**Dissertation Interview - Participant B – 23 February 2024**

Fanie Mordaunt: I’m going to record your details as African female that works in a Financial Services industry, who is in a leadership position. We will specify that it is in within Fund Operations and you are the Head of that Fund Operations team.

Participant B: Happy.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay, perfect. So, do you work in a virtual setting? So that could be fully remote, hybrid, anything of that sort of nature.

Participant B: Yes, I do. So, in our area it’s quite hybrid, not fully remote, but we do manage the hybrid area.

Fanie Mordaunt: And can you describe the organisation that you work for?

Participant B: So the organisation is also quite hybrid, so its supportive of employees working you know two days in a week from home and three days at the office.

Participant B: So it does support it, but it's also and I also condone it, it's also very hard on if you are not performing well, then you need to come fully back to the office.

Fanie Mordaunt: Are we going to get there? So in in this organisation, where does your team fit in? Could you describe your team in the context of the organisation?

Participant B: So I’m the head of funds operations. So we run the operations of the company and we do quite a lot of processing of financial transactions, which is quite important for the company and it's important for us to also get it right. Otherwise, you know, we get a lot of operational instances that cause the business money. So, it is quite important that we do our work diligently and very well.

Fanie Mordaunt: And how would you describe the culture of the organisation?

Participant B: And the culture of the organisation is like a work hard, play hard and it, it also stresses a lot of. You need to work hard. You need to dig deeper into the details and if you don't perform it's very strict on performance so its very performance driven.

Fanie Mordaunt: And how many people do you manage?

Participant B: I manage four people directly and thirty people indirectly. So that's four teams and thirty people in total.

Fanie Mordaunt: And how long have you been managing people for?

Participant B: So I've been managing people for about five years in total, but by far the last two years have been. I've been managing a large group of people that I've never managed before.

Fanie Mordaunt: And how would you describe your leadership style?

Participant B: So my leadership style is very trustworthy, so if we can develop a relationship on trust. Then I trust that you can do your work and trust that you will come to me whenever you face any, any problems, and also trust that we will also create or co- create the team together in a form of working together and taking the team forward.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay, and if you have to think back, it should be managing for five years. So, one of those years was pre pandemic. The other four were post, so if you have to think about how your leadership style adapted to a virtual setting and if we focus specifically on the change between fully at the office pre COVID to when the pandemic started. How would you say you had to adapt your leadership style for a virtual setting?

Participant B: Sure it was. It was quite difficult at first because I mean, we've never, well, I've never managed team at that point in time fully virtually.

Participant B: So, it was very difficult for me to actually get into it.

Fanie Mordaunt: So what happened then?

Participant B: Also got a coach to assist me in trying to understand and manage the people quite closely, but what really worked well for me is having daily call it daily, stand up meetings on a daily basis and I get to engage with the team more often in in those meetings and also got used to, you know, calling and video calling them during the day as well. So that helped me. It's sort of I was used to seeing them face to face and now I don't see them, but what helped is putting on your camera chatting like we used to. So, it helped to ease into managing them virtually.

It was difficult, but I think, yeah, I did. I did a bit better.

Fanie Mordaunt: And do you work remotely?

Participant B: Not quite, I can say 10% of the time if I really have, you know, something urgent at home. But I don't work remotely.

Fanie Mordaunt: No, but your subordinates worked remotely,

Participant B: Yes, they're on a hybrid two days at home.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay. So majority of the time you are actually are, so there's actually almost every day there's somebody that you are managing that is not physically in front of you.

Participant B: That is correct.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay, so if you have to think about that, what do you believe are some of the challenges that you've personally encountered since you've started managing employees virtually? So, if you just think of that major challenge and you know just how, how did you go about resolving that problem or what did you put in place to overcome that challenge?

Participant B: I think like I mentioned the working from home is based on you know I trust that the employees have the maturity to do their work while they are at home. So, if I'm at the office, I believe that you are doing your work and immediately, that's something falls through the cracks. I'm able to see it through.

Participant B: You know, utilisations that's on reports and I can see that something is wrong and I investigate and that particular issue and if it is really a working from home issue, then I retract that privilege or opportunity for you to work from home and you have to come back to the office because it seems that maybe you're not mature enough to, you know hold yourself accountable to work your full 8 hours at home and you probably maybe doing other things.

Fanie Mordaunt: Do you use the word privilege? So, do you see working from home as a benefit?

Participant B: I think it is a benefit. Because I believe, well, I mean when we signed a contract, when you sign a contract with an employer, it's written that you have to work at this particular address from your eight o'clock to five o'clock. And when we give you this opportunity, it is a privilege because if you don't perform well, I can actually take it away. If it wasn't a privilege, that means that I wouldn't be able to take it away from you.

Fanie Mordaunt: So basically, since you say poor performance. You're saying cannot work from home.

Participant B: Absolutely.

Fanie Mordaunt: Work from home, so I'm just taking down notes briefly and then I'm obviously now in this environment it makes managing people virtually even harder because now we've got power cuts and we've got situations where sometimes people have water cuts and then they have water cut does say I'll just work from home. Maybe it wasn't their day to work from home, but they know that it's an option now, or I'm this. They're working from home, but it's maybe a power cut and the signal or the Internet is very bad and it will affect their productivity. Have you experienced this in your space and how do you manage it?

Participant B: Yeah. So, I've experienced it quite a lot in my area, but I've made it very clear with all the team members that if you do have connectivity issues, you need to come to work. So, whatever that hinders you from doing your work, we've got sufficient Internet line that works very well.

