The function of enterprise resource planning systems in the establishment of a flexible working environment in a South African organisation

by

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic affected almost all business sectors globally by altering the essence of business and life. Technology became the pillar for communication during this period, and enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems grew increasingly important for the critical success of businesses. In order to survive, business organisations had to adopt ERP systems to enable their workers to work from home. Now, after the pandemic, no organisation can conduct business without a technology-infused working business management system. Despite the widely documented importance of ERP systems, and the pivotal role they play in streamlining the operations of businesses, literature on their adoption in South Africa is scarce. This study sought to remedy this in part by exploring the adoption of ERP systems to allow remote working in selected hospitality and finance sectors in Cape Town. Questionnaires with open- and closed-ended questions were used to collect data from 20 participants. A focus group was also used as a data collection method, involving 9 participants from the IT department.

The study revealed that employees were efficient and effective working from home and had a positive perception of the work from home practice. The success of adopting ERP systems was mainly attributable to the organisational support that the employees received to enable them to utilise the systems and work remotely. The ERP support systems included an ERP platform and software for use during the work-from-home period. The study also revealed the benefits associated with the adoption of ERP systems to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19. Most importantly, ERP systems enabled employees to continue working despite the regulations put in place by the government of South Africa. Several challenges and risks were articulated by the participants, including technological challenges, website attacks, (electricity) load shedding and network connectivity issues.

Keywords: COVID-19; enterprise resource planning (ERP); software, technology

DECLARATION

I, **ZENOBIA NATALIE ADAMS**, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signed_____ Date_____

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Everything is made possible by the Lord.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and many friends. A special thanks to Jennifer Adams, my loving, supportive, and strong mother, for her words of encouragement and her drive, tenacity and perseverance. You truly inspire me to know that anything and everything is possible if you put your mind to it.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

COVID-19 affected people's personal working lives as well as the global economy (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Galanti et al., 2021; Mendrika et al., 2021; Misra et al., 2022). Enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems played a vital role in enabling businesses to operate effectively during the pandemic (Aroba et al., 2023; Shimange & Pillay, 2023). Such systems have the capacity to operate from any location, offer real-time customer support, and enable communication with colleagues around the world (Michel, 2019). The primary intent behind the development of ERP platforms like Microsoft and SAP was to build a single repository for all relevant data such as human resource information, financial records, supply chain logistics, customer relationship management, inventory levels, and production schedules (Sharma et al., 2020). These systems' universal applicability in the contemporary era is a testament to their significance (Shimange & Pillay, 2023). Over time, ERP systems have branched out into three distinct varieties, as described by Hadidi et al. (2020): Traditional (On-Premises) ERP, an interface accessible only in a physical location, such as an office or warehouse; Cloud-Based ERP, an interface accessible from anywhere; and Hybrid (modern cloud systems), a combination of the more established IT infrastructure and the more flexible cloud infrastructure, now used by most companies to facilitate telecommuting and web-based ERP (Hadidi et al., 2020).

All these systems are critical to an organisation's strategic decision-making, and technological, operational, organisational and financial effectiveness. With the socioeconomic problems that countries continue to face, organisations can survive by using an ERP system that allows individuals to work efficiently and effectively from home (Ruivo et al., 2020). ERP systems are made up of subsystems that work together to form a single electronic organisational system that employees may access from anywhere (Aroba et al., 2023). According to Hadidi et al. (2020), "ERP systems provide wide benefits

and land facilities to the entire organisation. ERP systems assist organisations in exchanging and transferring information across various functions and departments."

Emerging researchers have noted the relevance of human-technology interactions (Wilson & Daugherty, 2018; Noble et al., 2022) and the need to have a deeper understanding of the strengths that both entities bring to these interactions (Huang et al., 2019), so that they augment each other's capabilities in appropriate ways (Kopalle et al., 2022). The consensus within this field of research is that employees, consumers and companies will together soon realise a future in which humans and machines act synergistically (Noble et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023). Joshi (2021) notes that, as of 2021, we live in a tech-savvy world where company culture has gone electronic, and no organisation can survive without an ERP system. Employees can instantly save information by working remotely via an ERP system since it is no longer necessary for them to get to the office to do so.

In this research study, the researcher looks at how ERP systems have assisted in the establishment of a flexible working environment for private sector organisations in South Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic changed lives worldwide as countries implemented drastic social distancing measures to curb the spread of the disease (Turale et al., 2020; Suryasa et al., 2021). These measures included the closure of workplaces to limit interpersonal contact (Suryasa et al., 2021), with – initially, at least – dire economic consequences (Grobovsek et al., 2020). Work could only continue if it could be conducted from workers' homes.

1.2 Problem statement

ERP systems have been around for decades, developed to make it easy for employees to analyse and share information via one database (Aroba et al., 2023). But over time the world has become digitised to a point at which businesses depend on technology to deliver services and information in real time (Hilbert, 2020). The extent of a system depends on the type of business and the needs of the business organisation involved. EPR systems are costly, yet in the long run offer savings through efficiency (e.g. by

providing real-time reports and reducing paper usage) (Mahmood et al., 2020). As indicated above, there are – broadly speaking – two types of ERP systems: the traditional, for on-premises use (which is a software system installed and managed on a company's local servers, providing full control over data); and the cloud-based, where all the data, software and systems are hosted online (Hadidi et al., 2020). The cloud ERP system is extremely adaptable, allowing organisations easily to adapt without having to reload, whereas the traditional ERP system takes time to integrate with enterprises (Hadidi et al., 2020).

In the year 2020, organisations worldwide came to see ERP systems as essential, providing an in-depth look at the financials of the organisation, and the crucial business drivers of customer service, accounting and manufacturing (Joshi, 2021). To deliver real-time customer service, many organisations had to migrate from a traditional ERP system that only allowed access at work to a cloud-based system that enabled employees to work from home on flexible schedules (Razzaq et al., 2020). The number of enterprises moving to a cloud ERP system solution is growing all the time (Hadidi et al., 2020; Haddara et al., 2022). For example, in the banking industry, a client can deal with a banker via an online application; this helped to avoid long queues and mitigated risk during the global pandemic (Ali et al., 2020). It is critical to remember that an ERP system is not a computer system: it is a ‘people’ system that happens to run on computers since it depends upon people’s input and participation (Shimange & Pillay, 2023).

The main challenge or issue with the ERP system in today’s society is that employees are now allowed to work from home, or at least are not required to be in the office every day (Bresfelean et al., 2021). Being able to access company information anywhere adds to the risk of phishing or hacking, can be detrimental to the organisation (Arora et al., 2021). A possible issue is employee productivity and service quality, since face-to-face supervision is not taking place (Bresfelean et al., 2021). Other disadvantages include technical issues such as hardware crashes, server problems and the updating of software. All these can result in a delay in completing a task or rendering service to a client (Arora et al., 2021; Salih et al., 2021).

Data issues are also prevalent, especially when it comes to transferring old data to a new ERP system: information can get lost or not be completely transferred (Salih et al., 2021). The quality of data is a critical issue when it comes to the implementation of an ERP system, as it will have a significant impact on an organisation's information system (Zhang & Luck, 2023). Simple causes of data error include mistakenly entered names and addresses, as well as address information that has changed since it was gathered (Clayson et al., 2021).

However, the most important issue is the human element. It is very important that end-users feel comfortable about using the system (Zhang & Luck, 2023). Working from home necessitates trust, open communication, flexibility, and space, especially because team members may be dealing with a variety of psychological or personal issues (Leeuwerik et al., 2023). With the use of ERP systems, work-from-home employees may require constant engagement as many experience work underload or overload, which causes stress or burnout (Kerman et al., 2022). Team leaders must pay close attention to how to foster genuine connections and keep team members in communication (Stoker et al., 2022). This can be accomplished on an individual basis through regular interaction (e.g., emails, phone calls and video chats), but more importantly on a group level, with the goal of developing an online community (Stoker et al., 2022).

During the pandemic, everyone around the world experienced personal challenges with working from home (Stoker et al., 2022), and work-life balance remains a big challenge in this context. One study has reported that the pandemic lockdown decreased the work efficiency for almost half of the researchers polled, yet around a quarter of them were more efficient during this time compared to before (Aczel et al., 2021). In South Africa, only 26% of workers in all sectors had the freedom to work from home before the COVID-19 pandemic (Raze, 2022). When the lockdown was implemented, the number of workers working remotely increased dramatically to 79% (Raze, 2022). Working from home requires staff to be well-equipped with resources which include efficient ERP systems, a strong IT team, the greatest connectivity, and working on a family schedule that provides for the least disturbances (Kerman et al., 2022). Working from home can make an

employee more driven and fulfilled by their work, most likely due to increased work-life flexibility and control.

The hospitality sector in South Africa faced operational inefficiencies due to limited adoption of ERP systems, leading to challenges in managing reservations, inventory, finance, and customer relations. Many establishments still rely on fragmented or manual digital solutions, hindering real-time decision-making and overall service quality. The lack of integrated ERP solutions affects business continuity, especially during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. This study investigated the extent of ERP system adoption in South Africa's hospitality industry, its impact on operational efficiency, and the missed opportunities by businesses that have not embraced digital transformation to enhance service delivery and maintain a competitive edge.

1.3 Aim and objectives of the research

1.3.1 Aim of the research

Responding to the research problem articulated above, the study seeks to explore the flexibility, advantages and disadvantages of ERP systems that allow for remote working in the hospitality sector of Cape Town.

1.3.2 Objectives

Based on the above aim of the study, the following objectives have been identified:

- To determine the perceptions of workers towards working from home.
- To determine the support by the organisation for adopting enterprise resource planning systems.
- To determine the benefits associated with the adoption of enterprise resource planning systems.
- To determine the major risks or challenges associated with ERP systems and working from home.
- To determine the willingness of workers to return to working in the office after the pandemic.

1.4 Research questions

Given this aim and these research objectives, the following research questions guide the project:

- How do workers perceive working from home?
- Do workers have institutional support towards adopting ERP?
- What are the benefits associated with the adoption of ERP?
- What are the major risks or challenges associated with ERP systems and working from home?
- Are workers willing to return to working in the office after the pandemic?

1.5 Rationale and significance of the study

The significance of the study lies in its providing guidelines for, and indicating the benefits of, an efficient ERP system that enables a flexible working environment in which employees are no longer required to be physically at the office to complete a task. This can usefully prepare organisations for unforeseen events (for example, a pandemic) that oblige a business to shut down physical operations. Organisations will have to take into consideration employment contracts in terms of which the staff work from home in order to sustain the company.

This research is important as times are changing and the world is going digital. This study will discuss the extent of ERP system usage in organisations by looking into its benefits for business operations. The study will simultaneously identify the opportunities lost by organisations that do not apply ERP technologies to facilitate their business processes. Even for organisations that never embraced flexible working prior to COVID-19, the quick transformation brought on by the pandemic has meant that this option has become a requirement.

Furthermore, this study is especially important to the hospitality sector, where the adoption of ERP systems can enhance operational efficiency, improve guest experiences, and enable seamless coordination across departments such as reservations, finance, inventory management and customer service. By integrating ERP solutions, the

hospitality business can optimise resource allocation, enhance decision-making, and maintain resilience in the face of disruptions, ensuring sustained growth and competitiveness in an increasingly digital world.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Table 1.1: Presentation of the chapters in this thesis

Chapter	Description
1	This chapter introduces the thesis, provides some background to the study, a description of the problem, the goals and objectives of the research, research questions, and suggests the study's importance.
2	The chapter reviews current literature on ERP systems, summarising what has already been published in the area of the research topic. The literature discussed supports the theoretical argument being made and demonstrates that the author understands the primary ideas and discoveries relevant to the topic.
3	This chapter discusses the research methodologies and design used in this research, including the research instrument employed for data collection.
4	The chapter presents an analysis of the data that was gathered, presenting the information through figures and tables.
5	The chapter discusses the results presented in Chapter 4. The findings are evaluated in light of the research topics and compared to other literature. Objectives are reflected on and a conclusion is given.

1.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has characterised ERP systems as an emerging work-from-home tool that can be used to create or implement a dynamic model in any organisational or business structure, both locally and globally. The chapter has also provided a brief history of the early stages of ERP and its subsequent evolution over the decades. The expansion of technological innovation has created a new ecosystem in which ERP systems can be adopted and used to create a flexible working environment in which day-to-day activities

and business transactions can be continually conducted or processed. Some of the problems to be addressed in the study are described in this chapter, and the aim and objectives of the study are formulated. The following chapter provides a literature review of the theoretical background of the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing literature on ERP systems, with a focus on their adoption in the hospitality industry. It explores the importance of ERP in streamlining hotel operations, enhancing remote work capabilities, and improving overall efficiency. The chapter also examines ERP adoption in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), organisational challenges, and industry-specific needs. Special attention is given to the unique requirements of ERP systems in the hospitality sector, particularly in facilitating remote workforce management and business continuity. This review establishes the theoretical foundation for the study and identifies key research gaps.

2.2 ERP Background

An ERP system is a collection of interconnected software modules and a centralised database that can assist a company in better managing its resources by reengineering and automating business operations (Katuu, 2020). According to Mahmood et al. (2020), ERP systems have been evolving since 1990 as a useful tool for enterprises to restructure the organisation of day-to-day operations.

Since the 1990s, ERP systems have proliferated because of their ability to consolidate the business processes of any enterprise (Antero, 2015). In the brief early history of ERP, there was scepticism about its deployment in small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) due to the high cost of initial phase implementation, installation failures and continuous expenses. It was difficult to make a business case for such a substantial investment of time and money (Seethamraju, 2015). However, the advancement and exponential growth of technology has resulted in the development and transition of ERPs from a traditional on-premises model to a cloud-based system that has been adopted in recent years by both SMEs and larger business organisations globally (Razzaq et al., 2020; Salih et al., 2021). Assuming this transitional perspective on ERPs, this study aims to explore

the flexibility, advantages and disadvantages of ERP systems that allow for remote working. The study focuses on a selected organisation in the Western Cape, South Africa.

