

J. Chiwawa<sup>1</sup> , V. Naidoo<sup>1</sup> , R. Rena<sup>2\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa

\*e-mail: renar@cput.ac.za

## STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN THE POST-COVID-19 PERIOD: LESSONS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

It is essential to have integrated approaches to building employees' post-pandemic resilience, performance, and coping in the workplace. This study aims to explore the strategies that can be adopted to improve the employees' performance in the higher education institutions of Zimbabwe, post-COVID-19 period. The study was conducted to determine the effective human resource management practices that can be used to tackle issues such as lack of resources, digitalization, and the adaptability of the workforce in the academic environment that is currently undergoing a lot of changes. A qualitative phenomenological research approach was employed and 18 managers from three higher education institutions were purposefully selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed thematically to determine the keyways to improve the employee performance in the post pandemic period. The study found four key strategies: (1) Digital skill training and performance coaching, (2) Wellness and mental health programs, (3) Policy Adjustments and Flexibility, and (4) Communication and Engagement Enhancement. These strategies collectively increase the employees' resilience, performance, and the overall institutional performance in the post-COVID era. The study recommends a holistic, evidence-based HR interventions tailored to Zimbabwe's socio-economic constraints. It is therefore important that institutions focus on the long term on skills, mental health, workplace flexibility and communication to sustain employee output. The study provides a novel view by incorporating digital transformation, well-being, and policy changes into a single model for increasing the effectiveness of employees.

**Keywords:** Employee Performance, Higher Education Institutions, Human Resource Strategies, Post-COVID-19, Zimbabwe.

Дж. Чивава<sup>1</sup>, В. Найду<sup>1</sup>, Р. Рена<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Квазулу-Натал университеті, Дурбан, Оңтүстік Африка

<sup>2</sup>Кейп түбегінің технологиялық университеті, Кейптаун, Оңтүстік Африка

\*e-mail: renar@cput.ac.za

### COVID-19-дан кейінгі кезеңде қызметкерлердің тиімділігін арттыру стратегиялары: Зимбабве жоғары оқу орындарының тәжірибесі

Қызметкерлердің постпандемиялық орнықтылығын, олардың нәтижелілігін және жұмыс орнындағы стресс факторларымен күресу қабілетін қалыптастыру үшін кешенді тәсілдерді қолдану қажет. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – COVID-19-дан кейінгі кезеңде Зимбабвенің жоғары оқу орындары қызметкерлерінің тиімділігін арттыруға бағытталған стратегияларды зерделеу. Зерттеу қарқынды өзгерістерге ұшырап отырған академиялық ортада ресурстардың жетіспеушілігі, цифрландыру және кадрлардың бейімделгіштігі сияқты мәселелерді шешуге мүмкіндік беретін адами ресурстарды басқарудың тиімді тәжірибелерін айқындауға бағытталды. Зерттеуде сапалық феноменологиялық тәсіл қолданылды; үш жоғары оқу орнынан 18 менеджер мақсатты іріктеу арқылы таңдалып, жартылай құрылымданған сұхбаттарға қатысты. Жиналған деректер постпандемиялық кезеңде қызметкерлердің тиімділігін арттырудың негізгі бағыттарын анықтау мақсатында тақырыптық талдау әдісімен өңделді. Нәтижесінде төрт негізгі стратегия анықталды: (1) цифрлық дағдыларды дамыту және нәтижелілікті арттыруға бағытталған коучинг; (2) әл-ауқат пен психикалық денсаулықты қолдау бағдарламалары; (3) ұйымдық саясатты түзету және икемділікті арттыру; (4) коммуникацияны күшейту және қызметкерлердің қатысу белсенділігін арттыру. Аталған стратегияларды кешенді түрде жүзеге асыру қызметкерлердің орнықтылығын, олардың нәтижелілігін және жалпы институционалдық тиімділікті пост-COVID-19 кезеңінде арттыруға ықпал етеді. Зерттеу Зимбабвенің әлеуметтік-экономикалық шектеулеріне бейімделген, дәлелдерге негізделген кешенді HR-интервенцияларды енгізуді ұсынады. Ұзақ мерзімді перспективада мекемелер қызметкерлердің өнімділігін тұрақты

психикалық денсаулықты қолдауға, жұмыс үдерістерінің икемділігіне және тиімді коммуникацияға назар аударуы тиіс. Зерттеудің жаңалығы – цифрлық трансформацияны, қызметкерлердің әл-ауқатын және ұйымдық саясаттағы өзгерістерді қызметкерлердің тиімділігін арттырудың бірыңғай моделіне біріктіруінде.

