

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA



**THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ORGNISATIONS' WORK SYSTEMS,
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEES'
WELLBEING IN GHANA**



BY

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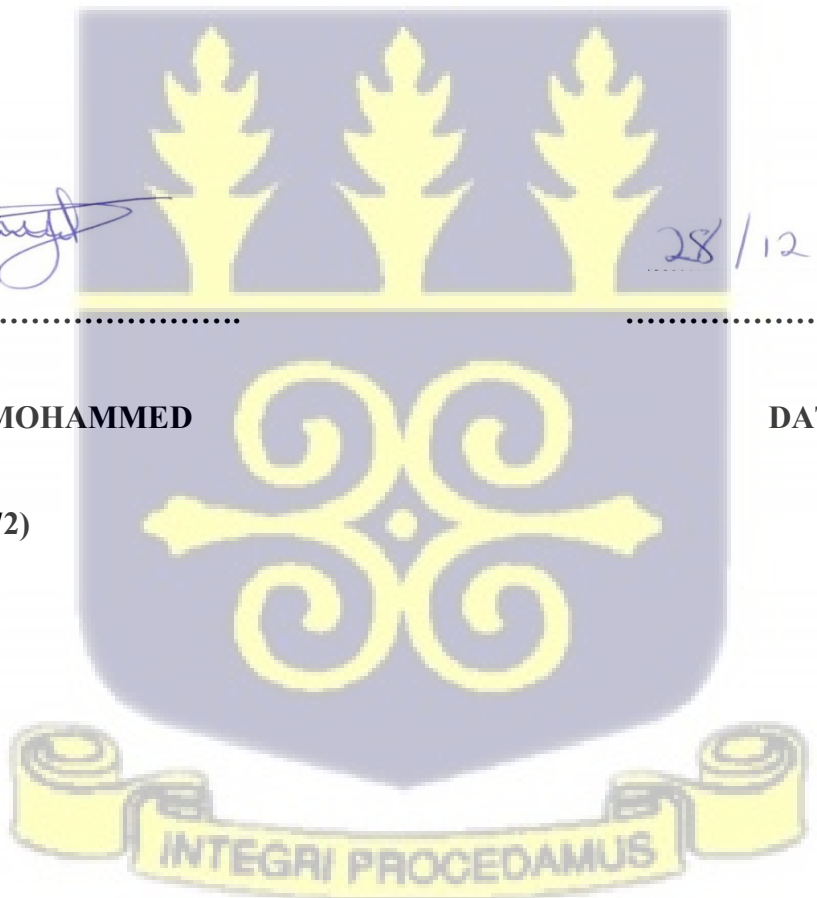
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DECLARATION

I, **RASHIDATU MOHAMMED**, hereby certify that this work is the result of my own research and has not been presented by anyone for any academic award in this or any other university. All references used in the work have been fully acknowledged.

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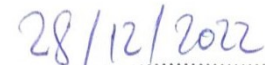
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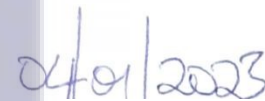
CERTIFICATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my entire family, particularly my parents, Alhaji Rabiuh Mohammed and Mrs. Sherifatu Mohammed. May Allah's blessings and protection be upon them.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs)
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
L&D	Learning and Development
R&D	Research and Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
GNA	Ghana News Agency
ILO	International Labour Organization
IHRMP	Institute of Human Resource Management Practitioners
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOI	Ministry of Information
RBV	Resource- Based View
VSA	Viable System Approach
VSM	Viable System Model



ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to explore the effects of COVID-19 on organisations' work system, digitalized human resource practices, and new capabilities necessary to survive and compete. Using a qualitative study method, a total of 20 medium to large-sized organisations were purposefully selected from Ghana's service sector, including: Educational, Transportation, Financial, Pharmaceutical, Health, Tourism and Hospitality sub- sectors. The research sample was made up of respondents in various managerial positions. To ascertain and explore themes linked to the research objectives, the study used a descriptive and thematic analysis technique. According to some of the findings, firms redesigned their work systems by implementing new business models that promote innovativeness through work virtualization, remote/telework deployment, and the adoption of flexible work schedules. The findings also indicated that the most essential capabilities required of firms to survive and compete in the post COVID-19 era are strengthened IT, improved L&D and/or R&D, effective human resources in terms of qualified and trained personnel, and the implementation of strong strategic plans and an effective management structure. Furthermore, findings revealed that triggers such as stress from work pressures and fear of COVID-19 had an influence on employees' well-being. Based on the study findings, it was suggested that employee well-being be prioritized in job designs since they are critical resources that support the flow of work and organisational success. It was also suggested that organisations integrate the aforementioned capabilities into their fundamental business functions in order to ensure survival, and competitive edge. Future research were also recommended to include other sectorial firms from other regions of Ghana to broaden the generalizability of the study findings.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the study

Globally, the coronavirus diseases of 2019 also known as “COVID-19” has imposed physical, psychological, and socioeconomic limits on individuals' survival, well-being, business growth, and recession on countries' gross domestic product (GDP). The United Nations Framework Report (2020) cites COVID-19 as one of the worst pandemics ever, with its effects including severe unemployment, limitations on free movement, and slow economic growth. According to the United Nations (2020), it had a tremendous influence on the global economy, totaling more than \$50 million, impacting a variety of sectors and businesses. Amankwah- Amoah, Khan, and Wood (2020), asserted that, it has recently been increasingly obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only fundamentally transformed the mode of operation of many organisations, but has also resulted in the failure of numerous firms around the world.

The coronavirus is said to have emerged from China (Wuhan, Hubei province) around December 2019. The COVID-19 virus is a zoonotic disease (or pathogens) that has been discovered to be transferred through droplets, contact, aerosol, and other routes (Tian, 2019) from an infected person's mouth or nose to bodily fluids when coughing, sneezing or talking. In February 2020, the International Committee on Virus Taxonomy (ICTV) and the World Health Organization (2020) both issued official names for the virus and the disease it causes. According to ICTV (2020), the virus was given the designation "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2," often referred to as "SARS-CoV-2". The name "SARS-CoV-2" was adopted because of its

genetic similarity to the virus accountable for the 2003 SARS outbreak, despite the fact that the two viruses are distinct (WHO, 2020a). The World Health Organization, on the other hand, labeled the virus "COVID-19" after previously developed guidelines with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the International Organization (FAO) (WHO, 2020).

According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) website, this COVID-19 pandemic has affected over 215 nations, with 234 million confirmed cases and 4.797 million fatalities as of October 3, 2021. Presently, according to World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) records, globally, as of 5: 08 pm CET on March 10, 2022, there were 450,229,635 recorded cases with a total of 6,019,085 deaths and 388,418,779 recoveries. Also, as of March 6, 2022, a total of 10,706,043, 684 vaccine doses were administered globally (WHO, 2022). These trends in virus-recorded figures and death tolls continued to be at all-time highs daily throughout the world. Concerning predictions of confirmed cases and death tolls globally from its inception in 2019 to its present status prompted the need for proper legislation to restrict its effects on people's mental health and well-being, and also the impact on business operations.

According to Yawson (2020), the global pandemic sparked a flurry of mitigation and reaction strategies around the world, with implications for economies, organisational behavior, and business model changes. Governments from many countries enacted policies such as border closures, local and national lockdowns, quarantine, and social separation, among others (Amankwah-Amoah, Khan, Wood & Knight, 2021). The partial or complete lockdowns according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) report (2020a), affected over 2.7 billion employees, or around 81% of the global workforce, because of limitations on free movement of people as a method of easing the crisis. Furthermore, the pandemic's impact, paired

with these actions, has resulted in employment losses and the insolvency of many businesses (large and small) in both developed and developing countries (Amankwah- Amoah, Khan, Wood & Knight, 2021; Patton, 2021).

Notably, several organisations shuttered their doors and encouraged employees to stay at home for an extended length of time to contain the pandemic. As a result, many organisations immediately adjusted or modified their business models by shifting their activities totally online, especially in contexts with strong digital infrastructure to support business operations. Research indicates a number of businesses and organisations were all largely digital prior to COVID-19, with core elements of their business models already digitalized (Moore & Tambini, 2018; Remane, Hanelt, Nickerson & Kolbe, 2017). However, in reaction to some of the rigorous measures adopted in the initial periods of the pandemic, the majority of businesses appeared to have expedited the digitalization of their work systems; and will continue to accelerate the adoption of new business models post the pandemic.

The adoption of new business models due to the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the wide digital divide between developing and established economies, urban and rural locations, rich and poor people (Beunoyer, Dup'ere & Guitton, 2020; African Business Magazine, 2020). Even within established countries, there are digital gaps between big cities and rural locations where access and internet infrastructure development vary, influencing possibilities for new business formation (Haight, Quan-Haase & Corbett, 2014). Despite the COVID impetus to adopt digital technology (Amankwah-Amoah, 2020a; 2020b; 2021), many entrepreneurs encounter human resource and capability hurdles including technical skills and digital literacy, which might slow digitalization (Effah & Nuhu, 2017). For instance, firms may however face the problem of deciding whether to implement remote working (work from home), working on-site (or from the

office) or a hybridized operating model in the setting of insufficient digital infrastructures and platforms (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Deloitte, 2020a). It is unclear how African countries specifically Ghana with poor institutional and underdeveloped digital infrastructures would model their businesses to respond flexibly to the effect, and what the implications for human resource management practices will entail post pandemic. As a backdrop, understanding how businesses and human capital systems will respond post COVID-19 pandemic is crucial.

It is expected that as long as COVID-19 exists, it will continue to drive the use of digitalization of business models and there will very certainly be greater scale-up post-pandemic. The pandemic has increased the demand for digitalization, which is an innovation process that aims to deliberately disrupt and fundamentally transform traditional processes and systems in order to gain continuity and competitive advantage (Datta, 2020; Datta, Walter & Amarilli, 2020). In light of COVID-19, according to Dahlander and Wallin (2020), there is an urgent need for enterprises to re-establish their innovative infrastructure and capabilities. Thus, the environment of work and the meaning of labor post COVID-19 will be different from the pre-pandemic as new sets of strategic and dynamic competencies will be necessary for enterprises to thrive and compete effectively.

According to International Labour Organization (2020b), COVID-19 has substantially affected organisations' working conditions. The International Labour Organization (2020b) defined working conditions as "the essence of paid work and employment relationships which address a wide range of subjects and problems, ranging from working time (hours of labor, rest intervals, and work schedules) to remuneration, as well as physical and mental workplace conditions". Most businesses presently have turned to telework to maintain business continuity, compelling their employees to work remotely (Aitken- Fox, Coffey, Dayaram, Fitzgerald, Gupta, McKenna

& Wei Tian, 2020; Gourinchas, 2020; Koirala & Acharya, 2020). However, according to Hamouche (2020), working remotely may increase employees' stress levels and risk of mental health issues, especially for people who were already dealing with high psychological demands at work prior to the pandemic (Quaedackers, Stein, Bhatt, Dogan, Hoen, Nijman,... & Bogaert, 2020) or those who work in high-risk professions such as healthcare professionals (Hamouche, 2020). According to Oehler (2020), although remote working can be beneficial, it also poses a number of concerns to employee well-being.

Because the work environment and the meaning of labor will be altered post COVID-19, as new sets of strategic and dynamic capabilities will be required for firms to grow and compete successfully, Szulc, Tomczak, and McGregor (2021) argued for strategic work reorganisation while taking current conditions into account. This has undoubtedly generated a demanding and complex environment for human resource managers, who must establish appropriate norms and settings that permit an acceptable degree of flexibility while also assisting and enabling their employees in coping with the complexities of this extreme situation, as well as reassess how jobs are designed to prioritize employee mental and emotional well-being. Therefore, exploring and understanding the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the human resource management practices of Ghanaian organisations is deemed important given the 'new normal' of the industrial environment and the pre-requisites of organisational restructuring and work systems redesigns.

1.1 Research Problem

In Ghana, the Government's response to the virus's spread, such as partial/total lockdown, isolations, social distancing, and border closures had a wide-ranging influence on industries and

employees. According to Trade Union Congress (2020) survey, over 42,000 Ghanaians have lost their employment by April 2020, with an approximated 75% of them being small traders, regular employees, and wage-laborers. Also, specific industries or businesses that rely on social connections, such as recreation, travel/transport, tourism, schools, hospitality, health sectors among others have suffered major consequences because of these measures.

For example, the pandemic has had an effect on education at all levels, from pre-school to postsecondary. According to Sudevan (2020), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that, the virus has forced school closures for over 1 billion kids, or approximately 72% of the world's student population. Following the closure of educational institutions, an emergency relief program was established to provide distant and online learning systems. Nonetheless, despite the efforts implemented with the assistance of the Education Ministry and the Ghana Education Service, certain students and teachers encountered challenges. Because many Ghanaians have low living conditions, not all students have access to smart phones, personal computers, or the internet. Ghana's education and e-learning systems are insufficient since just a few schools are capable of using online teaching methods. Therefore, when examining the change of teaching and learning process due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to take into account the challenges associated with the adoption of digital platforms.

Secondly, initiatives such as the Pan African Historical Theatre Festival "Pana fest," "the Year of Return," and "Beyond the Return," which were aimed at enticing international tourists, particularly those from the diaspora, to experience Ghanaian culture while also promoting Ghanaian tourist destinations (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2019), were impacted. According to the Ghana Tourism Authority (2019), the country's "Year of Return" celebration resulted in an unprecedented influx of over 1 million foreign tourists, generating approximately USD 1.9

billion in revenue. This, however, came to an end in March 2020, when 90% of global travel was halted to minimize the spread of the virus (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). As per estimates, the country lost an estimated USD 171 million in tourist earnings between March and June 2020 (Aduhene & Osei-Assibey, 2021) because of the closure of tourism enterprises due to the lockdown. Aside the economic recession, COVID-19 exposed some inefficiencies and inconsistencies in the tourism value chain. These arose from the industry's human resource system, legal, and infrastructure concerns (Adu-Ampong, 2018, 2019). From a human resource standpoint, the need for competent experts with the appropriate credentials for the business, as well as training of current workers in the area, posed a difficulty.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented issue for the healthcare sector, with cases rising all the time. The danger to doctors and healthcare frontline personnel is one of the most critical vulnerabilities in healthcare systems around the world (Nicola, Alsafi, Sohrabi, Kerwan, Al-Jabir & Iosifidis, 2020). When compared to other developed economies, Ghana's healthcare system is fragile and vulnerable. The pandemic has had a detrimental impact on both the healthcare system and the economy, owing to lack of funding and increasing pressure on the health-care delivery system. Similarly, the pharmaceutical companies are no exception in coping with the situation. The effect of COVID-19 on the pharmaceutical business has been more visible in Ghana. Because of the obvious surge in demand for PPEs, and other COVID-19 fighting anti-bacterial products, an estimated 80% of pharmaceutical industries switched from traditional medical supplies to PPEs, sanitizers, and other COVID-19 combating anti-bacterial drugs.

In addition, the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, as well as other corrective measures implemented, increased the risk and difficulty in Ghana's banking industry. Economic

contraction; reduced fee and trading income, as well as pressure on net interest income; higher credit losses and their impact on overall asset quality, capital, and liquidity; cybersecurity breaches; operational constraints of keeping employees safe and meeting customer expectations; and deterioration of IT and other support services due to internal challenges are some of the heightened risks (PWC, 2020). For instance, Ecobank Ghana (EGH) which is one of the banking industry in Ghana was known to be the most hit bank in April, according to KPMG (2020), with its share price decreasing by 20% from GHS. 8.10 on December 31, 2019, to GHS. 6.50 on April 21, 2020. Moreover, treasury bill rates and stock prices are expected to decline, putting pressure on banks' foreign exchange transactions and remittance fee earnings, as well as other industries (KPMG, 2020).

It is thus important to understand how tertiary or service sectors in Ghana, specifically Education, Transportation, Tourism and Hospitality, Health, Pharmaceutical, Financial and Telecommunication sectors redesigned their work systems in terms of accommodating the pandemic's effect, and how beneficial these changes would be to their operations. These selected sectors are reported to have made significant contributions to Ghana's economic growth and have suffered significant ramifications such as massive financial losses due to the occurrence of COVID-19 and government mitigation and reactive policies to combat the virus's spread. According to the annual report from Trading Economics (2022), the service sector accounts for approximately 52% of Ghana's GDP. This means that any disruptions in their business operations will have a significant impact on Ghana's growth and development. Hence imperative and appropriate to employ them into the present study.

Moreover, according to Ritter and Pederson (2020), although digitalization is not new to scholars and practicing managers, the potential effects of the pandemic in either halting or accelerating

the process of adoption of emerging technologies remains underexplored. According to some studies, many firms have the opportunity to develop new capabilities and strategies, such as increasing their digital presence, automating some processes, creating cost structures that are more flexible, having access to the appropriate technology, and creating safe substitutes for online ordering, shipping, and distribution. According to studies, these concepts should be explored since they are critical for the reopening of businesses in the post-COVID-19 era (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke & Zimmermann, 2020; Deloitte, 2020b; Henke, Puri & Saleh, 2020; Korn, 2020).

Subsequently, Richter (2020) believed that COVID-19-related public measures (e.g. lockdown, social distancing) act as enablers for digital activity, albeit with a plethora of problems for organisations. These concerns relate to productivity (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), which depends on an organisation's digital age, skills and mindset of employees. Therefore, even if the operations of the organisations are being digitalized, simply building up the structure is insufficient since people need to be trained in order to develop their digital mindset and abilities. Thus, the need for organisations to invest into developing training programs at the expense of substantially reduced revenues.

The dearth of such studies regarding the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Ghanaian industrial environment, particularly its influence on organisations' adaptations of digitalized human resource management systems and the effect of the digitized systemic practices on employees' development and wellbeing, is evident despite the abundance of studies related to pandemic challenges in the existing literature. This represents a knowledge gap that this study sought to fill. Adonu, Opuni, and Dorkenoo (2020) suggest that empirical research must concentrate on the influence of COVID-19 on significant HR policies, practices, and

interventions across industries in Ghana in order to appropriately adapt, cope, and establish guidelines for policy and practice. That is, it is essential to modify current human resource policies to ensure a fair distribution of responsibility between the organization and the employee.

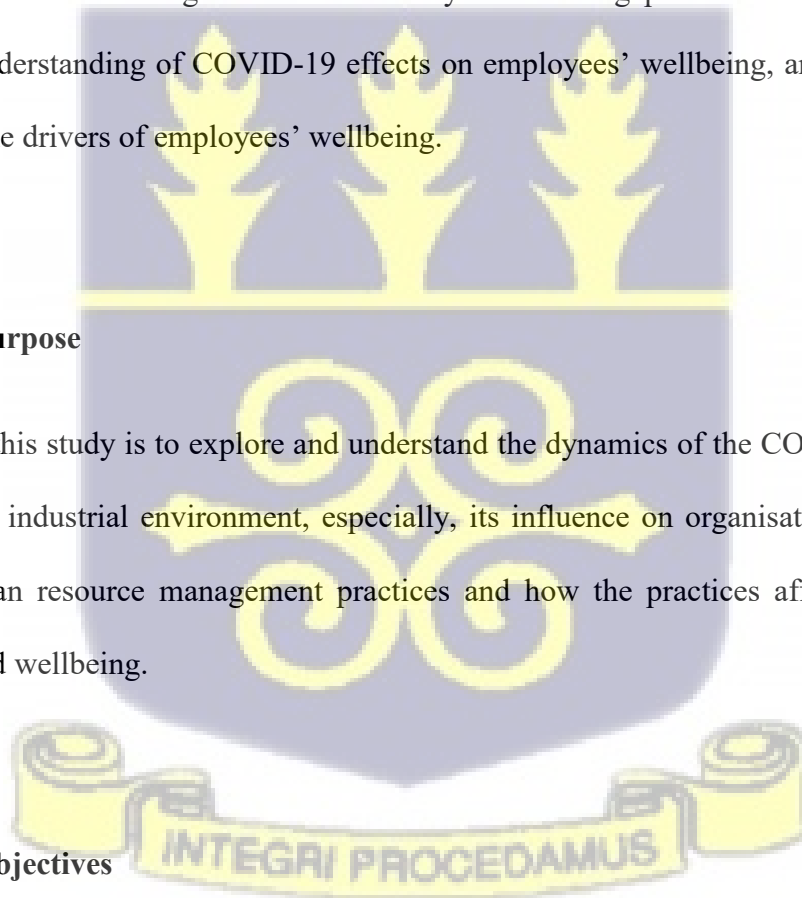
Also, the study makes three main contributions to literature. First, the study enriches the knowledge and understanding of digitally oriented or hybrid business models in response to COVID-19 pandemic. This also enriches the literature on COVID-19 and the impact on organisations and their work systems. Secondly, the study contributes to the human resource management literature by providing insights into the practices that are crucial for supporting the effective transformation of organisations' work systems during pandemics. Finally, the study broadens our understanding of COVID-19 effects on employees' wellbeing, and thus extend the knowledge on the drivers of employees' wellbeing.

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Ghanaian industrial environment, especially, its influence on organisations' adaptations of digitalized human resource management practices and how the practices affected employees' development and wellbeing.

1.3 Research Objectives

To address the issues raised above, specifically, this study seeks to:



- i. Explore how organisations redesigned their work systems to respond to government policies on COVID-19 pandemic
- ii. Explore the dynamics of the functionalities of the organisations digitalized HRM practices.
- iii. Determine the essential capabilities required of firms to ensure survival and competitiveness in the post- COVID-19 era.
- iv. Investigate how firms are positioning themselves to acquire and or utilize these capabilities to ensure survival and competitiveness.
- v. Explore the influence of COVID-19 and organisational responses on employees' mental and emotional wellbeing.
- vi. Assess how organisations facilitate employee training and development so as to develop their skills and mind-set to match up with these adjustments.

1.4 Research Questions

To address the objectives of the study, this study therefore seeks to explore the following research questions.

- i. How do the organisations, in response to government policies on COVID-19 pandemic, redesigned their work systems?
- ii. What are the functional dynamics of the organisations digitalized HRM practices?
- iii. What essential capabilities are required of firms to ensure survival and competitiveness in the post- COVID-19 era?

- iv. How are firms positioning themselves to acquire and or utilize these capabilities to ensure survival and competitiveness?
- v. What is the influence of COVID-19 and organisational responses on employees' mental and emotional wellbeing?
- vi. How does organisation's facilitate employee training and development so as to develop their skills and mind-set to match up with these adjustments?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge and emergent literature on COVID-19, organisations' work systems, human resource management, and employee's wellbeing which arguably have been rarely studied. The study is relevant to inform employers, human resource managers, and other organisational stakeholders about the significance of fostering an environment that will support employee well-being amidst adverse conditions such as the global pandemic and the ability to respond to abrupt dynamic changes by using cutting-edge strategies that have a substantial effect on today's business environment and favorably influence organisational outcomes.

1.6 Research Methodology

It is worth noting that all academic literature employs procedures for reaching conclusions based on issues raised by a researcher (Boateng, 2018). The interpretative or constructivist paradigm which is based on a relativist ontology approach that views reality as inter-subjective

understandings based on social and experiential meanings and understandings served as the research's philosophical foundation for the purposes of this study. To discover organisations and solicit their involvement, a qualitative research and a purposive sampling technique were utilized. This method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to investigate and gain deeper insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2013).

The population of interest in this study comprised of medium- to large firms from the service sector of Ghana's economy. The participating medium- large firms from the Service sector include; Telecommunication, Transport, Health, Education, Pharmaceutical, Financial, Tourism and Hospitality sectors. Furthermore, the primary data for this study was acquired through a semi-structured interview which was however, supplemented by firm records, public web-based information, and news articles. Thematic and descriptive analyses approach was used to analyse and discuss the themes gleaned from the data. Important common themes from the obtained data was identified and discussed in the findings section. Ethical protocols like the confidentiality of information, voluntary participation, right for participants to withdraw from the study, approved informed consent by respondents were well adhered to in the course of gathering data for the study.

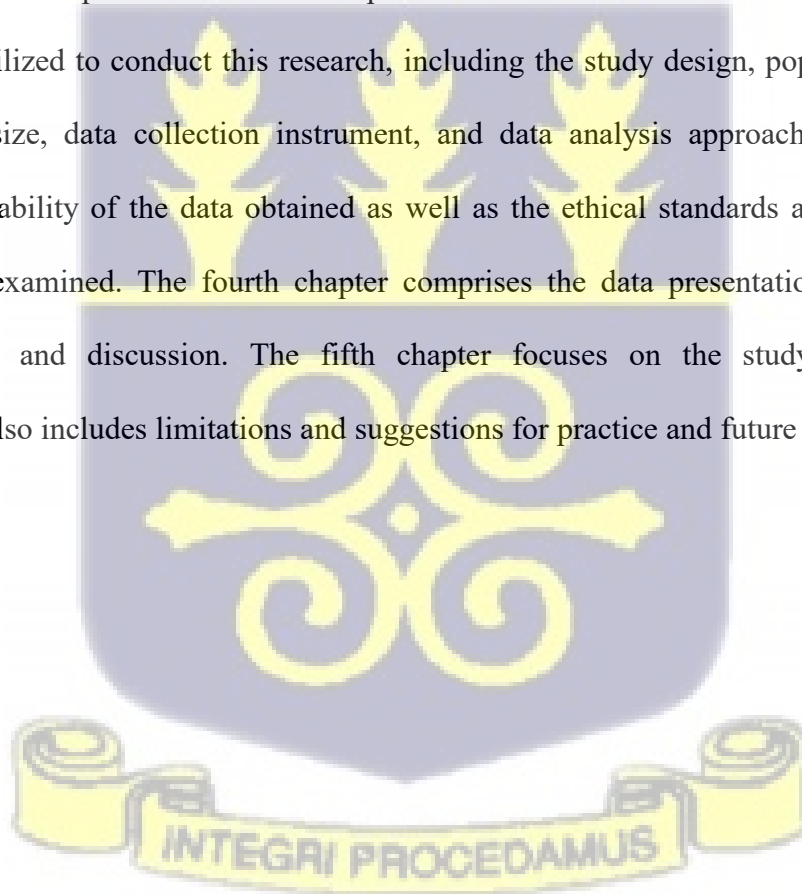
1.7 Research Limitations and Recommendation

The study employed a qualitative approach where persons in management positions have a tendency to suppress crucial information. As a result, future research might employ a mixed-method approach to get a diversity of views and a greater understanding of the research issue.

Despite this, the study is credible, and its value to research and practice is not diminished in any way.