According to Jackson and Fransman (2018), recent years have seen a widespread emphasis on work-life satisfaction (WLS) and a flexible working environment (FWE). The FWE factor impacts productivity in an organisation (Jackson & Fransman, 2018). Previous studies have found that FWE helped improve productivity and image, ensure loyalty and retention, health, job security, stress reduction and autonomy. Organisations have explored different FWE arrangements to ensure maximum WLS benefits (Chimote & Srivastava, 2013; Jackson & Fransman, 2018; Sekhar & Patwardhan, 2021). Despite the benefits conferred by a FWE, a 2018 study reported that only about 23% of organisations in South Africa have implemented this (Mokwena & Hlebela, 2018). However, a more recent study has reported that the percentage of organisations opting for a FWE increased during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to 77% (Chatterjee et al., 2022). According to Chatterjee et al. (2022), advances in digital technology have served to upscale the notion of adapting FWE, especially in financial firms.

Mahmood et al. (2020) confirm that ERP system adoption in public and private organisations has been a rapidly expanding phenomenon during the last decade. ERP systems have progressed to the point where we can now work from home (Goldston, 2019; Katuu, 2020; Amado & Belfo, 2021; Grobler-Debska et al., 2022; Maiti, 2022). The pandemic period revolutionised employees' relationships and interactions with organisational culture, resulting in the widespread adoption of ERP systems in organisations and businesses in South Africa and around the world (Raze, 2022). ERP systems provide quick access to work files and ongoing optimal functioning when at home, enabling a work-life balance for employees that also benefits the employer in terms of cost-saving while keeping the firm running smoothly (Grobler-Debska et al., 2022).

Despite enterprises' installation of ERP systems, the COVID-19 outbreak put further strain on South African businesses, which were already suffering as the result of a weakening economy (Raze, 2022). Many businesses saw their sales plummet as a result

of the shutdown, and the majority were compelled to reduce corporate expenditure to stay afloat (Asmal & Rooney, 2021).

An ERP system supports a set of activities through the application of software encompassing different modules and helps organisations accomplish and manage their business processes efficiently and effectively (Huang & Palvia, 2001). In the 1970s and 1980s, the enterprise resource planning system was employed to manage and predict material requirements, but its high cost of implementation prevented widespread adoption at the time (Amini & Abukari, 2020). Since then, however, the ERP system has evolved into a comprehensive, sophisticated technological facility, capable of handling complex tasks and organisational activities in a uniquely integrative way (Razzaq et al., 2020; Salih et al., 2021; Grobler-Debska et al., 2022). Most multi-nationals and Fortune 500 corporations have already adopted a resource planning system, with smaller concerns following suit (Behnke, n.d.). Inadequate information coordination within an organisation as a result of application legacy systems (ALS) can be easily remedied with the help of planning resources (Manickam et al., 2023). The ALS is now largely defunct because it was used to provide solutions that were complex and high-maintenance, and no longer matched the requirements of modern businesses (Manickam et al., 2023).

Since the epidemic, more and more employees are working remotely and companies must ensure that business activities continue to run efficiently (Kerman et al., 2022). Peterson (2009) notes that several financial benefits accrue to employees who work from home (see also Savić, 2020), one of which is the saving of time and money by dispensing with the commute to the office (Balbontin et al., 2021).

2.3 Background to the development of enterprise resource planning

In the 1960s, computer technology was introduced and organisations began to develop applications that assisted in ordering materials, tracking inventories and producing finished goods (Goldston, 2019). Through inventory control, organisations took the first step in running the operational side of their enterprise systematically (Jacobs & Weston, 2007; Thakur, 2016). In the 1970s, materials requirements planning (MRP) applications

were introduced to enable manufacturers to forecast, purchase and schedule production, spawning the founding firms of the industry such as J. D. Edwards and SAP (Singh & Nagpal, 2014; Egdair et al., 2015). With a number of organisations requiring systems to reduce their overhead costs, J. D. Edwards enhanced their MRP applications to include closed-loop scheduling and enhanced shop-floor reporting (Jacobs & Weston, 2007; Goldston, 2019). In this regard, manufacturing resource planning (MRP II) provided a solution as it included all the required functionality in addition to the capabilities offered by MRP (Goldston, 2019; Maiti, 2022). In the 1990s, ERP systems were introduced that included a wide range of software products supporting daily business operations and decision-making processes (Katuu, 2020; Amado & Belfo, 2021; Grobler-Debska et al., 2022). ERP serves many organisations and industries with numerous integrated functional areas, automating operations from supply chain management (SCM), inventory control, manufacturing scheduling and production, to customer relationship management, sales support, cost and financial accounting, human resources management and almost any other data-oriented management process (Razzhivina et al., 2015; Tarigan & Siagian, 2019). ERP vendors during the 1990s improved their functionality in features like customer relationship management (CRM), SCM and warehouse management (Katuu, 2020). The vendors also produced business intelligence and analytics features which led to a new phase in the developmental process named the extended ERP. The stages of ERP evolution over the decades described in this section are shown in Figure 2.1, below.

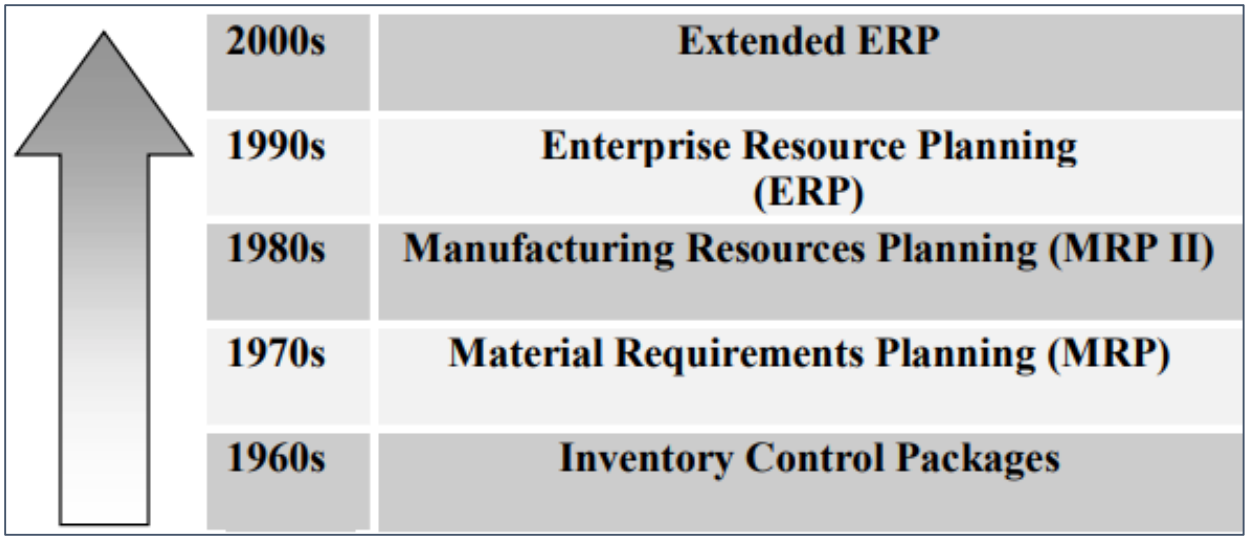

Figure 2.1: Stages of ERP evolution over the decades. Source: Rashid et al. (2002)

2.3.1 Comparison between ERP and MRP

ERP and MRP go hand-in-hand to optimise business operations (Rashid et al., 2002; Katuu et al., 2020; Finch, 2021). MRP software acts as a subsystem of an ERP solution, supplying information about materials and resources to the ERP solution, which integrates and uses that data to inform other business departments (Rahardja, 2022). For instance, a finance department may use information provided by the MRP solution to the ERP to calculate accounts receivable and the cost of production to determine product prices (Katuu et al., 2020). Both technologies have shaped the manufacturing industry, helping to increase efficiency and productivity while reducing production time (Rashid et al., 2002). Figure 2.2, below, presents a comparison between ERP and MRP.

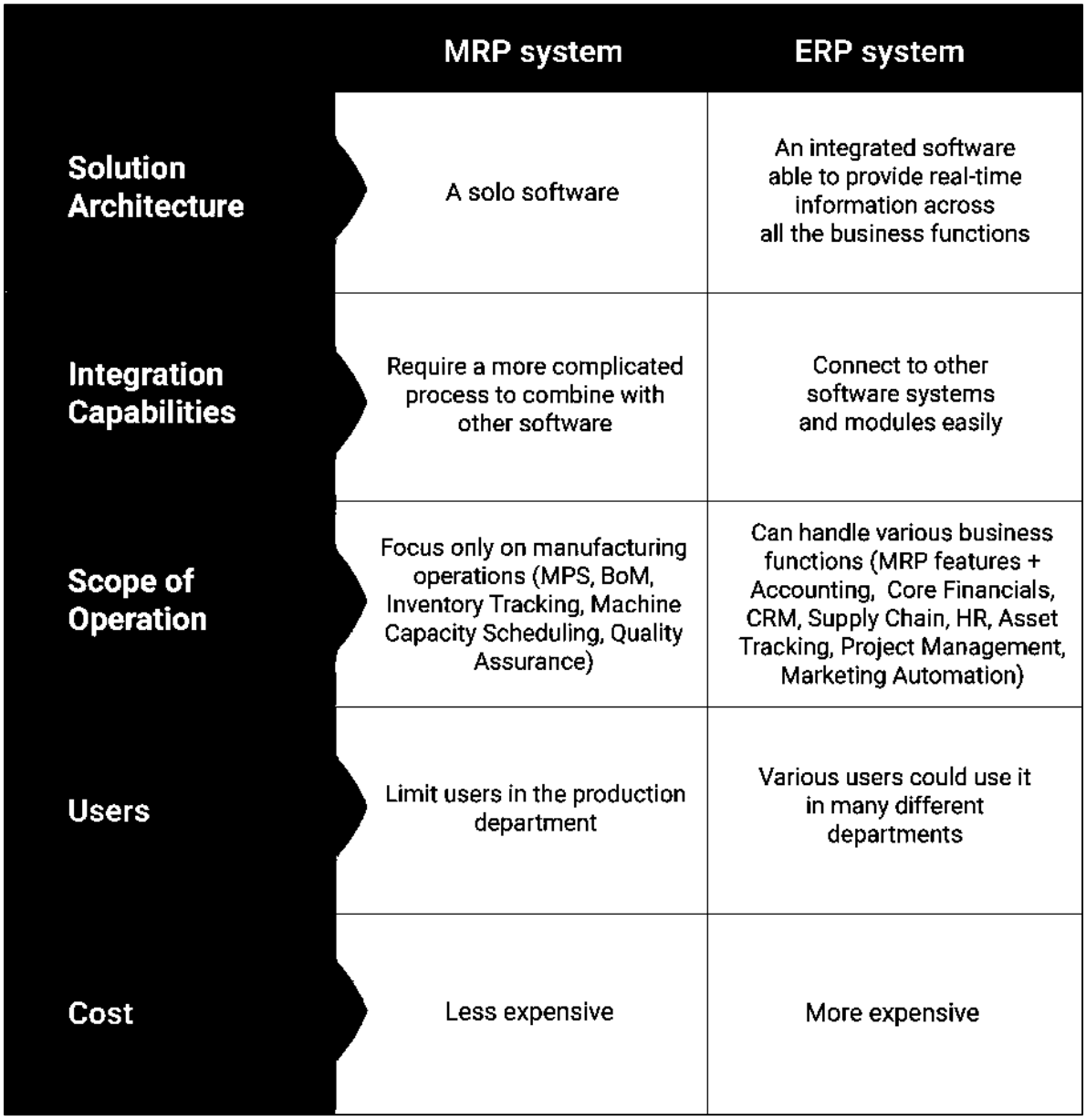

Figure 2.2: Comparison of MRP and ERP systems. Source: Finch (2021)

2.4 Innovation and technology in the adaptation of enterprise resource planning

The idea that innovation fosters the production of value and is a source of competitive advantage has developed from “concept to cliché” (Rahardja, 2022). The character, intensity, and dynamics of competition in the market have altered due to unprecedented invention activity, including both exploratory and exploitative technologies, as well as the growing integration of traditional and electronic business models (Rahardja, 2022).

An integrated information system is an entire software package that complies with the business model of the organisation as a whole, supports and integrates all of its organisational components and business functions, and links them to both internal and external business processes (Sacks et al., 2020). Modern businesses that use electronic business models and are characterised by digital technology must have an integrated information system in order to succeed (Li et al., 2022).

Figure 2.3 indicates how the main factors involved can be grouped into two sub-groups, organisational factors consisting of top management support, and ERP-related usage factors consisting of complexity, compatibility, user satisfaction, user involvement and training (AlMuhayfith & Shaiti, 2020). This grouping is based on distinctions made in the literature, as discussed above. The importance of these factors was investigated in an exploratory study, following which two new factors were added: knowledge sharing and vendor. The following section illustrates the importance of the exploratory study’s results for developing the study’s framework.