**Түйін сөздер:** қызметкерлердің тиімділігі, жоғары оқу орындары, адами ресурстарды басқару стратегиялары, пост-COVID-19, Зимбабве.

Дж. Чивава<sup>1</sup>, В. Найду<sup>1</sup>, Р. Рена<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Университет Квазулу-Натал, Дурбан, Южная Африка

<sup>2</sup>Кейпский полуостровной технологический университет, Кейптаун, Южная Африка

\*e-mail: renar@cput.ac.za

### **Стратегии повышения эффективности сотрудников в пост-COVID-19 период: опыт высших учебных заведений Зимбабве**

Необходимо применять интегрированные подходы к формированию постпандемической устойчивости сотрудников, их результативности и способности к совладанию с рабочими стрессорами. Цель данного исследования – изучить стратегии, которые могут быть использованы для повышения эффективности сотрудников высших учебных заведений Зимбабве в пост-COVID-19 период. Исследование было направлено на выявление эффективных практик управления человеческими ресурсами, позволяющих решать такие проблемы, как нехватка ресурсов, цифровизация и адаптивность персонала в академической среде, находящейся в состоянии интенсивных изменений. Применён качественный феноменологический исследовательский подход; 18 менеджеров из трёх высших учебных заведений были целенаправленно отобраны для участия в полуструктурированных интервью. Полученные данные были подвергнуты тематическому анализу с целью определения ключевых направлений повышения эффективности сотрудников в постпандемический период. В результате были выделены четыре основные стратегии: (1) развитие цифровых навыков и коучинг по повышению результативности; (2) программы поддержки благополучия и психического здоровья; (3) корректировка организационной политики и повышение гибкости; (4) усиление коммуникации и вовлечённости сотрудников. Совокупная реализация данных стратегий способствует повышению устойчивости персонала, его результативности и общей институциональной эффективности в пост-COVID-19 эпоху. Исследование рекомендует внедрение комплексных, основанных на доказательной базе HR-интервенций, адаптированных к социально-экономическим ограничениям Зимбабве. В долгосрочной перспективе учреждениям важно сосредоточиться на развитии навыков, поддержке психического здоровья, гибкости рабочих процессов и эффективной коммуникации для поддержания устойчивого уровня продуктивности сотрудников. Новизна исследования заключается в интеграции цифровой трансформации, благополучия персонала и изменений организационной политики в единую модель повышения эффективности сотрудников.

**Ключевые слова:** эффективность сотрудников, высшие учебные заведения, стратегии управления человеческими ресурсами, пост-COVID-19, Зимбабве.

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption in workplaces all over the world and therefore, public institutions of higher learning were not an exception. These institutions in Zimbabwe faced several challenges in the context of continuing with the academic work and protecting the employees (Fujita et al., 2021). As a result, changes in the workplace culture including telework, change in work schedule, and alterations in job description were implemented. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of life including social, economic and institutional life and this pandemic has

affected Higher Education institutions (Kaur & Gurnani, 2021). This has necessitated academic and administrative staff to change to new forms of work such as online learning, virtual meetings and altered business processes (Krishna et al., 2021). This sudden change has also implied that there is the need to look at how the performance of employees has been transformed in the post COVID-19 period, which is the central theme of this study.

Performance of employees is a critical factor in achieving the objectives of any organization and in the higher learning institution, both academic performance and administrative efficiency are of considerable importance (Hayashi et al., 2021). After

the pandemic, the concept of performance has not only been confined to accomplishment of tasks and attainment of organizational outcomes, but also includes bounce back, innovation, and emotional intelligence (Lim et al., 2020). The pandemic has, therefore, reminded the staff in the Higher Education institutions the need for flexible work arrangements, strong leadership and supportive environment (Skulmowski & Standl, 2021). Thus, performance of the employees in terms of effectiveness, viability, and job satisfaction became an important issue since the institutions struggled to achieve their academic and administrative goals under the conditions of reduced funding and increased demands.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about several changes to the workplace culture and thus affected the productivity, motivation, and effectiveness of workers in the higher learning institutions in Zimbabwe. Employees have faced issues such as technical difficulties, depression, and the new normal of working from home (Salju et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021). As institutions move to the next level after COVID-19 there is the need for sound strategies to enhance and sustain employee performance. However, the existing literature lacks a contextualization of the strategies within the socio-economic environment of Zimbabwe, which is characterized by resource constraints and systemic issues (Chimene et al., 2021). Therefore, it is still not clear how the institutions can strike a balance between the resource issues, cultural issues, and workforce issues in order to develop sustainable solutions. This research is therefore designed to investigate how higher education institutions in Harare can enhance employee performance as a way of adding to both the academic literature and practical management practices.