Participant B: We've got electricity 24 hours or a generator that backs us up during load shedding or power cuts. So, the working office is sufficient enough for you to do your work, and if you have anything that hinders you from doing your work, you need to come into the office because we cannot afford for you not to perform well during you know power cuts and or Internet connectivity issues. So, you need to come to the office. On instances like if there's water issues, I mean that that's a little bit sensitive. So yes, we do allow you to, on that particular day to work from home, but also bear in mind that you taking away maybe a particular day out of your week. So even though today is a water cut, you've got two days to work from home this week. The two days, that will form part of your two days and you can exchange. You can exchange with another team member on another day.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay, got you. And then trust within a team, especially when you're leading people it’s very critical. So how do you develop trust within the team, especially when the team members are working virtually?

Participant B: So I developed my trust with the managers first, and I believe that they are also managing their team properly. So, within all the other employees, I believe that the managers are managing them properly and if there is an issue, then we collaborate together with the managers. So, it makes it easier for the managers, to manage their teams as inform me any issue and if I see foresee with any employee

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay. And then when you have new starters in your team, how do you integrate them into this hybrid work environment?

Participant B: So with the new starter in the team and especially graduates and because how we've set up the working from home is not everyone in the team is supposed to be working from home at the same time. So, we've got half of the people working, you know, on a Monday and Tuesday and half of the other team on Wednesday and Thursday. And we've made Friday a working at the office day for everyone. So, the new starters, especially graduates every day when they come into the office. They do find team member here that they can, you know, collaborate with to make it easier for them to, you know.

Participant B: Smooth themselves into the team and environment.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay. And have you been in a situation where you've had to manage a conflict that has occurred over a virtual platform? I think, for example, if you're having a meeting and somebody says something that makes another person uncomfortable, or you dealing with a difficult conversation, but it has to happen. Unfortunately, over a virtual platform. How have you managed conflicts when they're currently these in these situations?

Participant B: Yeah. So if I have, I have countered such before. So how I managed it is I spoke to the individual separately first, just to try and understand their side of the stories separately and then also bring them together in one meeting and set up to try and air it out together in there and make sure that whoever was wrong apologises and makes sure that you know they understand what had happened and whether it was intentional on or not. Try to resolve it with everyone in the in the very same meeting, similar to how you would have it if everyone was in the office and I would speak to them. You know, individually first and then get them all together in one room and also try to air it out. So, I manage it quite similarly. Except that now. So, you know, over the phone and also do try to make them, you know, just put your camera on. So, I can see your real reaction.

Fanie Mordaunt: That's very good. And then you spoke about performance and keeping track of performance. I'm not going to into it because you've spoken about how you rely on data, the metrics, the util stats to tell you to show you if the person is working or reaching the performance objectives.

Fanie Mordaunt: So I think we've covered that. And then you said if they're not performing, they come back into the office?

Participant B: Yep.

Fanie Mordaunt: Based on your view of virtual working and what you're understand of it, if you could just break down a few of the characteristics that you've learned or that you believe are very important for leaders to have possess, if they're going to manage teams virtually, what would you say those things are?

Participant B: I would say number one, trust, you need to trust your people or your managers. Number one, to make sure that they execute accordingly. Number two and you need to have a good relationship with the people that you manage. So that connectivity is quite important. Number three, I would say it stems from the relationship, so you need to have a work sort of personal kind of relationship.

Fanie Mordaunt: Open relationship.

Participant B: Not, not too personal, but have an open relationship with the people that you that you manage so that it gives a little bit of personal touch to that relationship which makes it very easy for them to open up whenever there's any other issues outside of you know managing the people so it also helps and makes it easier.

Fanie Mordaunt: And is there anything that I haven't touched on that you think is important, maybe from your experience or what you've seen that you think you'd like to just mention here?

Participant B: And the one thing I wanted to ask is or maybe think about. If it wasn't for the reports that that, I mean I'm lucky to have it might make it a little bit difficult for me to you know understand if things are happening in the area and that would have made it. A little bit difficult or not too difficult, but I would rely more on the stand-up meeting so morning meetings every single day just to make sure it has this been done and go through all the things that were happening yesterday to make sure that everything is good. So, I think the reports actually make it easier and quicker.

Fanie Mordaunt: I think on that it's one of the biggest challenges with managing virtually how do we measure performance. You're lucky you're speaking about a metrics driven environment where there is data that can show us quickly when this work is being done. Whereas other working environment is more qualitative and the feedback only comes much later. You only see an issue later, so those environments are more complex and but I'm balancing like questions on because I think there's value in both sides where it's a highly metrics driven environment. You also find that there's more pressure and, you know, there's more things that can go wrong. So how you also are able to manage is also very important because in your space like you said, if something goes wrong it can have a big impact for the business, whereas in other spaces maybe if something goes wrong the impact is a bit lower or easier to manage because it doesn't affect the business wholistically. It might in in effect on a more micro level. Okay, no I really value your input. Thank you so much for your time and I will be transcribing this interview and I like I said, I will document your demographics as I stipulated above. But if there's anything else you want to add, you welcome to reach out to me and let me know.

Participant B: Perfect. Thank you so much.

Fanie Mordaunt: Thank you. I appreciate your time. Thank you so much.

Participant B: All right.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay, bye.

Participant B: You're welcome. Bye.