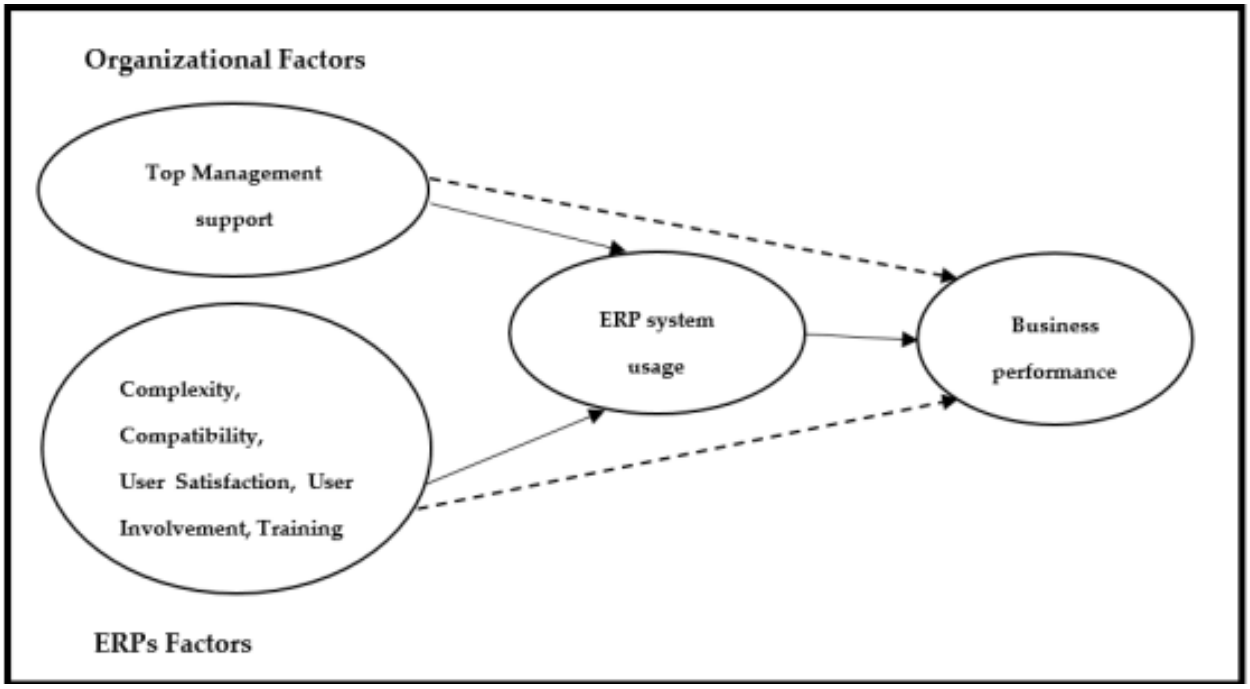

Figure 2.3: Schematic representation of ERP systems utilisation in organisations.
Source: AlMuhayfith and Shaiti (2020)

Figure 2.3 indicates the importance of support from top management (AlMuhayfith & Shaiti, 2020). Having a strong organisational culture adds value to employees by instilling confidence in the organisation's leadership (Aremu et al., 2018). Organisations with a low or weak culture typically provide only general guidelines for their employees, who often exhibit low compliance with the rules of the organisation (Christiansen et al., 2022). There is generally a positive relationship between a strong organisational culture and the adoption of ERP systems (Aremu et al., 2018). In the grouping of ERP factors, complexity reflects how difficult it is to understand, learn and use innovation (Christiansen et al., 2022). The perceived complexity of ERP will negatively influence its adoption decision and, therefore, the lower the perceived complexity of ERP, the more it is likely to be adopted (Christiansen et al., 2022). Compatibility refers to the degree to which ERP is perceived to be consistent with the existing needs and values of the organisation (Aremu et al., 2018). The greater the perception of compatibility between new ERP systems and existing IT systems in an organisation, the more likely it is that the new ERP technologies will be adopted (Christiansen et al., 2022).

Schallmo et al. (2017) addressed the technical components of content for digital transformation, identifying the technologies that enable this transformation. The four areas of “Digital Radar” – digital data, automation, digital client access, and the Internet of Things – are used to categorise all digital technologies. The cloud is one of the most widely used digital technologies (Salih et al., 2021). Since only an internet connection is required for its use, its main advantages are accessibility and transparency (Arora et al., 2021). On the other hand, data security is both its worst flaw and what prevents businesses from utilising it more widely. There are varieties of cloud technology: clouds can be either private (on a private network), public (on the internet), or hybrid (a blend of the first two clouds) (Arora et al., 2021).

Internet of Things (IoT) technologies provide device-to-device connection, after which the business receives the data over the Internet (Gupta & Quamara, 2020). IoT gathers massive databases that alter how corporate processes are managed using ERP systems (Adat & Gupta, 2018). The much greater reach and faster availability of data provided by IoT makes it possible for users from any department or location inside the business to access this data (Gupta & Quamara, 2020). Managers now have the opportunity to review inventory reports in real-time without relying on workers’ productivity (Gupta & Quamara, 2020).

Big data is a vast database that gathers together information from numerous sources, and many scientists and professionals analyse it (Yang et al., 2017). This digital technology is primarily utilised to make quick decisions based on the data collected because doing so increases productivity, lowers costs (missed decisions), and increases the transparency of all asset and process data (Yang et al., 2017). Organisations generally have had to migrate from traditional business models to using contemporary digital technology to increase business performance and success (Salih et al., 2021).

2.5 ERP and business practices

In order to be competitive in today's ever-growing and interconnected market, businesses need to implement next-generation information solutions like enterprise resource

planning (ERP) and thus improve their access to a solid information backbone (Aroba et al., 2023). ERP development involves two kinds of system, the social and the technical (Amado & Belfo, 2021). The new technologies must be deployed in an integrated manner using information engineering approaches to provide accurate information processing, data integrity and consistency, reliability, and usability for the company and its employees (Amado & Belfo, 2021).

2.6 Adoption of ERP in SMEs

SME environments are acknowledged to be fundamentally distinct from those of large corporations (Christiansen et al., 2022), and organisational size is a significant factor in ERP implementation. According to a study conducted in India, the main factors pushing SMEs to adopt ERP systems include business requirements, competition, market survival, and customer retention (Christiansen et al., 2022). One needs to develop a pre-adoption framework for assessing an ERP system's suitability in light of the degree of business's complexity and the scope of the change it wants to make (Hwang & Min, 2015). One also should develop a systematic decision-support methodology that aids decision-makers in adoption choices and may improve the overall ERP adoption project results (Amado & Belfo, 2021). Due to the organisational changes required for their implementation as well as the difficulty in predicting the return on investment, it is challenging to assess the contribution of ERP systems in terms of both value creation and economic returns (Huang & Yasuda, 2016).

These issues assume particular importance in SMEs, where the implementation and evaluation of the potential benefits of ERP systems remain difficult (Christiansen et al., 2022). As a result, SMEs have been slow to adopt ERP systems. Scarce resources, a lack of strategic planning, limited IT expertise, and the opportunity to adopt a process-oriented view of the business are among the elements that have a significant impact on ERP adoption by SMEs, either favourably or unfavourably (Huang & Yasuda, 2016).

We can draw the conclusion that SMEs use ERP solutions more frequently for unforeseen, exogenous reasons than because of thorough assessments of their

requirements and opportunities (Alsharari et al., 2020). The strategic evaluation of ERP use within SMEs, however, is a relatively recent issue that unquestionably calls for additional research (Huang & Yasuda, 2016; Haddara et al., 2022; Rahardja, 2022). Analysis of the data reported by relevant studies revealed several trends, the strongest of which is the correlation between the adoption of ERP and lean manufacturing (Rahardja, 2022). Application of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems and lean manufacturing are both tried-and-true ways to boost productivity (Abobakr et al., 2023). In fact, ERP systems and lean production are routinely ranked as the top two tactics used by manufacturers to compete for sales and profitability in international markets in polls on manufacturing improvement. ERP systems have traditionally been used to synchronize business operations and assist in executive decision-making (Abobakr et al., 2023).

However, the data indicates that while large corporations have adopted manufacturing philosophies like lean production, SMEs have not done so (Alkhoraif et al., 2019). Despite the effect of organisational inertia, larger businesses are more likely than smaller ones to adopt lean management techniques (Alkhoraif et al., 2019; Alsharari et al., 2020). The same can be said about the adoption of ERP systems: although these have been used successfully in large organisations SMEs frequently fail to apply ERP systems effectively (Salem et al., 2016; Abobakr et al., 2023). Although SMEs are adopting ERP at a faster rate than ever before, the data shows that many of them fall short of usage and improvement expectations (Alkhoraif et al., 2019).

This may be attributable to the degree of effectiveness of their ERP deployment (Christiansen et al., 2022), because ERP remains a popular option for manufacturing organisations to gain a competitive edge (Abobakr et al., 2023). ERP systems are made to offer seamless process integration across functional areas, enhanced workflow, standardised use of diverse business procedures, and real-time data access (Alkhoraif et al., 2019). ERP systems' core advantages actually arise from their capacity to handle transactions quickly and provide organised record-keeping systems for such transactions, not from their inherent planning skills (Rahardja, 2022). An ERP system is designed to oversee all business operations through separate software modules, while continuously

updating a main database (Salem et al., 2016; Razzaq et al., 2020; Rahardja, 2022).

ERP systems are a subset of Integrated Information Management Systems (IIMS), which are described as “a set of interconnected functional modules that optimise business operations both internally and externally”. The speed with which information is communicated is today becoming increasingly crucial (Rogers, 2019). Companies can streamline their management operations, which up until now have been done on paper or over the phone, by using ERP systems (Abobakr et al., 2023). All of the major business functions, including accounting and budgeting, human resource administration, document flow and reporting, are covered by ERP management (Alkhoraif et al., 2019). It is important to note that ERP systems are a prime example of complicated software, the implementation of which is frequently a challenging task for an organisation (Amini et al., 2020). Because an enterprise employing an ERP system depends on it, it is important to adapt the system correctly to meet the demands of the business (Abobakr et al., 2023).

SMEs that choose not to adopt expensive ERP systems often face challenges in streamlining their operations, leading to inefficiencies and fragmented data management. Without an integrated system, they may rely on manual processes or disparate software, which can result in errors, duplication of effort, and difficulty accessing real-time information. This lack of integration can hinder decision-making, reduce competitiveness, and impact overall business growth. Additionally, SMEs may struggle with scalability and adaptability during periods of expansion or crisis, like a pandemic, which makes flexible remote working and business continuity more difficult to achieve. Consequently, they risk falling behind competitors who leverage ERP systems for efficiency.

2.7 ERP and flexible working environment

It seems that the majority of employees prefer to work remotely for at least part of their working week (WTW, 2022). This is an important statistic: although remote work is frequently referred to as a fad, the numbers appear to show that it is here to stay. Working remotely or from home is become the norm (CTI Working Environments, 2022). Although some countries may warm to the concept more slowly than others, working from home is

the way of the future (WTW, 2022).

A flexible work schedule benefits both individuals and companies (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). Such a schedule helps employees to mix work, hobbies and social time, resulting in a healthy work-life balance and a reduction in workplace stress (Nachmias et al., 2022). From a purely practical standpoint, flexibility has suddenly become the only strategy to keep us all employed. Yet, due in large part to our ignorance of our options and the potential financial benefits, just a small percentage of people currently take advantage of flexible working arrangements (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021).

2.8 Advantages of working from home

2.8.1 Advantages for the employee

Work-from-home allows for a flexible working schedule; “being free to sleep in and work late, starting and ending early, working forty hours in four days instead of five or six days a week” (Akbar et al., 2020). The advantages also include reducing or eliminating commuting time, avoiding office politics, using less office space, increasing motivation and improving gender diversity (Dingel & Neilman, 2020).

According to Thorstensson (2020), it is essential to prevent the spread of fatal illnesses among workers, not least because it disturbs the work environment and incurs huge expense. A reduction in time and disruptive factors results in greater concentration, motivation, and employee happiness, as well as an increase in work energy. Working from home combined with ERP aids in the improvement of client relationships and client retention (Ricci et al., 2021). It is five times more expensive to attract a new customer than it is to maintain an existing one (Munthe, 2022). For example, orders get out the door faster when your inventory data is accurate and easy to retrieve. An ERP system enables users to access information from anywhere on their mobile devices, enabling sales to respond quickly (Munthe, 2022). The cloud has given us the flexibility to carry out core business functions wherever we are. There are many business advantages already being felt by those who went into lockdown with cloud ERP on board, such as streamlined organisation operations and the capacity to manage a business with only one system

(Ricci et al., 2021). Newer ERP systems are also upgrade-friendly.

2.8.2 Advantages for employers

ERP systems have become the backbone of an organisation, with the pandemic only increasing ERP systems' relevance and assisting organisations to withstand the pressure to meet client demands on time (Munthe, 2022). Working from home with ERP keeps costs low – "there are many ways of lowering your expenses, one of them your operational costs" (Vayre et al., 2022). Business management software such as ERP will allow you to eliminate redundant time-consuming tasks, improve performance metrics and do expense management (Vayre et al., 2022).

ERP systems also provide detailed information to management about what the team is doing. This enables managers to make better customer service decisions (Vayre et al., 2022). Good customer service keeps consumers on board, and with the data analytics provided by cloud ERP packages, you can detect and solve issues without leaving your house. For this exact reason, starting during the pandemic, organisations have encouraged working from home to promote the wellbeing of the employees, making it a part of organisational culture (Vayre et al., 2022).

2.8.3 Disadvantages of working from home

There are also several disadvantages to working from home. Isolation limits normal interaction with colleagues, and it is difficult to organise union activities (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). There is little opportunity to establish an informal communication network with colleagues (Thorstensson, 2020). Employee productivity can fall, and – for the employer – judging their professionalism is difficult. Managers do not have real-time evidence of what their team members are doing. Furthermore, employees find it difficult to request important information when they are not in the office. The pandemic situation has changed our ways of working, but not entirely for the better.

2.9 ERP Systems and remote working in the hospitality industry

ERP systems have become essential for streamlining operations across industries,

including hospitality (Ricci et al., 2021). Traditional ERP solutions were designed to integrate core business processes such as finance, supply chain, and human resources, but recent advancements have expanded their role in facilitating remote work (Razzaq et al., 2020). The hospitality industry, characterised by its dynamic operations and customer-centric focus, requires ERP systems that support seamless remote access, real-time data sharing, and centralized management.

One of the unique needs for ERP systems in the hospitality sector is centralised operational management. Hotels operate across multiple departments: reservations, housekeeping, customer relations, and inventory management; which require a unified system that allows remote monitoring and coordination. Cloud-based ERP solutions have addressed this by enabling staff to access crucial information from anywhere, ensuring uninterrupted service delivery.

Another critical aspect is financial management and reporting. Remote work necessitates secure access to financial data, including revenue tracking, payroll, and budgeting. Modern ERP systems offer cloud-based accounting modules that ensure financial transparency while maintaining data security. This is particularly important for hotel chains where financial transactions occur across multiple locations.

Additionally, guest experience management relies heavily on ERP systems. With remote work becoming prevalent, hotel managers and customer service teams need ERP-integrated CRM tools to track guest preferences, manage bookings, and personalise services remotely. This enhances operational efficiency and improves customer satisfaction. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of business continuity planning in hospitality. Hotels that had implemented ERP solutions with remote work capabilities adapted more easily to lockdowns and travel restrictions. These systems facilitated digital check-ins, remote workforce management, and seamless communication across teams. Incorporating ERP solutions tailored to remote work ensures that hospitality businesses remain resilient, efficient, and adaptable to industry disruptions, reinforcing their long-term sustainability in an increasingly digital world.