#### *Purpose of the study*

The purpose of this research is to investigate approaches that can be taken to enhance employee performance in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe, after the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on these institutions and the general challenges of limited resources and socio-economic issues, the study will attempt to establish the best human resource practices that can boost employee motivation, resilience and performance (Chimene et al., 2021; Hanu & Khumalo, 2023). The research will focus on organizational policies, employee adaptability and post pandemic recovery and thus will be useful in developing sustainable performance management practices that can aid in the success of institutions and their global competitiveness in the environment of rapid change (Judi & Kurniawan, 2024).

## **Literature review**

### *Theoretical framework*

The study is based on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV). Herzberg's theory looks at the motivational factors of recognition, career development, and achievement, as well as the hygiene factors of workplace safety, job security, and equitable policies to boost employee satisfaction and performance (Herzberg, 1968). These factors are particularly important after the COVID-19 pandemic, and institutions must pay attention to employee well-being and engagement to recover from the pandemic's effects (Rena and Mbukanma, 2023; Salju et al., 2023). The RBV strengthens this by explaining the strategic use of organizational resources like technological infrastructure, employee training, and leadership development to secure improved and sustained performance (Barney, 1991). This perspective is particularly important in resource scarce environments such as Zimbabwe where the institutions have to harness the existing strengths to create their competitive advantage (Chimene et al., 2021).

These theories provide an elaborate model that explains both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and the role of institutional resources in enhancing employee productivity. Thus, the study deploys both theory and practice in addressing the dual issue of employee needs and resource management to enhance sustainable performance in Zimbabwe's higher education sector (Wang et al., 2021).

### *Impact of COVID-19 on employee performance*

Both employees and organisations experience some form of crisis at some point in time that deploys organisational and personal resources while also interrupting the normal course of work (Rena, 2023; Hanu & Khumalo, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak brought many uncertainties to the management/ supervisors and employees in the workplace. The COVID-19 outbreak has affected the education sector in Zimbabwe, resulting in the closure of schools and disruption of learning processes nationwide (Mbunge et al., 2020). Popa et al (2022) found that the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees include fear of death of close friends and colleagues, job loss and uncertainty about the future as well as changes in work environment that decreased employees' motivation and performance.

Mohammed, Ibrahim, and Kawugana (2021) examined the effects of COVID-19 on employee performance at certain universities in Bauchi State and

discovered that the pandemic had a negative effect on the motivation and performance of employees, as well as their well-being. The pandemic especially affected the 50-64 years old employees (Mohammed et al., 2021). In some cases these employees were laid off and sent home and the young and inexperienced employees had to be left behind to do the job. So, the motivation and the performance of the young and inexperienced employees suffered (Rena and Mbukanma, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has normalised working from home for millions of employees worldwide. Many employees and businesses had to switch to remote work for the first time with no prior experience because of the pandemic (Rena and Mbukanma, 2023; Kwieciński, 2023; Langry and Rena, 2023). Early Eurofound estimates indicated that because of the pandemic, about 50% of employees worked from home (to some extent), up from 12% before the outbreak (Stofkova & Seemann, 2021). Many employees and organizations have adapted to the work-from-home model even after the pandemic. Like any organizational change, both the advantages and disadvantages of working from home are present (Rena and Mbukanma, 2023). This flexible work environment is generally perceived as a cultural shift that requires time to develop policies and rules to support work performance and balance (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has forced most firms to adopt this model while equipping most of its employees with the skills for remote work (Molino et al., 2020; Langry and Rena, 2023). As already stated, both advantages and disadvantages of remote work have been found in the literature (Vander Elst, Verhoogen, & Godderis, 2020).

#### *Post-COVID-19 HR Strategies to Enhance Employee Performance in Higher Education*

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the human resource departments in the higher education institutions have employed new strategies to build up the organization's capacity for resilience, performance, and meeting new challenges in the workplace (Rena and Mbukanma, 2023). These include flexibility, skill development, mental health support, and communication, to ensure that the new normal in the educational sector is sustainable (Atiku & Ganiyu, 2022; Sokolic, 2022). This has included the implementation of a flexible work policy which allows employees to choose between working from the office, from home or a combination of both, to reduce burnout and increase engagement. Atiku and Ganiyu (2022) state that such policies increase job

satisfaction and productivity, especially among academic staff who must balance between research and teaching because they get to choose when they want to work. Similarly, Sokolic (2022) report that higher education institutions that adopted flexible work arrangements had positive performance outcomes because employees were better at juggling work and personal life.