1.8 Study Disposition

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one focuses on the study's background, statement of the problem, study objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. The second chapter presents detailed review of related theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the study as well as conceptual framework. Chapter three discusses the methodology. It focuses on the processes utilized to conduct this research, including the study design, population, sampling technique and size, data collection instrument, and data analysis approach. The established validity and reliability of the data obtained as well as the ethical standards adhered during the study are also examined. The fourth chapter comprises the data presentation, as well as the study's analysis and discussion. The fifth chapter focuses on the study's summary and conclusions. It also includes limitations and suggestions for practice and future research.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews various literature related to the constructs on COVID-19, business models, digitalization, and human resource management practices. This chapter is organized into the following sections; evolution and definition of concepts, theoretical framework, review of empirical studies and the conceptual framework designed for the study.

2.1 Evolution of a Business Model

According to Markides (2013), Lang was the first to introduce the term "business model" in 1947. Osterwalder, Pigneur and Tucci (2005) revealed that, it first appeared in the title and abstract of a research by Jones in 1960, as well as in a 1957 academic paper by Bellman, Clark, Malcolm, Craft, and Ricciardi. According to Zott, Amit and Massa (2011), business models have grown in popularity in administration studies since the early 2000s, notably in subfields such as strategic administration (Baden-Fuller, Demil, Lecocq & MacMillan, 2010), innovative thinking (Schneider & Spieth, 2013), and entrepreneurialism (Demil, Lecocq, Ricart & Zott, 2015).

In addition, Wirtz, Pistoia, Ulrich and Göttel (2016) mentioned that, business model has been related to information technology since the 1970s, most prominently in business modeling. The enormous growth in the number of references to the business model in the literature has greatly aided attempts to theoretically and practically define this concept. Regardless of how far business

model research has progressed over the years, the business model literature remains heterogeneous and eclectic. The term has frequently been confused with other noteworthy management literature concepts such as strategy, business idea, revenue model, economic model, or even business process modeling (DaSilva & Trkman, 2014; Morris, Schindehutte & Allen, 2005).

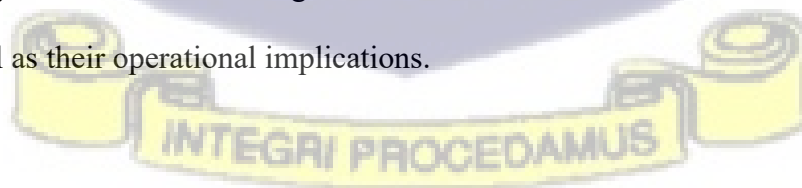
Given the various perspectives on business model, it was broadly acknowledged that its definitions typically comprised those aspects that generate the notion of value. The value proposition, in particular, is frequently centered on the products and services offered, or the value incorporated into the firm's services (Afuah & Tucci, 2003; Osterwalder, Pigneur & Tucci, 2005; Voelpel, Leibold, & Tekie, 2004). The firm's resource-based perspective (RBV) (see Amit & Zott, 2001; Seppänen & Mäkinen, 2007; Morris, Schindehutte & Allen, 2005; Seppänen, 2009) was also shown to be useful for the business model idea. Aside from the term resources, terms like strategic resources, assets, competences, information, or even technology or brand all refer to the tangible or intangible content of a company and its business model. Additionally, Zott, Amit and Massa, (2011), found that, vast majority of existing research on business models supports an activity system approach, which is a collection of interrelated organisational activities centered on a focal company.

Notwithstanding these variations in the understanding of the term and conception of business models, existing literature indicates a growing integration in meaning (Teece, 2010). According to Morris, Schindehutte and Allen (2005), the business model concept has evolved rapidly over the last decade, both operationally and strategically. The operational perspective deals with value generation and value capture rationalization. According to Morris et. al. (2005), the operational perspective includes architectural arrangement that allows the organisation to produce value.

This architectural method incorporates the firm's internal procedures and resources (Amit & Zott, 2001, 2015; Johnson, Christensen & Kagermann, 2008; Osterwalder et. al., 2005; Timmers, 1998; Voelpel, Leibold, Tekie & von Krogh, 2005; Wells, 2016). The strategic perspective addresses the future long - term viability of value creation.

Many scholars believe that strategy is critical when examining business model aspects. For example, Hamel (2000) saw core strategy as a key (first-order) component of a business model. A group of authors also mentions competitive strategy (Chesbrough, 2007; Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002; Kujala, Artto, Aaltonen & Turkulainen, 2010; Morris et. al., 2005). They are all in agreement that it must outline how the business will obtain and maintain an edge over competitors. However, although Richardson (2008) mainly agreed, he believes that basic strategy to acquire consumers and establish a competitive advantage is a second-order concept that relates to value proposition.

On the other hand, some authors do not comprehensively use the term strategy inside the business model framework. For example, Onetti, Zucchella, Jones and McDougall-Covin (2012), rely on contingencies that may develop in a competitive situation (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010; Tikkanen, Lamberg, Parvinen & Kallunki, 2005), and as a whole, strategy emphasizes the necessity of positioning (Magretta, 2002). According to Shafer, Smith and Linder (2005), whereas strategy is all about making decisions, a business model reflects those strategic decisions as well as their operational implications.



2.1.1 Concept of Business Models

A business model, according to Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), is a "blueprint" that is enacted through organisational formations, procedures, and process. Nonetheless, distinguishing between business models and strategy is crucial. Business models are concerned with the logic of the organisation, which focuses on financial and value generation components in businesses, whereas strategy is the plan to perform a certain set of actions while concentrating on competitors (see Magretta, 2002; Mansfield & Fourie, 2004; Seddon, Lewis, Freeman & Shanks 2004, p. 428). Business models illustrate a company's current or future position by providing simple depictions of some or all aspects of how they do business (Becker, Ulrich, Botzkowski & Eurich, 2017).

Alt and Zimmermann (2001) defined business models as "having six generic components: mission (which describes the overall vision and value proposition), structure (which defines the addressed industry, customers, and products), processes (which depicts customer orientation and coordination mechanism), revenues (which describe the sources of revenues), legal issues, and technology (which can also influence all other components due to emerging technologies)". According to Lüdeke-Freund, Gold and Bocken (2019), business models have four interconnected value dimensions: value proposition, delivery, creation, and capture. As a result, the development of a new business model is guided by a value proposition (Jaakkola & Hakanen, 2013; Nenonen & Storbacka, 2010; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

A new business model is defined as "the design process for bringing a relatively innovation to market, which is accompanied by an adjustment of the value proposition and/or the value constellation and aims at generating or securing a sustainable competitive advantage" by Wirtz,

Pistoia, Ullrich, and Göttel (2016). The concept of new business models is founded on comprehending the gestalt of organisations engaged in new internet-based methods of conducting business, as well as the new positions which these businesses perform in their specific environments (Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). There is an acknowledgment that a business model is not a fixed element, but rather one that requires continual innovation and iteration in response to external environmental conditions (Voelpel, Leibold & Tekie, 2004). For instance, according to Fossen Van, Morfin and Evans (2018), virtual space may be used as an innovation platform to enable new business models.

According to Johnson, Christensen, and Kagermann (2008), a profitable firm leverages its resources (people, technology, tangible and intangible assets) and engages in the relevant activities (trainings, development, production, budgeting, planning, and selling) to create value for the organisation. Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) developed the Canvas model in response to Johnson et. al.'s (2008)' thinking on business models.

2.1.2 Business Model Canvas

The Business Model Canvas, created by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), is a tool for describing how businesses operate. It is made up of nine components: value propositions, customer segments, channels, customer connections, revenue streams, key resources, key activities, key partners, and cost structures. According to Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), cited by Erävala, Salmela and Lampela (2020), a value proposition is a firm's ability to address a customer problem or meet a customer demand and is at the heart of any company's business intentions. The various groups of clients that a firm want to target and retain are defined as customer

segments. When a firm identifies its ideal customers, the appropriate business model must be founded on a thorough understanding of their necessities. Channels specify how a service or product will be delivered to clients. A company's interaction with its consumers is comprised of distribution, online marketplaces, and communication. Customer relationships, according to Erävala, Salmela, and Lampela (2020), are designed to have an impact on the whole customer experience. Client engagements are frequently linked to increased revenue, customer acquisition, and retention.

The revenue streams show how much money a company generates from each customer category. Revenue streams are frequently cost drivers and provide fundamental information about a company's financial position. Physical (buildings, equipment), intellectual (know-how, patents, information), financial (funds and sources of income), and human resources are the four categories of a company's core resources (employees and external partners). Knowing which core activities are critical to the firm's performance allows it to function successfully. Problem-solving methodologies, networking, and product quality are examples of key business model activities. The network of suppliers and partners that enables the business model to function is where key partnerships are formed. The kind of business model determines the cost structure, which outlines all of the expenditures connected with a certain business model (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010 as cited by Erävala, Salmela, & Lampela, 2020).

According to Coes (2014), the Business Model Canvas has received substantial criticism for not taking into consideration external forces such as competition, market variables and other dynamic conditions, as well as the value proposition's narrowness, because it concentrates on providing value with earnings on return. However, the Business Model Canvas, is extensively

used to explain firms' profit-making strategies and value proposition in addressing consumer's needs and preferences.

2.2 The Concept of Digitalization

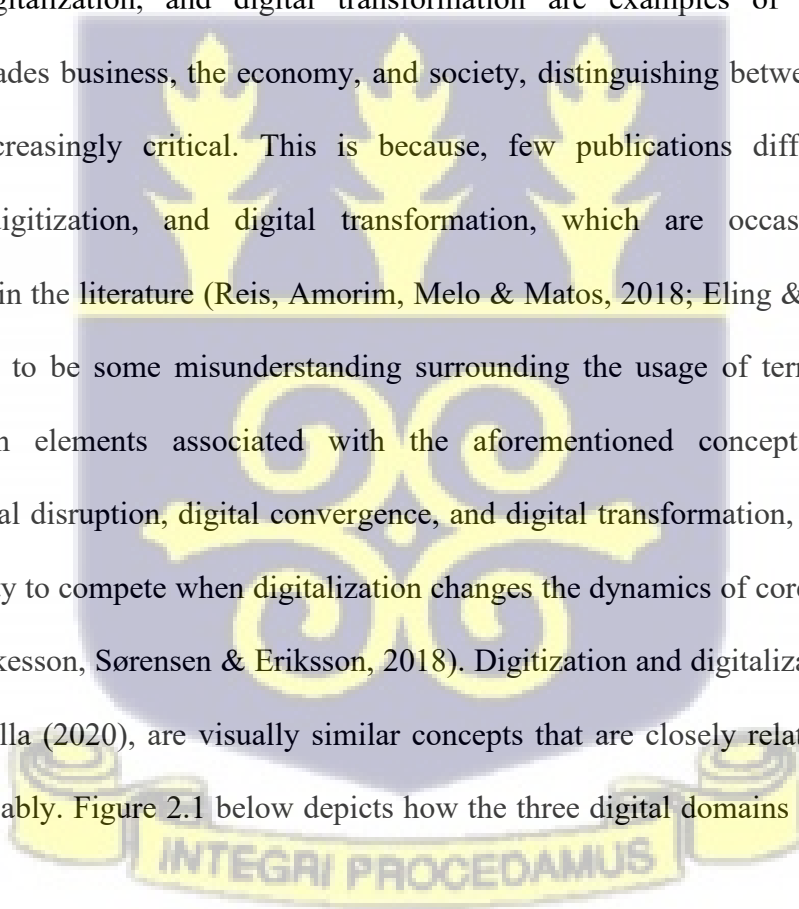
According to Saarikko, Westergren and Blomquist (2020), digitalization is the sociotechnical process of using electronic experiences or create new organisational strategies, business models, or economic possibilities. In other words, "digitalization refers to the process of converting elements of a company's value chain activities and business models to digital platforms by leveraging emerging digital technologies such as mobile and visual connectivity, cloud computing, robotics, smart phones, artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, additive manufacturing, 3-D printing, and the Internet of Things (IoT)" (Soto-Acosta, 2020). Digitalization has been regarded as the most major technological development affecting both society and business (Leviäkangas, 2016; Parviainen, Tihinen, Kääriäinen & Teppola, 2017). According to Warhurst and Hunt (2019), the digitalization enabled by fast technology innovation has the potential to boost human productivity by making products and services production more efficient and effective. Warhurst and Hunt (2019) posit that, in order to achieve productivity increases, businesses must invest more in the dissemination of digital skills, recruit the proper people, and foster a collaborative atmosphere that incorporates people more.

Past research has discovered that improved business procedure, new cooperative activities, customer involvement, and a greater rate of innovation are driving considerations in digitalization (Adomako, Amankwah-Amoah, Tarba & Khan, 2021; Rachinger, Rauter, Müller, Vorraber & Schirgi, 2019). According to Ritter and Pederson (2020), digitalization enhances the

ease of doing business and may help organisations develop and strengthen competitive positions. However, although becoming digital has several advantages, it also necessitates investments and related expenditures (Ahmad & Murray, 2019). In addition, Ross (2017) noted that, digitalization may however, have both anticipated (e.g., digital monitoring) and unanticipated (e.g., cybercrime) long-term consequences as with other new technology.

2.2.1. Digital Domains

Digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation are examples of these. As digital technology pervades business, the economy, and society, distinguishing between these concepts has become increasingly critical. This is because, few publications differentiate between digitalization, digitization, and digital transformation, which are occasionally discussed interchangeably in the literature (Reis, Amorim, Melo & Matos, 2018; Eling & Lehmann, 2018), or there appears to be some misunderstanding surrounding the usage of terminology (Clerck, 2017). Common elements associated with the aforementioned concepts include digital innovation, digital disruption, digital convergence, and digital transformation, which are various companies' ability to compete when digitalization changes the dynamics of core technologies and core markets (Åkesson, Sørensen & Eriksson, 2018). Digitization and digitalization, according to Owens and Padilla (2020), are visually similar concepts that are closely related and frequently used interchangeably. Figure 2.1 below depicts how the three digital domains are interconnected to one another.



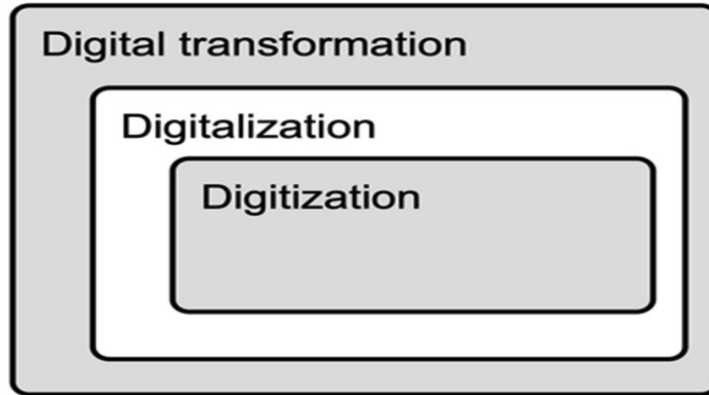


Figure- 2.2: The three digital domains (Saarikko, Westergren & Blomquist, 2020)

According to Gartner's Glossary (2021), digitalization is the use of digital technology to alter a business model and create new revenue and value-creating possibilities. The process of digitalization transforms a traditional firm into a digital business or a business that heavily relies on digital technology (SAP Insights, 2021; Madlenak, Madlenakova & Rudawska, 2017). Whereas digitization discusses a technology—or set of technologies—in terms of what it is and what it can do, digitalization explains why this technology is useful to a particular process or organisation.

In contrast, digital transformation refers to the "process that attempts to upgrade an entity by generating major changes to its attributes via the use of information, computer, communication, and networking technologies" (Vial, 2019, p. 121). Digital transformation, sometimes referred to as strategic business transformation, is customer-focused and necessitates organisational and cultural change. To expand markets and increase customer base, it also makes use of digital technology. The three digital domains may appear simple at first glance, but their centrality for value generation, management, business strategy, and organisational behavior all mask differing degrees of complexity.

2.2.2. Digitalization drivers:

2.2.2.1. *Shift to remote working*

The term "remote working" refers to performing activities from a place other than the office, such as a virtual location (Wang, Liu, Qian & Parker, 2021). Following the current pandemic's worldwide crisis, many firms have nearly overnight shifted to remote working arrangements. Firms are increasingly developing and deploying videoconferencing and remote collaboration solutions to better their remote-working operations (Cortez, 2020). According to the World Economic Forum (2020), 84% of employers in 15 industry sectors across 26 advanced and emerging countries intend to rapidly digitalize working processes, including a significant expansion of remote work, with the potential to move more than 40% of their workforce to operate remotely.

2.2.2.2. *Paperless Offices and Organisations*

According to Hudson (2012), organisations are increasingly using laptops, large storage devices, tablets, smartphones and high-speed wireless internet as tools for digitalization and paperless operations. Many businesses are learning that digitalizing some or all of their operations is a must in the new digital economy. Firms may expedite operations and reduce administration and processing costs by transitioning from paper version to a digitally-oriented approach to data storage, dissemination, and processing (Smith, 2019). With technology advancements, firms may now not only have paperless workspaces, but also become digital organisations in order to cut

costs, recover from disasters, and reduce time-consuming processes that frequently hinder new projects.

2.3 Human Resource Management

Human resource management was renamed from personnel management in the 1980s as a result of the study of renowned economist Michael Porter, who believes that any organisation's performance is determined by its people (Porter, 1980). This overhaul was prompted by the expanding economic recession, rapid industrialization, and technology improvements on entities (O'Riordan, 2017). According to Taylor (2011), the shift from personnel to human resource management marked not just novel terminology, but also substantial shifts in managerial thought. Contemporary human resource management (HRM) involves strategic planning or operations, whereas personnel management is confined to activities relating to recruiting, placement, and legal compliance.

For Armstrong and Taylor (2020), human resource management is engaged with how individuals are hired, managed and trained in firms. According to Olasoji (2019), human resource management's major objective is to optimize employee effectiveness in order to boost organisational productivity. Human resource (HR) professionals constantly seek to orient themselves as organisational strategic partners who actively support organisational strategy and adapt rapidly to ever-changing business challenges to support the HRM function's credibility and legitimacy and to strengthen its own responsibility within organisations (De Gama, McKenna & Peticca-Harris, 2012; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2009).

2.3.1 Human Resource Management Practices

For the purpose of this study, it is obvious that there is a need to focus on practices that enable the organisation to survive a crucial period. Therefore, the study focuses on three HR practices that are deemed relevant to this study. These are: acclimating firms to the current reality through promoting employee well-being, training and development, and maintaining work-life balance.

2.3.1.1. Human Resource Management and Employee Wellbeing

Voorde, Paauwe, and Veldhoven (2012) defined employee well-being in the workplace as the total quality of an employee's experience that may be assessed in terms of happiness, physical and mental health, and social wellness. This definition by Voorde, Paauwe, and Veldhoven (2012) can be categorized into three: psychological wellbeing, physical wellbeing, and social wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing examines employees' satisfaction levels with workplace practices, feelings, and attitudes about work context (Brunetto, Shaclock, Teo & Farr-Wharton, 2014); physical wellbeing examines employees' health outcomes such as accidents and stress; and social wellbeing includes employees' perception of equity, quality, and quantity of workplace (Grant, Christianson & Price, 2007).

When it comes to human resource management, there are two differing perspectives on the role of employers in employee well-being. According to the first perspective, which emphasizes mutual gains, HRM benefits both employers and employees, while the second perspective, which emphasizes conflicting outcomes, contends that HRM either has no negative influence on employee wellbeing (Voorde et. al., 2012). However, because people are an employer's most important asset, complex cases such as the pandemic require firms to place a greater emphasis on employee well-being (Bingham, 2020). Thus, in this unprecedented period, the pandemic makes

it imperative for HRM experts who are assigned to protect the safety and wellbeing of employees to recognize and tackle the concerns of employees (Leon, 2020). The importance of workplace well-being is vital to employees in terms of sustaining good health, as well as to managers and organisations (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). Evidence demonstrates that employee well-being is related to performance, withdrawal behaviors, work engagement, stress, and work-life balance (Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2021). As a result, managers must consider the issue of employee well-being in adverse condition such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3.1.2. Human Resource Management and Training and Development

Adjirackor, Dweh, Agarwal, Oppong, Darko, and Gagakuma (2016) defined training as a structured strategy for enhancing individual, team, and organisational success. Training facilitates the development of technical, human, cognitive, and managerial skills in order to improve individual and organisational performance (Kulkarni, 2013). According to Przytula, Strzelec, and Krysiska-Kociaska (2020), institutions must reskill and up skill their staff to suit the demands of the new 'remote economy' environment. The main challenge for HRM practitioners in this situation may be associated with the development of a training program that is tailored to the new reality of the organisation and its employees, as well as the selection of appropriate training methods, taking physical distancing measures and the need to have employees efficient and effective immediately in order to sustain the core operations. Devyania, Jewanc, Bansal, and Denge (2020) advised changing workers' training programs to preserve a long-term transition to the new working methods. Because employees are seen as a crucial component of every corporation, having a significant effect on its productivity, success, and

growth, organisations must invest extensively in employee development (Hameed & Waheed, 2011).

Development, on the other hand, prepares individuals for numerous opportunities inside the firm and boosts their ability to advance in their careers. In practice, developing people involves expanding not only their capabilities but also the business.

2.3.1.3. Human Resource Management and Work-Life Balance

In the competitive corporate environment of today, when remote work has become the norm, HR managers confront the challenge of maintaining work-life balance of employees. This is due to managers having to manage distant personnel and teams that they have never managed before (Gartner, 2020). Employees had to cope with childcare during the pandemic since schools and training were suspended, as well as the increased workload that comes with the switch to remote working. Due to the increased duties, according to Giurge and Bohns (2021) it might be difficult to set appropriate boundaries between work and family life.

In addition, according to Carnevale and Hatak (2020), when the employment setting presents a new environment that does not meet these demands of optimal functioning, employees' objectives are drastically affected and they may not adequately fit-in work context, as in the case of the current pandemic, resulting in incongruences in work and personal life.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The General System Theory, Resource- Based View Theory and the Dynamic Capability Theory were used to describe the constructs under exploration in this work.

2.4.1 The General System Theory

Ludwig von Bertalanffy introduced "General Systems Theory" with lectures in 1937, followed by publications beginning in 1946 (von Bertalanffy, 1967). Bertalanffy's Systems Theory is built on the notion that nothing can be explained by disassociating a system component. Systems Theory aids in establishing a knowledge of the system in which one is involved and how changing one part of that system may affect it. The General System Theory is based on several assumptions, some of which are: the composition of sub-systems; the ability to serve as gestalt, synergism, and wholeness; the supposition of open systems; homeostasis, steady state, and dynamic equilibrium; the capacity of any system to pursue several goals at once; and the ability of systems to reach desired states by various and alternate approaches (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972).

A system is described as an entity that is a unified whole (Ng, Maull, & Yip, 2009), with a boundary recognized around it to identify internal and external parts, as well as to define input and output pertaining to and arising from the entity (Aldrich, 1979). Beer (1972) considered a system as an entity that can adapt to survive in a changing environment. Systems thinking comes from the shift in attention from the part to the whole (Checkland, 1997; Weinberg, 2001) considering the observed reality as an integrated and interacting unicum of phenomena where the individual properties of the single parts become indistinct. In contrast, the links between the components and the events they create as a method of interaction become significantly more

essential, resulting in "system parts being logically coupled" (Luhmann, 1990) towards a shared objective. Many subsystems have been built on the basis of Generic Systems Theory. Some examples are 'Open System Theory, Viable System Model, and Viable System Approach.'

2.4.1.1 Theory of Open System (OST)

This reflects on the ability of organisations to adjust to changes in external conditions (whether or not information processing is necessary) (Boulding, 1956; Katz & Kahn, 1978). According to this theory, entities that can comprehend information about their own individual surroundings are more adaptable to changes in contextual situations. There are two orders of adaptive levels recognized, "counteraction – first level (processing information from an organism's environment), related to the ability to steer through personal purposeful behavior (Ashby, 1958); amplification – second level, related to constructivism theory (as opposed to realism), leading to work on self-organisation" (Von Foerster, 1981).

2.4.1.2 The Viable System Model (VSM)

The VSM allows for the scientific design of an organisation as a system with the regulatory, learning, and adaptive capabilities required to ensure its survival (viability) in the face of changes that may occur in its environment over time, even if they were not anticipated in its design. To achieve this survivability, the VSM proposes an invariant systemic structure based on the definition of five components, referred to as Systems One to Five, that are considered sufficient and necessary conditions for dealing with the system's operating environment's

complexity. System 1–3 (Brain of the Firm, pg. 167) are focused on the current functioning of the organisation, System 4 is focused with the 'there and then' - strategic responses to the organisation's external, environmental, and future needs (Brain of the Firm, pg. 181). System 5 is concerned with striking a balance between the 'here and now' and the 'there and then' in order to deliver policy directions that keeps the organisation afloat (Brain of the Firm, pg. 201).

2.4.1.3 The Viable System Approach (VSA)

The VSA was developed within the Italian scientific community (Golinelli, 2000, 2010; Barile, 2000, 2009) and is based on an upgraded version of Beer's Viable System Model (Golinelli, 2000, 2010; Barile, 2000, 2009). As previously stated, the VSA emerged from the early works of Barile (2000) and Golinelli (2000) in the disciplinary field of business management, following a rich research stream of systems theories such as the theories of open and closed systems (von Bertalanffy, 1968), socio-technical systems (Emery & Trist, 1960), the law of requisite variety (Ashby 1958), and systems dynamics (Forrester 1994). Two key variables can affect the dynamics and complexity of a system, both of which are driven by value co-creation with clients (Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008). First, component knowledge (for each type of transformation); and second, architectural or system knowledge (for understanding integration and how the value proposition will enable value co-creation with customers) (Ng, Maull & Smith, 2011).

Its overall schemes are helpful for interpreting the concept of complexity because they emphasize its systemic nature and aid in the investigation of its implications for decision making (Barile, 2009). When acting in complex situations, the VSA enables identifying (and qualifying) pertinent stakeholders who influence decision making and the actions that must be taken to

achieve long-term performance. In addition, this approach proposes a new interpretation of consolidated strategic organisational and managerial models: sub-systems and supra-systems. Sub-systems analyze the relationships between the internal components of enterprises, whereas supra-systems analyze the connections between enterprises and other influencing systemic entities in their context (Golinelli, 2005; Barile, 2008).

The researcher believes that the notions and principles of General System Theory will assist in establishing the insight necessary for recognizing a firm's activities and processes as a coherent entity. According to General System Theory, decisions to update aspects of a firm's business systems or develop new business models as a response plan to external situations must take other elements or systems into consideration in order to achieve effective functioning. For example, in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing various survivalist techniques (such as the use of digital technologies and the implementation of new business designs, among others), organisations must be well focused on their human capital resources, including employees, whose well-being may be directly or indirectly affected as a result of those strategic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic to attain a state of equilibrium.