2.10 Theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2021) explain that: “The COVID-19 pandemic was not only health emergency and economic hazard but has also resulted in dramatic changes in people’s personal lives; even roles within families have been disrupted”. Although ERP systems had been established for years, the COVID-19 pandemic increased their relevance as they helped companies to withstand the significant pressure to meet customer demands on time (Abobakr et al., 2023).

A theoretical framework provides a specific perspective from which the researcher approaches the research topic (Varpio et al., 2020). In this study, the researcher will use the technology acceptance model (TAM), which hinges on a user’s feeling that utilising technology will improve their work performance (Davis, 1989). Both the perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) influence the end users’ attitude towards the technology (Davis, 1989). The attitude towards the technology determines the behavioural intent to use the technology. In terms of perceived usefulness (PU), an ERP system plays a vital role in influencing employees to work from home, keeping safe by social distancing and enjoying peace of mind, knowing that their job is secure and that they can continue to provide for their families. Many organisations have reported that working from home has increased the productivity of employees, especially if their organisations offer them the necessary support, such as enhanced communication. It is claimed that the increase in productivity is mainly the result of the work-life balance of employees and the flexibility of their work hours (Thorstensson, 2020:13).

ERP user-friendly systems enhance perceived ease of use (PEOU), making it possible for employees to accept and adjust to working from home. Attitude towards use (ATU) is directly related to a person’s actual behaviour (Farahat, 2012). The better the employee’s attitude towards working from home, the easier it is to accept ERP systems as the new normal. PU and PEOU are the factors that influence the attitude of a person towards adapting to working from home. Attitude is indicative of behavioural intention to use (BITU) and is a good indicator of actual use and acceptance (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2009). These relational vectors are illustrated in Figure 2.4, below.

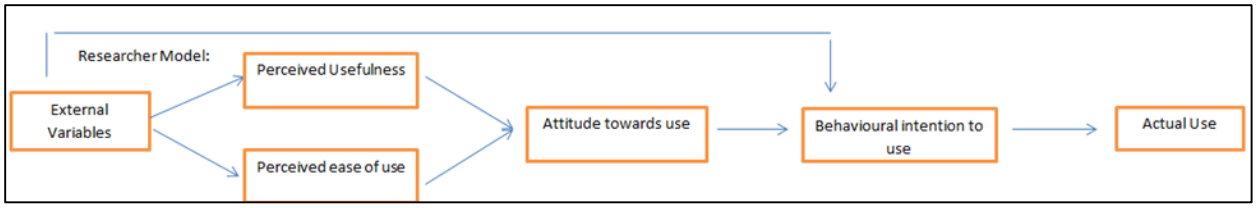

Figure 2.4: Conceptual framework for the study. Source: Researcher

2.11 Summary

This chapter has presented a detailed review of the literature on ERP. The chapter begins by defining what ERP is and how it has evolved over decades from the initial stages of inventory control packages up to the present extended ERP. This is followed by a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of ERP, particularly during the lockdown occasioned by the pandemic. The COVID-19 experience made it clear that ERP technologies are essential for a post-COVID organisational environment. Working from home requires staff to be well-equipped, which includes efficient ERP systems, a strong IT team, the greatest connectivity, and working according to a schedule that provides for the fewest interruptions. Yet despite the numerous advantages of working from home and utilising ERP systems, there are numerous concerns and obstacles associated with this utilisation and the flexibility that it provides, and with what proper employer support and communication involves. The study seeks to begin to close a research gap by exploring ERP systems in South Africa. The next chapter describes in detail the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research literature discussed in the previous chapter indicated that ERP systems aid in the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations still operating on a working-from-home basis (WFH). There is consensus that it is essential for businesses today to have systems to support, automate and manage business processes. This chapter describes how the research objectives were addressed and the research questions answered (Sileyew, 2016). It, therefore, details the methodological approach implemented in the study, including the research population, the sampling method used, data collection and analysis, the study's validity and limitations, and certain ethical considerations.

3.2 Research paradigm

A research philosophy accounts for how a social phenomenon is approached and examined to understand and explain it (Myers, 1997; Park et al., 2020; Dawadi et al., 2021). There are three main research paradigms in social sciences research: positivist, interpretivist and pragmatist (Myers, 1997; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Husam & Pius, 2020; Dawadi et al., 2021). The positivist paradigm informs quantitative research methods, the interpretivist paradigm frames qualitative research methods, and the pragmatist paradigm characterises the mixed methods research approach (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This research pursued a pragmatist, a mixed-methods approach. The researcher is interested in not only the objective facts of ERP adoption but also in the subjective views, opinions, emotions and values of the people affected by that adoption. The reason for including a post-positivist approach is that the researcher wants to be as objective as possible in her analysis by acknowledging and bracketing her personal values and beliefs.

3.3 Research approach

A research approach is generally defined as the procedures that are selected by the researcher to collect, analyse and interpret data. The research approach is sometimes

called the research design, but in this study the latter term is reserved for a more practical application (see 3.4, below). Qualitative and quantitative approaches are the most commonly used research methodologies, together with a third called mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kumar, 2018). The qualitative approach relies on words, statements and sometimes images, while the quantitative approach involves numbers and statistical analysis. Qualitative research is mainly based on respondents' perspectives (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). It is mostly achieved through communicating with people via questionnaires and interviews (Kumar, 2018). Quantitative research involves numbers and statistical analysis (Kumar, 2018). Using mathematical procedures, it typically generalises the results obtained from only a selected subgroup of a population to the whole population of interest (Hammarberg et al., 2016). The mixed methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Dawadi et al., 2021). The three research approaches are summarised in Table 3.1, below.

Table 3.1: Comparison of qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods designs

Qualitative design	Quantitative design	Mixed methods design
Emerging methods	Pre-determined	Both emerging and pre-determined
Open-ended questions	Instrument based questions	Both open-ended and close-ended questions
Interview data, observational data, document data and audio-visual data	Performance data, attribute data, observational data, and census data	Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities
Text and image analysis	Statistical analysis	Statistical and text analysis
Themes, patterns interpretation	Statistical interpretation	Across databases interpretation

Source: Creswell and Creswell (2018)

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative

approaches. Utilising the mixed-methods approach allows the researcher to expand an investigation to a necessary depth and breadth (Dawadi et al., 2021:27). It should lead to a thoroughly validated conclusion, its trustworthiness greater than any conclusion drawn from a single method because it addresses questions not possible to address when using single method (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The mixed-methods approach is apt for this study because the researcher intends both to quantify and to generate an in-depth understanding of how flexible ERP systems allowing for remote working can be. She seeks to gain an understanding of the issues surrounding ERP systems in South African businesses by addressing the “how” and the “why” as well as the ”how many”.

3.4 Research design

A research design refers to the overall strategy for conducting a study and addressing the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A research design provides a detailed structure and strategy for completing a research study and ensuring that the information gathered addresses the primary questions (Kumar, 2018). When determining a research design, the researcher may make use of different areas of study so that the topic is effectively addressed.

Although this research utilised a mixed methods approach, it was more qualitative than quantitative. The quantitative aspect mostly covered the demographic details such as age, level of education, years of experience. Hammarberg et al. (2016) regard qualitative research designs as appropriate when general or probability information is sought on opinions, attitudes, views, beliefs or preferences. The intensive, flexible and interactive way in which data is collected in qualitative research delivers to the researcher not only information about the social or cultural tendencies analysed but also the degree of co-operation offered by participants (Hoepfl, 1997). Qualitative research designs are malleable and inductive, allowing a researcher to adjust his/her approach based on research findings throughout the research process (McCombes & Bhandari, 2023). Qualitative research designs are concerned with gaining a rich, detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. There are several types of qualitative research design, including grounded theory, case studies, narrative research, ethnographic,

phenomenological and historical (McCombes & Bhandari, 2023).

The exploratory sequential strategy was well-suited to this research as it allowed for a comprehensive understanding of ERP implementation by first gathering qualitative insights and then using them to inform a quantitative investigation (Gogo & Musonda, 2022). In the qualitative exploration, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to uncover key themes, challenges, and perceptions regarding ERP adoption, remote work facilitation, and operational efficiency. The qualitative findings provided a contextual understanding of industry-specific ERP needs, including barriers to adoption and factors influencing successful implementation.

The quantitative analysis was designed based on the qualitative findings. This survey measured the prevalence and impact of ERP adoption on hotel operations and remote work. The quantitative data helped to validate and generalise the themes identified in the qualitative phase, ensuring a more comprehensive assessment of ERP implementation in the industry. By using an exploratory sequential design, the study ensured that the research was grounded in real-world experiences before applying statistical analysis. This approach provided depth and breadth to the investigation, making it well-suited for examining the complex and evolving role of ERP systems in the hospitality sector.

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Target population

The determination of a suitable population to be studied is vital in conducting research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A target population is a collection of homogeneous objects or elements that possess information needed by the researcher from which inferences are made (Kumar, 2018). The target population for this study is the hospitality industry in South Africa, and Hotel Express International was selected for the study. Hotel Express International is one of the world's leading hotel discount programmes, established in 1987. The company's headquarters are located in Norway, with sales and reservation offices in 40 countries including South Africa. Among the 10, 000 hotels on Hotel Express International worldwide, 269 are South African. The hotels selected for this study employ

15 people in the IT department in South Africa.

3.5.2 Sampling

Sampling is defined as the act of selecting a few individuals (a sample) from a larger group (the target population) to serve as the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, event, or outcome in the larger population (Figure 3.1) (Trivedi, 2020).

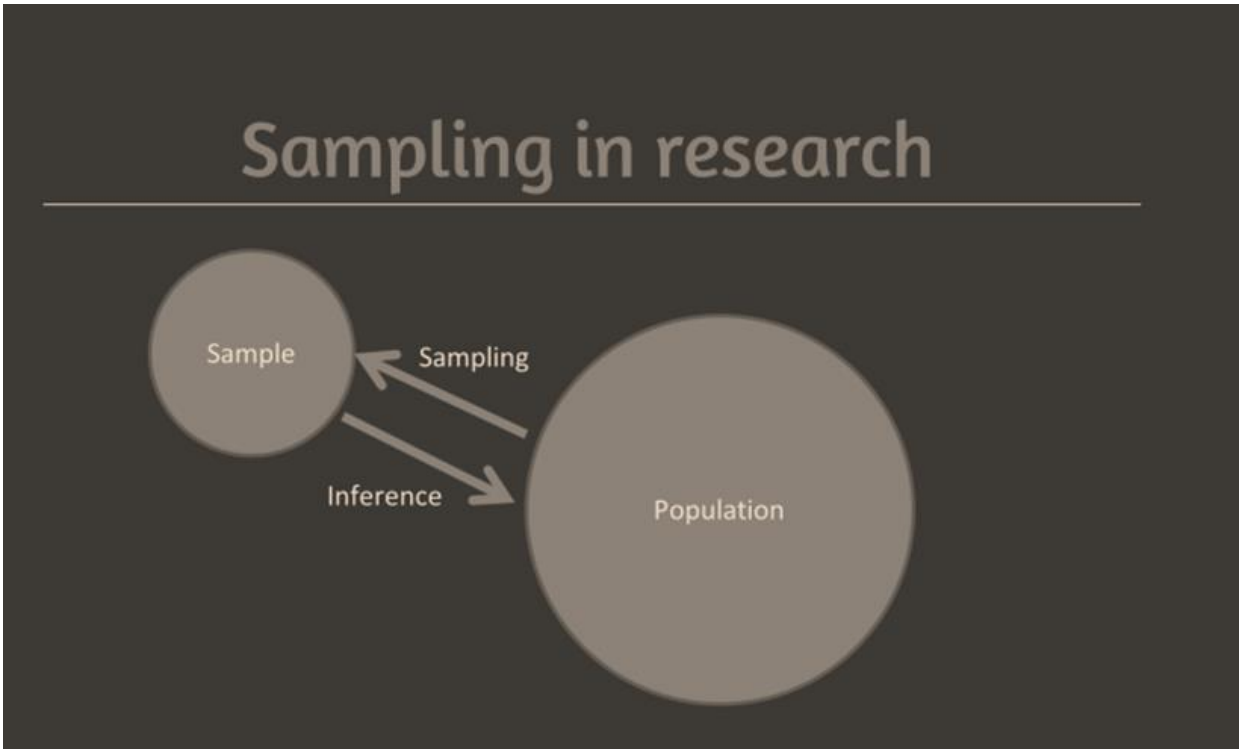

Figure 3.1: Sampling in research Source: Trivedi (2020)

There are two sampling methods, probability and non-probability sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). In probability sampling, members of a population are selected randomly, meaning that each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample (Saunders et al., 2019). Examples of probability sampling include simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling and cluster sampling (Stratton, 2021). With non-probability sampling, on the other hand, the researcher selects participants from the population who have relevant information or fit

certain criteria (Stratton, 2021). Examples of non-probability sampling methods include convenience sampling, voluntary response sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling and quota sampling (Saunders et al., 2019).

A combination of purposive and volunteer sampling were the non-probability sampling methods used in this study to select participants from the target population (Campbell et al., 2020). The logic and power of purposive sampling lie in selecting information-rich participants for the study. Information-rich participants are members from whom one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Campbell et al., 2020). The volunteer sampling approach meant that, in response to a research call, participants had to self-select (with the help of human resources managers) to become part of the study. This approach was utilised in part because the research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 20 employees from five South African hotels affiliated with Hotel Express International agreed to participate in this study. Thereafter, 9 participants from the IT department were purposively selected to participate in a focus group discussion. The inclusion criteria for this study focused on hospitality professionals, including hotel managers, IT administrators, and employees who have experience with ERP systems in hotels affiliated with Hotel Express International based in South Africa. Participants had direct involvement in ERP implementation, usage, or decision-making to ensure they can provide relevant insights into the system's role in enabling remote work and improving operational efficiency.