Training and digital skill development have also been identified as specific strategies that add value. The shift to online learning, which was forced by the pandemic, required institutions to invest in their employees' technological skills (Rena, 2023). Afrianty et al. (2022) establish that training in the use of digital platforms improves the quality of teaching and engagement in the virtual classroom. It also covers related areas such as management of development and lifelong learning that contribute to institutional resilience and work performance (Rena, 2023; Urbanek et al., 2023). The attention has also been paid to the mental health of the employees as the pandemic has brought many psychological challenges to the workplace. Organisations that have put in place facilities and services such as counselling, stress management workshops and wellbeing days have seen employee morale and engagement improve (Kelloway et al., 2023). Shipman et al. (2023) states that mental health support boosts motivation and commitment, which leads to high productivity at work. Communication and feedback are very important in aligning the employees with the organization's objectives. Shipman et al. (2023) established that the organizations that provided the employees with the regular feedback cycles and open communication had high trust and clarity, which in turn was associated with improved performance. Positive feedback is a part of the organization's commitment to growth; it makes the employees feel valued and motivated to work (Judi & Kurniawan, 2024).

#### **Materials and methods**

As explained by Williams (2021), phenomenology is the study of the meaning of the experiences of individuals, hence the most appropriate paradigm for identifying HR strategies that can be used to enhance employee performance post COVID-19. The design therefore allowed the researchers to understand the perception of the participants in detail to come up with useful conclusions regarding institutional responses.

A convenience sampling strategy was used to identify the higher education institutions that partic-

ipated in the study. This method was chosen because it was a convenient way of identifying institutions with employees who were available and willing to participate within the given time frame. Eighteen participants, who are Human Resource Managers and Deans of Students, were purposively selected from three higher education institutions, with six participants from each institution. Purposive sampling, as noted by Andrade (2021), is a technique used by researchers to select participants deliberately with the aim of having a sample that is representative of the population in terms of the study objectives. Semi-structured interviews were held with the participants and with the consent of the participants, the sessions were recorded and transcribed in full (McGrath, Palmgren, & Liljedahl, 2019). Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes in the data.

Ethical considerations were not forgotten. Confidentiality was kept throughout the study and permission was obtained from the participants and institutional authorities. According to Naidoo (2019) “the focal point of ethics in research is to protect the respondents from harm and safeguard their dignity, anonymity, and confidentiality”. The analysis of the study was shared with the participants to build confidence and transparency. The limitation of this study is that it only focused on respondents who held managerial positions in few institutions which were conveniently selected, and this may limit the generalization of the findings.

## Results and discussions

From the thematic analysis, one main theme was identified: Empowering Employee Skills Development, which is supported by four key strategies: Digital skill training and performance coaching, Wellness and mental health programs, Policy adjustments and flexibility, and Communication and engagement enhancement. These strategies are important for employee performance before and after COVID-19. They focus on training and development initiatives to fill the skill gap and enhance digital competence. Wellness and mental health are prioritized in wellness programs. Policy adjustments and flexibility emphasize adaptable work environments, while enhanced communication fosters trust and alignment with institutional goals. Analysis of how these strategies aid long-term employee performance and institutional resilience in the post COVID-19 era is provided in this section.

### *Digital skill training and performance coaching*

This strategy is aimed at closing skill gaps and enhancing digital competencies to enhance employee performance post COVID-19. Key interventions include investing in digital tools, reintroducing and refining the online performance management system with supportive training and implementing performance coaching to build adaptability. Training on digital tools improves greatly the performance of teaching and technical proficiency, while other skill development initiatives build resilience and sustain engagement in a dynamic work environment. This is confirmed by the following participant:

*We reinstated and enhanced the online performance management system, providing training to ensure effective use. Performance coaching was introduced to shift perceptions of performance management from periodic reviews to continuous engagement (Interviewee 10, 2024).*

This result is also in accordance with Bahmani-OSKooee and Feinberg (2022) who state that retraining and enhancing performance management systems are vital in the post-pandemic recovery phase. The focus on the reintroduction and improvement of online performance management systems, backed by training and performance coaching, is in line with Urbanek et al. (2023) who stated that continuous engagement improves the employee performance in the long run. The development of digital infrastructure and the education of employees to use these tools properly makes the performance systems strong and flexible in the event of organizational changes (Afrianty et al., 2022). The integration of digital literacy initiatives also supports Urbanek et al. (2023)’s claim that technical competency enhances creativity and strength. The skill acquisition and mental health management also echo Salju et al. (2023) suggesting that effective programs should encompass both the professional and emotional aspects of employees’ development.