2.4.2 The Resource- Based View Theory

This theory was first introduced by Barney (1991). It tries to establish a link between diverse resources and competitive advantage. The ideology was inspired by Penrose's (1959) study, in which she emphasizes managerial resources as a crucial source of growth. According to Penrose (1959), internal management resources are both accelerators and constraints to the expansion that any one organisation may pursue. Since Barney's (1991) article laying out the core theoretical

framework and standards for determinants of sustained competitive advantage, the RBV has been by far the most often adopted theory within Strategic Human Resource Management, both in theory creation and as the justification for empirical research (McMahan, Virick & Wright, 1999). The RBV has had a considerable impact on academic study as well as business strategy. It also analyses the internal sources of long-term competitive advantage in order to explain variances across enterprises in the same industry (Kraaijenbrink, Spender & Groen, 2010).

The RBV Theory emphasizes that resources must have different characteristics to provide advantage. As per Habbershon and Williams (1999), Barney (1991) identified four features of such resources. This includes "(a) it must be valuable in the context that it exploits opportunities and/or neutralizes risks in a firm's environment, (b) it must be uncommon among a firm's present and future rivals, (c) it must be imperfectly imitable, and (d) there should not be strategic equivalent replacements for this resource that are valuable" (Barney, 1991 as cited by Habbershon & Williams, 1999). "The RBV Theory explains competitive heterogeneity by assuming that close rivals differ significantly in their resources and capabilities across time" (Helfat & Peteraf, 2003).

According to Wernerfelt (1984), a resource is "everything that may be viewed as a strength or weakness of a particular organisation whose tangible assets are connected "semi-permanently" to the business." Barney (1991) expanded this definition to "all assets, capabilities, organisational processes, firm traits, information, knowledge, and so on that enable the business to create and implement strategies that enhance its efficiency and effectiveness." According to Barney (1991) the three forms of resources are physical capital resources, human capital resources, and organisational capital resources. Fixed assets, brand names, technology, and geographical location are examples of physical capital resources. Individual managers' and workers'

experience, skills, and intellect are examples of human capital resources. Organisational capital resources comprise the structure, planning, controlling, and coordinating processes of the organisation. These valuable resources according to Barney (1991) and Amit and Schoemaker (1993) are termed strategic assets. The RBV Theory, like many other management science concepts, has been subjected to many types of criticism, with some researchers claiming that it is only a point of view rather than a theory (Arend & Lévesque, 2010; Kraaijenbrink, Spender & Groen, 2010). Nonetheless, despite the concerns, RBV continues to inform a significant amount of research in organisational and strategic management. In applying the RBV Theory to this study, it serves as a means to demonstrate an explanation of the managerial approach used to determine the strategic resources or capabilities a firm can exploit to achieve long-term competitive advantage. As a result, since organisations are confronted with COVID-19 and adopting new business models that they believe are necessary for enhancing survival and creating a competitive edge, it is worth emphasizing that organisations who are able to leverage on the resources that Barney (1991) believes provide a firm critical strategic advantages over other rivals in terms of these traits such as being rare, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable are capable of preserving sustainability and competitiveness.

However, given the difficulties that the occurrence of COVID-19 has brought to firms and their operations, it is critical to understand that understanding the RBV Theory as a means of gaining a competitive advantage is not enough, particularly now that the market space is regarded to be dynamic; firm's resources must also change over time to remain relevant to changing market conditions. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) contend that this is mostly due to the firm's dynamic capabilities. Dynamic capabilities are firm processes that employ resources, especially procedures to incorporate, reorganize, accumulate, and utilize the resources. While RBV focuses

on the sorts of resources and capabilities that are strategic in nature, dynamic capability focuses on how such organisational capabilities must alter or update over time to remain relevant in a changing economy. As a result, knowing the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which provides a deeper grasp of how businesses achieve long-term competitive knowledge in dynamic situations, is essential.

2.4.3 The Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Teece and Pisano (1994) opined that Dynamic Capabilities Theory is an extension of the firm's RBV Theory (Barney, 1986, 1991) wherein the RBV Theory is considered immobile and incapable of describing a firm's distinct competitive edge in dynamic business conditions (Priem & Butler, 2001). Thus, researchers have suggested that for a firm to achieve competitive advantage, it must establish distinctive capabilities and engage in continuous learning (Hammer, 2001; Jashapara, 1993) particularly in dynamic and unpredictable market environments (Wilden, Gudergan, Nielsen & Lings, 2013). This theory's key assumption is that an organisation's core capabilities should be leveraged to build short-term competitiveness that can be turned into long-term competitive edge.

Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) defined dynamic capabilities as a firm's capacity to integrate, build, and reconfigure external and internal expertise. Further to that, Zaefarian, Forkmann, Mitrga, and Henneberg (2017) defined dynamic capability as “the continuous renewal of an organisation's business processes or operational capabilities in order to match the company's resources with the changing business environment”. It suggests that the organisation establish strategic partnerships in response to changing business demands. As a response, when global

competitive dynamics shift industrial settings, the dynamic capabilities approach becomes extremely important.

The early proponents of dynamic capabilities claimed that, they have a direct connection with firm performance (Teece et al., 1997). The direct link between firms' performance and dynamic capabilities has been studied by Zollo and Winter (2002). However, Eisenhardt and Martin (2000), for example, suggest that dynamic capabilities by itself does not ensure a firm's competitive advantage. Rather, the organisation and positioning of the firm's resources as a result of dynamic capacities is more competent than competition. According to Eisenhardt and Martin (2000, p. 1117), the only way these dynamic capabilities may provide a competitive advantage is if they are deployed "sooner, more succinctly, or more serendipitously." Clearly, the ability to employ dynamic skills "quicker or more succinctly" is a capability in and of itself.

Therefore, it is pivotal to stress that Resource-Based View Theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are major elements in understanding competitive advantage, mainly in a rapidly changing context (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009; Barreto, 2010; Wang & Ahmed, 2007; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

2.5 Review of Empirical Studies

2.5.1. COVID-19 Pandemic and Digitalization of Work Systems

During the COVID-19 outbreak, Naab and Bans-Akutey (2021) conducted a study on the use of e-business practices by SMEs in Ghana. Using a sample size of 62 respondents from Tema and Ashaiman districts, they observed that the pandemic's presence pushed numerous SMEs to adapt new business models. According to them, the pandemic has moved SMEs' focus to incorporating

or expanding virtual dynamism into their operations for the benefits it provides, such as continued sales and enhanced visibility. However, according to Naab and Bans- Akutey' (2021), many of these initiatives to embrace new business models have been hampered by challenges such as financial limits, internet connectivity, and knowledge technical expertise. They mentioned that training in ICT, hiring an expert with ICT skills, and requesting government financing are some of the options available to business owners to deal with these challenges.

Besides this, Thierry, Mihai, and Timber (2020) conducted a comparative study to assess how the business models of Romanian and Dutch organisations have altered under the COVID-19 pandemic and discovered that both Romanian and Dutch organisations have significantly adapted their business models to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis by implementing technology innovation or variety of digital methods in their value creation and delivery. Furthermore, a case-based study conducted by Chanyasak, Koseoglu, King and Aladag (2021) on hotel owner/managers in Chiang Mai, Thailand, discovered that the hotels in the study adapted their business models by cutting costs through discontinuing non-essential initiatives, intensifying non-room earnings and adding new sources of revenue, bringing in earnings from advance bookings, securing financial support from creditors, leveraging government support, and training employees for the "new normal". Further to that, Polinkevych, Glonti, Baranova, Levchenko, and Yermoshenko (2021) discovered that business models of Ukrainian insurance companies have changed from traditional to innovative, hybrid, and digital-oriented under the influence of the pandemic, with the main changes in insurance company business models being integrated digital communications such as the launch of chatbots, and big data.

Krouk and Almeida (2020) also employed a qualitative study approach to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability of the airbnb business model. They found that, while the

COVID-19 has touched all sectors, it has had a particularly negative impact on enterprises who use a shared economy model in the tourism industry. However, the potential provided by digital technologies and the pandemic for firms to re-invent their business models have been limited by impediments like organisational inflexibility, digital divide, and unequal impacts on employee welfare. Seetharaman, (2020) also presented two intriguing topics for future study on the transition pathways that organisations have taken to undertake business model upgrades. Second, she inquired about the firm's agility and dynamic capacities in capitalizing on the possibility for change that the COVID-19 situation provided. Moreover, in a series of six qualitative research on teaching staff involved in online teaching and learning at a university in Scotland, Webb, McQuaid, and Webster (2021) found that the COVID-19 epidemic has increased the rate at which digital methods of working have become embedded in organizational life and service delivery, including new forms of learning.

A qualitative study by Addae, Amponsah and Gborti (2021) analyzed students' experiences with the COVID-19 situation in Ghana and found that instructors used digital platforms in the educational process adequately. Their research also found that the high cost of data and the unpredictability of the internet point to a widespread issue throughout the African continent. This also emphasizes the economic inequality and the uneven pattern of growth in agrarian and inner-city areas. For Jattan and Chaudhary (2015), as cited by Paul and Lal (2018), there is little doubt that technology-mediated instructional practices may enable curriculum change and creative assessment approaches in response to changing instructional objectives. However, according to Paul and Lal (2018), "digital developments in higher education are prevalent," implying that "technology has the capacity to profoundly disrupt conventional education when used to the teaching and learning process" (p. 18). The advent of the virus demonstrated the unavoidable

trajectory toward digitalization in teaching and learning. Despite the obvious advantages of digital technology in such scenarios, Hartzog (2020) believes there may be an inclination to roll it back in the face of inadequate formulation and management.

In addition, Kronblad and Pregmark (2021) explored the quick shift toward digital business models in Sweden in the retail and service industries. The results of a qualitative design indicated four types of organisations (crisispreneurs¹, accelerators², endurers³ and thrivers⁴). Each category has unique problems and exhibits varying degrees of intensity in their upgrade. For example, firms who were previously on a digital path but were not yet prospering (accelerators) tend to be the ones that anticipate that both their newly gained capabilities and their newly - formed work and business models would persist. The authors argue that the quick shift to digital business models will have long-term consequences since businesses have obtained transformative skills that will last, and that the digital trajectory has, as a result, changed forever.

According to Kronblad and Pregmark (2021) analysis, while there may be a temporary spike of quick digital adoption, a new normal has been formed, and the pace of digitalization will be steeper and faster than previously predicted. Some writers suggest that, while a digitalization may help firms to survive the crisis and generate new value, the digitally enabled organisations would employ fewer people than before, resulting in a quick increase in unemployment (Kim, Kim & Lee, 2017; Frey & Osborne, 2013). Chernoff and Warman (2020) demonstrate that

¹ Crisispreneurs are organisations that have managed to release entrepreneurial capability in the current crisis and have been creative in the development of digital value propositions not only to overcome the crisis but also in the long run.

² Accelerators: Are organisations that could have transformed crisis, but lacked a sense of urgency.

³ Endurers are organisations that have little chance of innovating themselves out crisis.

⁴ Thrivers: these organizations are fully digitalized in terms of their business model, including a digital delivery of the service.

COVID-19 has resulted in such impacts, with the extent of labour automation increasing throughout the crisis. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the adoption of emerging technologies, according to Amankwah-Amoah, Khan, Wood, and Knight (2021), may be hampered by entrenched external interests, sentimentality, and employer competitive intensity, along with negative effects on employee well-being that erodes effectiveness, work–life stability, and the future of work. Amankwah-Amoah, et. al. (2021) remarked that, while digitalization creates new possibilities, it also introduces hazards that are difficult to manage or plan for.

Furthermore, the study of Amankwah-Amoah et. al. (2021) identifies certain challenges to digitalization adoption. Technology infrastructure, institutional restrictions, security and privacy issues, and organisational level limits are examples of these. Rosalsky (2020) states that, some people's long-held opinion that digital and audio-visual platforms are inferior to physical offices is a barrier to digitalization. Some scholars feel that human resource and capacity restrictions are another major impediment to digitalization (Effah & Nuhu, 2017), while others argue that budgetary limits, institutional bottlenecks, and a lack of commitment from top management are impediments to digitalization. Therefore, because of digital working, there may be concerns about increased scrutiny, danger, and collaborate balance difficulties.

Digitalization may be a critical component of post-pandemic industrial strategy, but it may also pose several concerns and challenges. According to some hopeful reports, digitalization may increase business competitiveness while boosting worker status (Shibata, 2021). COVID-19 has heightened the stakes in terms of digital access and participation. Some online engagement may subside when new measures become available, allowing for more in-person contacts. However, in areas where the pandemic has worked as a motivator, like as telework and e-commerce, it is likely to continue to rise. This keeps pressure on building high-quality networking while also

enhancing people's and businesses' capacity to employ more complex digital solutions (OECD, 2020).

2.5.2. COVID-19 Pandemic and Digitalization of HRM Practices

Vnoučková (2020) conducted a study on the impact of COVID-19 on human resource management, highlighting some changes in HR practices that create challenges for top management to develop a response team, strategize work, reflect, and modify policy and activities to current situation on a daily, if not hourly, basis. According to Vnoučková (2020), the changes in human resource due to COVID-19 influence on human resource procedures has had a substantial effect on their business particularly in organisations that lack the adaptive capacity to these improvements.

Aurelia and Momin (2020) also examined COVID-19's influence on human resource management. In terms of training and development, according to Aurelia and Momin (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way companies train in novel ways. Organisations of all sizes and sectors are looking at technology solutions to help with their training and development initiatives. This is supporting the increasing demands for technology-driven training programs. Meaning that, core competencies have shifted, necessitating the development of new skills. Employers, managers, and corporate leaders are all under pressure to retrain and reskill. The majority of them claim COVID-19 and the ensuing economic crisis have increased the need to learn new skills. Emerging technologies, in particular, are playing an important role in helping to create novel methods to enable individuals of all ages improve knowledge and skills (Mulvie,

2021), and have nearly become the only accessible choice to ensure staff development during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, Mikołajczyk (2021) carried out a qualitative study in Poland. Utilizing 19 in-depth interviews with professional HR managers to probe the direction and extent of changes in the approach organisations have taken to employee development because of the COVID-19 pandemic, discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted developmental processes in organisations. Mikołajczyk (2021) also observed lower employee involvement and exhaustion as a result of the utilization of many online development programs.

According to the fundamental conclusion of a research done in August by The Association for Talent Development (2020), the global health and economic crisis has had three key consequences on the state of labor skills. To begin with, it is boosting the demand for new skillset. Second, it limits opportunities for skill development. Third, it is reskilling and however, increasing the workforce's stress and vulnerability. According to several recent study findings, creating a lifelong learning mentality in employees improves both actual and perceived career success (Drewery, Sproule & Pretti, 2020), and employee professional development also boosts job satisfaction and decreases turnover (Glazer, Mahoney & Randall, 2019).

According to several recent study findings, creating a lifelong learning mentality in employees improves both actual and perceived career success (Drewery, Sproule & Pretti, 2020), and employee professional development also boosts job satisfaction and decreases turnover (Glazer, Mahoney & Randall, 2019). It should be underlined that researchers should recognize an expanded realm of development activities and include employee-driven development into classical development theory (Dachner, Ellingson, Noe & Saxton, 2019). According to Stefaniuk

(2020), study findings suggest that training has a major impact not just on the development of technological knowledge, but also on real employee behaviors. As a result, training that fosters remote work abilities will be critical, and firms will need to swiftly change their training programs to match current demands.

Likewise, a study conducted on demanding scenarios on HRM methods for handling the post-pandemic by Porkodi, A-lZawaidi, Al-Muharbi, Al-Sarmi, and Al-Shibli, (2021) with a direct focus on oil & gas firms in Oman, revealed that the pandemic raised major concerns that could jeopardize employees' health and safety, work life balance, and implications for strategic focus on health facilities, safety measures, work flexibility and training programmes. Porkodi, A-lZawaidi, Al-Muharbi, Al-Sarmi, and Al-Shibli (2021) underlined that these challenges should be addressed in a reasonable timeframe by all managerial levels in all enterprises to ensure the organisation's progress during and after the pandemic. In consistent with the findings of Porkodi, A-lZawaidi, Al-Muharbi, Al-Sarmi, and Al-Shibli (2021), Aurelia and Momin (2020) predicted that, post-COVID-19 HRM responsibilities will include a greater focus on health and wellness, full acceptance of workplace flexibility, a more significant role and adoption of technology in general, a prioritization of constant learning, up skilling, and more agile planning for dynamic environments.

According to Carnevale and Hatak (2020), existing employees working for the organisation may be infected with this virus, therefore HR managers may be responsible for their safety as well as fostering a strong relation between employees and the firm. According to Hamouche (2020), the intensity of this pandemic has significantly harmed most employees' emotional wellbeing and motivation, with the unpredictability and suddenness of the pandemic's arrival leading many to feel scared and concerned about their overall well-being and their professions in particular

(Hamouche, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, according to Qiu, Shen, Zhao, Wang, Xie, and Xu (2020), has posed major hazards to people's physical health and life, as well as triggering other psychological or mental issues like panic attacks, anxiety, and depression. According to studies, the level of physical and mental well-being of employees has tended to drop during the pandemic, a trend that may have been driven by emotions such as worry, fear, or stress, as well as unusual working circumstances implemented as a result of the pandemic (Ince, 2020).

According to Mujumdar, Biswas, and Sahu (2020), social distance and detachment at home have a detrimental influence on employees' mental well-being and make them more lethargic and reliant on digital gadgets such as phones and computers. Besides, Weibelzahl, Reiter, and Duden (2021) as well as Braquehais, Vargas-Cáceres, Gómez-Durán, Nieva, Valero, Casas, and Bruguera (2020) conducted studies on the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the mental well-being of health workers. Both studies discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the intensity of psychological symptoms, including anxiety and depression. Interestingly, Popa, Stefan, Olariu, Popa, and Popa (2021) discovered that the pandemic effects experienced by employees did not directly affect their mental and physical well-being, but rather, the COVID-19 pandemic impacts felt by employees affected their overall work performance in a study conducted in Romania to investigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic effects on employees' health and mental well-being, as well as on their working performance.

Subsequently, the enforced remote working measure in number of firms have been found to increase the likelihood of work-family conflict (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Thus, the shift to remote working and the pace of digitalization are having a substantial influence on individuals' work-life balance and overall well-being. Studies on the influence of remote working owing to COVID-19 on work-life balance have shown conflicting results, suggesting that remote working

might have both beneficial and negative consequences (Sullivan, 2012). Despite the fact that remote working methods are viewed as a viable path to work-life balance by governments, politicians, and people inside companies, there is a greater correlation between working from home and work-family conflict (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). These developments have blurred work – home duties even further, making it more challenging than ever to maintain acceptable work-family role boundaries (Giurge & Bohns, 2020). According to Gigauri (2020), working from home entails significant diversions such as childcare and domestic activities that push employees to complete specified tasks at night. Employee well-being may be jeopardized as a result of inadequate work-life balance.

Correspondingly, Adonu, Opuni, and Dorkenoo (2020) conducted an extensive study utilizing a Ghanaian sample from the formal sectors and discovered that the existence of the COVID-19 had an influence on HR practices. Implementation of new technologies, recruitment and selection, remote working, staff rationalization, retrenchments, and its cost implications, according to Adonu, Opuni, and Dorkenoo (2020), are key decisions that employers are challenged with as the COVID-19 has altered the structure of formal sector work. This compelled them to make an argument for learning, innovation, and reform of HR policies in order to secure the firm's commercial survival and a fair division of the burden between both the employer and the employee.



2.6 Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature in the previous sections on the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic on organizations works systems relative to their human resources management

practices and its implications on the employees' competence development and wellbeing, the conceptual framework shown in figure 2.2 below is developed.

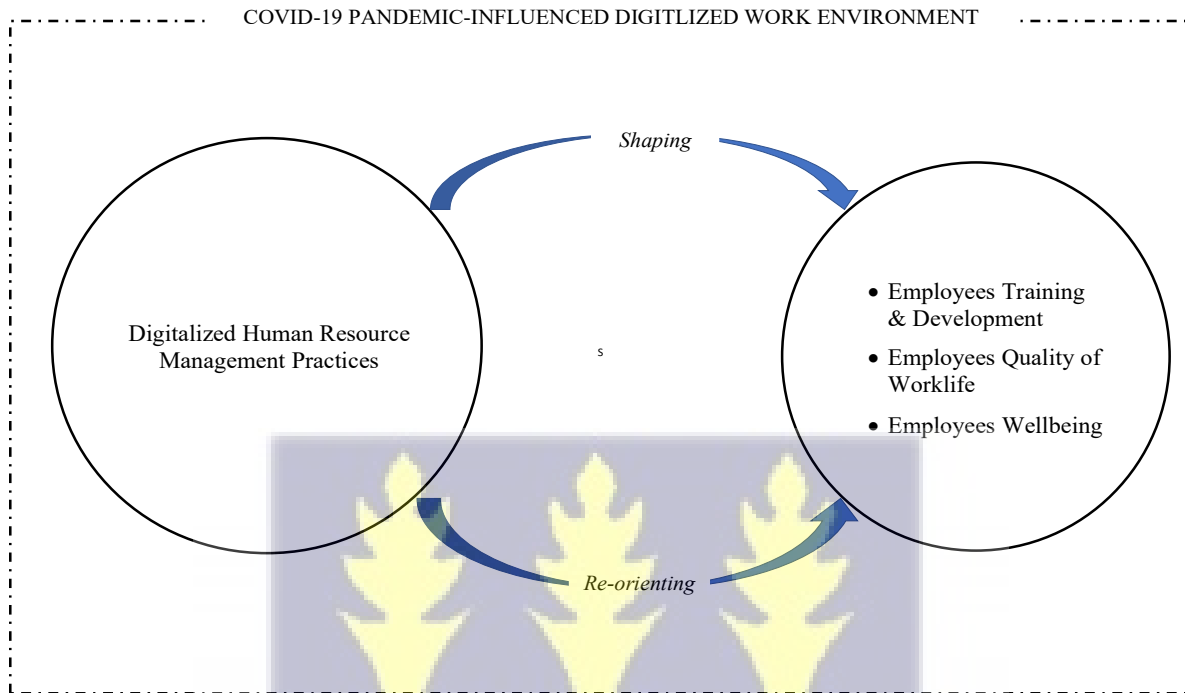


Figure 2.3: Conceptual framework to guide the study

Source: Author's construct (2022)

The conceptual framework as shown in Figure 2.3 above depicts the effects of COVID-19 on organisations' work systems, digitalized human resource management practices concentrating on training and development, fostering work-life balance, and supporting employee wellbeing. Based on the literatures reviewed for this study, COVID-19 is seen to have an effect on the variables under study. Organisations' were seen to have made significant changes to their work systems by adopting new business models due to COVID-19 and also driving the use of digital process into core business practices. In terms of digitalized human resource management

practices, the COVID-19 was explored in terms of how HR practitioners facilitate employee training and development to adjust to workplace changes, maintaining employee work-life balance, and employee wellbeing as a result of organisations' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a consequence, the author's framework is developed on the empirical studies reviewed in this current study, as well as theories utilized to explain the constructs under exploration.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the processes and techniques used in carrying out the study. It takes into account the paradigm, the design and approach used, as well as the information on the study population, the sampling technique and size used. It also encompasses any ethical issues that may emerge throughout the data gathering process, as well as data collection procedures and data analysis techniques.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The term paradigm stems from the Greek phrase “paradeigma”, which means pattern, and was first used by Kuhn (1962) to refer to a conceptual framework shared by a network of scientists that provided them with an appropriate model for exploring issues and finding solutions. Creswell (2014), described paradigm as researcher’s overarching theoretical viewpoint on a phenomena and the kind of research that he or she brings to a study. A paradigm, as described by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), consists of three components: a belief about the nature of knowledge, a methodology, and validity standards. Guba and Lincoln (1994) characterized these three terminologies as three questions that help establish a paradigm, namely the ontological, epistemological, and methodological elements that underpin the diverse research positions.

Furthermore, Creswell (2014) identified four basic paradigms: post- positivist, constructivist, transformational, and pragmatist paradigms, each having its own sets of epistemological,

ontological, and methodological assumptions that differentiate it apart from the others (Creswell, 2007). The objective of this research is to however look at the phenomenon being studied from the constructivist perspective. The constructivist paradigm is driven by the core principles that knowledge is socially obtained by participants involved in the research and that researchers must seek to understand the complex situation of lived experience in the context of those who live it (Schwandt, 2000). The paradigm's ontological proposition is based on numerous, socially created realities, which claims that there is no one reality, but rather various realities that are open to the perspectives and experiences of social actors. This paradigm's epistemology maintains that knowledge is subject to interpretation to get a greater understanding of social processes, and it also maintains an interactive relationship between researcher and participants, where values are made apparent in making discoveries. In the constructivist paradigm, the idea of objectivity, which is prevalent in the post positivist paradigm, is replaced with the concept of confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This paradigm's methodological perspective is mostly qualitative, as evidenced by interviews, observations, and document evaluations. As a result, the researcher adopted the constructivist paradigm based on its philosophical principles, which corresponds with the research objectives in the quest to explore the issue under study via the experiences of participants and to obtain in-depth information and knowledge about the issue through the subjective experiences of those participated in the study.

3.2 Research Design

According to Creswell (2014), research designs are classified into three types: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method methodologies. The philosophical stance of a researcher, research strategies, and techniques for establishing these strategies all have an influence on the choice of a

study design (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, Bryman (2008) identified five major research designs utilized in research: case study, experimental design, comparative design, cross sectional or survey design, and longitudinal research design.

The researcher employed a multiple case study research design to explore the six research questions. The cases focus on individuals in managerial positions in medium to large firms from the service sector of Ghana, specifically, its capital city, Greater Accra. The case studies also ensured that these were organisations who were substantially affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 and made major adjustments to their business models and strategic HR policies. Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabir, and Waseem (2019) defined the case study design as one that provides some depth to presenting the conditions of a phenomena under study and is ideal for the processing of complex studies. Because respondents in the study were drawn from some firms from the country's service sector, a multiple case study was used.

3.3. Research Approach

To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative approach was utilized to explore and obtain deeper insights into the phenomena under inquiry in light of the present study on the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to comprehend the post-pandemic effects (Chandra, 2017; Sendlhofer, 2019). According to Wyse (2011), the qualitative approach offers specific insights into the problem by contributing in the discovery of patterns in thinking and opinion, as well as the exploration of deeper into the issue. One key reason for using a qualitative research approach is that there are few validated scales that allow quantitative analyses of these concerns, and research on COVID-19 and its ramifications is still in its stages of development. This further

illustrates the need for qualitative study to thoroughly explore the issues by offering fresh insights.