3.5.3 Data collection instrument

In order to learn more about the topic at hand, the data for the research was gathered from a variety of sources. Both primary and secondary sources of data were explored to produce optimum results. Table 3.2 shows the differences between primary and secondary data.

Table 3.2: Differences between primary and secondary data

Primary Data	Secondary Data
First-party data is collected or obtained directly by the researcher with the intent to use it	Secondary data sources can be extremely beneficial
Primary data is always collected with a specific goal in mind	They enable researchers to create large, high-quality databases that aid in the resolution of research problems
Interviewing people within the organisation	Google research on the topic on Google scholar
Observing a moderated discussion with selected people	Information collected from other research articles
Questionnaires, focus groups	Census Bureau

Source: Nieuwenhuis (2007)

Questionnaires served as the primary method of data collection. These were compiled by the researcher, based on the research questions. A questionnaire (rather than interviews) was indicated since this was during the COVID-19 pandemic, when strict protocols were being implemented by the government. Among the conditions for the study were that it should not hinder workers' productivity and that it took place at a time convenient for them. The researcher sent the questionnaires to potential participants for completion at a time that suited them. The phone numbers and email addresses of respondents who agreed to participate in the study were obtained and confidentially kept by the researcher. The researcher sent messages to the respondents every week via emails reminding them to complete the questionnaire. In situations when the questionnaires had not been received after two weeks, the follow-up procedure included telephone calls every week. If the researcher had received nothing after six weeks, it was declared a non-response.

The questionnaire featured both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Asking a set

of pre-determined questions in the same order made it easier for the researcher to compare responses. The questionnaire was semi-structured, combining elements of structured and unstructured questions, which gave it the advantages of both: comparable, reliable data, and the flexibility to ask follow-up questions (Cheung, 2021). This method was chosen as it offered rich phenomenological data for in-depth exploration of the practical experiences of the participants in their place of employment. The questionnaire used for this study is attached in Appendix C.

A focus group discussion was also conducted to collect data. A focus group brings together a group of individuals to discuss and answer questions in a moderated environment or setting (George, 2023). The individuals in the focus group are chosen because of certain population characteristics and the discussion and questions are designed to shed light on a topic of interest (George, 2023). Nine participants from the IT department were purposively selected to participate in a focus group discussion that was conducted online.

3.5.4 Data analysis

Data analysis involves analysing the data collected and appropriately communicating the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The following steps were taken after data collection:

Step 1: Raw data was entered in MS Excel and represented according to the respondents' actual words.

Step 2: Data integrity was checked, which involved confirming that the data collected contained information that followed a set of research guidelines and standards and that there was no misinformation or bias.

Step 3: Data editing was done to check for information consistency, completeness and legibility, thus making the data suitable for analysis.

Step 5: The MS Excel data file was stored.

Step 6: The data was then analysed.

Data from the completed questionnaires was sorted and entered into MS Excel.

Quantitative operations were performed to produce descriptive statistics including percentages, frequencies, tables and graphs. For the qualitative data, content analysis was applied: frequent responses were summarised and supported by direct quotations from the individual participants. Shava (2021) defines content analysis as a data analysis method used to classify oral or written materials into identifiable categories of similar meanings (thematic analysis) which represent either inferred or explicit communication. The kind of data collected in this study was suitable for analysis via the content analysis technique.

3.5.5 Reliability and validity

In mixed-methods research, issues of reliability and validity are different from those faced by researchers who utilise qualitative and quantitative methods independently (Dellinger & Leech, 2007). According to Pandey and Pandey (2015), reliability refers to consistency throughout a series of measurements. For example, if a respondent gives a response to a particular question, he or she is expected to give the same response to that or a similar item even if s/he is asked repeatedly. The researcher should therefore arrange the items in the questionnaire in such a manner as to evince consistency and therefore reliability. In the current study, the questionnaire was used to ascertain what had to be ascertained as accurately as possible. The questionnaire was checked by the supervisors to ensure that it was reliably pursuing the research objectives.

Validity refers to the accuracy and credibility of the findings of the research. Mueller and Knapp (2018) agrees that in research the extent to which a study accurately reflects or evaluates the particular concept that the researcher is seeking to measure or comprehend is referred to as validity. It is about making sure that the study investigates what it claims to investigate. In the current study, the questionnaire was considered to be valid because it measured what it was expected to measure. The objectives of the research were assessed to validate whether the research questions and data collection tools were responding appropriately to the issues arising from the literature. Cleary et al. (2014) argues that validity also refers to the quality of the research, in other words, how genuine the outcome of the research is.

According to Dellinger and Leech (2007), objectivity can be viewed as either that the researcher should be neutral during descriptions and interpretations, or that the researcher has to develop trust to get near the study participants in order to generate valid and truthful descriptions. The research design should allow for the use of appropriately objective measurement tools, in terms of which each judge or observer who assesses a performance must provide an exact report. In other words, the objectivity of the procedure may be judged by the degree of agreement between the final scores assigned to different individuals by more than one independent observer. This ensures the objectivity of the collected data for analysis and interpretation (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). In this vein, Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that the researcher is required to ensure that the findings of the research are sufficiently credible and plausible. Credibility is viewed as the most important factor in assessing trustworthiness. This is because credibility demands the researcher clearly to correlate the research study's conclusions with reality to demonstrate the validity of the findings. The current study is credible because it was conducted in a manner that makes it authentic. In addition, the necessary steps were taken to present the results and findings credibly (Kumar, 2018). To further ensure the credibility of the data collected, the researcher invited the participants to examine, review and check the accuracy of their answers.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in line with the research ethics standards of the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Ethical standards are vital in research studies, especially those that involve human participants (Arrant, 2020). The following standards or principles were adhered to achieve the aim and objectives of this study.

3.6.1 Informed consent

The participants were briefed on the topic and consented to participate in the study by signing a letter of consent. In this way, they gave their full agreement to participate in the study. The informed consent letter indicated that the participants had the right to refuse to take part in the study and or to withdraw at any time, without any penalties.

3.6.2 Voluntary participation

The participants were asked to participate voluntarily. No participants were coerced into participating in this study.

3.6.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

It is the responsibility of the researcher to protect the identity of the participants so that they remain anonymous and to keep their personal information confidential. The researcher must always ensure that all research data is treated with appropriate discretion, meaning that s/he must maintain a high level of confidentiality and respect the privacy of the data sources by not revealing any information about the participants without permission. Anonymity was achieved by using “Participant 1, 2, 3..., 20 to represent the individual participants rather than their names. The names of the hotels were also omitted from this study.

3.6.4 Protection from harm

It is also the researcher’s responsibility to ensure that study participants are safe from damage, whether physical, psychological or social. The researcher must ensure that the participants are free from interference, anguish, anxiety, humiliation, emotional or any other form of harm.

3.7 Delimitation

Gossel (2022) describes delimitations as “those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of your study ... the delimitations are in your control.” The purpose of the research is to ascertain how ERP systems contribute to the development of a flexible workplace in South African organisations. The study was limited to the hospitality industry in South Africa. Only employees from hotels affiliated with Hotel Express International participated.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has described the research methodology deployed in the execution of the research. The study utilised a mixed methods approach, from data collection analysis and

interpretation. To explore how ERP systems facilitate remote working, the researcher administered questionnaires with both closed- and open-ended questions. A total of twenty employees from hotels affiliated with Hotel Express International in Cape Town participated in this study. In addition, a focus group was conducted with nine participants from the IT department of the hotel. Qualitative content data analysis was applied. Data was collected following ethical protocols that include informed consent, voluntary participation, protection from harm and confidentiality and anonymity. The next chapter presents the findings of this study generated in the ways discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the research methodology used in this study, including the data collection methods. The research, carried out in Cape Town, sought to explore the flexibility, advantages and disadvantages of ERP systems that allow for remote working in the hospitality sector of Cape Town. A mixed methodology was utilised to enable the researcher to understand and analyse the individual experience of each employee working from home. This chapter presents the results obtained from the data collected. These results are based on transcribed questionnaire responses to questions. The study included 30 employees from diverse professions holding various positions within the organisation. In addition, 10 employees from IT participated in a focus group discussion. The research findings are presented in frequency tables, charts and graphs.

4.2 General information about workers

This section of the questionnaire contained 4 questions about the respondents' gender, age, experience and qualifications. The results are presented in Table 4.1, below. There were more females (70%) than other categories who participated in this study. The 30-39 age category was the most represented (45%) compared with other age categories. Individuals with 11-15 years of experience were the most plentiful (30%). With regard to educational qualifications, individuals with a certificate were in the majority (40%).

Table 4.1: General information about workers

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	14	70
	Male	4	20
	No Gender	2	10
Age	20-29	4	20
	30-39	9	45
	40-49	5	25
	50-59	2	10
	60 years& older	0	0
Experience	1-5 years	4	20
	6-10 years	3	15
	11-15 years	6	30
	16-20 years	4	20
	21 years & more	3	15
Qualification	Grade 12	4	20
	Certificate	8	40
	Diploma	5	25
	Bachelor's Degree	3	15
	Master's Degree	0	0
	Doctorate	0	0

4.3 Workers' perceptions of working from home

Most respondents (65%) said that working from home worked for them, while the remaining 35% said that it did not work. Respondents were further asked to state where they were most effective, working from home or work. The numbers were almost balanced between respondents who claimed they were more effective at home (n = 9; 45%) and those who said they were more effective at work (n = 8; 40%). the remaining 3 respondents (15%) were neutral (Figure 4.1).

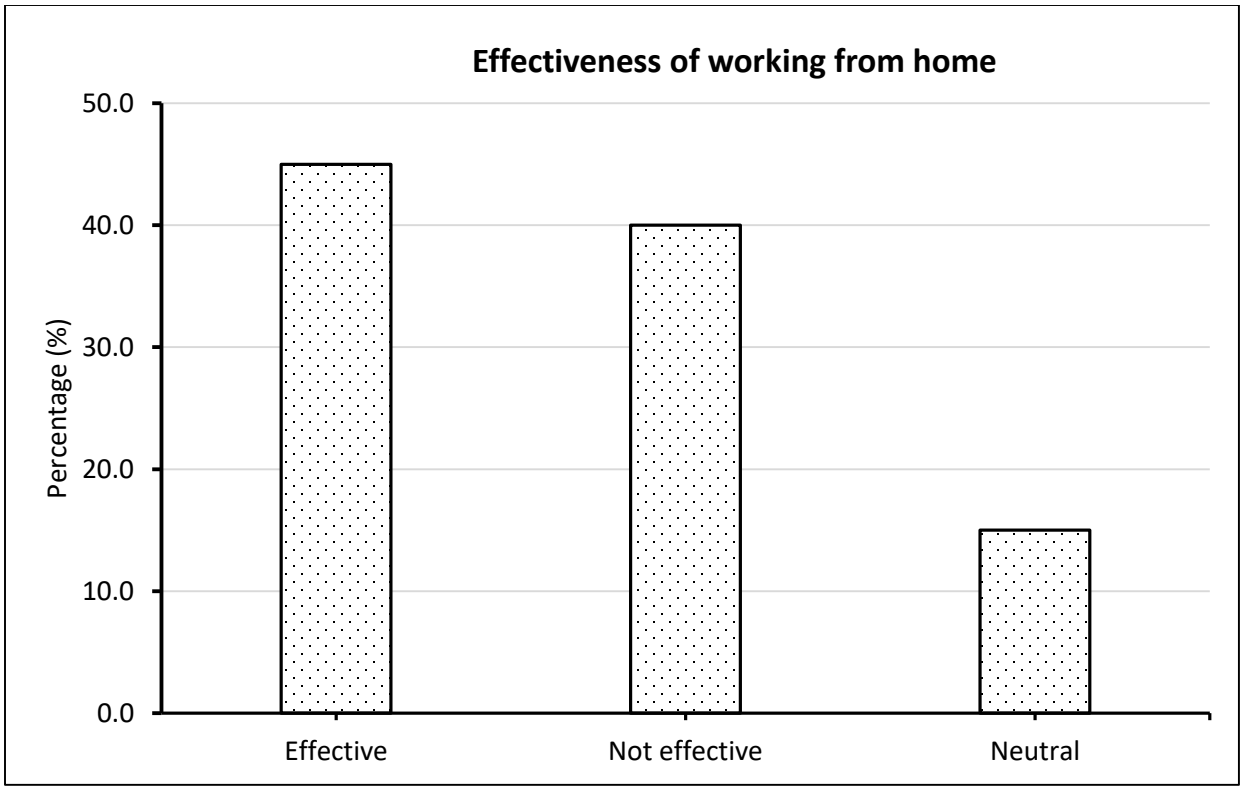

Figure 4.1: Effectiveness of working from home

Several researchers have indicated that working from home is associated with numerous benefits (Gigauri, 2020a, 2020b; Saurombe et al., 2022; Oo et al., 2023). First, individuals who work from home enjoy managing their own schedules, enabling them to attend to other commitments. As a result, they feel less pressured (Saurombe et al., 2022). Secondly, working from home is regarded as a cost-efficient practice for employees and more convenient (Ngobeni et al., 2022). This is because employees save on fuel and fare costs as well as time spent travelling to work (Saurombe et al., 2022). Thirdly, employees tend to work freely without bosses breathing down their necks and subjecting them to the sort of micromanagement that frequently occurs in the office. Fourthly, levels of stress among workers are low, as traffic jams and long hours of travel to work tend to stress employees and negatively influence their productivity (Saurombe et al., 2022). There are doubtless more advantages to working from home, depending on the individual.

Overall, the research findings of this study corroborate the findings of other research endeavours, for example, those of De Klerk et al. (2021), Lal et al. (2021), Saurombe et

al. (2022), who revealed that a majority of respondents preferred working remotely.