### *Wellness and Mental Health Programs*

This sub-theme explains the HR strategies that help in supporting the mental and emotional well-being of employees in the post COVID-19 period. Wellbeing initiatives such as wellness events and the employee assistance programs for staff and their dependents were also mentioned by participants as being involved in helping with managing the mental health issues and building up resilience. Other measures also included debriefing sessions and mental health resources to assist the employees in their transition to the physical workplaces. These well-being

efforts are holistic and, therefore, complementary to the training efforts and conducive to overall performance. Positive strategies to mental health have therefore aided in making the transition to traditional work environments more seamless, thus enhancing resilience, well-being, and productivity in the changing workplace. This was also echoed by a participant who gave:

*The strategies we employed to improve performance post COVID 19 included; training and development interventions for all the staff, wellness events and the launch of Employee Assistance Programs to support both the staff and their families. We also have support programs like debriefing sessions and mental health resources (Interviewee 4, 2024).*

These findings are similar to those of Atiku and Ganiyu (2022) who state that employee assistance programs are very useful in improving organizational performance because they help in solving the problems of mental health. In a manner like Urbanek et al. (2023) stress that a holistic approach to mental health strengthens resilience and well-being and is consistent with training initiatives. Participants noted significant institutional investments in mental health resources, a commitment that supports Mohammed et al. (2021) assertion of organizational responsibility in promoting employee welfare. Skill development and mental health interventions are also integrated as Atiku and Ganiyu (2022) recommended holistic approaches to managing professional and emotional needs in the context of changing workplaces. Furthermore, the focus on debriefing sessions is in line with Bahmani-OSKooee and Feinberg's (2022) claim that such measures are necessary for helping employees transition back to physical workplaces. Also, Kelloway et al. (2023) point out that sustained mental health strategies are essential for smoother workforce adaptation and enhanced productivity in post-pandemic workplace dynamics. These integrated wellness programs show that a holistic approach to enhancing employee resilience and performance is important.

#### ***Policy Adjustments and Flexibility***

This strategy includes the adoption of hybrid work models as an important HR strategy in the post COVID 19 period to give the employees the option of working from home and coming to the office. Participants stated that the phased reintegration and retraining measures enabled a safe return to the workplace with minimal disruption to productivity and wellbeing. These institutions have recognized the need to change and have developed working

from home policies to formalise flexible work and ensure that workers have what they need to do their job. These changes in the policies of the organization are in line with the changes in the work environment, in order to meet the needs of the employees and achieve the organizational goals. By integrating flexibility and resource support these policy changes have improved the resilience and productivity of the workforce and have reinforced the balance between employee well-being and organizational performance during and after the pandemic. This perspective is also supported by a participant who stated:

*We have also implemented hybrid work models as one of our strategies and this has enabled staff to work from home. For instance, we have developed a work from home policy to ensure that the employees have what they need to work. (Interviewee 12, 2024).*

This study finds consistency with Bahmani-OSKooee and Feinberg (2022) in that the implementation of the hybrid work models improves employee well-being and productivity due to flexibility. Phased reintegration and retraining are also supported by Kwieciński (2023) who maintain that sticking to strategies of transitioning to the workplace is most useful in achieving the goals of employees and organization. Mathews et al. (2022) also establishes that the use of the hybrid model depicts organizational learning, which has a positive influence on employee satisfaction and performance during the recovery period. The development of working-from-home policies is in line with the idea of Stofkova and Seemann (2021), who state that rules are important for the management of flexible work arrangements. In addition, the provision of resources is related to Toropova et al. (2021) who discovered that remote work becomes more effective with appropriate tools and equipment. Atoko (2021) also argues that changes in policies should be made in relation to changes in the work environment in order to arrive at a balance between the organization's goal of building resilience and enhancing productivity in the post pandemic world.