3.4 Research Instruments

Because literature on COVID-19's effects on organisations' business models, human resource management and employees' wellbeing are now emerging, using a qualitative research approach with the utilization of an interview procedure will help to broaden the scope of the study because interviews improve the accumulation of detailed knowledge on a phenomena based on people's personal experiences. Dworkin (2012), asserts that interviews contribute significantly in research works because they help carve out very important ideas that the researcher may have not known. An interview, according to Boateng (2016), is a means for researchers to obtain fresh and in-depth data from the respondents. According to McLeod (2014), there are four major forms of interviews used in the social sciences which are; structured interviews, open-ended interviews, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews. According to Berg (2007), structured interviews involve an instant and mostly 'yes' or 'no' reply, providing little flexibility to either the participant and the researcher; unstructured or open-ended interviews involve interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee where there is flexibility and allows interviewees to shed more light on the issue; and semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to probe further and expand based on the development of the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). According to Berg (2007), semi-structured interviews necessitate the use of a check- list or interview guide to ensure that all major research issues are addressed; finally, focus group interviewing is a method in which participants are chosen for the purpose, even if they are no longer common of a group but are focused on a specific subject matter or problem. The objectives of the research study

were attained through the utilization of semi-structured interview which were guided by an interview guide.

The interview guide was structured into three sections namely A, B and C. Section A solicited responses from respondents on demographics characteristics such as education level, employment status, tenure, estimated number of workers, and type of organisation with which the respondent is involved, since they are relevant to the current study. Section B explored respondents' knowledge about COVID-19, the extent to which they were personally affected and whether work hours were lost due to existence of the COVID-19. Section C focused on the questions related to the research objectives, examples of which include about the new capabilities needed to compete post-COVID-19; how the pandemic and organisational responses affect employees' mental and emotional well-being; and, finally, how organisations promote work-life balance and facilitate employee training and development post-COVID-19.

3.5 Target Population/ Research Participants

A population, according to Boateng (2014), is a complete group of persons that a researcher investigates to explain and understand a social phenomenon. This study's population was made up of medium – large firms from some selected subsectors of the service sector of the economy. The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2015) classification of businesses was used to characterize medium-sized establishments which employ 31 to 100 people; and large-sized firms which employ more than 100 people. Focusing on medium to large firms as a research population offered the necessary knowledge, allowing the study's results to be generalized, because samples drawn from the various fields mirrored the population under examination.

3.6 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A sampling technique is a way to choose samples from a population to serve as the foundation for doing research on that group to collect data for a study subject (Boateng, 2014). Probability sampling and non-probability sampling are the two sampling techniques. The probability sampling technique, according to Rahi (2017), is a sampling method in which each unit has an equal chance of being chosen. According to Rahi (2017), some examples of probability sampling are simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, systematic random sampling, cluster sampling, and multi-stage sampling. In contrast, according to Taherdoost (2016), non-probability sampling is more employed in qualitative research, to investigate real-life situations rather than drawing statistical conclusions (Yin, 2003). Non-probability sampling techniques include convenience sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling.

The purposive sampling technique was used in this study to discover organisations and solicit their possible participation in the study via an official list from the Registrar General's department. Purposive sampling, also known as judgment or subjective sampling, allows the researcher to choose respondents based on certain attributes that the respondents possess that are relevant to the study, according to Boateng (2014). Purposive sampling, according to Creswell (2011), comprises identifying and choosing people or groups of persons who are well-informed about a topic of interest and is therefore utilized to get insights from 'information-rich' environments in order to gain a complete knowledge (Patton, 2015).

According to Creswell (2003), to extrapolate research findings, it is necessary to work with a selection of people known as sample who are representative of the population. A sample, according to Bryman (2012), is a fraction of the population considered for inquiry. This fraction

of the population then becomes the sample size which Singh and Masuku (2014) posited that, the sample size is critical for any study that aims to draw conclusions from a sample of the population. However, choosing the appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is a complex undertaking because no standardized sample size criteria exist (Terra-Blanch, Durheim, & Painter, 2006). Mason (2010) contends that a sample size of 5 to 50 is appropriate for qualitative research. Nonetheless, other researchers suggested that the sample size for qualitative research be limited to 30 (Boddy, 2016; Dworkin, 2012) because data saturation is obvious at this level. According to Mason (2010), data saturation is the absence of new or insightful information during the data gathering process.

This study's sample comprised of established medium to large firms from the service sector (i.e. Education, Transportation, Health, Financial, Telecommunication, Pharmaceutical, Tourism and Hospitality sectors) with an estimated 20 respondents in management positions from 20 distinct organisations who provided thorough and precise responses about the organisations' business models and strategic HR practices. The justification for using established medium to large enterprises from the service sector as the study lens is due to the destruction caused by the pandemic, which has influenced their operations in response to the circumstance, resulting in a significant upheaval in Ghana's economy as they are the major impetus for job creation and domestic revenue generation in Ghana. As a result, their responses had to be recorded as part of the present exploration. Furthermore, the rationale for using a total of 20 respondents stems from Boddy (2016) and Dworkin (2012)'s recommendations on sample size selection for a qualitative study, as well as Mason (2010)'s argument that a sample size ranging from 5 to 50 is acceptable for qualitative research.

3.7 Source of Data

The major source of data for this study was primary data. According to Mesly (2015), a researcher's primary data is real first-hand knowledge. The data was augmented, however, by secondary data gleaned from corporate records, - like brochures, memos, reports as well as public web-based material. The secondary source of data was used to supplement and enrich the primary data by giving supporting evidence for the study's findings. Mesly (2015) explained that the secondary data, represents information gathered by a researcher for a reason other than the one in question.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

The procedure for data gathering is one element of research methodology which is the process of actually doing things in a step-by-step manner. Data collection began in April and continued through mid-June 2022. This was after obtaining an introduction letter from the University of Ghana's Business School's Department of Organisation and Human Resource Management. The letter was then forwarded to all firms, enabling approval and appointment scheduling based entirely on the respondents' preferred day and time. The researcher after which proceeded to each of the firms with whom an approval have been given and appointment had been arranged. The participants were then engaged in either face to face or virtual interview session that lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes, during which they were asked questions related to the study's objectives that were structured in the interview guide and utilized a recording device such as a smartphone to record their replies to ensure that the correct information was obtained and data accuracy was assured. A notepad and pen were also used to jot down key points from the

respondents' responses. Following that, the recorded responses were transcribed, and about 5 of the transcribed data were sent to the respondents for verification of their inputs into the research query, to ensure that the precise thoughts they ideally conveyed were transcribed and no disinformation was decoded. And these were respondents whose voice pitches were low during the data collection process, resulting in faint voice notes being collected. This is one technique to guarantee that the transcribed data is reliable for further analysis.

3.9 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the thematic and descriptive analysis approach were adopted to draw out themes which were significant for the study. This is because, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic data analysis is the most widely used method which is regarded as the fundamental method for analyzing qualitative data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). The data collection and initial data analysis stages overlapped, and so time recorded interviews were transcribed from audio to a text format within a day to ensure rich insights including all verbal and nonverbal communications were captured (Yin, 2013). This method was extremely beneficial in capturing the immediacy of the interview data (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). In the process, the data was put into codes and identified based on the themes from the text segments. Within-case analysis was manually performed first, followed by cross-case studies or analysis. During this time, significant common themes from the data emerged, which were then presented in the findings section, along with actual statements from respondents. This was also done to give the work a voice because it reflected the feelings, ideologies, intents, and mindsets of the participants.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Like any other well-executed study, this one followed research ethics. Ethics are principles or regulations of behavior that govern research project. In every research, the first step is to get informed consent. Informed consent extends beyond a potential participant just expressing willingness to participate in study. They must understand exactly what they are consenting to. As a result, the researcher described the study's objectives to respondents, ensuring that they knew that their participation in the data collection process was to aid the researcher in acquiring information needed in the study and to get their agreement by completing a written consent form. The anonymity of respondents' names and other data protected the secrecy of the information obtained from them. Anonymity is the hiding of the researcher's identity in order to better protect them from harm (Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015). Taylor (2015) asserts that when research participants' identities are safeguarded, they provide candid replies that are crucial to the study's results (Vainio, 2013). To prevent unauthorized access, recorded responses were password-protected. Furthermore, research ethics, which included the respondents' voluntary participation, among others were taken into account. Participants were also given the right to exit the interview at any time without argument from the interviewer as their disengagement might be the result of personal issues that must not be overlooked.

3.11 Validity and Reliability

According to Pandey and Patnaik (2014), every research, quantitative or qualitative, need credibility in their study, which may be obtained by the research methodology' validity and reliability. In the domain of qualitative research, reliability is concerned with the consistency of

the measure, whereas validity relates to the credibility, appropriateness, rigor, and trustworthiness of the methods, procedures, and data used to arrive at the research findings, as well as the amount to which a study correctly represents the ideas being studied (Leung, 2015; Maxwell, 1992; Thomson, 2011). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the criteria for establishing trustworthiness include credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability.

To ensure that the study's trustworthiness is established by meeting Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four trustworthiness criteria, the study sought clarification of ambiguities with respondents to ensure that their words correspond to what they intend to say, as this allowed for mutual understanding and thus increased the credibility of the findings. The current study was supplemented by corporate records, web-based materials, and news items to corroborate the core data and ensure the credibility of the study's results. Furthermore, to ensure data consistency, the current study's research approach was thoroughly examined in terms of assuring dependability, outlining the complete data gathering and analysis procedure. Furthermore, to ensure data transferability to other settings, the purposive sampling approach was utilized in this study to identify organisations and seek their potential involvement in the study so that the findings from this study may be applied to other comparable organisations, and comprehensive descriptions of the study contexts were presented.

3.12 Research Setting- Ghana

The study was carried out in Ghana- Greater Accra region, and it is critical to be aware of and comprehend the COVID-19 pandemic situation in this jurisdiction, as well as the various Government initiatives to halt its spread and boost the economy.

3.12.1 Demographic Profile of Ghana

Ghana is a resource-rich Western African country with a current population of approximately 32,078,182 people, comprised of 16,275,863 men (50.70%) and 15,829,122 females (49.30%), and a growth rate of 3.02% as of January 21, 2022 (Ghana population, 2022). Historically, Ghana's economy has been divided into three sectors: agriculture (primary), industry (secondary), and services (tertiary) (Affum & Wang, 2019). The primary sector includes agriculture and related industries such as mining, fishing and forestry. The secondary sector encompasses all of the country's construction and manufacturing industries whereas the tertiary or service sector encompasses all industries, including information technology, hotels, restaurants, education, health centers, real estate, finance and insurance activity, transportation, and travel and tourism. A study on Ghana's GDP annual growth found that the service sector accounts for 52% of the country's GDP (Trading Economics, 2022). The industry sector, on the other hand, accounts for 26% of GDP, while agriculture and related sectors account for 22% of GDP (Trading Economics, 2022).

3.12.2 Overview of the Introduction of COVID-19 in Ghana

The disease was first recorded in Ghana on March 12th, 2020, with two imported cases from two travelers from Turkey and Norway (Ghana Health Service, 2020). Ghana had recorded 141 cases of COVID-19 and three deaths by March 30, 2020, prompting the Government to impose partial lockdowns on major urban areas (Gyasi, 2020; Essien, 2020). On March 22, 2020, all entrance points into Ghana were entirely closed (Ministry of Information (MOI), 2020), and all permits on arrival were suspended (Asante & Mills, 2020; Sibiri, Zankawah, & Prah, 2020).

As part of these lockdowns, the President of Ghana barred airplane travel, closed down business operations, schools, and religious/large gatherings, and imposed movement restrictions (Agyeman-Manu, 2020; Gyasi, 2020). Apart from Ghanaians and foreigners with residency permits, the country's borders remained closed as of July 31, 2020. Travel restrictions and border closures remained in effect until September 1st, 2020, when they were reassessed. Even though these processes were designed to minimize health issues, they caused weeks of stress and anxiety for several people across the country, especially in disadvantaged areas with low socioeconomic status. For example, the three-week lockdown of economically vital urban areas, as well as the widespread social isolation imposed in the absence of suitable social assistance packages, has had a significant detrimental influence on low wage earners who are living in appalling conditions (Addo, 2020; Asante & Mills, 2020).

Ghana is rated fifth in Africa, behind South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, and Morocco, in terms of confirmed cases. Ghana had the largest number of new cases on August 1, 2020, with 1,513 new cases, and a backlog of samples gathered (GHS, 2020). Ghana recorded its first recovery on March 26, 2020. (GHS, 2020) and by October 25th, 2020, there were around 46,800 recovered cases in the country. Unfortunately, 316 people died as a result of the virus on March 21, 2020, when Ghana confirmed its first death (GHS, 2020). On April 12, 2020, Ghana documented 566 new confirmed cases, which had climbed to about 7,881 by the end of May 31, 2020 (GHS, 2020).

Since September 2020, overseas travelers were to undergo an obligatory antigen test at a cost of \$150 per passenger and have a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) result (no more than three days before to travel). Critics have questioned the quick antigen test's ability to identify the virus when compared to the gold standard PCR. The cost of the antigen test has been specifically

criticized as being prohibitively costly. On January 31, 2021, the President of Ghana (in coordination with the ECOWAS assembly of heads of state) announced a decrease in the cost of the antigen test for ECOWAS nationals to \$50 per passenger (The Presidency, 2020a).

Moreover, Ghana, like many other nations, faced the second wave of the coronavirus, having detected the 501Y.V2 type of the virus, which was initially found in South Africa (World Health Organization, 2021). The second wave resulted in a rise in COVID-19 cases in the fourth quarter (December 2020 to February 2021), with more deaths (GHS, 2020 as cited in Amponsah, Tagoe & Afriyie, 2021).

As of 30th January, 2022, there were 156,690 coronavirus cases, 1391 deaths and 153,393 recoveries in Ghana (Worldometers, 2022). Also, as of 30th March, 2022, Ghana has recorded 160,925 cases, 1,445 deaths and 159,409 recoveries (Worldometers, 2022). These trends of the coronavirus cases, as highlighted in figure 3.1 below, continues to increase looking at the recorded numbers from January, 2022 to March, 2022.

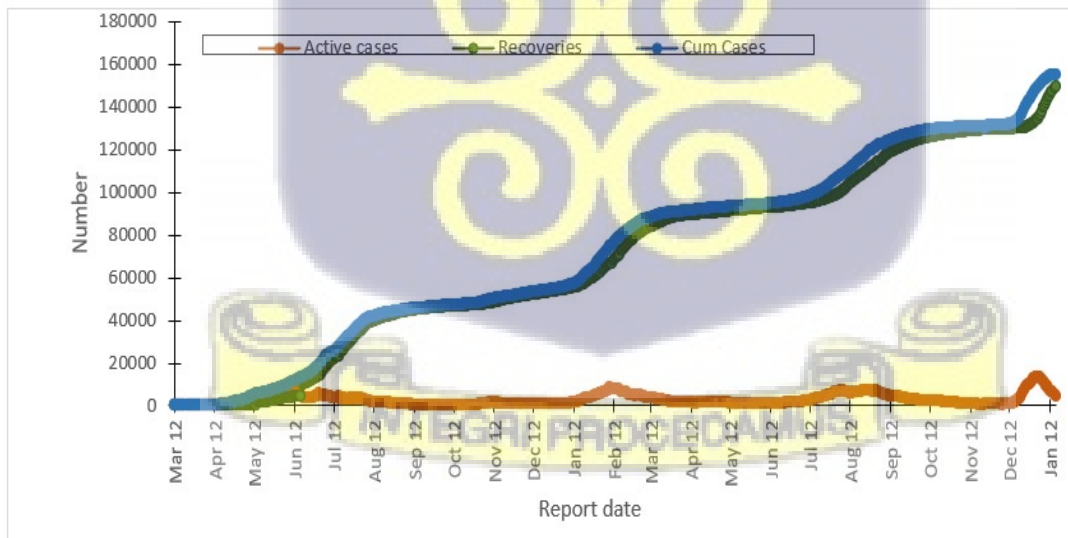


Figure 3.1: Active COVID-19 cases and recoveries in Ghana (Ghana Health Service, 2022).

According to Hope (2020), the virus pervasive nature increased the strain on health personnel worldwide, with many of them believed to have contracted the virus. Based on this, Ghana, like most African countries, implemented steps to incentivize health workers in the aftermath of the global fight against the virus (The Presidency, 2020b). Among many other measures, front-line workers, including health personnel, in particular, were said to have received a three-month allowance equal to half of their monthly pay (March, April and May). Furthermore, health workers in the country were granted tax exemptions, in addition to the issuance of a three hundred and fifty thousand cedis (GH350, 000.00) insurance cover for each health worker (The Presidency, 2020c).

It is well recognized that Africa, especially Ghana's health system, is unstable, with poor and marginalized people having limited access to healthcare. As a consequence, prior to the emergence of the pandemic, international communities, particularly donors, had long been concerned about issues such as infrastructure staffing, funding, health regulations, and management models in African healthcare systems (Mazibuko, 2019). It was thus hypothesized that Africa's already vulnerable health systems, combined with a high burden of respiratory and diabetes diseases and densely populated urban areas, were likely to worsen countries' vulnerability and the virus's lethality (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020).

3.12.3 Detailed Measures from the Government of Ghana to Control COVID-19

The increasing number of daily cases reported from across the country's various areas prompted the Government to act quickly and implement actions (both financial and non-financial measures) to control the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana.

3.12.3.1 Non- financial Measures

Prior to the COVID-19's first two occurrences on March 12, 2020, Ghana's Government embraced the usage of Presidential addresses. The President describes all of the attempts to minimize and prevent the spread of the virus in these addresses (The Presidency, 2020d). For example, in his addresses to the country, the President repeatedly emphasized the need for always wearing nose masks as the prescribed norm of the global system; and directed the Police to enforce the wearing of nose and facial masks. According to the rule, "Ghanaian residents who failed to utilize face masks as a preventive measure against the transmission of COVID-19 were liable to a fine of up to GHS-60,000 (about US\$10,297) or a maximum of 10 years imprisonment" (Robin-Lee, 2020).

In addition, fumigation of marketplaces and transport ports around the country was one of the non-financial measures implemented by the Government in response to the outbreak. Also, in response to reports of community spread, on March 21, 2020, a legislation (Imposition of Restrictions Act, 2020 [Act 1012]) was adopted to prohibit mobility (International Labour Organisation, 2020). On March 30, 2020, the country's two main cities, Accra and Kumasi, as well as their surrounding towns, was placed on partial lockdown for the first time for two weeks. This activity was critical in slowing the virus's spread from hotspots to non-hotspot areas were placed under of the country, and it attempted to scale up contact tracing of those who had come into touch with infected people in order to test them and, if required, isolate and quarantine them for treatment (The Presidency, 2020a).

The Government mandated mass testing among individuals as part of its attempts to restrict the spread of SARS-CoV-2; however, during the beginning of the pandemic, there were just a few

testing labs, as the only centres were the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, Kumasi Centre for Collaborative Research, and the National Public Health Reference Laboratory. By June 2020, the list of testing sites had grown to ten (Globally Harmonized System, 2020), which was later raised to sixteen. Ghana performed nearly 370 000 tests between March and mid-July, making it one of the nations in the West Africa Region with the highest tests per 100 000 people (WHO, 2020d) and was ranked first in Africa in relative to the number of tests conducted per million inhabitants (Ghana News Agency, 2020a).

According to the Ghana News Agency (GNA) (2020a), the President of Ghana declared the end of the partial lockdown on April 19, 2020, with effect from 1:00 a.m. on April 20, 2020. A variety of factors contributed to the partial lockdown being lifted. These included a better understanding of COVID-19, effectiveness in limiting its dissemination thus far, and an improved testing program; identification of possible hotspots'- and the expansion of isolation and treatment centres around the nation. Internal flights in Ghana also began on May 1, 2020, and international borders were shortly opened (Andoh, 2020). After the President's address on May 31, 2020, schools also resumed operations. To stop the virus from spreading in schools, the government also provided supplies to all instructors and students who were scheduled to return to class (Kokutse, 2020).

Moreover, according to records, the Government constructed a 100-bed facility for the quarantine and recovery of COVID-19 patients (Ghanaweb, 2020). Concurrently, the Vice President, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, in conjunction with the Ministry of Communication, launched the COVID-19 tracker app, a new software meant to promote awareness of novel coronaviruses, track COVID-19 cases, and offer patient information to major health service providers across the country (Ministry of Communication and Digitalization, 2020). This tracker

software was designed to give help that would supplement the states' efforts in combating the worldwide pandemic.

The latter phase of the approach to prevent the virus's increased transmission in the country is the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines. Ghana was the first West African country to get the initial shipment of 600,000 Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine from the COVAX plant on February 24, 2021 (WHO Official Website, 2021). During the deployment, an additional 50,000 AstraZeneca vaccines were donated by the Indian Government to Ghana on 5th March, 2021 (Ghana Official Website, 2021). As of May 2021, about 800,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccination had been delivered in Ghana. According to Dokuaa- Sasu (2022), Ghana received more than 3.5 million doses of the vaccine and had provided about 9.6 million shots of (COVID-19) vaccination as of January 18, 2022, an increase from the preceding weeks. (Dokuaa- Sasu, 2022).

3.12.3.2 Financial Measures

The Government developed a proactive GH560 million National Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP) for COVID-19 to control and limit the virus's spread while also strengthening national capacity for monitoring, diagnosis, and case management (Ministry of Finance (MOFa), 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 Trust Fund was established which prompted a flurry of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), and churches to contribute significantly to the trust fund, boosting the Government's fight against the pandemic (Domena, 2020). For instance, the United Bank of Africa (UBA) and Newmont Ghana are said to have donated \$350,000 (about GHC1, 925,000) and \$100,000, respectively, to the fund (Domena, 2020), to help the Government respond to the

COVID-19 crisis in Ghana. Within two months of its establishment, the COVID-19 Trust Fund had received GH 45 million in financial donations.

The Trust Fund contributed GHS.10- 257,360.00 for the purchase of PPEs for frontline employees, according to the Ministry of Finance (2020). A US\$100 million facility was procured from the World Bank under the ‘Ghana Emergency Preparedness and Response Project (GEPRP)⁵’ to provide financial and social support and free health services to COVID-19 patients and their families in quarantine (Ministry of Health, 2020). A grant of GH 2,500,000.00 was also awarded to the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) to help promote COVID-19 public awareness (Ghanaweb, 2020b). In addition, the Institute of Statistical, Social, and Economic Research (ISSER) was given a GHS. 297,920.00 grant to undertake research on the pandemic's impact in 80 Ghanaian districts in order to make appropriate COVID-19 decisions (Ghanaweb, 2020b). The Government also introduced economic recovery and stabilization initiatives, such as the COVID-19 Alleviation and Revitalization of Enterprises Support (Ghana CARES) Obaatanpa Initiative (MOF, 2020b). These initiatives included soft loans, statutory payment intervention, monetary policies, utility bill suspension, job benefits, and guaranteed support.

3.12.3.2.1 Support for Soft Loans:

First, the Government set aside GH1.2 billion to assist pandemic-affected businesses (Government of Ghana, 2020) of which the Government provided a soft loan of up to GH600,

The (GEPRP) intends to avoid, identify, and respond to the COVID-19 danger, as well as to enhance Ghana's national infrastructure for public health preparedness.

000,000 out of the GH1.2 billion. A one-year suspension and a two-year settlement term apply to businesses that receive this money (GOG, 2020; MOF, 2020). Over 200,000 SMEs are projected to benefit from the funding, which would help limit losses in the aftermath of the pandemic.

3.12.3.2.2 Intervention in the Payment of Statutory Benefits

The Government extended the deadline for filing yearly reports as part of its efforts to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 (Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG), 2020). Also, all firms were exempted from the penalty for late annual reporting, and businesses that missed the deadline were not required to pay any penalties (MOF, 2020b).

3.12.3.2.3 Monetary Measures

According to the Ministry of Finance (2020), the Government of Ghana lowered its interest rate from 16% to 14.5% in order to support small enterprises in need of finance. The Central Bank took steps to increase liquidity, such as cutting reserve requirements for commercial banks from 10% to 8% and decreasing the capital conservation buffer for lenders from 3% to 1.5% (Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC), 2020). The Bank of Ghana has also waived the expense of financial transactions when using mobile banking services in alliance with the Ghana Interbank Payment and Settlement Systems Ltd (GHIPSS), which they believe will benefit small businesses and borrowing enterprises, who are also expected to benefit from lower interest rates and longer payment periods guaranteed by the Government (KPMG, 2020).

3.12.3.2.4 Suspension of Utility Bills

Despite the fact that the majority of businesses in Ghana were closed for the first half of the year, overhead expenditures such as power and water must be met regardless of output. As a result, the government implemented two utilities programs to help these enterprises deal with economic issues. First, the Government covered half of a company's power expenditures for six months under the March 2020 plan (Government of Ghana (GOG), 2020). Furthermore, the Ghanaian Government has paid the cost of 50% of all residents' power use for three months (April-June 2020) and 100% for lifeline clients (those who spend 0 to 50 kilowatt hours per month) from March 2020 (Dapaah, 2020). The free electricity supply was expected to benefit an estimated 1.7 million lifeline subscribers (Amoh, 2020).

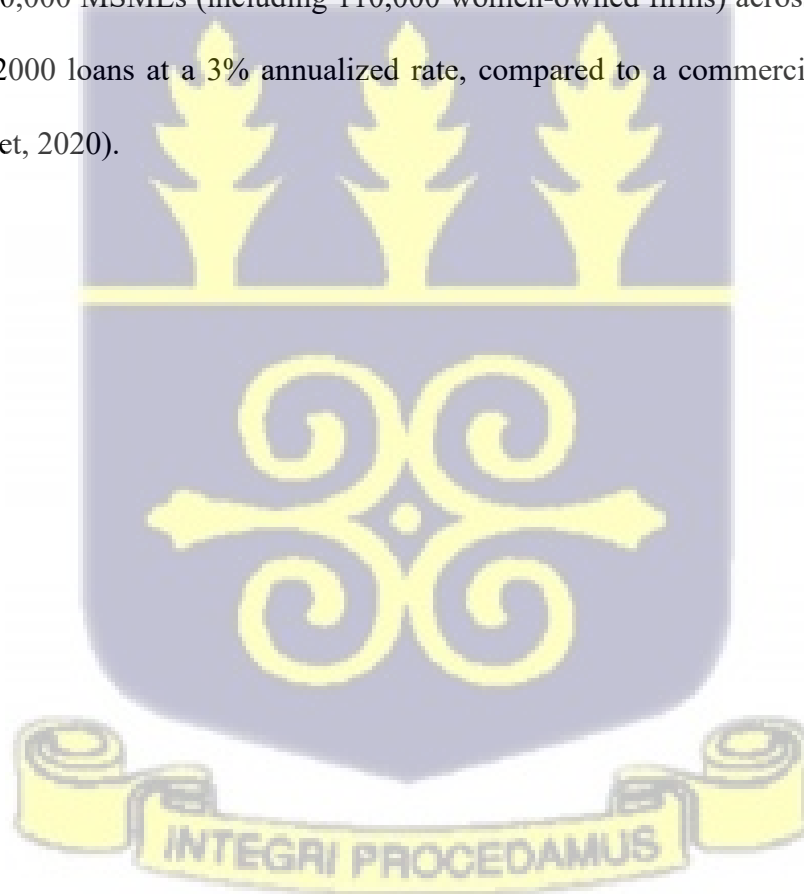
Second, the Ghanaian Government offered free water supply for all citizens in order to facilitate access to water and promote hygienic practices (e.g. hand washing). The subsidy, which had been promised for three months (April-June 2020), was extended until December 2020. According to the Government, this measure was to assist industry and the service sector recoup part of their lost revenues (MOF, 2020b).