However, there are also certain setbacks that organisations and employees can experience as a result of the abrupt transition from office work to working from home (Saurombe et al., 2022). These include the general atmospheric difference between home and office, which tends to cause a loss of employee motivation (Singer-Velush et al., 2020). There are numerous distractions at home, such as family, television, social media, entertainment and noise in the neighbourhood (Purwanto et al., 2020; Saurombe et al., 2022). The feeling of isolation and not being able to physically interact and share ideas with other employees detracts from the performance and productivity of an employee (Purwanto et al., 2020). The feeling of isolation also affects the psychological wellbeing of an employee (Saurombe et al., 2022). On the issue of cost saving discussed in the benefits of working from home, employee costs may increase due to mobile bill increases, electricity consumption increases, data costs, increases in their grocery budgets and costs associated with ensuring an appropriate office space at home (Gigauri, 2020b; Purwanto et al., 2020). These working-from-home pitfalls were also mentioned by the respondents in this study, who indicated that remote working caused them to work in isolation and for longer hours than in the office to prove their productivity to their line managers and employers, thus detracting from their social lives. Some participants who were interviewed by Kramer and Kramer (2020) mentioned that they did not prefer working from home but were now forced into this arrangement. Respondents in this study also raised the question of distractions concomitant with working from home, which affected their productivity. This issue has been documented by several researchers (Gigauri, 2020; Purwanto et al., 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020; De Klerk et al., 2021; Roffia & Mola, 2022; Saurombe et al., 2022).

4.4 Support from the company towards adopting ERP systems

4.4.1 Did your organisation provide an ERP platform/software/system to use during the WFH period?

On this question, 8 respondents managed to provide more detailed responses. All the respondents (100%) confirmed that their organisations provided an ERP

platform/software/system to use during the work-from-home period. Some of the ERP platforms were already being used by the organisations. The responses are summarised in Table 4.2, below.

Table 4.2: Responses on organisational support towards ERP systems

Respondent	Response
1	Yes they did. They ensured such measures were in place a couple of years prior to Covid, in the event of any disastrous happenings that could take place
2	We used the normal platforms already available with the exception of a remote connection to Lotus Notes
3	Yes, the company provided us with an ERP during the working from home period
4	Yes, we used the systems we already had and the IT department was always readily available, seems like now that we are back in office the systems are giving us endless issues
5	Yes, the company did.
6	Yes, our team has desktops, we got given laptops and additional screens as well, we used all the same systems as we would in office
7	Yes, company provided systems only, the issue was fibre and load shedding. Trying to find a balance as we did go to work, led to longer working hours at times
8	Yes, used all same systems as at the office, only bore was when systems needed updates, load shedding

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many organisations to rethink, transform and revolutionise their operations, leveraging ICT tools for the continuity and survival of their businesses despite the lockdown (Mykytyn, 2020; Naidoo, 2020; Roffia & Mola, 2022). The sudden shift to working from home and the increased use of ICT tools during the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to be the only way for organisations to keep their

operations going (Ågerfalk et al., 2020; Yost, 2020; Roffia & Mola, 2022). Firms aimed to reassure their stakeholders – including clients, employees and service providers – by demonstrating their capacity to keep the business afloat during the pandemic and therefore had to meet certain conditions (Roffia & Mola, 2022). According to Wang et al. (2021), organisations had to ensure that their employees had the right technologies and resources for them to perform their work effectively. It is commendable that respondents in this study confirmed that their organisations equipped them with suitable tools for transitioning smoothly to working from home. Interestingly, several respondents confirmed that the organisation had ERP platforms in place before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, so it was no real challenge to switch to working from home during the pandemic. Apart from the ERP systems, employees also required data to conduct work remotely as well as airtime for mobile phone communication (Wang et al., 2021).

4.5 Benefits associated with the adoption of ERP systems

4.5.1 Did the ERP platform/software/system benefit the employees?

An ERP system enables users to access information from anywhere on their ICT devices, enabling business to be conducted smoothly (Munthe, 2022). Most importantly, ERP systems equip individuals to work from home (Xulu & Suknunan, 2020). The benefits of ERP systems for employees working from home were comprehensively discussed in the literature review. All the respondents (100%) in this study also reported benefits associated with the adoption of ERP systems. Some respondents added that the adoption of ERP systems was not only beneficial for their work but also for clients. Work from home combined with ERP aids in the maintenance and improvement of client relationships, and ERP systems play an important role in client retention (Ricci et al., 2021). With a sound ERP system, orders can be efficiently processed as the inventory data will be accurate and easy to retrieve (Munthe, 2022). Individual responses from this study are summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Responses on the benefits of adopting ERP systems

Respondent	Response
1	From a work perspective it benefited my productivity, in ensuring things were done with good turnaround times. Keeping clients happy and being efficient
2	I think it did as it normally took hours to complete a credit minute and this assisted with increased efficiency
3	Yes it did benefit employees, as it saved us time in processing some of our tasks/deals
4	It got things done and if there was an issue it was resolved within a short period of time
5	Did not just benefit employees, helped us render better service to clients also gave clients insights into future technology whereby they can do things themselves
6	Yes
7	Yes, client to do more by themselves via the app or online, which allowed us to render better service and product advice to clients
8	Yes, it did especially now that we will never go back to working in office 5 days a week. Flexi-work is the future thanks to the ERP system and technology

4.5.2 Did the ERP platform/software/system increase or decrease the productivity of the organisation?

ERP systems have the capacity to provide quicker and more accurate control of changes in a business, which is important in the current era of constant economic changes and inescapable competition (Xulu & Suknunan, 2020; Chopra et al., 2022). The implementation of ERP systems therefore results in substantial benefits and a relatively quick return on investment (Xulu & Suknunan, 2020). A successful ERP system requires loyal use and a willingness among employees to recommend its use to others (Roffia & Mola, 2022). All the respondents (100%) confirmed that the adoption of an ERP system

increased productivity. The increase in productivity was mainly due to how ERP systems made the work easier and faster. Respondents' views are summarised in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Responses on whether ERP systems increased work productivity

Respondent	Response
1	It allowed for continuity of one's work function, and for me it definitely increased productivity. This allowed for the ability to access our platforms at any time to work efficiently
2	Productivity was increased as we could work faster when processing credit applications
3	It increased the productivity, it is cloud based, so paperwork processes were diminished and new processes were put in place which increased productivity
4	Working from home was best thing, yes it helped a lot to have documents signed electronically, scanning documents removed helped making working process very smooth
5	It helped a lot with productivity and time management, bit frustrating when there where issues or systems are down but overall, systems ran smoothly
6	Yes, I could work anywhere as we would visit my parents' farm just to escape our wall at home. Easy access to all data required everything was centralised and basically at a click of a button. Where in office one had to chat to people, get clearance systems made it easier
7	Yes, easy to communicate with colleges across departments, processes were streamlined, meant more can be done. Some things client received in real time not eta required
8	Yes, the fact that one did have to print, scan. Everything done electronically was great workflow, was automated, would automatically go to the next department

4.5.3 Do you feel sufficiently connected to your teammates?

Respondents were asked if they felt that they were sufficiently connected to their teammates. Most respondents (60%, n = 12) agreed that they still felt sufficiently connected to teammates, whilst 40% (n = 8) disagreed (Figure 4.2). Respondents were also asked to state whether they got assistance from someone for the work-from-home transition. Most respondents (65%) got assistance whilst 15% said that they did not get assistance and 20% were neutral. Respondents were also asked how easy it was to contact their teammates and leaders in case they required help. Most respondents (65%, n = 13) confirmed that it was easy to contact their workmates, while 30% (n = 6) claimed that it was not easy and 10% (1) were neutral.

A disadvantage of working from home using ERP systems is that there is less teamwork, and meaningful connections with others may be absent, increasing employees' sense of social isolation (Purwanto et al., 2020; De Klerk et al., 2021). Communication efficiency is therefore a vital concern for both employees and employers (Saurombe et al., 2023). An employee might get stuck with a task and because they are working from home, they will not have someone to readily assist, unlike in the office. Other tasks require teamwork and in some situations this is not possible. The issues of social isolation and employees getting stuck with given tasks have also been reported by other researchers (e.g., Waizenegger et al., 2020).

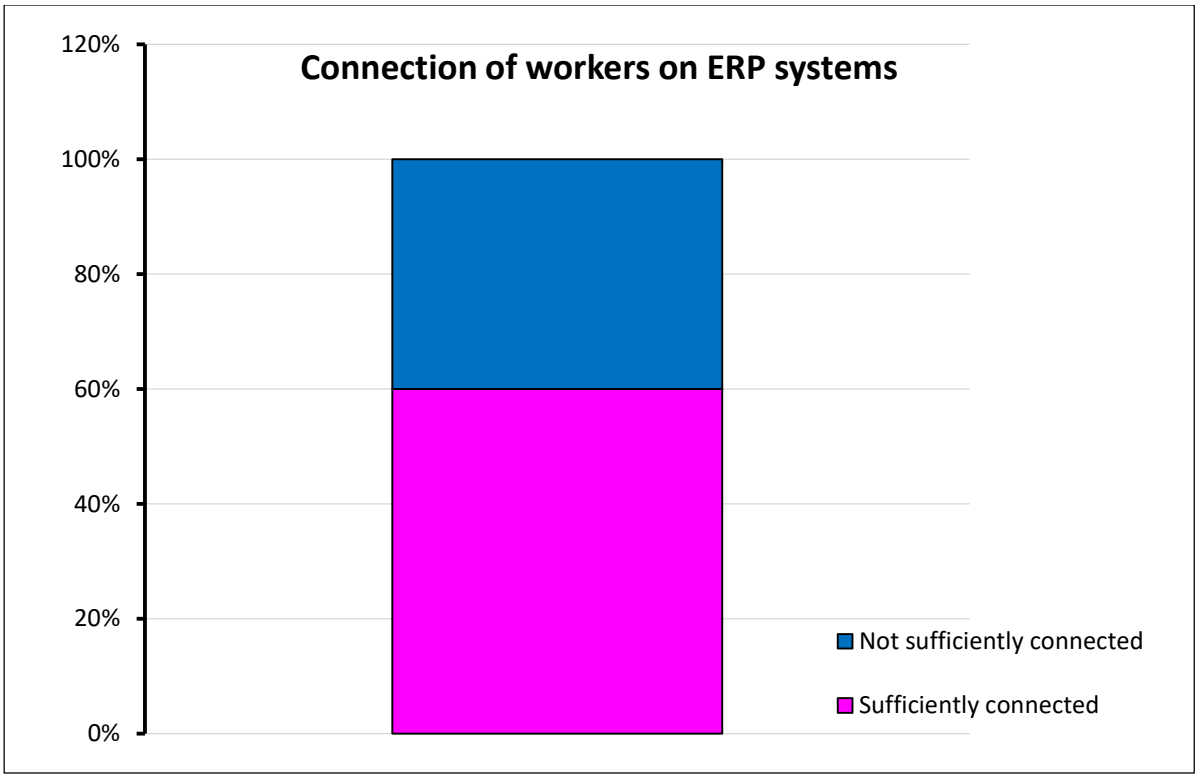

Figure 4.2: Connectivity of workers after the adoption of ERP systems

4.6 Challenges associated with ERP systems and working from home

This was a focus group question directed to the IT staff. When it came to IT assistance, the IT team was already planning for work from home. Flexibility was achieved by ensuring that all staff had laptop computers. All workers can work from home; however, if there are complications and the IT team is unable to remotely access the employee's laptop, s/he has to come to the office for IT assistance.

Teams communication was an innovative system that employed quick access to aid employees, with the help of WhatsApp. The IT team was available on multiple systems. When they were required to undertake personal tasks and needed a team member to assist or be on standby, they communicated effectively. Training IT staff members under lockdown was difficult because it was done remotely on days when the person would be in the office, and the new person had to learn quickly because this is a support department that needs to aid others. Training in-house is far superior to training remotely. Security was always in place, with GlobalProtect and two-step authentication for personnel who

had to print from home, as well as sign-off and approval. Daily security checks were performed remotely to ensure that no dangers existed.

4.7 Willingness of workers to return to working in the office after the pandemic

Most workers 46% (n = 6) were not willing to go back to work, whilst 31% (n = 4) were happy to go back to working in the office (Figure 4.3). Another 23% (n = 3) were neutral about this. Due to the flexibility that remote work provided for their lifestyles and the numerous other perceived advantages of flexible working, most participants were not eager to return to their offices for daily work. Some respondents questioned why they would need to go back to their offices since they had proved that they could work remotely over the previous two years. Several respondents claimed that the move to remote work had given them the chance to learn new skills, like how to supervise people while working remotely. Others discovered that online meetings opened fresh business chances by connecting them with people and organisations they might not have otherwise encountered. The 31% who showed a willingness to return to the office indicated that virtual meetings could not replace in-person interactions.

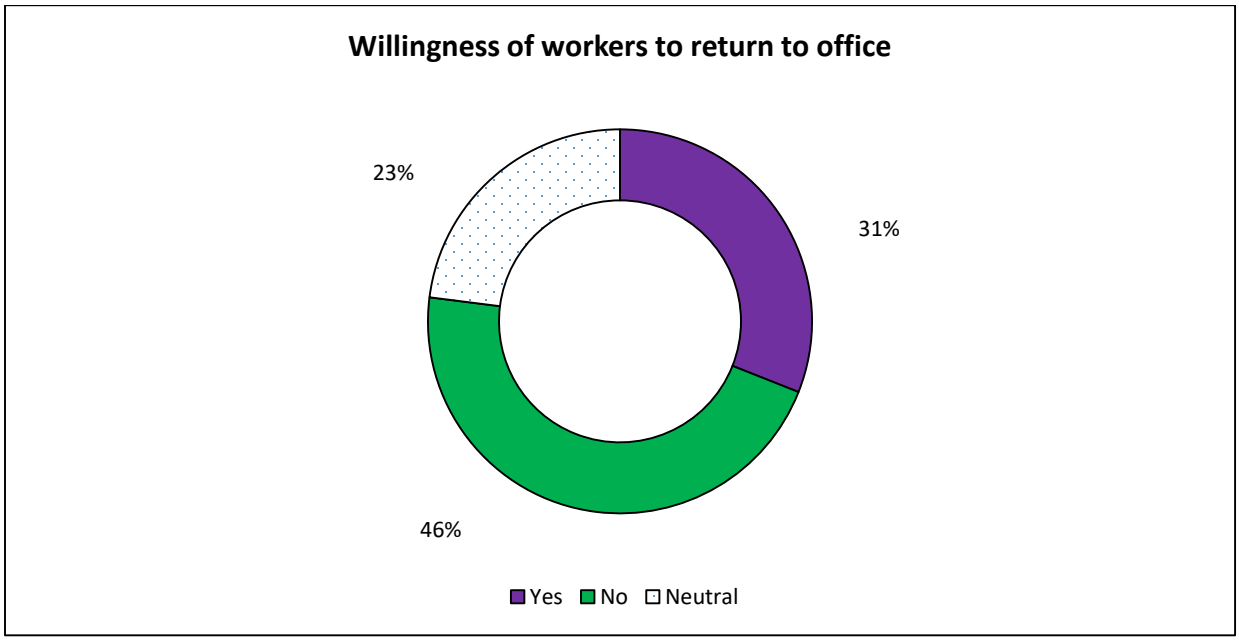

Figure 4.3: Willingness of workers to return to working in the office

Boland (2020) reported that 80% of the people questioned claimed to enjoy working from

home. Many employees were liberated from the long commutes to and from work and had found some productive ways to spend that time. Most people had got used to greater flexibility in balancing their professional and personal lives and were not willing to return to the office (Boland, 2020). In a survey conducted by Digital.com (2023), 51% of employees who were interviewed believed that they were more productive working from home than in the office. Other studies have confirmed this trend (e.g., Alexander et al., 2023). It therefore makes sense that a percentage of employees want to continue working from home. In this study, it seems the majority of employees were not willing to go back to the office. In an extreme case reported by Digital.com (2023), the return to the office was marred by several challenges including individuals who had got so used to working from home that they quit their jobs when the employer asked them to resume working in the office. Employers should therefore conduct surveys like these to determine the preference of employees regarding working from home or the office and come up with the best system that guarantees the productivity of the company while meeting the welfare needs of the workers (Alexander et al., 2023).

