participants (4 and 5) mentioned financial constraints as a reason for not having team bonding exercises. One participant mentioned that the company is less interested in team-bonding exercises. Notably, both the leaders who mentioned constraints work in government institutions.

Discussion: Professional relationship

Inclusive leaders may face challenges such as an organisational environment that focuses on protecting the interests of an organisation (Adamovic et al., 2022; Shore & Chung, 2021). The participants' responses indicate that certain organisations neglect employee well-being. One of the participants stated that they prefer providing support to individuals, instead of a group setting. This could result in employees being reluctant to work in a virtual environment because of the fear of social exclusion and lack of visibility (Adamovic et al., 2022).

Limitations

Understanding how leaders maintain inclusivity in a virtual work environment is the main objective of this study. Even if the interviewees do not practice inclusion, there is a chance that they would depict themselves as inclusive leaders by putting themselves in a socially acceptable scenario, and this is known as interviewee bias. This can be avoided by asking more probing questions and asking the interviewee to elaborate or provide practical examples. Additionally, there was a possibility of the interviewer being biased from the beginning, which could influence the responses in a particular way during the interviews (Saunders et al., 2016). This can be avoided by paraphrasing the responses from the participants and the interviewer explaining each theme for a better understanding to avoid bias. The LMX theory, a social exchange method that emphasises three dimensions – leader, follower and relationship – was the foundation of the study (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The notion, according to the authors, is based on the idea that a leader and a follower can form a mature leadership relationship. The study concentrated solely at one facet of the dimension, the leader's point of view. It excluded the followers' (employees') perspective. A separate study can be done from this perspective.

Recommendations

Leaders

The results show that although leaders do their best to be inclusive, they need to work harder in practising inclusive leadership. They need to consider the opinions of employees when making decisions, regardless of their level.

A leader who subscribes to people-oriented principles supports differences of opinions, interacts with employees, takes into consideration the contributions and opinions of employees and is flexible and adaptable (Gupta et al., 2022). Leaders are expected to be the driving force of inclusive leadership, thereby contributing positively to employee well-being. On the other hand, employees are the drivers of the economy (Shafaei et al., 2024). As mentioned, the study is based on the LMX theory, which focuses on three dimensions: leader, follower and relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to Alang et al. (2022), an inclusive leader's capabilities encompass knowledge, skills, behaviours and mentality. The participants' responses make it clear that leadership lacks the necessary tools to assist employees who operate remotely. As they now must work digitally, they struggle to explain and provide real-world instances of how they practice inclusive leadership.

Organisations

Organisations that consider inclusive leadership and adopt equitable workplaces enhance their reputation and increase their competitive advantage (Sun et al., 2024). When an organisation supports and promotes the phenomenon of

inclusion, it can result in positive outcomes and benefits, such as a reduction in the attrition rate (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2021). The decision to promote inclusivity, especially in a virtual work environment, should be a strategic one, that is, it should be decided at a board level, and this will make it easier for leaders to implement it. Programmes should be put in place to support leaders and take them through training to enhance their skills. Good talent can be retained by organisations if their employees feel supported and included. This will result in organisations achieving their goals.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that leaders are not fully equipped to virtually manage teams as this is quite a new phenomenon. Leaders are good at certain aspects of inclusive leadership and lack in other aspects. The findings revealed that a virtual team setup can bring challenges to open communication. The absence of face-to-face or direct contact can result in a lower sense of cohesion and personal rapport among members (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

There are gaps in our understanding of how inclusion in a virtual work environment is perceived by the recipients, that is, employees. As mentioned previously, the study focused on one aspect of the dimension; that is, it only considered the view from a leader's perspective and did not consider the follower's perspective on how they view and experience the relational part of the dimension. A future study could focus on exploring the effects of inclusive leadership from an employee (follower) perspective, from an in-group or out-group perspective, as this study focused on leaders and not employees and can be recommended for a future study.

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Authors' contributions

Primary author B.T. was the main researcher. Contributing author M.H.R.B. contributed to the design of this study and

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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Annexures starts on the next page →

ANNEXURE: A

Ethical Clearance Approval

**Gordon
Institute
of Business
Science**
University
of Pretoria

05 July 2024

GIBS Ethics Committee

Dear Bridget Tshabalala

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

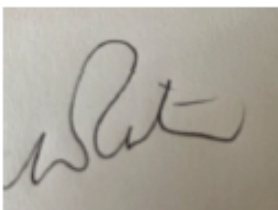
Please note that approval is granted based on the methodology and research instruments provided in the application. If there is any deviation change or addition to the research method or tools, a supplementary application for approval must be obtained.

You have been cleared based on the following as per our application form:

- *prior consent,*
- *voluntary participation without penalty,*
- *no physical harm,*
- *no psychological harm,*
- *confidential information and only anonymous aggregated reporting*
- *storing of data securely*

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards



GIBS MBA Research Ethical Clearance Committee

ANNEXURE: B

Example of a signed consent form from a participant

Informed consent letter:

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on **Maintaining inclusive leadership in a virtual work environment** and am trying to find out more on how leaders maintain this style of leadership in the new set up of working virtually. I would like to set up an appointment for an online interview.

Our interview is expected to last about 45 minutes.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

All data will be reported without identifiers. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Bridget Tshabalala

Research Supervisor name: Prof Mark Bussin

Email: 21751987@mygibs.co.za

Email: drbussin@mweb.co.za

Phone: 082 575 0572

Phone: 082 901 0055

Should you be interested in the outcomes of this study, please advise.

Signature of participant:

Date: 

ANNEXURE C

Copy of a transcript from one of the interviews

Transcript

September 29, 2024, 2:10PM

Tshabalala, Bridget B started transcription

DM 0:05
Mm hmm.

TB Tshabalala, Bridget B 0:07
As indicated in the informed consent letter your participation in this interview is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty and also when.

DM 0:14
Absolutely.
Yes yeah.

TB Tshabalala, Bridget B 0:20
And I do my my report.
I will not.
Give your company neither your full name and surname how I'm going to do it is just to say interview number one.
Number 2 depending where you fall in the thing because for confidentiality we have to do that.

DM 0:35
...

TB Tshabalala, Bridget B 0:52
I do this so that we we protect your company that you work for so the interview is mostly around your leadership style and also to understand whether in this new virtual environment that we know that we first were faced with since COVID how the leaders actually maintain the.

DM 0:56
Yes.
Hmm.
Hmm.

TB Tshabalala, Bridget B 1:14
Inclusive leadership within when they managing what call employees so I have. About 5.
Questions that I need to ask you so each question has got a theme so I'll give you what the theme is and then ask the question.

DM 1:24
OK.

TB Tshabalala, Bridget B 1:30
Now I just need to understand in terms of your role what is your role.

DM 1:30
OK