3.12.3.2.5 Employment Benefits

The Government provided a start-up fund to enable employees who have been sent home develop or learn new skills in order to increase their chances of obtaining a new job (MOF, 2020b). Furthermore, the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations developed a National Unemployment Insurance Scheme to provide SMEs with interim financial assistance in order to reduce layoffs (MOF, 2020b).

3.12.3.2.6 Guaranteed Support

The Government devised a GHS.2 billion guarantee plan to help banks in granting financial support to the country's SMEs as they recover from the COVID-19 upheavals (Ghana News Agency (GNA), 2020b). The Ghana Care Guarantee Scheme (GCGS) aims to help SMEs get bank loans with lower interest rates and for longer durations (GNA, 2020b). The second project is the Corona Virus Alleviation Programme (CAP) - Business Help Scheme (CAP-BuSS), which has a GHS. 600 million budget and was launched on May 19, 2020 to help micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) by H. E. President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (MoF, 2020a). Over 170,000 MSMEs (including 110,000 women-owned firms) across the country have received GHS. 2000 loans at a 3% annualized rate, compared to a commercial rate of 30% on average (Ggea.net, 2020).



CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter of the current study presents the data analysis performed on the data collected and then discusses the findings in light of the literature studied for the investigation. The data analysis explains the research questions generated by the research objectives. The first segment of this chapter focuses on the interviewees' demographics. The study also covers the findings from the qualitative data collected, with an emphasis on understanding the effects of COVID-19 on organisation's work systems and employee well-being, as well as explores the essential or new capabilities required of firms to survive and compete. A total of 20 respondents serving in managerial positions from medium to large firms in several tertiary subsectors (i.e., Health, Transportation, Financial, Pharmaceuticals, Education, Telecommunication, Tourism, and Hospitality sectors) of the Ghanaian economy provided precise and thorough responses to the study inquiry. The data obtained from respondents was analyzed using the thematic analysis approach and presented in accordance with the specified research objectives.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section provides information on the demographics of the study respondents who are in a position to provide the necessary information on the study objectives. Job position, educational qualification, professional qualification, duration with the entity, position tenure, the type of firm they work in, and the size of the firm in terms of the number of current employees working in the

firm are among the demographics. Their demographics were critical in ensuring that the interviewees' responses were consistent with those represented in the research (Creswell, 2014).

As a result, Table 4.1 below summarizes the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.



Table 4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Respondent	Job Position	Educational Qualification	Professional Qualification	Duration With the Firm	Job Position Tenure	Firm Size	Type of Firm	Sector
Respondent 1	Financial controller	MBA in Finance	Chartered Accountant	3 years	3 years	230	Large	Logistic Industry
Respondent 2	Dean	PhD in Development Policy Mgt.	None	14 years	3years	547	Large	Education
Respondent 3	Traffic Operations Officer	BA in Logistics and Supply Chain Mgt.	Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport	14 years	6years	2400	Large	Transport
Respondent 4	Senior HR Officer	MBA HRM	IHRMP	14 years	7 years	2135	Large	Transport
Respondent 5	Deputy Director, HR P.M.E	EMBA in Project Mgt.	Nurse	17 years	1 year	7100	Large	Health
Respondent 6	Manager, HR	MSc Service Mgt.	Certified Hospitality Professional	6 years	3 years	80	Medium	Tourism & Hospitality
Respondent 7	Director, HR	EMBA HRM	IHRMP	16 years	5 years	5000	Large	Telecomm.
Respondent 8	Manager, HR strategy	MSc Service Mgt.	IHRMP	5 years	5 years	70	Medium	Tourism & Hospitality
Respondent 9	Deputy HR Manager	MBA HRM	IHRMP	18 years	5 years	6000	Large	Health
Respondent 10	Director, HR	PhD in Educational Leadership and Mgt.	PgMP.	10 years	4 years	1200	Large	Education
Respondent 11	Head of Dept.HR	PhD in Strategic Mgt. & Int. Business	None	10 years	<1 year	-	-	Education
Respondent 12	Manager	MSc in Air Transport & Aviation Mgt.	Certified Aviation Manager	10 years	3 years	500	Large	Transport
Respondent 13	Manager, HR	MBA in Tourism & Hospitality Mgt.	None	3 years	3 years	60	Medium	Tourism & Hospitality
Respondent 14	Senior Lecturer	PhD in Psychology	Professional I/O Psychologist	16 years	5 years	2000	Large	Education
Respondent 15	Director, HR	EMBA HRM	IHRMP	14 years	4 years	400	Large	Pharmaceutical
Respondent 16	Senior Manager, HR	MBA HRM	IHRMP	12 years	3 years	300	Large	Pharmaceutical
Respondent 17	Manager, HR	MSc. HRM	None	8 years	3 years	100	Medium	Tourism & Hospitality
Respondent 18	Senior Manager, HR	MBA HRM	IHRMP	12 years	3 years	3500	Large	Telecomm.
Respondent 19	HR Assistant	MSc. Service Mgt.	None	12 years	4 years	350	Large	Tourism & Hospitality
Respondent 20	Senior Manager, HR	EMBA HRM	IHRMP	14 years	4 years	5000	Large	Financial Institution

Source: Field Data (2022)

4.1.1 Job Position of Respondents

The data reported in Table 4.1 above clearly shows that the majority of respondents (85%) are in management positions within the HR function. Given this, around 15% are in non-managerial jobs within the function. These job positions validate the respondents' abilities and experience in the administration of different strategic HR policies related to reacting and responding to COVID-19 as well as government mitigation and reactive policies.

4.1.2. Educational Qualification of Respondents

Table 4.1 clearly shows that the majority of respondents had a Master's degree, with 15 accounting for 75% of the total. This is followed by PhD holders, who account for 20% of the total, with one respondent holding a first degree, - accounting for 5%. As a result, it is obvious that the sample for this study consists of highly educated individuals. It is also clear that practically all of the respondents had prior experience in Human Resource Management and/or managerial responsibilities.

4.1.3. Professional Affiliation of Respondents

As shown in Table 4.1 above, nearly half of the respondents accounting for 40% are Professional HR Practitioners who are also members of the Chartered Institute of Human Resource Management Practitioners; 30% accounting for professions such as Chartered Accountant, Program Management Professional (PgMP), Certified Hospitality Professional, Certified Aviation Manager, Industrial/Organisational Psychologist, Certified Logistics and Transport

Officer. 1 respondent is listed as a nurse as a profession, whereas 25% are not linked with any professional organisations.

4.1.4 Respondents' Tenure with the Organisation

Table 4.1 above depicts the respondents' years on the job or tenure in their respective organisations. The majority of the respondents, that is 60% of respondents, have 11- 20 years of continuous service in the HR function; with 40% having 1 - 10 years of work experience. This demonstrates the respondents' extensive hands-on experience and in-depth understanding of the organisational structure and the management of the organisation's human capital, as well as its contribution to the overall competitiveness and success. This is also attributable to the fact that these respondents are aware of the organisation's internal processes and were already professionals in the distinct firms prior to the COVID-19 pandemic' and thus are aware of the changing trends of the workplace over the COVID-19 period and its disruptions to organisational operations and how the organisation is positioning itself towards achieving organisational success and competitive edge.

4.1.5 Job Position Period in the Organisation

This is to ascertain how long respondents have been in their varied current work positions and hence are part of team that may have generated strategic plans to adapt to changing market conditions and new business practices because of COVID-19's effects. Thus, in position to provide relevant and in-depth information in response to the research questions. As a result, Table 4.1 shows that approximately 85% were in their different positions between 1 and 5 years,

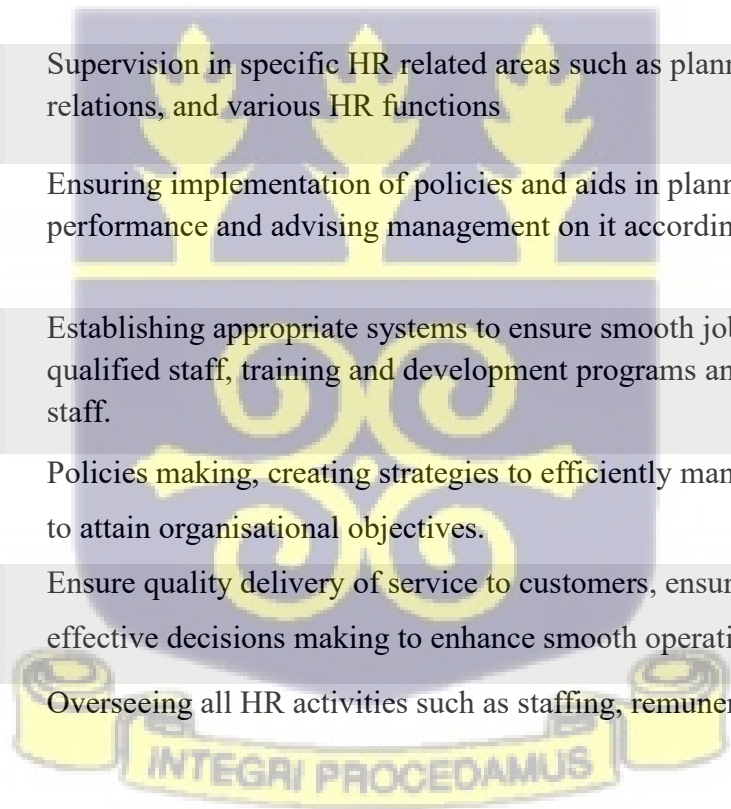
whilst 10% were in their respective job positions between 6 and 10 years, and 5% was less than 1 year in the position. This evidently implies that the respondents are very well aware of the events posed by the pandemic and so have the essential knowledge pertaining to the research questions since they are strategic leaders in various businesses and are well up to date with current developments in managing the effects of COVID-19.

Table 4.2 below summarizes the respondents' replies on their responsibilities in their various work organisations to help comprehend the roles they perform in their varied employment positions.



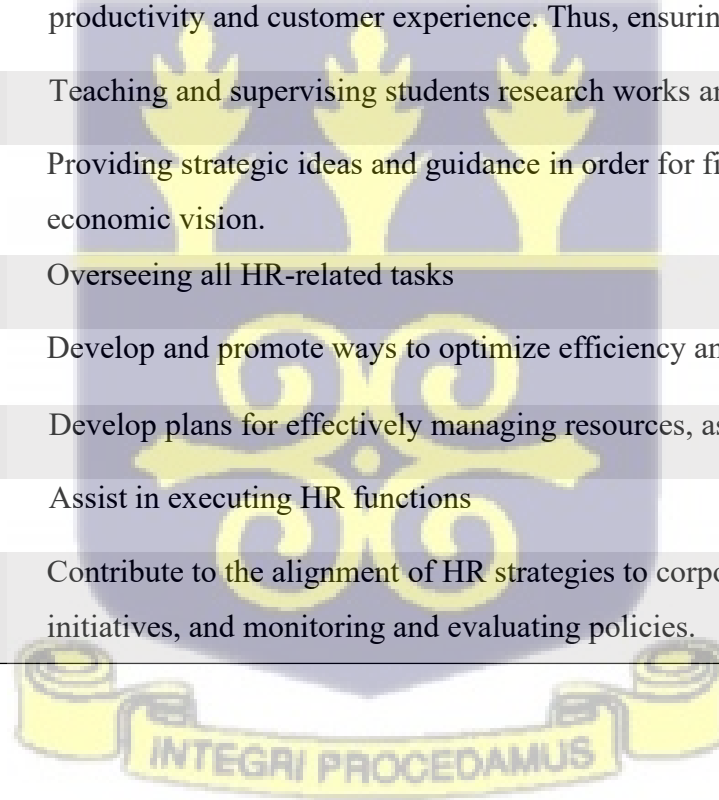
Table 4. 2: Summary of the Job Responsibilities of Respondents

Respondent	Job Position	Responsibilities
Respondent 1	Financial controller	Control finances by taking care of the treasury, accounts payables, and accounts receivable
Respondent 2	Dean	Performing largely administrative functions, ensuring the effectiveness of teaching and research and enhancing students learning experiences
Respondent 3	Traffic Operations Officer	Consolidation of generated revenues by the respective branches
Respondent 4	Senior HR Officer	Supervision in specific HR related areas such as planning, training and development, employee relations, and various HR functions
Respondent 5	Deputy Director, HR Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation	Ensuring implementation of policies and aids in planning, monitoring and evaluating the performance and advising management on it accordingly.
Respondent 6	Manager, HR	Establishing appropriate systems to ensure smooth job functions through the hiring of well qualified staff, training and development programs and mandated tool to firing and promoting of staff.
Respondent 7	Director, HR	Policies making, creating strategies to efficiently manage resources and executing best policies to attain organisational objectives.
Respondent 8	Manager, HR strategy	Ensure quality delivery of service to customers, ensure proper coordination of activities, and effective decisions making to enhance smooth operation.
Respondent 9	Deputy HR Manager	Overseeing all HR activities such as staffing, remuneration, promotion and others



Respondent 10	Director, HR	Ensuring student academic advancement through assisting in establishing curriculum and instruction, as well as managing members of staff.
Respondent 11	Head of Dept.HR	Managing colleagues, students and public person to be responsible per the School's requirement. Also represents department through the Dean of the school
Respondent 12	Manager	Overseeing aviation-related tasks and ensuring everyone is operating together towards the strategic objectives.
Respondent 13	Manager, HR	Assessing performance to identify possible issues and designing best solutions to boost productivity and customer experience. Thus, ensuring proper coordination of work activities
Respondent 14	Senior Lecturer	Teaching and supervising students research works and engage in rigorous research
Respondent 15	Director, HR	Providing strategic ideas and guidance in order for firm to reach its long-term objectives and economic vision.
Respondent 16	Senior Manager, HR	Overseeing all HR-related tasks
Respondent 17	Manager, HR	Develop and promote ways to optimize efficiency and customer satisfaction.
Respondent 18	Senior Manager, HR	Develop plans for effectively managing resources, assign supervisors to handle day-to-day tasks
Respondent 19	HR Assistant	Assist in executing HR functions
Respondent 20	Senior Manager, HR	Contribute to the alignment of HR strategies to corporate goals by planning, execution of HR initiatives, and monitoring and evaluating policies.

Source: Field data (2022)



4.1.6 Size and Type of Firm

This section presents the specific types of enterprises the respondents came from based on the number of employees. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2015) integrated business establishment survey report, micro-sized enterprises employ no more than five people; medium-sized establishments employ 31 to 100 people; and large-sized firms employ more than 100 people. Using this classification of enterprises based on firm size as specified in GSS (2015) report, it is indicative in Table 4. 1 that 20% of respondents came from established medium firms which have $> 31 \leq 100$ employees, 75% of established large firms which have > 100 and above employees, and 5% indicated no information of the approximate number of employees in the company and hence no categorization was formed. As a result, the established medium to large firms from specified industries of the service sector of the Ghanaian economy were used for the current study.

4.1.7 Sub-Sectors of Respondents' Firms

The last demographic feature focused on the sub-sectors of the businesses the respondents work for. Out of the 20 respondents from different firms, 25% of respondents came from the Tourism and Hospitality sector; 20% of respondents from the Educational sector (tertiary), 15% from the Transport industry, 10% each from the Health, Telecommunications, and Pharmaceutical sectors, 5% from the other business service, which is the Logistic industry as well as 5% from the Financial institution. Based on study findings and Ghana Statistical annual survey reports, this data shows that respondents are collectively workers or professionals from individual firms that have been severely impacted by the incidence of COVID-19 and whose

major contributions to Ghana's economy and development have been significantly hit. As a result, the necessity for these firms to be included in the study, as well as the fact that the tertiary or service sector contributes 52% of GDP based on Ghana's GDP annual report (Trading Economics, 2022), emphasizes the importance of their being included in the study population.

4.2 Exploring Respondents' Knowledge of and About COVID-19

In light of the preceding discussions, the research questioned respondents about their understanding of COVID-19, how it has affected them personally, and if man hours were lost due to the occurrence of COVID-19, which may have had an impact on their firm and revenue.

Table 4.3 below presents all the respondents' replies in terms of their comprehension and knowledge of COVID-19, as specified in Section B of the interview guide used to gather primary information.

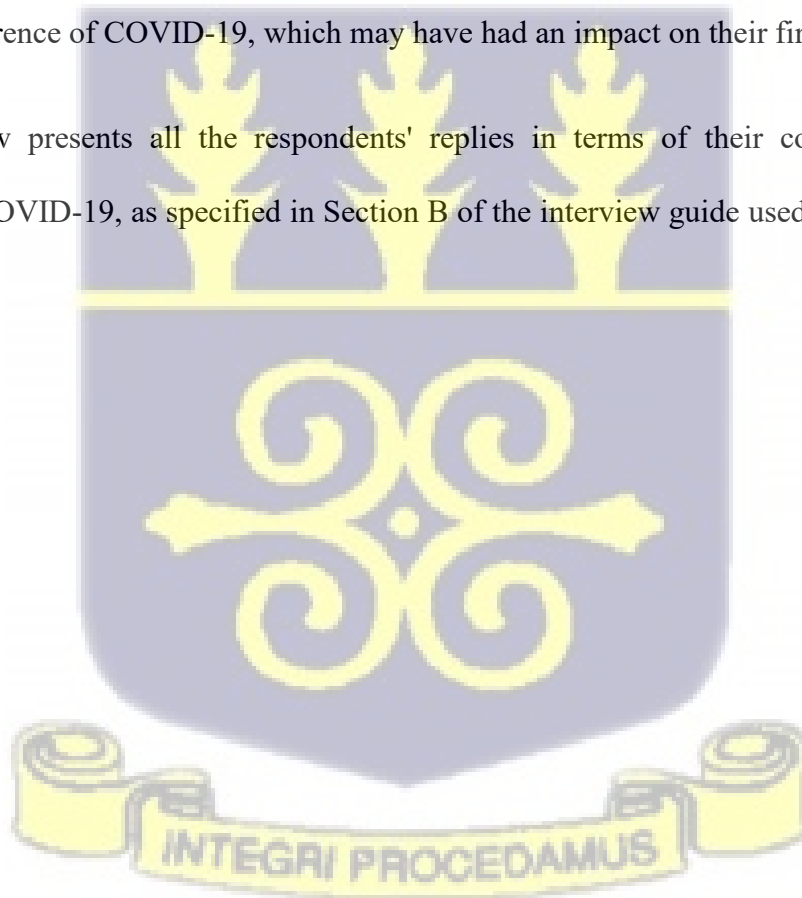


Table 4.3: Respondents' Description and Understanding of COVID-19

- Respondent 1:** *COVID-19 is the short name for coronavirus, which broke out in 2019. So that is why it is COVID-19, so coronavirus disease 2019. I know it first broke out in China and somehow that was in 2019, around November. And then by March- April, it have spread all over the world.*
- Respondent 2:** *COVID-19 is a viral disease that affects the lungs and ability to breath and also, a disease that is transmitted through contact which broke out in 2019 in China (Wuhan) and quickly spread throughout the world. It got classified as pandemic because pandemics are said to have a certain scale of across the world and so far there have been millions of who have died as well as millions who have been infected. It have moved away from just been an health issue which created the massive lockdowns and social and economic challenges and countries, industries have been affected and individuals have loss jobs, therefore, from a health problem it have grown to become economic and social problem and have affected industries across the globe.*
- Respondent 3:** *COVID-19 is the pandemic that hit the world and affected everything our economy and generally everything.*
- Respondent 4:** *COVID-19 is an outbreak of virus which started somewhere in 2019, it is believed to start in China. It affects the lungs and it's airborne and quiet deadly and it led to one of the biggest pandemics in the world. Over the period it havocked the entire world so countries suffered some recorded relatively high casualties. God being so good there are vaccinations that are being used to prevent the spread of the disease. It has also affected businesses all around the world.*
- Respondent 5:** *COVID-19 is a global pandemic because it crosses the various countries and affects everyone across the globe so is a pandemic.*
- Respondent 6:** *COVID-19 is one of the most serious pandemics that hit the world so hard causing difficulties in our daily lives or activities, brought a halt to business survival or continuity and generally affecting the economy at large.*

- Respondent 7:** *COVID-19 is a disease or virus which emerged from China in 2019 and transmissible when you come into contact with an infected person through droplets such as saliva. It became a pandemic due to its prevalence across almost all the countries in the world that why it's known to be a global pandemic and has caused massive destructions in world economy, and number of people losing their lives to it.*
- Respondent 8:** *COVID-19 is the full name of coronavirus disease of 2019 which was believed to have originated from China and has caused death, business failures and lots of setbacks to economy development both in developed and developing nations. It was something that has seriously affected all sectorial businesses and has brought about changes in our way of life as well as businesses.*
- Respondent 9:** *COVID-19 is a pandemic that affects everything because as it spreads it affects work and health.*
- Respondent 10:** *COVID-19 is a pandemic that has hit the world so hard since its effects have been felt by countries across the globe. It is a virus that was believed to have originated from China and very infectious which cause massive fatalities worldwide and also caused havoc to business operations and growth.*
- Respondent 11:** *COVID-19 is a global pandemic, or global virus and is really a deadly disease because people died out of that and even those who did not die it wasn't easy for them managing it.*
- Respondent 12:** *COVID-19 is one of the most catastrophic pandemics in history because, while there have been a few pandemics in the past, they did not compare to the damage this current pandemic has brought and the lives it has destroyed worldwide. So, according to my understanding of COVID-19, it is a virus that has harmed livelihoods, company operations, and growth, resulting in a slowing of global economic progress. This is because its impacts were felt globally, rather than just in one country.*
- Respondent 13:** *COVID-19 is known to be a virus that is deadly and can be transmitted by coming into contact with positive cases and became a pandemic when it affected everybody globally and has affected business progress and livelihoods.*



- Respondent 14:** *COVID-19 is a coronavirus disease which is discovered in 2019 in China. It is respiratory disease that we understand is in the air and upon breathing any virus, it gets to affect the respiratory system especially the lungs and so on. At the time it was very difficult to manage such case so people were dying and gradually our scientists in the world managed to discover some combination of chemicals or vaccines to support.*
- Respondent 15:** *COVID-19 is a global pandemic which is caused by a virus that affects the lungs of persons who have contracted it and can spread from a positive case to others when they come into touch with them unprotected. It is considered to have begun in China and has had a profound influence on everyone in the world. It has produced a high number of fatalities and the agony associated with people having to grieve loved ones who have passed away*
- Respondent 16:** *COVID-19 is a virus that affects the lungs of persons who have contracted the virus after coming into contact with an infected person. It emerged from China in 2019 and has affected each and every individual on this globe.*
- Respondent 17:** *COVID-19 is a virus that is known to have originated in China and has spread over the world, which is why it is referred to as a pandemic as it affects everyone across the globe. It is very deadly, and symptoms include fever, coughing, fatigue, and others.*
- Respondent 18:** *COVID-19 is a virus or disease that first surfaced in China in 2019 and is spread through contact with body fluids or even other droplets from an infected individual. It spread to practically every country in the globe, which is how it became a pandemic. As a result, it is recognized as a worldwide pandemic, has severely damaged the global economy, and has claimed many lives*
- Respondent 19:** *COVID-19 is a disease, came from China, and is very transmissible, and has brought about death and business closures and failures. It has affected everyone globally.*
- Respondent 20:** *COVID-19 is global pandemic that has triggered lots of destructions to firms operations, livelihoods and generally impacted all sectorial businesses.*

Source: Field data (2022)

As per Table 4.3 above, participants are knowledgeable about COVID-19 and are aware of the severity of its effects on health, livelihoods, and businesses. Per their responses, most respondents believe that COVID-19 started in China in 2019 and has since spread to countries all over the world, causing catastrophic consequences for individual health, company operations, livelihoods, and large mortality tolls. The respondents' responses resonate with findings from Song, Shi, Shan, Zhang, Shen, Lu, Ling, Jiang and Shi (2020) that, the COVID-19 virus is a zoonotic disease (or pathogen) that is transmissible which symptoms include fever, difficulty breathing, coughing, and invasive infections on both lungs in patients. And the fact that COVID-19 can be transferred through droplets, contact, aerosol, and other routes (Tian, 2019) from an infected person's mouth or nose to bodily fluids when coughing, sneezing and talking.

Furthermore, respondents' responses to the extent to which the COVID-19 has affected them demonstrate that they were greatly influenced in one way or another. Almost all the respondents (90%), specified how they had been affected, with the most dominant consequences being general and mental well-being, economic constraints, mobility limits, and work-related demands. However, approximately 15% acknowledged no economic problems on their income. 10% indicated it was socially advantageous since they got to spend time with their families.