#### ***Communication and Engagement Enhancement***

This strategy is an explanation of how the communications and engagement personnel should prepare for the post COVID 19 normal. Employees were prepared to tackle the challenges of the pandemic through mandatory training on tools like Moodle and MS Teams, online seminars and tailored awareness programs. A COVID 19 task team set up and guided by experts in Health Sciences cre-

ated a structured support system to facilitate collaboration, skill development and resilience. Monthly operational planning and strategy meetings as part of the structured communication strategies were also seen as important in setting targets, monitoring progress and ensuring coherence with the organizational objectives. These initiatives also enhanced accountability, improved interactivity between the staff and management, and created a collaborative culture that would foster the necessary change and growth in the shifting academic environment. One participant stated:

*A great deal of focus was placed on training especially on Moodle and MS Teams. Support mechanisms were also given to the academics on COVID 19 and its implications. A professor from Health Sciences was the head of the COVID 19 task team that was led by staff members. Moreover, I and my team attended a monthly Operational Planning and Strategy meeting where we set targets for the month (Interviewee 8, 2024).*

This outcome is also in line with the findings of Rana and Singh (2022) who state that training in digital platforms like Moodle and MS Teams enhances communication and productivity in academic institutions. The mandatory training and awareness programs described here are a form of structured digital skill development for fostering resilience in the crisis, as Bahmani-OSKooee and Feinberg (2022) also highlighted. Moreover, the formation of the COVID 19 task team is an example of a collaborative approach which is also supported by Atiku and Ganiyu (2022) in the sense that such initiatives which are led by experts help in solving the issues that are specific to the sector. In addition, Toropova et al. (2021) maintain that systematic communication strategies, including monthly progress meetings, are necessary for coherence with institutional objectives, while Kelloway et al. (2023) and Afrianty et al. (2022) stress that frequent feedback and interaction enhance accountability, trust, and engagement in transition.

## Conclusion

This study examines the measures that universities in Harare, Zimbabwe, have put in place to enhance employee performance after the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings show that the enhancement of performance needs multiply approaches that include skills training, wellness support, policy modifications, and communication enhancement. Skill and digital competency gaps were addressed

through training and development initiatives that promoted adaptability and resilience. It also identified that wellness programs, including mental health resources and Employee Assistance Programs, are vital for addressing the emotional well-being of employees in addition to their professional responsibilities.

Policy changes including hybrid work models and resource allocation showed that the institution is flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the employee, boosts productivity and increases job satisfaction. Improved communication strategies were also because of digital training and structured meetings to enhance collaboration, accountability and engagement in order to achieve institutional objectives. These interventions show that holistic and evidence-based approaches are crucial for lasting performance in constrained environments. The study contributes to academic literature and provides practical advice on managing workforce dynamics during the post-pandemic period. However, the findings indicate that more resources should be allocated to employee support and the use of available resources to maintain resilience, innovation and productivity in Zimbabwe's higher education sector.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be proposed as to how to enhance employee performance in higher education institutions in Harare, Zimbabwe during the post COVID 19 recovery period. In the first place, institutions should make sure that continuous skill development is encouraged through targeted training programs that address the emerging technological needs and digital competencies. This ensures that the employees can meet the changing needs of the job by having performance coaching and ongoing professional development as part of the institutional policies. Thirdly, wellness and mental health initiatives should be expanded to include regular debriefing sessions, comprehensive Employee Assistance Programs, and easy access to mental health services for employees and their dependents. These institutions should make sure that they promote the well-being culture and these programs should be part of their long-term plans. Fourthly, the flexible work policies such as the hybrid model and work from home should be formalized and frequently discussed to meet the needs of the employees and the goals of the organization. These institutions should also ensure that necessary resources and clear guidelines are available for supporting these policies. Lastly,

communication and engagement efforts should be enhanced through structured feedback mechanisms, regular progress meetings, and training on collaborative platforms like Moodle and MS Teams. This is because, formation of specialized task teams to address organizational challenges and fostering an

inclusive decision-making environment is most effective in building trust, accountability and alignment to goals. These recommendations are intended to help maintain the level of employee performance, well-being, and innovation to support institutional resilience and long-term success.