4.8 Improving working from home

With regard to measures that can be implemented to improve working from home, most respondents (33%) mentioned that not much should be done as they were satisfied with the current ERP platforms and working-from-home support (Figure 4.4). Other respondents (25%) believed that their companies needed to invest in better tools and equipment for working from home to be practised effectively. Seventeen percent of the respondents highlighted the issue of improving internet connectivity and another 17% brought up the issue of additional employees and a day for planning. A few respondents (8%) felt that there should be a set schedule for working from home (Figure 4.4).

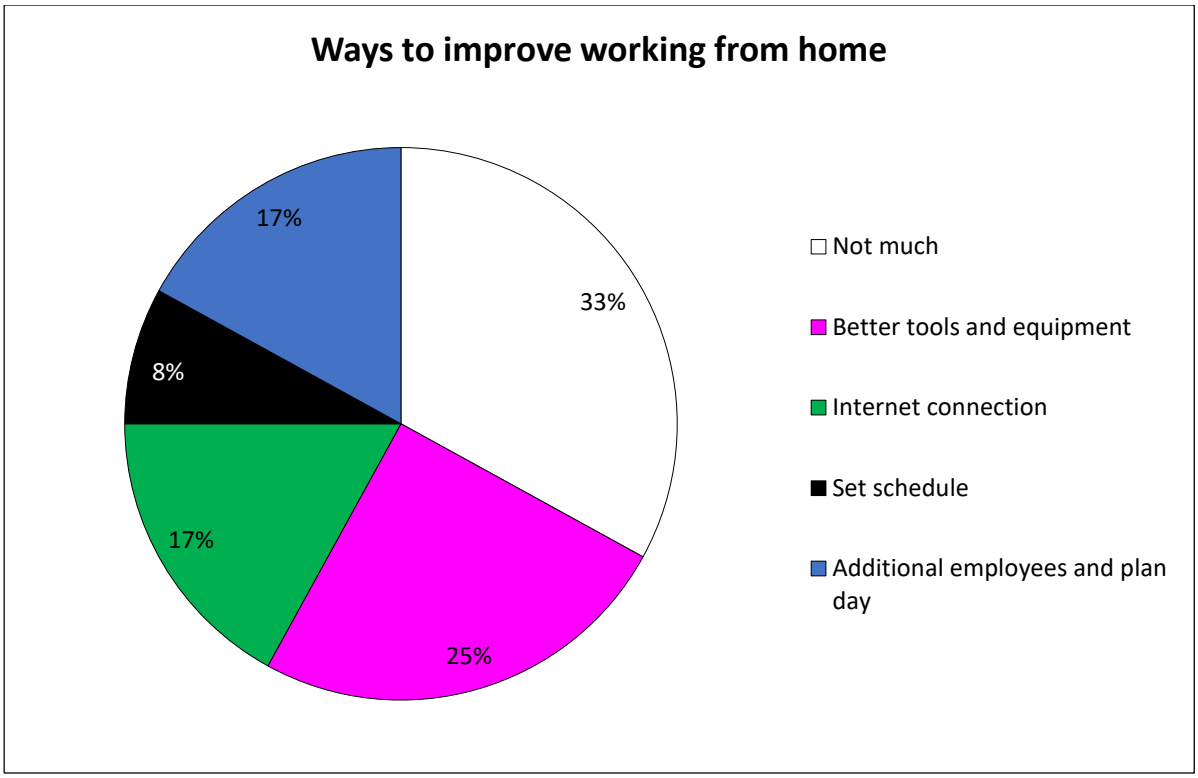

Figure 4.4: Ways to improve working from home

There are several ways in which organisations can support their employees to work from home. According to Wang et al. (2021), organisations should ensure that employees working remotely have the right technological tools and resources to enable them to perform their work effectively. The employer should set clear objectives and goals to give employees a sense of belonging. This provides necessary guidance and also helps to motivate employees. Employers must have one-on-one sessions to engage with their employees. The quick office chats or small meetings must be replaced by remote conversations on the phone, WhatsApp, Zoom and other platforms to discuss issues and progress in remote work. It is crucial regularly to conduct feedback sessions with employees to ensure that all are on the same page. Such sessions can also serve to highlight the remote working challenges being faced by the organisation. Keeping track of the tasks given to employees is required to measure individual performance, and employers should acknowledge employee accomplishments (Wang et al., 2021).

4.9 Summary

This chapter presented the research findings of the study by discussing the results of the questionnaires in relation to the research objectives. The results presented in this chapter provide information on how flexible ERP systems are in allowing for remote working. The findings reveal that most respondents support the WFH concept although there was no difference in number between those who regarded it as effective and those who did not. The findings also revealed that organisations provided an ERP platform/software/system to use during the WFH period, and that some of these ERP platforms were already being used by the organisations. Concerning the benefits associated with the adoption of ERP systems, all the respondents confirmed that their adoption during the COVID-19 pandemic was beneficial. Several challenges to the adoption of ERP systems were mentioned. The next chapter concludes this study and makes recommendations for organisations and individuals.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Working remotely from home has become more widespread in recent years as a result of expanding global markets, technological advances and shifting workforce demands (Barrero et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic that affected the entire world further accelerated this work-from-home trend, forcing businesses to adapt to remote work conditions to ensure the survival of their businesses (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Galanti et al., 2021; Mendrika et al., 2021). While it used to be mainly freelancers who worked remotely (Nakrošienė et al., 2019; Dingel & Neilman, 2020), working from home has now been accepted by organisations as a mainstream business practice (Barrero et al., 2023). Many organisations have managed to transition from traditional physical work models to remote and hybrid approaches that offer customers and employees greater flexibility (Barrero et al., 2023).

Enterprise resource planning systems have emerged as beneficial resources that enable business organisations to work remotely by integrating various business functions, such as human resources, finance, customer relationship management and inventory management. Through centralising data and streamlining operations, ERP systems improve decision-making processes, enhance visibility and increase the overall efficiency of the organisation. The benefits of ERP systems have been widely documented in the literature and are reviewed in Chapter 2 of this study.

Chapter 2 summarises what is known about ERPs. ERPs are defined and their evolution over decades is traced, beginning with Inventory Control Packages and progressing to the contemporary Extended ERP. The benefits and drawbacks of ERP are discussed, particularly as these manifested during lockdown periods as the pandemic pushed organisations to face new challenges. Since then, it has become clear that ERP technologies are just as important for a post-COVID organisational environment. Working

from home requires employees to be well-equipped, which includes efficient ERP systems, a strong IT team, the best connectivity, and working according to a family schedule that minimises disruptions. Despite the various benefits of working from home and using ERP systems, there are also challenges to be faced and their introduction requires effective corporate support and communication. This study therefore filled a research gap by investigating how adaptable ERP systems are for permitting remote working in South Africa.

The hotel and hospitality industry was also highly affected during the pandemic, and businesses without ERP systems seem to have suffered the most. This study explored the flexibility of ERP systems in enabling remote working in the hotel and hospitality industry of South Africa. The focus was on hotels in Cape Town affiliated with Hotel Express International. The research utilised a mixed methods approach, administering a semi-structured questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions to gather insights from participants. The project was driven primarily by the desire to understand what percentage of ERP systems made remote working optimal in terms of both job efficiency and work-life balance. Looking back on the early days of the practice, most responses were positive. This chapter reflects on the study, provides a conclusion, and makes recommendations based on the research findings presented in the previous chapter.

5.2 Recap of the research: An overview

Chapter 1: This chapter introduced the thesis, providing some background to the study, and presenting the problem statement, research aim and objectives, research questions and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2: The chapter presented a review of existing literature on ERP systems. The literature canvassed supports the theoretical argument being made and demonstrates that the author understands the primary ideas and discoveries relevant to the topic.

Chapter 3: This chapter discussed the research design and methodologies used in the study, including the research instrument employed for data collection.

Chapter 4: The chapter presented and discussed the research findings of the study.

Chapter 5: This current chapter concludes the study by referring to the results presented in Chapter 4. The research questions are reflected on and a conclusion is reached.

5.3 The research questions answered by the study's findings

- How do workers perceive working from home?
- Do workers have institutional support towards adopting enterprise resource planning systems?
- What are the benefits associated with the adoption of enterprise resource planning systems?
- What are the major risks or challenges associated with ERP systems and working from home?
- Are workers willing to return to working in the office after the pandemic?

5.4 Conclusions

5.4.1 How do workers perceive working from home?

The findings of the study reveal that most employees were very successful working remotely and positively perceived the working-from-home practice. This could be due to the employee benefits associated with remote working, as described in Chapter 2: a flexible working schedule, reduced commuting time, avoidance of office politics, using less office space, increased motivation and improved gender diversity (Dingel & Neilman, 2020; Thorstensson 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021; Kaluza & Van Dick, 2023; Kooli, 2023). It must be recalled that the work-from-home practice had been introduced by almost all business sectors because of government directives to shut down physical operations in order to curb COVID-19. However, working remotely has since gained momentum all over the world (Raišienė et al., 2020; Kaluza & Van Dick, 2023; Kooli, 2023), which suggested

that it was timely to determine to what extent employees in the hotel and hospitality industry have accepted the work-from-home practice.

As most respondents had a positive perception of working from home, the hotel and hospitality industry is in an advantageous position to curb the drastic impacts of events like a future pandemic. Yet the percentage of employees who negatively perceived working from home cannot be ignored, as they identified several real drawbacks to working from home. The most important of these is the absence of institutional support: if such support is lacking, employees develop a negative attitude towards working from home. It is important for organisations to identify such factors and adequately equip employees with the resources and skills required for remote working.

The results of this study correlate with other surveys conducted around the world to determine employees' perceptions of working from home. In a survey by Global Workplace Analytics (2021), 68% of employees had a positive perception of working from home, regarding the arrangement as highly successful. In China, Qu and Yan (2023) determined the satisfaction levels of employees with working from home. They report that most workers were highly satisfied with remote working as long as their remuneration was not affected (Qu & Yan, 2023). Raišienė et al. (2020) determined the perceptions of employees towards working remotely in Lithuania. The country had previously had a low percentage of workers working from home and had suddenly to switch to remote working. The study showed that employees were satisfied with working from home, with differences in opinion that were attributed to demographic details such as age, work experience, education, and previous experience of remote working (Raišienė et al., 2020). In South Africa, 63% of workers in various sectors believed they were successful when working from home and perceived the experience positively (Raze, 2022). The results from this study therefore corroborate other research findings both within South Africa and around the world.

It is also important to note that after the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working opportunities declined and are largely restricted to specific industries (Business Tech,

202). It is specifically those industries with a high demand for specific critical skills where job operations can be done remotely. Examples include jobs in the ICT space, which makes up about 60% of all remote working followed by finance, admin, business management and sales (Business Tech, 2020). As the Hotel Express International hotels have IT departments, these are already equipped with the knowledge and skills required for remote working.

5.4.2 Do workers have institutional support towards adopting ERP systems?

When business organisations make decisions on the adoption and implementation of ERP systems, there is a range of factors that need to be considered. As raised in the previous sub-section, it is important to equip employees with adequate resources for them to be able to work from home and efficiently utilise ERP systems. The results of this study revealed that all the respondents received support from their organisations for them to work from home. The support received included an ERP platform/software/ system that they used during the work-from-home period. The employees confirmed that some of the ERP platforms were already being used by the organisation before the COVID-19 pandemic. This is commendable as it revealed that the organisation was well prepared for unforeseeable and adverse circumstances.

The results of this study also correlate with other research findings around the world that acknowledge organisational support as an important factor in the successful adoption of ERP systems. In India, putting in place efficient ERP systems resulted in preserving databases, saving time, cutting costs and other benefits (Pandey & Kumar, 2023). In a study conducted in Nigeria, organisational support was among the three main factors that significantly influenced the adoption of ERP systems to improve the performance of an organisation (Aremu et al., 2023). In South Africa, Aroba and Mnguni (2023) investigated impediments to the adoption of ERP systems and identified one of these as the availability of sound ERP systems. In a separate study, Ngoepe and Mello (2021) emphasised the importance of organisational support in adopting ERP systems. It is interesting to note that Ngoepe and Mello (2021) revealed that a South African water utility company has been implementing an ERP system since 2004. The availability of ERP systems remains

a major factor in the implementation of work-from-home practices. The fact that all the participants confirmed that they had received institutional support places the hotel and hospitality industry in a position of being able to thrive during pandemics. The use of cloud computing in ERP systems has offered business organisations the flexibility to carry out core business functions remotely.