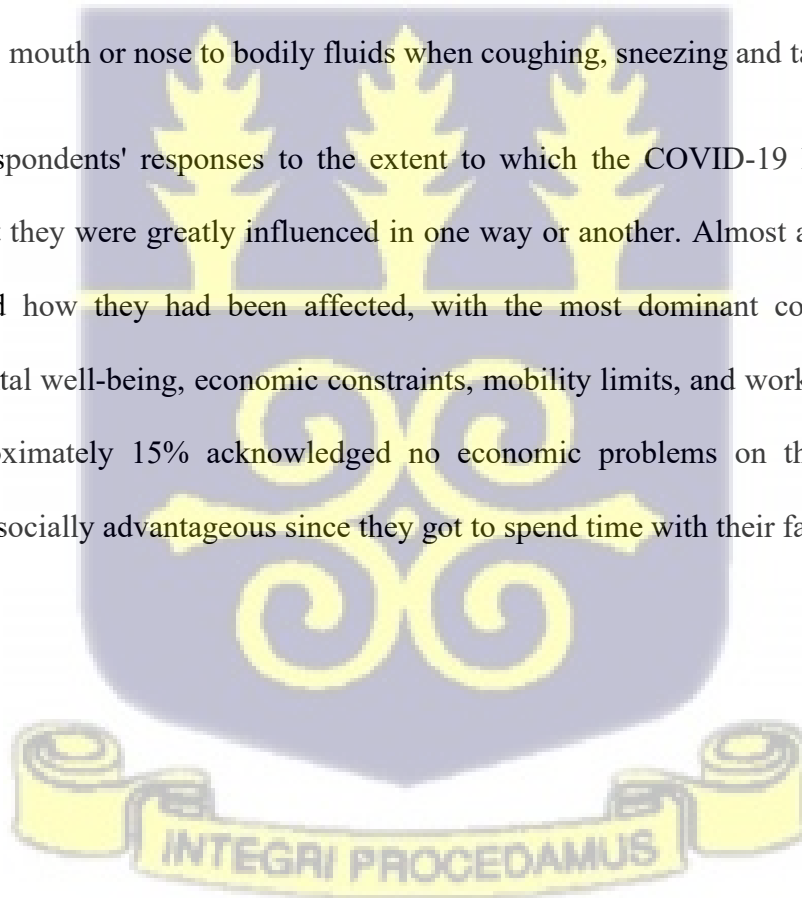
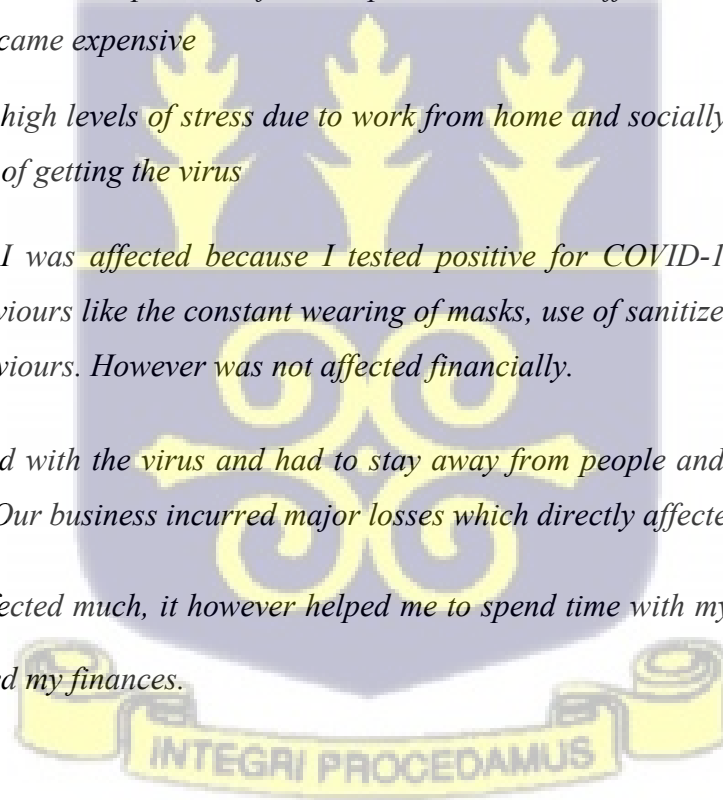


Table 4.4: Respondents' responses on how COVID-19 affected them personally

Respondent 1:	<i>The imposition of the lockdown due to limiting the spread of the virus restricted my movements hence affecting my business travelling plans</i>
Respondent 2:	<i>I was faced with pressures from work in making changing overs, managing human resources and experiencing stress in relation to adjusting to certain new work models.</i>
Respondent 3:	<i>No payrolls due to suspension of most operations which affected conditions of livings as living standards became expensive</i>
Respondent 4:	<i>Experienced high levels of stress due to work from home and socially withdrew from social events with the fear of getting the virus</i>
Respondent 5:	<i>Health-wise I was affected because I tested positive for COVID-19 and the need to adapt to certain behaviours like the constant wearing of masks, use of sanitizers and others which were not normal behaviours. However was not affected financially.</i>
Respondent 6:	<i>I was infected with the virus and had to stay away from people and work thereby restricting my movements. Our business incurred major losses which directly affected my income.</i>
Respondent 7:	<i>I was not affected much, it however helped me to spend time with my family even though to some extent affected my finances.</i>



Respondent 8: *I was greatly affected by placing burden on my income, social and psychological wellbeing. I was also affected economically owing to temporary shutdown of business and decrease customer patronize of services*

Respondent 9: *There are kinds of events and gathering especially large gatherings that you avoid because of the fear of being exposed to the virus, so I withdrew from such events which I would have loved to participate in but need to protect myself.*

Respondent 10: *The existence of COVID-19 has however been beneficial for me as I got much time to spend with my family. Was however pressurized at work after resumption or reopening of firms.*

Respondent 11: *Economically I was affected. I also tested positive for the Omicron which came and had to be quarantined*

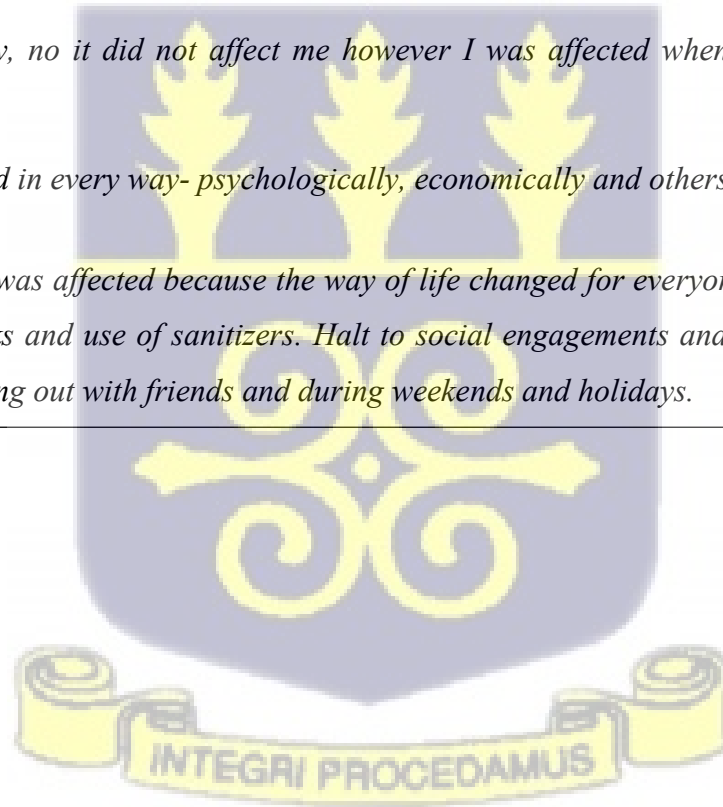
Respondent 12: *I was affected economically and this was as result of the lockdown. So how do I gain the financial competence to cater for my family?*

Respondent 13: *I was affected because I tested positive for COVID-19 which inhibited my movement until I am fully recovered. It also affected my finances, health and social life.*

Respondent 14: *Personally, I thank God I was not infected. In terms of health, I was psychologically traumatized in anxiety of what to happen next. Also the fact that, there is the need to purchase PPEs for myself and families which were expensive to acquire in the early days of the pandemic hence a toll on my finances. In addition, restrictions from moving about during the lockdown periods affected me.*

- Respondent 15:** *In every way- physically which altered everyone lives and psychologically- due to the increased tension and fear of being exposed to the virus which can have impact on one's mental health regardless of using PPEs.*
- Respondent 16:** *I was affected in every area, from my finances to my health because I tested positive for COVID-19 within its third week of hitting us.*
- Respondent 17:** *I was affected because of the increased stress I experienced with work and home related issues and disengagements from physical and/ or social interactions.*
- Respondent 18:** *Economically, no it did not affect me however I was affected when face-face interactions were halted.*
- Respondent 19:** *I was affected in every way- psychologically, economically and others.*
- Respondent 20:** *Physically I was affected because the way of life changed for everyone such as constants wearing of nose masks and use of sanitizers. Halt to social engagements and ceremonies were you get to relax and hang out with friends and during weekends and holidays.*

Source: Field data (2022)



The respondents were also questioned if they had missed work because of the COVID-19 pandemic. 20% reported that they did not miss any workdays since the nature of their employment and job positions demanded their presence. This 20% statement of no lost workdays is Respondents 9, 15, 16, and 20. Furthermore, 80% said yes to missing work days due to COVID-19 and the imposition of lockdowns as mitigating policies to limit its spread, as well as the fact that some of them tested positive for COVID-19 necessitating the need to step aside. This data demonstrates that productive hours were lost as a result of the incidence of COVID-19, having a major impact on business survival and growth. This is therefore related to the International Labor Organization (ILO) (2020) conclusions that, the partial or total lockdowns affected about 2.7 billion workers as a result of restrictions on free movement of people as a means of easing the crisis.

4.3 Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This segment discusses the results of the study in relation to the research objectives and existing literature. The main objectives of the study were to:

- i. Explore and understand how organisations, in response to government policies on COVID-19 pandemic, redesigned their work systems
- ii. Explore the dynamics of the functionalities of the organisations digitalized HRM practices.
- iii. Determine the essential capabilities required of firms to ensure survival and competitiveness in the post- COVID-19 era.

- iv. Investigate how firms are positioning themselves to acquire and or utilize these capabilities to ensure survival and competitiveness.
- v. Evaluate the influence of COVID-19 and organisational responses on employees' mental and emotional wellbeing
- vi. Explore how organisations facilitate employee training and development so as to develop their skills and mind-set to match up with these adjustments.

4.3.1 Objective 1: Exploring And Understanding How Organisations, In Response To Government Policies On COVID-19 Pandemic, Redesigned Their Work Systems

The first research objective explores and understand the varied effects of COVID-19 on the work systems of medium-large enterprises in selected subsectors of Ghana's service sector from respondents in management positions. In light of this, questions were posed to determine how organisations redesigned their work systems to account for the effects of COVID-19, as well as government mitigation and reactive policies on COVID-19 pandemic. Attempts were also made to determine whether, organisations had been able to plan for COVID-19 once they knew it was imminent and to what degree the plans were successful.

4.3.1.1. How Organisations have Redesigned Their Work Systems in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

The incidence of COVID-19 has clearly affected the majority of enterprises, with numerous firms closing their doors and encouraging staff to stay at home for extended periods of time to limit the spread of the virus. As a result, several organisations swiftly altered their work

processes by implementing new business models, such as moving all of their operations online and turned to telework to ensure business continuity (Aitken- Fox, Coffey, Dayaram, Fitzgerald, Gupta, McKenna & Wei Tian, 2020; Gourinchas, 2020; Koirala & Acharya, 2020).

It is unsurprising that data acquired from virtually all the enterprises where the study respondents came from indicated that the pandemic had effects on their work systems and that in order to maintain their survival, they used a variety of new techniques to deal with the crisis.

The three most prominent themes that emerged from these techniques were;

- i. Conduction of online business through virtualization of work
- ii. Deployment of remote/ telework
- iii. Adoption of flexible work arrangements.

The most prevalent reaction was that, as a result of the effect of COVID-19 on operations, organisations reacted by implementing new business models through virtual forms of working such as meeting hosting, online transactions, and so on. This perspective was upheld by eighteen of the twenty respondents, accounting for 90% of the selected firms. In answer to the question: “How did your firms’ redesigned their work systems in response to COVID-19?”

Respondents offered the following:

[...] we adopted virtual mode by going online in all of our things such as meetings, students’ supervisions, and teachings and I know some students doing their research moved online, lecturers started moving their research online and all of that
(Respondent 2).

Another respondent made a similar statement. He remarked that;

[...] teaching has become virtual, and so have staff meetings and other activities. As a result, we made more use of our online learning management system to enhance the teaching and learning process (Respondent 10).

Furthermore, a respondent from the Transportation sector provided a similar response. He mentioned that;

[...] most of our departmental meetings are now held online, we communicate via zoom or Microsoft teams' platforms, and we use email more to share and receive information (Respondent 12).

These and similar comments came from a majority of respondents and are consistent with findings from Naab and Bans- Akutey's (2021) study on SMEs in Ghana that, as a result of the pandemic, enterprises have adapted to new business strategies such as boosting virtual dynamism to their operations for the benefits it delivers, such as continued sales and improved visibility. These ideas are also consistent with the results of Polinkevych, Glonti, Baranova, Levchenko, and Yermoshenko (2021), who note that COVID-19 has resulted in major shifts from traditional to innovative, hybrid, and digital-oriented, as well as the integration of digital communications. Besides this, a qualitative study conducted by Addae, Amponsah, and Gborti (2021) validates these statements from at least two of the respondents from the Educational sector, that most instructors adequately used online platforms in the educational processes as a result of the COVID-19 situation in Ghana. Although some studies indicate that a number of businesses and organisations were already substantially digital prior to COVID-19, with essential components of their business models already digitalized (Moore & Tambini, 2018; Remane, Hanelt, Nickerson, & Kolbe, 2017), the 90% response rate reveals that the majority of enterprises redesigned their work systems to a more innovative way through virtualization of work and integration of digital platforms into core business processes, hence boosting the usage of digitalization.

The adoption of remote or telework models was the second theme that emerged from the replies. This statement was shared by nine respondents, accounting for 45% of all responses.

Among the replies were the following;

[...] by ensuring some of our employees work from home (Respondent 3).

Another respondent also answered by saying;

[...] our employees whose presence is not critical to our service delivery work remotely (Respondent 8).

Furthermore, one respondent from the Telecommunications sector gave the same response as the others. He stated;

[...] by implementing telework and do not have to close down on our operation since we are telecommunication industry and need to be always available to our customers' needs and queries (Respondent 7).

These replies from respondents are consistent with what has been reported in number of studies that the occurrence of COVID-19 has resulted in the use of a variety of corporate methods to improve business continuity and growth. Thus, according to Shaw, Main, Findley, Collie Kristman, and Gross (2020), businesses are now operating under unusual norms and a new functioning (e.g., physical separation in the workplace) as a result of COVID-19's effects, which shows no end in sight. This also affirms other studies which state that, to ensure business continuity, most enterprises have implemented telework, requiring their workers to work from home (Aitken- Fox, Coffey, Dayaram, Fitzgerald, Gupta, McKenna, & Wei Tian, 2020; Gourinchas, 2020; Koirala & Acharya, 2020).

In connection with the third theme, approximately 35%, agreed that flexible work arrangements in terms of flexible work hours, including shift system, and others were used as a method of responding to effects of COVID-19. Here are a few of the responses. According to one respondent;

[...] we had to start running schedules so the people will have to also work during the night like the technicians so that we don't congest them at the various workshops

(Respondent 4).

Another respondent from the Pharmaceuticals sector stated;

[...] due to government social distancing policy and other directives, we had to implement flexible work hours for our onsite workers and the use of shift systems for these tasks (Respondent 15).

A Financial sector respondent also stated how they reacted to the situation by ensuring flexibility at work. He claimed;

[...] we adjusted our work hours. Before COVID-19 occurred, we closed work at 5pm; now, due to the situation, we close work by 3pm and start work at 9 am, giving employees the opportunity to work for 6 hours rather than the 8 to 9 hours they had previously (Respondent 20).

Consistent with these comments are the arguments given by Szulc, Tomczak, and McGregor (2021) who state that it is vital for businesses to develop conducive regulations and settings that allow for an acceptable degree of flexibility, as well as the necessity to reconsider how jobs are organized to guarantee employee mental and emotional well-being at the forefront of job design. As a result of the replies received from the respondents, it is obvious that the majority of the enterprises reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic by changing their business processes online, implementing work from home measures, and ensuring flexible working arrangements.

4.3.1.2 Organisations' Reactions to Government Mitigation and Reactive Policies on COVID-19 Pandemic

Due to the many measures established by the Government to prevent the spread of the virus, such as border and airport closures, lockdowns, social distancing regulations, and the closure of specific institutions such as schools, the researcher probed the respondents to learn how these policies affected them and how they were able to adjust their work systems in reaction to these reactive policies from the government. The majority of respondents claimed that they reacted by purchasing personal protective equipment (PPEs) despite financial limits on their earnings, as well as implementing rigorous sanitary standards and temporarily suspending business activities. As a result, the three major approaches discovered were;

- i. Implementation of stringent sanitary regulations
- ii. Procurements of PPEs
- iii. Temporary suspension of business

The first theme, the execution of stringent hygienic standards, arose as a result of the government's entreaties to all persons and organisations to adhere to sanitary procedures such as frequent hand washing under running water, the use of sanitizers and nose masks, social distancing policy, and others. It is therefore not unexpected that around 45% of the 20 respondents said that they imposed stringent sanitary regulations in their business operations. Some of the respondents' opinions include;

[...] we implemented the strict sanitary protocols, including the required usage of nose masks and the use of sanitizers, to ensure that we adhered to the government's reactionary rules (Respondent 13).

Another response from a Tourism sector respondent was as follows;

[...] in order to assist the government in limiting the spread of the virus, we implemented stringent sanitary regulations (Respondent 17).

However, one respondent from the Hospitality sector had a different viewpoint, perceiving the government's reactionary actions as a secondary crisis, albeit adhering to the government's enacted rules. She stated;

[...] we managed to ensure there is greater sanitization practices, good health and safety measures for our employees and clients so we adapted to the situation quite well. But I will say the government mitigation and reactive policies acted as secondary crisis whereby the first crisis is dealing with the impact of COVID-19 (Respondent 8).

Moving on to the second theme, PPE procurement, 35%, reported that they purchased PPEs for their staff in order to ensure that everyone is adequately protected in the workplace. Below are some of the replies received from respondents;

[...] it also had a strain on our budget since we need to procure protective equipment's that is PPEs for our staff. So yes the government also impacted our business operation (Respondent 7).

Another comment from a Tourism and Hospitality sector respondent stated;

[...] we ensured that we have enough of these supplies or PPEs to protect both our staff and visitors. Therefore, there was the need to purchase these PPEs and to maintain a clean, safe atmosphere (Respondent 13).

The third theme that emerged from the answer is the suspension of business as a result of government mitigation and counter initiatives. According to an International Labour Organization (ILO) study (2020), partial or total lockdowns affected roughly 2.7 billion employees, or around 81% of the worldwide workforce, as a result of restrictions on free movement of people as a means of relieving the crisis. Because if most firms were inactive

owing to government policies such as the closure of specific institutions and other rules, it would result in a shutdown in operations, layoffs, and poor revenues. These are some of the respondents' viewpoints: One respondent from the Educational sector said;

[...] the first thing the University did was to immediately shut down the University and then all of us were asked to go home and rest, so that was the first reaction. That reaction was meant to protect the assets of the University which is the staffs and students (Respondent 2).

Another respondent from the Tourism sector had this to say;

[...] because we rely heavily on foreign visitors to the country for tourist visits and exploration of our beautiful cultures and arts, the ban on both local and international flights during the early stages of the pandemic put a halt to our business operations. As a result, we had to temporarily stop operations until the government issued a formal order allowing airport operations to resume, but even then, business was not flourishing as it had been prior to the COVID-19 period (Respondent 13).

It is clear that the Government's mitigation and reactive policies to the COVID-19 pandemic had some impact on business operations with approximately 25% of the respondents agreeing to this assertion.

Furthermore, the researcher investigated how establishments plan with the occurrence of the COVID-19. Almost all replies show that no firm was able to plan for COVID-19. It is hardly unexpected that the majority of businesses did not have procedures in place for emergency scenarios such as the pandemic. This is why the pandemic affected every institution in both developed and developing countries. And even industrialized nations with enough and required resources were struck far worse. The study showed that 90% of respondents reported that there were no plans in place to tackle the emergence of the virus; nevertheless, it was only after its occurrence that reactive measures were put in place to salvage the situation.

Additionally, 10% respondents claimed that backup plans were in place to address any emergency situation, albeit the plans were not related to COVID-19 but to comparable events such as Ebola, COVID-19 prompted such backup plans to be triggered. This is one of the responses from a Health sector respondent. She stated;

[...] I will say that we didn't really have any preparation towards COVID-19 in particular but because of the experiences of Ebola, we had something like a "blueprint" which we just had to activate it but we really didn't prepare for COVID-19 in particular, it just hit everybody. It hit us like it hit everybody else (Respondent 5).

Another respondent answered by stating;

[...] well, it was difficult, you know this was something no one expected so there was really not a plan, what happened was that we started reacting so in organisational studies you cannot call that planning really because we did not expect it we just heard the news and we had to react, so we reacted based on knowledge that we had (Respondent 2).

Another respondent held a similar viewpoint. He stated that;

[...] I don't think anybody or any firm was able to plan for this because nobody saw it coming. So I would say we never planned for it. We didn't know about it, and it just hit us. So we rather had to maybe divisive fighting approach. So maybe that was what happened. Instead of us planning, we just had to confront it head on (Respondent 1).

Moreover, one respondent also indicated that;

[...] we didn't plan for COVID-19; it just hit us, as it did to other industries. Even in industrialized countries, they were unable to manage it when it first emerged. Reactive solutions were devised after its occurrence to lessen its influence on business and institutional operations (Respondent 10).

Based on the respondents' responses that there was no planned strategy in place when the pandemic occurred, but that they instead responded by implementing reactive measures, the

researcher next questioned the respondents on how successful these reactive measures were in mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on their operations. 95% said that it serves a role in maintaining business continuity. However, 5% was undecided about the extent to which such reactive actions were successful. Some of the replies obtained are listed below;

[...] I would say the “blueprint strategy” we activated was successful if not more people would have died. You know even though this Ebola didn’t affect Ghana, it gave us an opportunity to plan for any emergency. Ebola took a lot of time and throughout all that we were using to plan. Imagine COVID-19 had come and we didn’t even had a plan we would have used all that time to be planning and by the time we want to put in any stop measure, a lot of people may have died. So I think that reactivation of the already existing blueprint helped to kind of salvaged the situation and helped us manage the situation better (Respondent 5).

Another respondent from the Pharmaceutical sector responded thus;

[...] it was really effective in assisting us in managing the crisis and enabling us to facilitate smooth operation despite the negative impact the COVID-19 had on businesses and livelihoods. Because no one knew when COVID-19 would end, if we were to sit down without any strategy to control the situation, then like by now we would have all been wiped out, so yes, it was indeed successful and helpful. Therefore, without reactive measures, we might have failed completely (Respondent 15).

One person from the Transportation sector disagreed with the others regarding how effective such reactive steps were. He stated;

[...] we didn’t plan for the pandemic all we did was to implement measures that will enable us to operate, so to some extent I would say it was good but vehemently say it was not that successful as it came with other challenges (Respondent 3).

Based on these replies, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has had major consequences on organisation's business operations, and drastic steps have been implemented to curb the virus's

transmission from the national to the institutional level, with implications for organisations' work systems. It is also obvious that when the COVID-19 occurred, most institutions did not have plans in place to cope with it and instead resorted to reactive ways of ensuring business continuity.

4.3.2 Objective 2: Exploring the Dynamics of the Functionalities of the Organisations Digitalized HRM Practices

The second objective was to find out about the functionalities of the organisations' digitalized HRM practices. Participants were asked questions about the benefits they have experienced as well as key problems they have faced since implementing digitalized HRM practices. Furthermore, the researcher dug deeper to learn about some of the challenges firms faced when incorporating emerging technology and digital platforms into their new business models, as these new approaches necessitated the use of advanced digital solutions, making it necessary to take lessons about the challenges encountered.

4.3.2.1 Benefits of Digitalized HRM Practices to Firms' Operations

Respondents revealed that these new digitalized HRM practices benefit them in a variety of ways, the most dominant of which are how cost and time- effective they are, its innovativeness in the advancement of business, and a method to ensure business continuity and/or survival. Out of the 20 individuals interviewed, approximately 65% stated that, the digitalized HRM practices help to advance the modes of work. Approximately 20% said it is cost and time effective, and about 15% mentioned that, it helped to ensure business continuity. As a result, to corroborate these

identified themes, below are some of the replies gathered to illustrate the benefits or usefulness of digitalized HRM practices to the operations of organisations;

[...] It has really made us understand and appreciate the fact that we could have used technology to improve our ways of operating and reduce costs all this while. For instance those days when we were doing training nationwide, COVID-19 has made us realize the importance of online activities so now if we were doing training we do it online which reduces costs about 90%. So COVID-19 has opened our eyes to advanced ways of doing business and reducing cost in that regard (Respondent 4).

Another respondent from the Financial sector had this to say;

[...] it has improved job efficiency and productivity, business continuity or survival, and the quickest ways to manage and communicate with team at any time (Respondent 20).

Moreover, another respondent from the Telecommunications sector said this;

[...] unlike some firms that shut down for some time in our case it wasn't so since we quickly implemented telework which made us continue operating so it enabled business continuity, reduced stress of employees where they don't need to worry about going up and down to work (Respondent 7).

Furthermore, one respondent also indicated that;

[...] the positive side of it is that it has also kind of cut down on our travel expenses and stuff because almost every two weeks we used to travel to Takoradi to check on the operations and stuff like that. But now with the new modes of working, we are able to work remotely, meet online and discuss than the need to travel (Respondent 1).

Based on the replies received, it is obvious that there are certain attributed benefits of digitalized HRM practices to company operations. According to the respondents' statements, regardless of the threat COVID-19 posed to firm's survival and growth, new discoveries regarding alternate

work practices have resulted in positive experiences in terms of the benefits they were able to derive, including time and cost effectiveness, sustained business operations, and more advanced approaches to work. Furthermore, despite some barriers to adopting new business models, such as financial constraints, training and hiring experts, knowledge, and skills, as expressed in a study conducted by Naab and Bans-Akutey (2021), it is critical to recognize that these digitalized HRM practices are also beneficial, as evidenced by some of the responses shown above.

4.3.2.2 Drawbacks of the Digitalized HRM Practices to Firms' Operations

In addition to favorable experiences with digitalized HRM practices, the researcher further explored the drawbacks of digitalized HRM practices to firm's operations. The most encountered drawbacks are the cost associated, staff resistance to change, and decreased quality of service delivery, as identified by respondents. According to the responses gathered, approximately 40 % reported that it was costly to transform traditional business practices to more innovative ones due to the need to acquire the necessary resources and tools for this transition, posing financial constraints on their operations. To buttress this, one respondent from the Hospitality sector said this;

[...] some of the drawbacks included the costs involved in procuring devices for our staffs, the investments in training some of our employees and the need to guide and counsel some of our employees who were initially opposing to the new adjustments (Respondent 8).

Another respondent from the Educational sector also shared a similar experience. He said;

[...] as I previously noted, how do we incorporate our students with special needs into the changes in our teaching and learning delivery? This is a drawback as well as an additional financial strain on our budget because we need to provide them with their own instructors,

required tools to assist them. So, these are some of the disadvantages of performing things virtually (Respondent 10).

Moreover, a respondent from the Pharmaceutical sector said;

[...] I will consider the expense of investing in and acquiring the resources required for these modifications to our business operations as the drawback (Respondent 15).

According to the generated second theme based on the collected responses, approximately 25% of respondents faced various types of reactions and resistance to change from their workforce, which they felt were barriers to their organisation's business strategies. A Transportation sector respondent gave this explanation;

[...] there were people that hold the believe that there were no virus, those conspiracy theories and all that so people that were not obeying the measures because they don't believe the existence of the virus so people resisted the measures and some of our approaches to work that were put in place to reduce the spread (Respondent 4).

In addition a respondent also shared that;

[...] some of our employees initially opposed to the adjustments made which was really time draining since we needed to quickly adjust and adapt to the new work practices so as not to be left behind and here are some of them being a resistance to some of these measures (Respondent 8).

The third recognized theme is that the quality of service delivery is being impeded by digitalized HRM practices, with around 20% of respondents attesting to this. The responses displayed below are from respondents in the Educational, Telecommunications, and Health sectors, respectively.