## References

- Afrianty, T. W., Artatanaya, I. G., & Burgess, J. (2022). Working from home effectiveness during Covid-19: Evidence from university staff in Indonesia. *Asia Pacific Management Review*, 27(1), 50-57.
- Andrade, C. (2021). The inconvenient truth about convenience and purposive samples. *Indian journal of psychological medicine*, 43(1), 86-88.
- Atiku, S. O., & Ganiyu, I. O. (2022). Flexible work options in higher educational institutions in times of crisis. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20, 1693.
- Atoko, S. R. (2021). The impact of remote working on employee performance during the Coronavirus (COVID19) Pandemic. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management*, 9(2), 369-383.
- Bahmani-OSKooee, M., & Feinberg, B. (2022). The effect of work discipline on employee job satisfaction with incentives as an intervening variable (Case Study on Medical doctor and Nurses in Wisconsin City Area). *MEDALION JOURNAL: Medical Research, Nursing, Health and Midwife Participation*, 3(4), 149-154.
- Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99-120.
- Chimene, M., Nhari, L. G., Dzobo, M., Mhango, M., & Dzinamarira, T. (2021). COVID-19 rapid response in a limited resource setting (notes from the field): Chinhoyi Provincial Hospital, Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe. *Pan African Medical Journal*, 39(1).
- Fujita, K., Kanai, O., Nanba, K., Esaka, N., Hata, H., Seta, K., & Odagaki, T. (2021). Acute rhabdomyolysis in a young woman with moderate covid-19. *ID Cases*, 25, e01212.
- Hanu, C., & Khumalo, N. (2023). Developing ambidexterity and resilience: The predictive role of high-performance work systems. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21, 2226.
- Hayashi, K., Ito, Y., Yamane, R., Yoshizaki, M., Matsushita, K., Kajikawa, G., & Goto, H. (2021). The case of a liver-transplant recipient with severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 infection who had a favorable outcome. *Clinical Journal of Gastroenterology*, 14(3), 842-845.
- Herzberg, F. (1968). *Work and the Nature of Man*. Cleveland: World Publishing.
- Judi, T. E., & Kurniawan, D. (2024). Public policy and organizational resilience: Leadership, innovation, and sustainability in the post-pandemic era. *Manajemen dan Bisnis*, 23(1), 197-212.
- Kaur, K. and Gurnani, B. (2021). Intricate scientometric analysis and citation trend of covid-19-related publications in Indian journal of ophthalmology during covid-19 pandemic. *Indian Journal of Ophthalmology*, 69(8), 2196-2201.
- Kelloway, E. K., Dimoff, J. K., & Gilbert, S. (2023). Mental health in the workplace. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 10(1), 363-387.
- Krishna, V., Ahmad, M., Overton, E. T., & Jain, G. (2021). Recurrent covid-19 in hemodialysis: a case report of 2 possible reinfections. *Kidney Medicine*, 3(3), 447-450.
- Kwieciński, K. (2023). Home during quarantine: living space weaknesses revealed by COVID-19 pandemic. *Środowisko Mieszkaniowe/Housing Environment*, 41(1), 4-14.
- Lim, S. M., Tan, M., Sze, Y. L., & Au, L. (2021). Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on COVID-19 negative geriatric patients with hip fractures. *The Journal of Frailty & Aging*, 10, 75-76.
- Mathews, M., Khumalo, N., & Dlamini, B. I. (2022). Roots and causes of occupational stress amongst female academics in universities of technology in South Africa. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 11(7).
- Mbunge, E., Fashoto, S., Akinnuwesi, B., Gurajena, C., Metfula, A., & Mashwama, P. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic in higher education: critical role of emerging technologies in Zimbabwe. *Available at SSRN 3743246*.
- McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. J., & Liljedahl, M. (2019). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical teacher*, 41(9), 1002-1006.
- Molino, M., Ingusci, E., Signore, F., Manuti, A., Giancaspro, M. L., Russo, V., & Cortese, C. G. (2020). Wellbeing costs of technology use during Covid-19 remote working: An investigation using the Italian translation of the technostress creators scale. *Sustainability*, 12(15), 5911.
- Naidoo, V. (2019). Relevance and Importance of Ethics in Post-Grad Research at South African Universities. In A. Sandu, A. Frunza, & E. Unguru (Eds.), *Ethics in Research Practice and Innovation* (pp. 75-87). IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-6310-5.ch003>
- Popa, I., Ștefan, S. C., Olariu, A. A., Popa, Ș. C., & Popa, C. F. (2022). Modelling the COVID-19 pandemic effects on employees' health and performance: a PLS-SEM mediation approach. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(3), 1865.