5.4.3 What are the benefits associated with the adoption of ERP systems?

This study revealed the benefits associated with the adoption of ERP systems as a response to the challenges posed by COVID-19. The pandemic struck most businesses, and without sound ERP systems, many of them were highly impacted. ERP systems came to be enormously appreciated as they enabled work to continue remotely. The participants in this study revealed how ERP systems generally improved their performance, resulting overall in customer satisfaction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, certain hotels were allowed to open under strict conditions and one of the requirements was that they had to make do with fewer members of staff in the building. It was important to have ERP systems that enabled customers to book and receive service with minimal interaction between them and hotel employees.

The participants also revealed several personal benefits they gained from ERP adoption, as described Section 5.4.1, above. When an employee adopts an ERP system and works remotely, several problems associated with office work are resolved. The issue of transport to the office and associated challenges that include costs, traffic jams and consequent delays are all overridden by working from home. Other plus factors include the avoidance of office politics and the use of less office space (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021; Kooli, 2023). The results show that when employees work in an environment where they are happy and comfortable, productivity increases.

5.4.3 What are the major risks or challenges associated with ERP systems and working from home

Despite the benefits associated with the adoption of ERP systems and working from home, several challenges and risks should not be ignored as they affect the overall

implementation of working remotely. These were discussed in a focus group comprising nine IT specialists. The IT specialists revealed how prepared they were to tackle the challenges associated with the adoption of ERP systems during the pandemic.

According to the participants, training staff members under lockdown was difficult because it had to be done remotely or on days when the trainee was in the office. The new person had to learn quickly because IT is a supportive department whose role is in part to assist others. Security was always in place, with GlobalProtect and two-step authentication for personnel who had to print from home, as well as sign-off and approval. Security checks were performed remotely on a daily basis to ensure that no dangers existed. The challenge was the ongoing need to upgrade systems and passwords so that the systems were always up to date, as well as to curb attacks on company websites and important information. Employees often struggled with remembering passwords that were frequently updated. The issues of load shedding and network connectivity also constituted a major challenge, though this was beyond the employee's and employer's control. On the whole, according to members of the focus group, hotels were managing the difficulties associated with the adoption of ERP systems rather well.

5.4.4 Are workers willing to return to working in the office after the pandemic?

This is the last research question addressed by the study. Based on the benefits and challenges associated with ERP adoption and working from home, most workers were not willing to go back to the office after the COVID-19 regulations were lifted. Many participants questioned the need to go back to work since they had been productive throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. They attributed this to the flexibility that remote work provided for their lifestyles and the numerous other perceived advantages of flexible working. Working from home has numerous potential benefits for both the employer and the employee, as discussed in Chapter 2. This result correlates with that of Samarasinghe et al. (2021), who found a significant positive relationship between ERP adoption and employee performance, accompanied by an unwillingness to return to work at the office. Liu et al. (2020) also investigated the willingness of employees to return to work after the COVID-19 pandemic. Most participants, particularly women and employees living in multi-

generational households, were unwilling to return to work after the pandemic (Liu et al., 2020). Kong et al. (2022) reported that individuals with some prior work-from-home experience were reluctant to return to work, while those who did not have this were willing to return to work. Organisations should therefore conduct an in-depth analysis of the feasibility of continued remote working so that they can reach an arrangement that supports productivity at the workplace and the welfare of the employees.

5.5 Overall conclusion

This explored the flexibility, advantages and disadvantages of ERP systems that allow for remote working in the hospitality sector of Cape Town. This aim was broken down into five objectives, which were all achieved by collecting data through questionnaires and a focus group.

It became clear that COVID-19 made remote working the “new normal”, provided that the organisation had the necessary ERP systems and technologies in place to allow staff to work remotely with ease. The study revealed that employees were very successful working remotely and positively perceived the working-from-home practice. The success of adopting ERP systems was mainly due to the organisational support that the employees received to enable them to utilise these systems and work remotely. The ERP support systems included the ERP platform/software/system that they used during the work-from-home period. The study has also revealed the benefits associated with the adoption of ERP systems in line with the challenges posed by COVID-19. Most importantly, ERP systems enabled employees to continue working despite the regulations put in place by the government of South Africa.

The adoption of ERP systems was not, however, without certain impediments. Several challenges and risks were cited by the participants, including technological challenges and website attacks, as well as load shedding and network connectivity issues. Working from home has disadvantages such as social and professional isolation, as well as a lack of creativity because of the absence of in-office interaction. Overall, this research has provided a thorough analysis of the many ways in which ERP systems help to create a

flexible working environment and enable an organisation to operate smoothly. Several participants reported that working from home made it more difficult to establish a good work-life balance since they worked longer hours. Many participants had young children who were not yet in school, requiring them to balance work from home with childcare. Because of the pandemic, many stated they had more time to spend with their friends and family. To ensure the successful implementation of the work-from-home policy in a way that is likely to be advantageous to both the employee and employer, certain criteria and principles must be in place: most importantly, the IT department and the ERP system must provide employees with the support that they need to work effectively. The next subsection presents several recommendations arising from the research findings, including directions for further research.

5.6 Recommendations

5.6.1 Recommendations based on research questions

How do workers perceive working from home?

This study revealed that most employees were very successful working remotely and positively perceived the working-from-home practice. It is therefore recommended that organisations should periodically allow a percentage of their employees to work from home so that their skills are enhanced and they will be well prepared for anything like a recurrence of COVID-19.

Do workers have institutional support towards adopting enterprise resource planning systems?

Organisations should equip their employees with ERP resources and skills that enable them to work from home. Among other advantages, this enables employees to remotely access their databases to respond to urgent business requests.

What are the major risks or challenges associated with ERP systems and working from home?

Organisations should determine the challenges and benefits of adopting ERP systems and working from home. This can be done through meetings and workshops to discuss

and assess the success of the ERP systems so that the associated benefits are maintained and challenges are addressed. Failure to do the latter will affect the performance of the organisation in the face of a situation that requires remote work.

Are workers willing to return to working in the office after the pandemic?

The employer should have an understanding regarding the preference of workers to work from home or in the office. A hybrid working model can be adopted to allow employees to combine on- and off-site work in ways that best suit them and their employer. Hybrid working will improve the satisfaction levels of employees, which is important for the business to remain competitive.

5.6.2 General recommendations

It is now simpler for businesses to adapt to new working techniques than it would have been in the past thanks to the broad availability of internet infrastructure and software such as ERP systems. An ERP is effectively a foundation on which companies can base their operations, and it will continue to serve as such for years to come. Modern software, employees' ERP knowledge, and recent organisational tendencies have shown crucial flexibility and openness, enabling a variety of work practices without the need for technological adaptation. However, it has been said that if working from home becomes more popular, businesses will need more sophisticated organisational techniques and technologies that as closely as possible replicate the "in-office" experience.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, organisations that do not already have a flexible working hours policy should consider adopting one. Participants in this study had a positive outlook on the notion of a flexible working environment, but the success of a working-from-home policy depends on the organisation's having a culture of open and honest communication. This is what organisations, in the hospitality industry and beyond, need to develop so that they are able fully to execute their business mandates.

5.7 Limitations

The study only focused on the hotel and hospitality sector in Cape Town and their adoption of ERP systems. Quite obviously, this does not represent all the hotels in the province or in South Africa at large. It does, however, provide a snapshot of the extent to which hotels have adopted ERP systems and their level of preparedness in the event of pandemics or other unforeseen situations. The research also sampled individuals with positions higher up the organogram hierarchy and did not sample lower-level workers. The information obtained is therefore biased towards this sample group and the views of general workers who may also be affected by work-from-home/office policies were not captured. As the study was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a challenge to conduct face-to-face interviews. Questionnaires had to be sent to potential participants, who may not have fully understood all the questions. This challenge could have been averted by face-to-face interviews, where the interviewer can clarify each and every question. Lastly, this study had a sample size of 20. Future studies may need to gather information from a larger sample so that comprehensive information on ERP systems adoption can be documented.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This Chapter concluded the study by reflecting on the findings and addressing the research questions. The research highlighted the critical role of ERP systems in enabling remote working, particularly in the hotel and hospitality industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees perceived remote work positively, benefiting from flexibility, reduced commuting, and increased productivity. Institutional support for ERP adoption was identified as essential for ensuring smooth transitions to remote work. While challenges such as training difficulties, security concerns, and technological limitations were noted, the study found that ERP systems significantly facilitated the shift to remote work. Moreover, most employees expressed a preference for continuing remote work post-pandemic, suggesting a potential shift toward hybrid work models. The study also identified the need for organisations to address the risks and challenges associated with ERP systems, ensuring continued support for remote work and optimal performance. Recommendations for future improvements were also provided.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: CPUT Ethics Approval Certificate

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

P.O. Box 1906 | Bellville 7535
Symphony Road Bellville 7535
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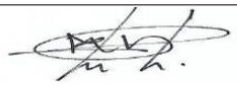
Tel: +27 21 4603291
Email: fbmsethics@cput.ac.za

Office of the Chairperson Research Ethics Committee	**FACULTY: BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES**

The Faculty's Research Ethics Committee (FREC) on **16 November 2021**, ethics **APPROVAL** was granted to **Zenobia N. Adams (207148911)** for a research activity for **Master of Business and Information Administration** at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Title of project:	**The Function of Enterprise Resource Planning systems in the establishment of a flexible working environment in South Africa organisation** Researcher (s): Prof V Naicker

Decision: APPROVED

 **Signed: Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee**	**30 November 2021** **Date**

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the CPUT Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study requires that the researcher stops the study and immediately informs the chairperson of the relevant Faculty Ethics Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines, and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, notably compliance with the Bill of Rights as provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (the Constitution) and where applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003 and/or other legislations that is relevant.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after two (2) years for Masters and Doctorate research project from the date of issue of the Ethics Certificate. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report (REC 6) will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Clearance Certificate No | 2021_FBMSREC 107

Appendix B: Permission to conduct research letter

Department of Business & Information Administration
FACULTY OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT SCIENCES
PO Box 652, Hannover Street, District 6, Cape Town, 8000

20 March 2023

To whom it may concern

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Zenobia Adams, and I am currently a Business and Information Systems student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in Cape Town. The research I wish to conduct is towards a Master's in Business & Information Administration (MBIS) that involves *"the function of Enterprise Resource (ERP) systems in creating a flexible working environment in South African businesses"*. This project will be conducted under the supervisor of Prof. V Naicker and Mr D Dyers from the department of Business & Information Administration at CPUT.

Individuals between the ages of 25 to 50 from your company will be invited to take part in this research. They'll be prompted to fill out a questionnaire if they fully give consent, furthermore from a supportive perspective, there will be a separate focus group session with employees within the IT department. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes whereas the focus group discussions will take approximately 60 minutes. The discussion will be recorded, and it will only be used for the purpose of the study.

Participants will be asked to give their written consent before the research commence. Their completed responses whether via questionnaire or recorded focus group session will be treated confidentially, and the identities of the individuals will be anonymous unless otherwise indicated beforehand. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

As a result, I am here by writing to request written permission to conduct my research at your organization. The authorization letter should be written on your organization's letterhead, signed, and dated, and include my name and the title of my research title.

If you require any other information, please let me know. I eagerly await your response as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,
Zenobia Natalie Adams

Contact Details

Student: Ms Z Adams
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Supervisor: Prof V Naicker
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Co-Supervisor: Mr D Dyers
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Appendix C: Questionnaire

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Questionnaire

I'm researching the function of ERP systems in fostering a flexible working environment in South African businesses. I'd like to hear about your experiences working from home and balancing career and family life during and after the pandemic. Please take 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire; your comments are anonymous, and you may skip any question you are unsure about. All information gathered will be used solely for research purposes.

1. Personal Information (please mark with and X)

Gender:	Female:	Male:

Age:	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60years or older

What is your highest qualification?

Grade 12	Certificate	Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate

How many years of experience do you have within the industry?

1-5years	6-10years	11-15years	16-20years	21yearsormore

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how frequently do you communicate with clients? 1 being never & 10 being everyday

_____
_____
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_____
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3. **What are your thoughts on working from home?**

4. **Do you consider yourself to have a healthy work-life balance?**

5. **Do you have a separate and appropriate workplace in your home?**

6. **Is it simple to "turn off work mode" after the day is done?**

7. **Do you think you're effective at home as you are at work?**

8. Is there anything preventing you from finishing your work?

_____
_____
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_____

9. Has someone on your team been particularly supportive of your WFH transition?

_____
_____
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_____

10. Did your organisation provide an ERP platform/software/system to use during the WFH period?

_____
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11. Did the ERP platform/software/system increase or decrease productivity of the organisation?

_____
_____
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_____

12. Did the ERP platform/software/system benefit the employees?

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_____
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_____

13. Do you feel sufficiently connected to your teammates? NB: please explain whether answer yes or no

_____
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_____
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_____
_____

14. Do you believe you've had the opportunity to learn and grow in the recent 12 months? If so, how would you go about doing it? Why not, if not?

_____
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_____

15. Do you believe your teammates and team leaders communicate effectively?

_____
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_____
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_____
_____

16. **How pleased are you with management's communication frequency? 1 - Never & 10- frequently**

_____
_____
_____

17. **What methods of communication are most effective for you?**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

18. **Is it simple to contact your co-workers and team leaders when you require assistance?**

_____
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_____

19. **Do you trust and feel supported by your team leader? By means of the organisation?**

_____
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20. **What is your most difficult WFH challenge? What can your boss do to help you with your work while you're working from home?**

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21. Do you have all the necessary equipment and remote tools to do your work to the best of your ability? What do you require if not?

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22. What can be done personally do to improve your remote work experience?

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23. Are the WFH policies in place?

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_____
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_____
_____
_____

24. Are you looking forward to returning to the office?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

25. Do you look forward to returning to the office? Yes? or No? kindly elaborate

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

If you have any additional comments you wish to make, please feel free to add them

here.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thankyoufortakingthetimetocompletethequestionnaire;ifyouhaveanyquestions,pleasecontactther
esearcherat:

Miss Zenobia Adams through any of the

following

Email:207148911@mycput.ac.za

Contactnumber:0795863373
Orcontactmy supervisorProfVNaickeron0214603113Email:naickerv@mycput.ac.za