[...] some drawbacks has to do with the quality of service provided which was impacted due to some of the challenges I talked about with the usage of the adopted approaches to teaching delivery and learning processes (Respondent 2).

[...] another challenge was the quality of service we provide to our customers, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, so we had to completely rebuild some of our operations and our IT professionals had to work very hard to ensure that good quality of service was provided (Respondent 7).

[...] and of course we weren't used to working from home and this is a hospital the patients come here to receive treatment so you cannot be a nurse and work from home, so it was difficult to get the right number of people to be at post. Due to this, there were instances that we even had to reschedule some surgeries, so there was like a linked kind of effect so from HR not being present, it affected the service delivery (Respondent 5).

Whilst the responses in terms of the cost involved in ascribing to digitalized processes are evident in Naab and Bans- Akutey's (2021) findings, the explored responses gathered from the present study also point out that these new practices are hampered not only by the cost but also by the quality of services delivered and resistance from employees, which are part of the drawbacks of digitalized HRM practices on firm's operations.

4.3.2.3. Challenges of Emerging Technology and Digital Platforms for Organisations' New Business Models

According to Gerald, Obianuju, and Chukwunonso (2020), around 244,000 enterprises were expected to begin modifying their business models to include more technology services as a result of reactionary actions such as pandemic lockdowns. However, endeavors to embrace

technology have been hampered by obstacles such as budgetary constraints, internet connectivity, and technical skills (Naab & Bans- Akutey, 2021). According to some researchers, despite the COVID impetus to embrace digital technology (Amankwah-Amoah, 2020a; 2020b; 2021), many entrepreneurs face human resource and capability challenges, such as technical skills and digital literacy may delay digitalization (Effah & Nuhu, 2017). It comes as no surprise that most businesses found several hurdles in adopting technology and digital platforms for their organisations' new business models, with the major themes obtained from the various comments pertaining to the challenges encountered being the network challenges, cost involved in terms of acquiring digital tools and data; and the technical skills and expertise required to use digital platforms. In terms of internet access concerns, almost 75% of the respondents listed this as the most difficult aspect. Some challenges were identified from the study. A respondent from the Health sector had to say;

[...] because of African regions we don't have stable networks, there are instances you are communicating on zoom and then the network goes off and then you have to adapt. And one you haven't given anybody money for data so they will say you didn't give me data so I won't join the meeting, that kind of thing, and some funny kind of excuses (Respondent 5).

Another respondent from the Educational sector said;

[...] in terms of network coverage or connectivity; for example, a lecturer may be on the platform teaching and then end up leaving for a short period of time due to a limited data bundle or issues with network connectivity; similarly, students may be on and off or exiting the platform for the same or different reasons (Respondent 10).

In addition one respondent also answered by saying;

[...] there was a problem regarding the internet connectivity. Internet connectivity challenges were very rampant (Respondent 11).

Regarding the second theme, which is the cost of acquiring emerging technologies and platforms, 50%, identified this as one of the barriers in employing emerging technologies. One of the recorded responses complained that;

[...] the other challenge have to do with financing so we needed to do a lot of Innovations to be able to address the impact of COVID- 19 but funding was a problem, we are a public University so we don't have all the money, the procurement processes to get things done quickly because we need to respond quickly (Respondent 2).

One respondent also stated that;

[...] the price of acquiring these technologies, the costs of paying professionals to instruct or train users or workers, and the problems associated with using these platforms for communication—such as network issues and data costs—are all elements of these challenges (Respondent 20).

In addition, a respondent from the Educational sector said that;

[...] another issue is the cost of obtaining data for this online style of instruction, therefore these are/were the problems we encountered as an institution (Respondent 10).

The third theme gained from the cross-case analysis is about the technical skills and expertise required for embracing digital platforms. Around 35% of respondents attributed the difficulties in embracing emerging technologies to a lack of staff with the necessary digital innovation skills.

According to a Transportation sector respondent;

[...] we also have older people, people with little knowledge in computing and all those also had difficulty (Respondent 3).

Another respondent responded with the following explanation;

[...] another issue was our limited IT resources and management. I believe that poor resource management planning and a lack of IT resources make it difficult to adopt or embrace innovative techniques. In terms of IT resources, a shortage of workforce and talent or well-skilled people are some of the challenges to overcome while adopting innovative technology (Respondent 7).

Moreover, this is what one respondent from the Pharmaceuticals sector had to say;

[...] not all employees have technical knowledge or technical expertise to these approaches. Therefore, we need for everyone to be on the same page of progression in terms of skills and knowledge in order to smoothly incorporate them into our core functions (Respondent 15).

It is also worth noting that, in addition to the main themes identified by respondents, approximately 15% identified data security as a major threat and challenge in ensuring digital risk protection of sensitive data, personally identifiable information (PII), intellectual property, and industry information systems. Responses from respondents 5, 7, and 18 are listed below;

[...] and also the issue of data security because now that you have been given the data from online, we haven't actually taken a serious look at the data security so you might be given information but you don't know who is taking the information anywhere (Respondent 5).

[...] ensuring digital security to fully ensure digital risk protection of sensitive data, and industry information systems which will preserve our reputation and increase customer trust. Especially now that we have implemented telework whereby some of our staff are operating from home heightens the risk of data leakage, or third party risk. Therefore for us to ensure we have strong digital security system we had to massively invest a data security plan to protect our sensitive data which is also costly (Respondent 7).

[...] also, the issues of securing digital security in terms of safeguarding private data, as well as digital hazards including hacking and information breaches (Respondent 18).

Furthermore, two respondents (10%) stated that they had had no difficulties, explaining that;

[...] technologically, the University is already on board of using advanced technology in teaching, we have online and almost all of our library, and these have been digitalized so when COVID-19 struck and we need to go full or online, that aspect were okay and where it requires some training we were notified and we responded swiftly (Respondent 14).

[...] we didn't change any aspects of our business, therefore I am unsure how to respond to your question. The only issue our industry has had is network connectivity since occasionally the system goes down and we have to wait for it to reestablish its network signal. Aside from this, we haven't encountered any problems utilizing these ICT tools or technology before COVID-19 even existed (Respondent 13).

These respondents' perspectives support studies on how practitioners and entrepreneurs experience hurdles while utilizing digital platforms. Effah and Nuhu (2017), for example, discovered that many entrepreneurs have human resource and capacity challenges, such as technical skills and digital literacy, which may delay digitalization. Furthermore, the assertion is also congruent with findings from a qualitative study conducted by Addae, Amponsah, and Gborti (2021), who discovered that the high cost of data and the unpredictability of the internet indicate a pervasive problem across the African continent. This also connects to one of the respondent's response, who cited the network instability in African regions. According to Haight, Quan- Haase, and Corbett (2014), there exist digital gaps between urban cities and rural areas where access and internet infrastructure development differs, impacting opportunities for new business formation. Furthermore, Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021) identify technical infrastructure, institutional constraints, security and privacy difficulties, and organisational level limits as factors influencing digitalization adoption.

4.3.3 Objective 3: Determining the Essential Capabilities Required of Firms to Ensure Survival and Competitiveness in the Post- COVID-19 Era.

The third objective was principally focused on identifying the capabilities necessary to ensure firms' survival and competitiveness in the post-COVID-19 era. The respondents expressed a variety of diverse opinions about the capabilities they feel would assure competitiveness and survival. Some of the capabilities mentioned include: improving HR capabilities in terms of qualified and trained personnel; improving IT innovation; expanding infrastructure; developing a sound strategic plan and an efficient management system; and improving L&D and/or R&D. Around 65% of the respondents indicated that being able to establish and enhance IT would enable survival and competitiveness because they argue that the post-pandemic period is all about innovativeness and those who are able to do this will be able to have substantial market shares since consumer behavior and habits have switched to more innovative or online modes which are done by leveraging digital solutions, making it vital for enterprises to develop IT innovative behavior.

Approximately 45% of respondents also mentioned the opportunity to boost HR by having a pool of skilled and trained workforce since these are the individuals that drive innovation and ensure that these IT solutions are properly utilized and integrated into key operations. About 35% also identified the need for firms to strengthen L&D/ R&D as this will enable firms to be learning organisations, resilient and easily adaptable to situations, and through research and development, will improve organisational effectiveness and keep up with major trends affecting today's business both locally and globally.

30% also mentioned the importance of having solid strategic plans and an effective management structure in place to guarantee the formulation and implementation of both short-term and long-term strategies. They asserted that when good strategic plans are always executed, it would improve survival and competitiveness.

Below are some of the replies obtained in terms of strengthening IT innovations. According to one Health sector respondent;

[...] we have to strengthen the infrastructure, the IT technology, we have to strengthen the health information. That's also another block, it's different from technology. For The technology, the equipment, the infrastructure, all those other things that we need. And the health information, that is data to make decision So how are we collecting the data, how we storing the data, how are we analyzing the data and how we are making use of that data is very important (Respondent 5).

Another respondent from the Telecommunications sector emphasized that;

[...] I believe that being able to accelerate the use of digital solutions, for instance the COVID-19, has really changed the norm of work today, and that the majority of firms are shifting towards use of emerging approaches into their operations, as well as the need for firms' to incorporate fresh data in order to make real-time decisions (Respondent 7).

In addition, a respondent from the Educational sector suggested that;

[...] I believe the post-COVID-19 era will require the use of digital initiatives because people have witnessed major benefits and advancement in business or activities, regardless of the drawbacks it may pose, so far as you want to survive and compete, you must adapt and go with the pace with major changes taking place as well as the skillset critical to boost productivity and development.. Because adopting these developing platforms without the necessary human resources in terms of skills and expertise to exploit these resources will be meaningless (Respondent 10).

Some replies in respect of enhancing HR in terms of skills, knowledge, and mindsets are set out below. One respondent from the telecommunications sector suggested as follows;

[...] maintaining a balanced digital market is advantageous because it makes services more useful to customers, therefore, the need to make the workforce as digital as possible by hiring the expertise needed for this role, or re - training existing employees (Respondent 18).

Another respondent also shared a similar view, saying;

[...] so having the IT apparatus or IT resources are very important because through that we could reach people everywhere therefore, we also need the personnel who can manage the IT well (Respondent 11).

In addition, a respondent also indicated that;

[...] as a human resource person we should have the strategic plan and people that are committed to work is one that is what we call relational capability. So having the human resource that is the skillset and talents, the infrastructure and the IT (Respondent 4).

It is also vital to convey the viewpoint of one of the respondents who cited IT innovation as a capability by expanding on the necessity for enterprises to analyze some of the values of the innovation. He contends that;

[...] in the post-COVID-19 era, innovation is a capability that is crucial, and before a company decides to be innovative, they need to analyze whether it can accomplish these goals; improve operational effectiveness, enhance customer or stakeholder experience, and create innovative and distinctive goods or services at an affordable rate (Respondent 16).

A Health sector respondent also established and posed critical questions about the human resources required for the post-COVID-19 era. She posited that;

[...] you need to strengthen human resource. When we talk about human resource, we are thinking about their numbers, do you have enough human resource that has the critical skills, the knowledge about emergency preparedness and even management of an emergency when it comes to like COVID-19? Do we have them well spread in terms of their reaching across the hospital? Do you have them with the required competencies? Do they have the appropriate knowledge that when this kind of incidence happens they will be able to manage and of course are they motivated so that they say, should I risk my life for emergency and also die? So they have to look at all those balancing factors when it comes to human resource (Respondent 5).

Furthermore, other respondents mentioned the following capabilities for strengthening L&D and R&D. One respondent explained that;

[...] what is also important are the capabilities to develop your R&-D that is research and development capabilities because as it is now it looks to me that the world has been changed largely and those companies that are able to let research and development and innovation lead them are the companies that would make it. But you can't venture into those terrain without research and development so you need companies to develop their capabilities or research and development. I think these would help companies to survive in this era (Respondent 2).

In addition, a respondent also commented that;

[...] so being able to establish L&D, meaning learning and development, will be a significant advantage for organisations in order to compete since the environment we live in is continuously changing, necessitating the need to promote lifelong learning and development in order to adapt into an ever-changing world (Respondent 10).

Moreover, a respondent from the Pharmaceutical sector mentioned that;

[...] improving or developing R&D is very significant. Therefore, firms must manage their R&D to increase productivity by reacting to problems and coordination via research (Respondent 16).

Others were in relation to the implementation of good strategic plans and an effective management system. One respondent explained that;

[...] my key areas that I think we can strengthen is the health system blocks, and that is the leadership and governance, the service delivery, the human resources. When we talk about leadership and governance, we are interested in the regulations, the regulatory compliance, for the hospital we are talking about the strategic management, does the hospital have any strategic document or any strategic plan or any emergency response plan that if any emergency comes they would use it to handle? Then, we are looking at management capacity of the people you have in the hospital, so leadership to be able to kind of respond and support when an emergency comes so the need to strengthen leadership and governance (Respondent 5).

Another respondent also stated that;

[...] as a human resource person we should have the strategic plan and people that are committed to work is one that is what we call relational capability (Respondent 4).

Previous research has established that improved business procedures, new cooperative activities, customer involvement, and a faster rate of innovation are driving considerations in digitalization, according to Adomako, Amankwah-Amoah, Tarba, and Khan (2021) as well as Rachinger, Rauter, Müller, Vorraber, and Schirgi (2019). As a result, it is comprehensible for respondents to rank these capabilities as vital for maintaining survival and competitiveness in the post-COVID-19 era. Also, the high number of respondents' attributing digital innovation as a capability is down to the advantages they understand organisations would benefit from, such as ease of doing business and enhancing competitive edge, as highlighted by Ritter and Pedderon (2020).

Furthermore, researchers such as Lupton (2020) and Vural, Roso, Halld'orsson, Sthle, and Yaruta (2020) have stated that digital innovation or platforms such as webpages, social networking sites,

gadgets, content-exchange portals, e-procurement platforms, block chain, automation, robots, and smart devices have enabled businesses to effectively engage in R&D and capitalize on new market opportunities. As a result, the respondents believe that boosting HR in terms of skilled and trained workers; strengthening IT innovation; having a sound strategic plan and an effective management system; and strengthening L&D and/or R&D will improve the firm's survival and competitive edge.

4.3.4 Objective 4: Investigating How Firms Are Positioning Themselves to Acquire And/ Or Utilize These Capabilities to Ensure Survival and Competitiveness

The fourth study objective explored how organisations position themselves to maintain survival and competitiveness by acquiring or exploiting the indicated capabilities, the majority of which were described in the third objective. Some significant answers were obtained that are critical to the study's findings when respondents from these medium-large sized organisations were asked to describe how they are positioning themselves by using these capabilities to ensure competitiveness. Several relevant responses were recorded, with the most dominating themes obtained from the majority of respondents being; through re-tooling and upgrading of IT infrastructures; reskilling their workforce through training; and utilizing L&D and R&D. Approximately 65% responded that through re-tooling and modernizing IT infrastructures, companies are able to remain relevant and position themselves advantageously in order to survive and compete with other well-known entities. 30% also stated that they are reskilling their workers through the provision of training programs that would allow them to fit well into the dynamic work environment and fully utilize emerging platforms successfully. 20% stated that they will be able to compete and survive by utilizing L&D and R&D.

Several recorded replies of respondents in terms of re-tooling and upgrading IT infrastructures to improve firms' performance and service delivery quality are presented below;

[...] we are also consistently updating and building our IT infrastructure, we just set up two computer labs to make sure students have places to learn, we have provided every staff now with a good computer to make sure they can deliver services to them. We are also retooling to make sure that we can provide our best services. We have also just recently finished developing the UGBS app which we intend to deploy very soon to make sure that we get students to be able to have as much information about the school as possible (Respondent 2).

Another respondent also stated that;

[...] we are strengthening and upgrading our IT system so that it can manage the capacity of changes occurring in our learning institution (Respondent 10).

In addition, a respondent also shared this comment;

[...] we have invested in or will continue to invest in IT infrastructure and procedures that will improve our service delivery and help us become a more sustainable industry. So this investment is not just in infrastructure and technology, but also in developing and obtaining viable strategies that can be quickly implemented in the event of an emergency (Respondent 12).

Some of the responses that listed re-skilling of the workforce through training as means to which they are positioning themselves explained that;

[...] the University has taken the steps to train almost everybody and subscribe to some platforms which really can help in sharing data, in sharing information like using the zoom platform to deliver classes and now they have acquired the Microsoft teams with enough capacity, more than enough capacity to take the students and they are gradually taking lecturers through how to handle these apps to deliver the real business of the University and this will

make us or making us more competitive to make us visible at the International scene and we keep getting lots of students who want to come and do their studies here (Respondent 14).

A respondent from the Pharmaceutical sector mentioned that;

[...] we are also investing in re-skilling via training and development (Respondent 15).

Moreover a respondent from the Hospitality sector indicated that;

[...] we have also utilized accessible or developing technology to give an alternative to pre-existing organisational or industrial methods, as well as reskilling for our staff (Respondent 8).

These are some of the justifications given by businesses for their use of L&D and R&D in terms of positioning themselves to ensure survival and competitiveness. According to one Pharmaceutical sector respondent;

[...] we have strengthened our R&D, streamlined our training plan and training quality, and optimized our production processes by utilizing advanced quality control equipment, and others (Respondent 16).

A respondent from the Educational sector shared that;

[...] so we have been able to utilize both L&D and R&D, training the majority of our staff to be well-advanced with the changes occurring in our institutions, as well as rigorously intensifying our research and development capabilities, which will enable us to stand out among other prestigious institutions in the country and even beyond (Respondent 10).

Another respondent also added that;

[...] we are employing R&D by starting several clinical trials for our pharmaceutical manufacturing and other healthcare products. The food and drugs authority has also introduced various new standards for performing clinical trials and we are strictly abiding by those standards (Respondent 15).

Dahlander and Wallin (2020) noted in their study that, as with COVID-19, there is an instant executive emphasis on digital innovation, allowing firms to re-establish their innovative infrastructure and capabilities. As a result, the majority of respondents, approximately 90%, believe that retooling and investing in IT infrastructures, reskilling to have the skillset required, and utilizing L&D and R&D are critical, not only to alleviate COVID-19's adverse effects, but also to strengthen competitive advantages and survival.

4.3.5 Objective 5: Exploring the Influence of COVID-19 and Organisational Responses on Employees' Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

As part of the study, attempts were made to explore the influence of COVID-19 and organisational responses on employees' mental and emotional well-being, as well as the strategies firms have used to manage and/or ameliorate the impacts of COVID-19 on employee well-being and also ensure work-life balance. The medium-large enterprises interviewed shared their perspectives on the questions focusing on these objectives. The findings and comments for this objective are shown below.

To begin with, assessing both the COVID-19 and organisational responses on mental and emotional well-being showed two significant elements. This includes stress emancipation from job pressure as well as coping with COVID-19; and fear, which has an impact on employees' mental and emotional well-being. Fear of contracting COVID-19 was mentioned by approximately 65% of the respondents from medium to large firms as a factor influencing employees' mental and emotional well-being. One of the Hospitality respondents explained;

[...] the fear alone of contracting the virus or coming into contact with infected individual really poses stress and mental issues and hinders the capability of being able to carry out job roles adequately or effectively (Respondent 6).

One respondent also shared that;

[...] as the number of confirmed cases and deaths continued to rise, most of our employees, particularly those working onsite, were fearful of contracting the virus (Respondent 12).

Also, a respondent from the Educational sector emphasized that;

[...] so initially the COVID-19 is something that once you hear the name, psychologically you get that fear as to what is the next especially so when there was no cure initially, there were no vaccines and so on, it affected employee's interaction and people's movement (Respondent 14).

In addition, another respondent also mentioned that;

[...] the COVID-19 is a threat to human life and wellbeing so what I can say is that the fear of being infected with the virus can affect the wellbeing and the traumatic experiences they may go through in losing a loved one, friend or relative can also impact their mental and emotional wellbeing, and also increase their anxiety as they do not know what next (19).

The second theme was stress caused by work-related challenges and/or adjustments; 60% mentioned this as an effect on employees' mental and emotional wellbeing. According to one respondent from the Educational sector;

[...] for the first time there was a lot of fear and people were really stressed, people were scared to come to work and all of that and then it created a lot of stress because people were under pressure to work so there were fear and lots of stress, as there is work overload (Respondent 2).

Another respondent also from the Hospitality sector elaborated that;

[...] I think this caused lots of stress and although individuals tend to have different levels of stress, in whatever way it usually have significant impact on their well-being the reason being that even though they seem to adapt to the situation, the anxiety of being affected by the COVID-19 alone impacts their work behavior, performance and mental well-being and because of how we have adjusted our business mode of operations some may feel if they are not able to match up with these advancements in the work place they might lose their job so they tend to go out of their way to proof a point of how productive they are and like I mentioned earlier will lead to stress or burnout (Respondent 8).

Furthermore, one of the respondents explained that;

[...] COVID-19 has increased employee stress because managing the COVID-19 on your own is stressful, and in this situation, adjustments are being made at work and strict supervision is being delivered by supervisors to ensure effective operation. High levels of stress result from these factors, which pose risks to employee mental health or wellbeing. Those who are unable to control their stress and tension sometimes vent their rage and frustration on their coworkers and occasionally customers, which affects the corporate image and even create an unhealthy working environment (Respondent 20).

From the study's findings, employee well-being is related to position and presence on the job, as well as external threats to life and well-being. This result concurs with Hamouche's (2020) findings that unusual working conditions may increase employees' stress levels as well as their likelihood of developing mental health problems, particularly for individuals who were already dealing with severe psychological pressures at work prior to the outbreak (Quaedackers, Stein, Bhatt, Dogan, Hoen, Nijman, ..., & Bogaert, 2020) or those who have a high-risk job position, e.g., healthcare workers (Hamouche, 2020). Employees' well-being is thus influenced by triggers such as work pressures and fear of an external threat such as a pandemic. According to Carnevale and Hatak (2020), HR managers should be accountable for employees' wellbeing as well as establishing a strong relationship between employees and the firm because existing

employees working for the company may be exposed to and infected with this virus. This finding is also consistent with the findings of Ince (2020), who stated that the level of physical and mental well-being of employees has tended to decline during the pandemic, owing to conditions driven by emotions such as worry, fear, or stress, as well as unusual working conditions implemented as a result of the pandemic.

It is, nonetheless, intriguing to hear two opposing viewpoints from other respondents. One of the replies claimed that staff were pleased with the job changes and that the organisational actions were not intended to impact employees' well-being. He claimed;

[...] I do not think our responses to the COVID-19 affected our employees' emotional and mental well-being since the remote working was to safeguard them from the COVID-19, so not really it didn't affect their well-being since they were even happy to get the opportunity to work from home (Respondent 3).

The second contrary view also believe that the organisational strategies adopted were not a direct influence on employees' wellbeing. He stated that;

[...] I believe some of our strategies or responses may affect them one way or the other such as being apprehensive of the whole situation, dealing with learning or upgrading their skills through training which is all demanding on staff with children and major responsibilities but then again the main factor triggering employees mental and emotional challenges is the COVID-19 itself (Respondent 15).

These two contradictory views from the other responses shares some elements with Popa, Stefan, Olariu, Popa, and Popa's (2021) discovery that, the pandemic effects such as work changes experienced by workers did not directly affect their mental and physical well-being, but rather

the COVID-19 pandemic impacts felt by employees affected their total job performance and employees' health and well-being.

4.3.5.1 Identifying the Strategies Firms Have Put In Place to Manage and/or Ameliorate the Effects of COVID-19 on Employees' Wellbeing

Based on the replies, the researcher dug further to uncover the strategies that medium-large enterprises have put in place to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on employee wellbeing and ensure that their wellbeing is prioritized within the established firms. According to the data acquired, firms have built numerous ways such as promoting education and awareness of the problem, developing a culture of trust, prompt payment of salaries and bonuses, and others to reduce the effects of the COVID-19 on employee well-being. However, the following are the key themes that emerged from this inquiry:

- i. Adoption of flexible work arrangement
- ii. Provision of healthcare support and mental health programs
- iii. Provision of PPEs

Out of the 20 replies, 50% indicated that employing flexible work arrangements, such as adjusting work hours and remote work, protects employees from viral infections and minimizes workplace congestion—one of the causes that compromises employees' health. One respondent who is skeptical if flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, can be called a strategy stated;

[...] not really, we have not adopted any strategy. The only thing was to implement remote working which we believe in a way would help limit the negative impact of COVID-19 on

our employee well-being so maybe that would be a strategy should we consider that approach as one (Respondent 3).

A respondent from the Telecommunications sector commented that;

[...] by re-designing our work processes to improve flexible work practices, along with adjusting our work hours. Therefore, these changes will aid in minimizing the effects of COVID-19 on employee wellbeing (Respondent 18).

Another respondent also from the Hospitality sector stated;

[...] so what we did or implemented was that, we made our staff work time to be flexible and accommodating so that they would also have time for themselves and not spend many hours performing their job roles. So we have ensured flexibility in our work time (Respondent 6).

In accordance with the second theme from the cross-analysis of the responses, 45% of respondents said that one of the strategies they used was to offer healthcare support to employees in the form of insurance coverage and mental health programs because they felt that doing so would raise knowledge of COVID-19 and potentially helpful strategies for reducing its effects on employee wellbeing. According to one response from the Health sector, she explained that;

[...] there was this psychological team that counselled the staff and provided health programs and now we are thinking of doing what we call occupational health or employee wellness kind of thing so that they get more counselling about their wellbeing so is like keeping track about their performance so that even if you hear of any report that they are not doing well, you may want to go and find out if there is any underlying condition or something (Respondent 5).

Another respondent from the Educational sector mentioned that;

[...] so the University has made available telephone lines for people to call if they are having issues. The University has upgraded the student's hospital on campus here for students to go in for attention if there is any challenge, we the workers have also been provided for in terms

of the health and so on. There are positive signals from the University management regarding responding to challenges staff went through during the pandemic as to at least giving us something to reduce the cost some of us incurred in taking care of the situation so the University is doing so well along those lines (Respondent 14).

Another respondent also indicated that;

[...] we also contacted a mental health specialist who assists in providing mental health programs to our employees and other working staff because all of them are important, and if any of them have a problem, they contact these specialists who provide advice and mental support (Respondent 10).

Moreover, a respondent from the Health sector explained that;

[...] so what we have done is provide our employees with health insurance coverage because it's possible that an employee is worried about his or her health while also worrying about health bills and other things, so we make sure that these things are covered so that their worries are lessened. Also, through constant guidance and counselling from our center, those whose mental health was impacted due to the fear of becoming infected with the virus were talked to and offered help and need to adhere to all measures put in place to protect themselves (Respondent 12).