- Rana, S., & Singh, S. (2022). Performance appraisal justice and affective commitment: examining the moderating role of age and gender. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 30(1), 24-46.
- Rana, S., & Singh, S. (2022). Performance appraisal justice and affective commitment: examining the moderating role of age and gender. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 30(1), 24-46.
- Rena, R. and Mbukanma, I. (2023). Evaluating the Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Socioeconomic Status of South African Women. *Ikenga: Journal of Institute of African Studies*, 24(1), 1-20.
- Rena, R. (2023). An overview on the role of Innovation in making Sustainable and future-ready Businesses. *Indian Journal of Commerce & Management Studies*, 14(1), 11-18.
- Langry, F., and Rena, R. (2023). Socio-Economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the South African informal economy. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies*, 5(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v5i1.11818>.
- Salju, S., Junaidi, J., & Goso, G. (2023). The effect of digitalization, work-family conflict, and organizational factors on employee performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 21(1), 107.
- Shipman, K., Burrell, D. N., & Huff Mac Pherson, A. (2023). An organizational analysis of how managers must understand the mental health impact of teleworking during COVID-19 on employees. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 31(4), 1081-1104.
- Skulmowski, A. and Standl, B. (2021). Covid-19 information fatigue? A case study of a German university website during two waves of the pandemic. *Human Behaviour and Emerging Technologies*, 3(3), 350-356.
- Sokolic, D. (2022). Remote work and hybrid work organizations. *Economic and social development: Book of proceedings*, 202-213.
- Stofkova, Z., & Seemann, P. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of life. In *SHS Web of Conferences* (vol. 129, p. 01029). EDP Sciences.
- Toropova, A., Myrberg, E., & Johansson, S. (2021). Teacher job satisfaction: the importance of school working conditions and teacher characteristics. *Educational review*, 73(1), 71-97.
- Toscano, F., & Zappalà, S. (2020). Smart working in Italia: origine, diffusione e possibili esiti. *Psicologia sociale*, 15(2), 203-223.
- Urbanek, A., Losa, A., Wieczorek-Kosmala, M., Hlaváček, K., & Lokaj, A. (2023). Did the Quality of Digital Communication Skills in Education Improve after the Pandemic? Evidence from HEIs. *Sustainability*, 15(15), 11878.
- Vander Elst, T., Verhoogen, R., & Godderis, L. (2020). Teleworking and employee well-being in corona times: the importance of optimal psychosocial work conditions. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 62(12), e776-e777.
- Wang, B., Liu, Y., Qian, J., & Parker, S. K. (2021). Achieving effective remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic: A work design perspective. *Applied psychology*, 70(1), 16-59.
- Williams, H. (2021). The meaning of “Phenomenology”: Qualitative and philosophical phenomenological research methods. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(2), 366-385.

#### **Author Contributions**

*Julius Chiwawa: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Formal Analysis. Writing – Original Draft.*

*Vannie Naidoo: Project administration, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Supervision, Validation, Formal Analysis.*

*Ravinder Rena: Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Validation, Formal Analysis, Writing, Writing – Review & Editing.*

#### **Information about authors:**

*Julius Chiwawa – School of Management, IT and Governance, University of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban, South Africa, e-mail: chiwawajulie@gmail.com).*

*Vannie Naidoo – Professor at the School of Management, IT and Governance, University of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban, South Africa, e-mail: naidooa@ukzn.ac.za).*

*Ravinder Rena (corresponding-author) – Professor in the Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Management, Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (Cape Town, South Africa, e-mail: reinar@cput.ac.za).*

#### **Авторлар туралы мәлімет:**

*Джулиус Чивава – Менеджмент, ақпараттық технологиялар және басқару мектебі, Квазулу-Натал университеті (Дурбан, Оңтүстік Африка, e-mail: chiwawajulie@gmail.com).*

*Вэнни Найду – Менеджмент, ақпараттық технологиялар және басқару мектебінің профессоры, Квазулу-Натал университеті (Дурбан, Оңтүстік Африка, e-mail: naidooa@ukzn.ac.za).*

*Равиндер Рена (корреспондент-автор) – Кейп түбегінің технологиялық университетінің бизнес және басқару ғылымдары факультетінің кәсіпкерлік және бизнесті басқару кафедрасының профессоры (Кейптаун, Оңтүстік Африка, e-mail: reinar@cput.ac.za).*

**Сведения об авторах:**

Джулиус Чивава – школа менеджмента, информационных технологий и управления, Университет Квазулу-Натал (Дурбан, Южная Африка, e-mail: chiwawajulie@gmail.com);

Вэнни Найду – профессор школы менеджмента, информационных технологий и управления, Университет Квазулу-Натал (Дурбан, Южная Африка, e-mail: paidoova@ukzn.ac.za);

Равиндер Рена (автор-корреспондент) – профессор кафедры предпринимательства и управления бизнесом факультета бизнеса и управленческих наук Кейпского полуостровного технологического университета (Кейптаун, Южная Африка, e-mail: renar@cpu.ac.za).

Келіп түсті: 22 қаңтар 2026 жыл  
Қабылданды: 04 наурыз 2026 жыл