The third theme extracted from the replies shows that 35% of respondents emphasized providing PPEs for employees to hinder the spread of the virus and its constituents' impacts on employees' wellbeing. This is what one member of the Pharmaceuticals sector had to say about it;

[...] first and foremost, we made sure that our employees were well-protected by giving them supplies like personal protective equipment (PPEs). Because getting PPEs in the early stages of the pandemic was expensive, we made sure to give our employees enough of these supplies so they wouldn't have to worry about the impact on their finances (Respondent 15).

Another respondent from the Hospitality sector indicated that;

[...] we have provided them with PPEs to protect them from the virus and whenever any of them is unwell we allow them to take a break and resume when he or she is well (Respondent 19).

In addition, a respondent stated that;

[...] we have put in lots of measures to manage the COVID-19 on employee's wellbeing like the provision of sanitizers, nose masks and others. We have mental health practitioners around too who help give support to employees (Respondent 16).

This findings are therefore consistent with the findings of Porkodi, A-lZawaidi, Al-Muharbi, Al-Sarmi, and Al-Shibli (2021), as well as Aurelia and Momin (2020), who mentioned that, post-COVID-19 HRM responsibilities will include a greater focus on health and wellbeing, full acceptance of workplace flexibility, a more significant role and adoption of technology in general, a focus on continuous learning and skill development, and more agile planning for dynamic environments. It is undeniable that most HR practitioners are putting employees' wellbeing at the forefront of job design by implementing strategies such as workplace flexibility arrangements, mental-health support programs, and the provision of resources in protecting employees' health and wellbeing.

4.3.5.2 Assessing Organisations' Strategies for Ensuring Work-Life Balance

According to Anderson and Kelliher (2020), the enforced remote working measure in a number of firms has been found to increase the likelihood of work-family conflict, indicating that the shift to remote working and the rate of digitalization are having a significant impact on individuals' work-life balance and overall well-being. It is therefore critical to identify whether

companies have implemented strategies for ensuring work-life balance, and this objective assisted in asking participants about the approaches they have used to ensure work-life balance in the various firms. 15 of the 20 respondents representing 75% mentioned that they had adjusted their work schedules to provide workers time for other personal roles. 20% answered that no strategies were implemented since it is the employees' responsibility to be time conscious and manage time properly, and the claim that the firm is not competent at ensuring that. One reply, representing 5%, indicated offering some staff annual leave. These are some of the respondents' replies that back up this result. According to one Hospitality sector respondent;

[...] we allow our staff to work in shifts because we don't close early so we have those who come in the morning and in the afternoon they end their work and the other sect on the evening duties take over so that's how is done is so with this they can get time for themselves and relax and be able to balance work with life (Respondent 19).

Another respondent indicated that;

[...] in order for us to promote work-life balance we have adjusted our work time so that they do not have to burden themselves with much work and ensure they close early from work with this they would also have time for their families and others. So basically through work time adjustment (Respondent 3).

In addition, another respondent from the Travel and Tourism sector also shared similar idea. He stated that;

[...] we provide flexible work schedules so that employees may balance responsibilities outside of work. We also get to encourage flexible working conditions by allowing our non-essential personnel to work from home (Respondent 17).

Some of the respondents who stated that either the firm does not support work-life balance or it is the sole responsibility of employees to ensure work-life balance explained that;

[...] being able to promote work-life balance is the responsibilities of employees to be time conscious and manage their time well if that happens they are also able to assist the industry in promoting work life balance because of some flexible adjustments that has been made (Respondent 7).

Another respondent from the Educational sector shared this view;

[...] to be honest, the Business School here, we are bad at that, so like I said, you know lecturers are supposed to have to teach when they are not teaching they can take time off and all of that (Respondent 2).

One of the respondents from the Transportation sector who mentioned giving work leave to some employees explained that;

[...] we ensure that first the essence of the annual leave is to ensure work life balance. We are very committed to work schedules, vacations to go and rest so one thing we do is we don't buy off people's leave and also make sure they are paid (Respondent 4).

Based on this discovery, it is indicative that firms have implemented methods such as flexible work hours and not depriving employees of their yearly leave to guarantee work-life balance. The findings of this study are comparable with the findings of Porkodi, A-lZawaidi, Al-Muharbi, Al-Sarmi, and Al-Shibli's, (2021) study in Oman, which revealed that the pandemic raised major concerns that could jeopardize employees' health and safety, as well as work life balance, implying the need for a strategic focus on health facilities, safety measures, work flexibility, and training programs. As a result, one of the approaches utilized by human resource managers to provide flexible rules and working environments for their workers to complete their

responsibilities successfully and precisely, as well as to ensure work-life balance, is workplace flexibility.

4.3.5 Objective 6: Exploring How Organisation's Facilitate Training and Development to Develop Employees' Skills and Mind-Set to match up with these Adjustments

As part of the research, efforts were carried out to ascertain how organisations facilitate employee training and development to develop employees' skills and mind set to match up with adjustments taking place at the workplace. Devyania, Jewanc, Bansal, and Denge (2020) advised modifying workers' training programs to ensure a long-term transition to the new working practices. Furthermore, Przytula, Strzelec, and Krysiska-Kociaska (2020) emphasized that institutions must reskill and up skill their employees to meet the expectations of the changing economic environment.

Findings from the collected data revealed that, to facilitate employees' training and development, HR professionals designed competency and/or technical- based skill training, as well as offering sponsorships in the form of study loans and scholarships to employees in order for them to be trained and reskilled for the 'new normal' and match up to these adjustments. As a result, the two prominent viewpoints that are considered key themes are

- i. Competency and technical skill- based training
- ii. Provision of sponsorship

In terms of competence and technical skill-based training, 75% responded that they provide this type of training to employees in order to upgrade or reskill them to be more advanced and match

up with massive adjustments firms are making to their business models. One respondent stated that;

[...] so first, training and development is a critical part what we do as HR department. Our job is to develop the skills of the people and make them more competent and efficient on their various roles or functions so we organize various trainings for them. Anything the employees must know and work, any gap in terms of skill we try to close those gaps, so yes we focus on competency building training and talent development so that people have what it takes for the profession and that is done by developing annual training and development grounds every year (Respondent 4).

Another respondent from the Telecommunications sector gave an in-depth explanation that;

[...] for us, we are looking at technical skills needed for the long term, which will help us to have a pool of skilled employees who will be available to assist with any needed adjustments because we cannot predict what the future will bring. We cannot predict whether there will be other more serious cases like this pandemic, so our job is to be on the lookout for any necessary skills and to equip our existing employees with them, regardless of the cost, because having skilled and knowledgeable employees is a good resource to have and can serve as a competitive advantage (Respondent 7).

Moreover, a respondent from the Transportation sector indicated that;

[...], we are investing in educating our employees to be well equipped with the skills necessary for leveraging technological solutions and being very much geared up to big changes in the business environment (Respondent 12).

Regarding the second theme, approximately 30% stated that offering sponsorship is a means to ensure that employees are adequately trained and developed in their various careers. Among the recorded replies are;

[...] so there are number of things we have been doing now, this year we have sponsored at least 7 people (our own staff) into our master's program in different areas because we need to

build capacity for adaptive thinking and one way is to get people to develop their competencies, so we are sponsoring people as well as sponsoring people across the University and we are talking about the bigger picture and then we are facilitating short training programs, seminars and sessions for our staff, we do a lot of IT related training for faculty, we have done short courses for teaching virtual and stuff like that, so faculty can get the freshest knowledge to be able to adapt and all of that (Respondent 2).

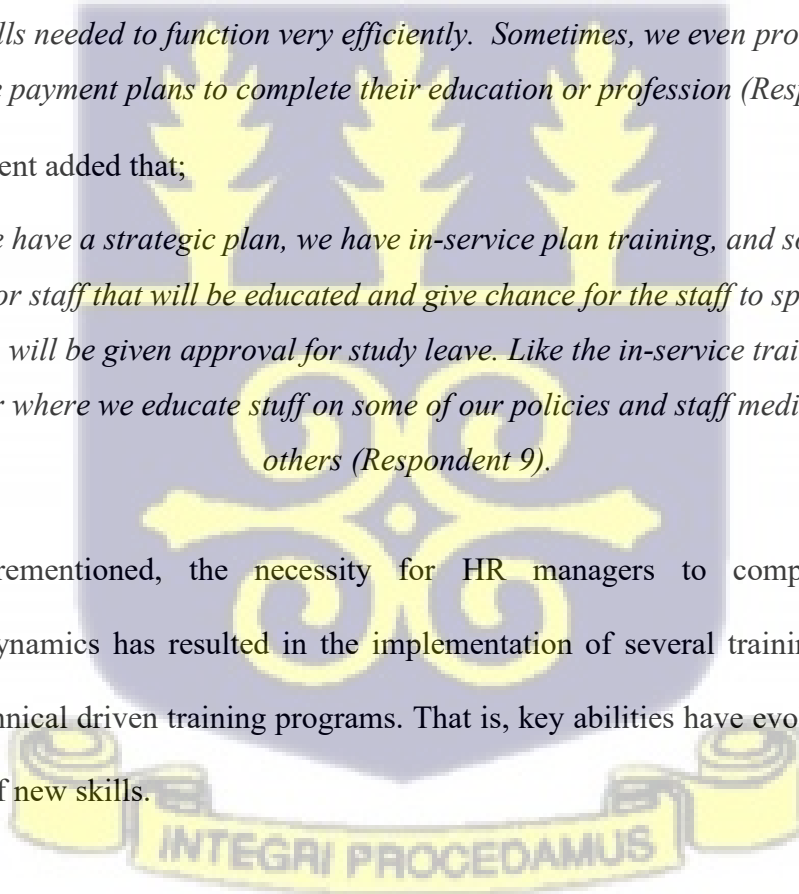
In addition, a respondent from the Financial sector explained that;

[...] we do give technical training to our employees, and we even support their training in other areas related to their career progress. In this case, we attempt to improve career development as well as involving our workers through seminars and short courses to have the necessary skills needed to function very efficiently. Sometimes, we even provide loans with reasonable payment plans to complete their education or profession (Respondent 20).

Another respondent added that;

[...] we have a strategic plan, we have in-service plan training, and so there is 5years strategic plan for staff that will be educated and give chance for the staff to sponsor themselves at schools which will be given approval for study leave. Like the in-service training, there will be a staff durbar where we educate stuff on some of our policies and staff medicare and many others (Respondent 9).

Given the aforementioned, the necessity for HR managers to comprehend changing organisational dynamics has resulted in the implementation of several training efforts with an emphasis on technical driven training programs. That is, key abilities have evolved, necessitating the acquisition of new skills.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study, which were previously discussed in depth. The study's conclusions are then presented, which were heavily influenced by the research objectives, findings, and limitations. Based on the study's findings, the last chapter closes with key recommendations for practice and policy and future research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study sought to elicit insights about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on organisations' work systems, human resource management practices, and how the practices affected employees' development and wellbeing to enrich emergent COVID-19 literature. The following objectives were examined in this research: explore and understand how organisations, in response to government policies on COVID-19 pandemic, redesigned their work systems; explore the dynamics of the functionalities of the organisations digitalized HRM practices; the barriers to digitalization or full adoption of emerging digital technology and platforms, capabilities required post-COVID-19 in order to be competitive, how firms are positioning themselves to ensure survival and competitiveness in the post-COVID-19 era; and assess the impact of COVID-19 and organisational responses on employees' mental and emotional well-being, as well as

strategies implemented to lessen the effects, and also how organisations support staff training and development to match up with the various adjustments in their organisations.

According to the respondents' demographic information, 75% of the respondents have a master's degree, followed by 20% of respondents who have a PhD and one respondent who only has a first degree. Of the respondents, 40% have professional qualifications in human resource management, 35% have specific professional certifications, and 25% do not have any professional qualifications. The demographics also revealed that all of the respondents employed by the various firms had an average of three to twenty years of job experience and had been in their current position ranging from less than one to six years. Using a thematic and descriptive analysis approach, six research objectives and questions were stated and assessed. The following summarizes the key findings:

5.1.1 Exploring the Effects of COVID-19 on Organisations' Work Systems

The study's first objective explored how organisations have redesigned their work systems to account for government mitigation and reaction policies on COVID-19. In light of achieving the first objective, efforts were made to determine whether, in the event of COVID-19, organisations were able to plan for it and, if so, to what extent the plans were successful. According to the study findings, organisations adopted new business models in responding and reacting to government policies on COVID-19 by conducting online business through virtualization of work, utilization of remote/ telework, and adoption of flexible work arrangements. These respondents believe that by employing these strategies, they will be able to survive and improve business continuity. Respondents also revealed that they adapted to the government's mitigation and reactive

policies by implementing strict sanitary regulations, purchasing PPEs for employees, and temporarily suspending business operations.

In addition, based on 90% of the responses gathered, it was found that no plans had been established, and that only 10% of the responses indicated the activation of a "blueprint" or backup plans that had been implemented during a similar case known as Ebola. This information was obtained when determining the plans organisations set in place in response to the onset of COVID-19 and how effective those plans were in combating the virus's effects on business operations. These findings showed that, despite being aware of the effects that external threats like this pandemic have on their operations and growth, the majority of medium to large firms in Ghana did not have plans in place to handle an unexpected emergency. The incorporation of emergency preparedness plans into these organisations' business strategic plans, which can be activated in the event of a future situation akin to the current one, is therefore crucial. Although the majority of the firms admitted that no specific plans were designed in response to the pandemic, they did convey that measures were put in place to salvage the situation and improve business continuity, and about 95% of the respondents said these measures were successful in helping deal with the situation.

5.1.2 Exploring the Functional Dynamics of the Organisations Digitalized HRM Practices

According to the study's findings, the most noticeable usefulness of digitalized HRM practices to their organisations' operations are cost and time effectiveness, improvement in work, and facilitation of business continuity. According to this finding, respondents accounted for the fact that, while there are some disadvantages to the digitalized process to work, there have been considerable experiences with these new practices.

Furthermore, findings from this study indicated that some of the constituents' problems include the expenses involved with adopting digitalized HRM practices, employee resistance to change, and decreasing quality of service delivery, as reported by respondents. According to the respondents' accounts, while there are benefits, there are also negatives that impair the efficiency and efficacy of the digitalized system in organisations' operations.

In light of the aforementioned, efforts were also undertaken to investigate the problems that organisations encounter while adopting emerging technologies and digital platforms for their new business models. It is critical to delve deeper into the topic in terms of the challenges associated with embracing digital platforms for new business models, as these two cannot be separated, as evidenced in the literature and particularly in the findings section, where respondents mentioned purchasing digital solutions for their new business models. The findings show that the most significant hurdles connected with embracing emerging technology and digital platforms are the expense of acquiring digital tools, employing experts to teach people in its use, and data acquisition. Another issue is internet access, as well as the technical skills and knowledge required for these technologies and digital platforms. This research therefore demonstrates the barriers to digital platforms.

5.1.3 Determining the Essential Capabilities Required of Firms to Ensure Survival and Competitiveness in the Post- COVID-19 Era

The third objective was to identify the essential capabilities required by firms in the post-COVID-19 era to ensure survival and competitiveness. Based on the interviews, respondents suggested the following: improving human resources in terms of competent and trained

employees, improving IT innovation; building infrastructures, establishing good strategic plans and efficient management systems, and improving L& D and/or R& D as capabilities essential for the post-pandemic era. Approximately 65% of the comments obtained stressed the need for improving IT innovation as they debated its potential to guarantee survival and competitiveness. 45% stated the need of having adequate and effective human resources in terms of qualified and trained personnel, 35% identified the need to enhance L&D and R&D, and around 30% emphasized the relevance of excellent strategic planning and an effective management structure. The finding establishes that the abovementioned capabilities are what the study's respondents anticipated would improve firms' survival and competitiveness in the post-COVID-19 age.

5.1.4 Investigating How Firms Are Positioning Themselves to Acquire And/ Or Utilize These Capabilities to Ensure Survival and Competitiveness

Respondents from medium-large firms were asked in this study how they are positioning themselves to acquire and use these capabilities to ensure survival and competitiveness. It is noteworthy to note that over 65% of organisations are re-tooling and updating their IT infrastructure, while 30% are reskilling their personnel through the development of training programs and enhancing their service delivery quality. 20% said they use L&D and R&D because they feel it will help them position themselves better and secure their survival and competitiveness.



5.1.5 The Influence of COVID-19 and Organisational Responses on Employees' Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

The fifth objective examines the effect of COVID-19 and organisational responses on employees' mental and emotional well-being. Attempts were also made to explore the strategies organisations have adopted to manage and/or mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on employee well-being and work-life balance. According to the findings, 65% of respondents feel that the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic causes fear in employees because they see it to be a danger to their life, hence negatively affecting employees' mental and emotional well-being. The respondents also demonstrated that stress emancipation from job pressure as a means of dealing with the substantial changes occurring in today's industry owing to the advent of the COVID-19 influences employees' mental and emotional wellbeing. This study demonstrated that employees' well-being is impacted by triggers such as stress from work demands and fear of COVID-19. However some two opposing opinions claimed that staff were delighted with the job adjustments and that organisational actions were not meant to impact employees' well-being yet the major trigger to employees' well-being is the COVID-19 pandemic itself.

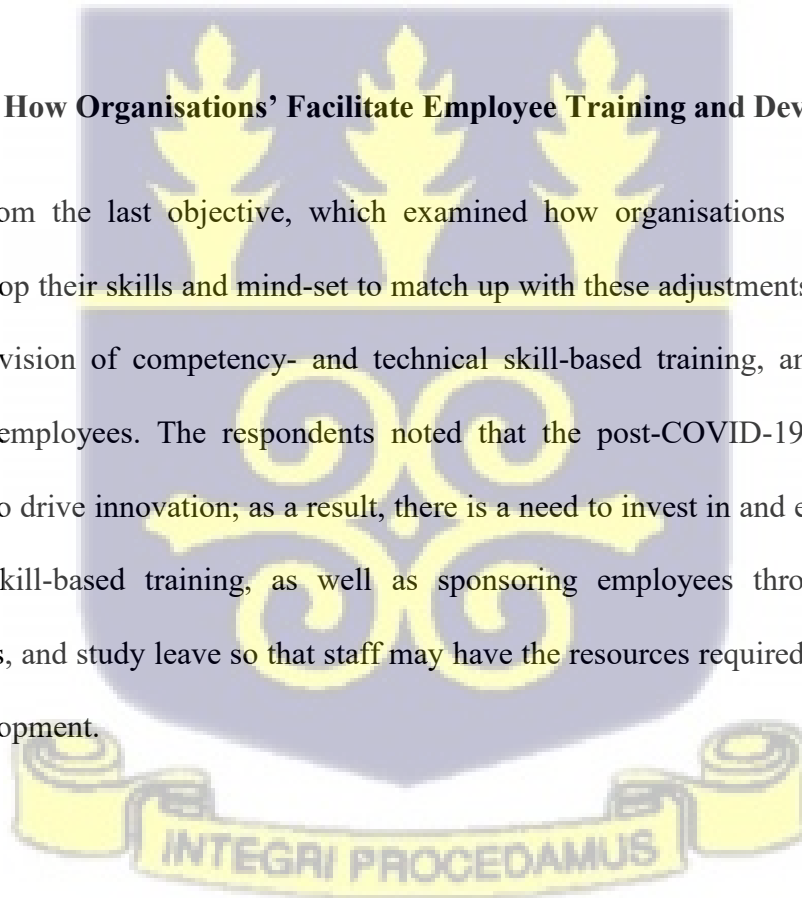
Findings from this study also shows that in order for firms to offset the effects of COVID-19 and organisational reactions on employees' wellbeing, some of the key themes derived as the strategies firms utilized in achieving this include: the adoption of flexible work arrangements, the provision of healthcare assistance and mental health programs, and the supply of staff PPEs to ensure their safety on the job.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that numerous methods have been implemented to guarantee work life balance. The dominating themes of which are the changes of work schedules,

which 75% of respondents alluded to, and the provision of yearly leave to staff, which one respondent noted. It is, nevertheless, distressing to see that almost 20% of respondents believe it is the employees' responsibility to be time conscious and manage time appropriately in order to balance work and life, and hence the organisation need not put any plans in place to maintain work life balance. But if no strategic procedures are in place to promote work-life balance, how can employees be time conscious when most jobs are demanding and stressful, as evidenced by the finding that owing to work demands, employees tend to be stressed, which has an impact on their wellbeing.

5.1.6 Exploring How Organisations' Facilitate Employee Training and Development

The findings from the last objective, which examined how organisations support employee training to develop their skills and mind-set to match up with these adjustments, point to two key themes: the provision of competency- and technical skill-based training, and the offering of sponsorship to employees. The respondents noted that the post-COVID-19 age is all about technical skills to drive innovation; as a result, there is a need to invest in and enable competence and technical skill-based training, as well as sponsoring employees through scholarships, granting of loans, and study leave so that staff may have the resources required for their trainings and career development.



5.2 Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was developed in the study's literature review section to describe the effects of COVID-19 on organisations' business models, digitalized human resource management practices. The framework below illustrate how COVID-19 affects these constructs, which has had a significant implications on organisation business operations and human resource practices. For example, the virtualization of work and integration of digital technology into core business functions, as well as management's support of employee well-being, work-life balance, and training and development, have all significantly taken place because of the occurrence of COVID-19. However, the conceptual framework in Figure 2.3 may be reviewed and evaluated in light of the empirical framework shown in Figure 5.1 below, which was built on the basis of the study's findings.

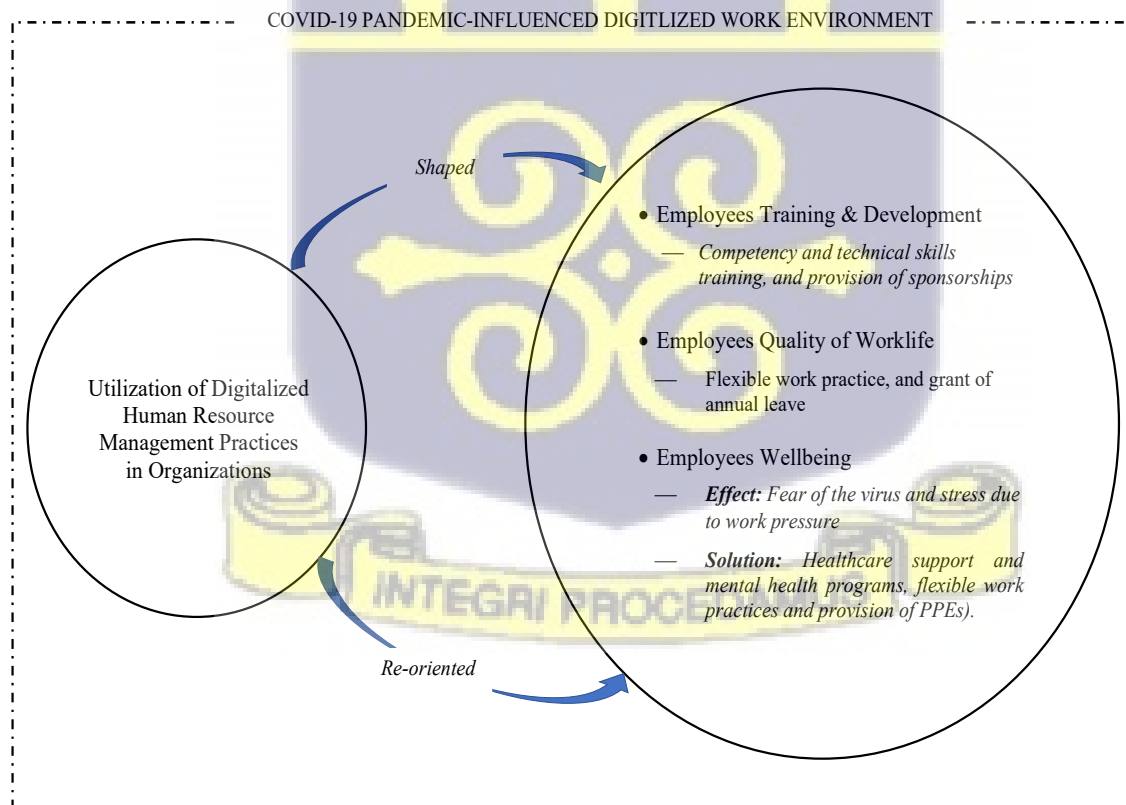


Figure 5.1: Empirical Framework

This shows that the effects of COVID-19 on organisations' work systems have led to new business models adoption such as the shift to digitalized and/ or flexible work practices. For instance, in terms of human resource management practices, the study reveals that when it comes to supporting training and development, management prioritizes competency and technical skills training, as well as the provision of sponsorships to help with training and development. In terms of encouraging quality work-life in the face of the pandemic, the study findings indicate the adoption of flexible work practices and the provision of annual leave, and in guaranteeing employee wellbeing, management facilitates healthcare support and mental health programs, flexible work practices, and the supply of PPEs to workers. Finally, assessing the effects of COVID-19 and organisations responses to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that the COVID-19 causes fear and stress emanating from work demands as a consequence of several organisational changes, all of which influence employee well-being.

5.2 Conclusions of the Study

The study has shown how COVID-19 pandemic is affecting people, organisations, and national development. Despite the detrimental effects of COVID-19 on business operations, employee well-being, and HR practices, it is encouraging to see that the majority of enterprises were able to begin their path to recovery. The existence of COVID-19 pandemic has not only been a negative phenomenon, but it has also sparked the creation of new work approaches, the use of cutting-edge technologies and digital platforms, the prioritization of employees' wellbeing in work designs, and the coining of the term "new normal" in reference to ways of living and doing business. According to the study, COVID-19's effects and any reactive measures or strategies

employed have prompted organisational innovation, flexible work options, retooling, and reskilling to improve staff's skill sets. It is also noteworthy from the study's findings the various techniques and strategies businesses have used to lessen the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and organisational responses on employees' wellbeing. These techniques include building and utilizing IT innovation, bolstering human resources, bolstering L& D and R& D, developing sound strategic plans, and putting in place efficient management systems.

5.3 Research Limitations

This study, like many others, has limitations. First, the focus on some selected sub-sectors of the service industries limits the study to specific organisations although other sectorial businesses were also significantly affected by the occurrence of COVID-19. As a result, this limits the study's applicability and generalizability of findings to all businesses in Ghana. In addition, because the study employed respondents in managerial positions, there was also a propensity to withhold pertinent information that respondents considered to be confidential due to organisational privacy laws and restrictions.

5.4 Recommendations

On the basis of the stated objectives, research questions and findings, the study makes a number of recommendations- for practice and policy. It also makes some recommendations for future research that are based on the study limitations.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Practice and Policy.

The following suggestions for practice and policy are offered based on the study objectives, research questions, and findings.

First and foremost, management of organisations should demonstrate their dedication to improving employees' mental and emotional wellbeing by offering better strategic practices that are favorable to both organisations and employees. It is critical for businesses to recognize that workers are crucial resources that facilitates the flow of work and organisational performance; hence, employees' well-being must be prioritized in job design.

Second, it is essential for corporate policy-makers, the Ghana Employers Association (GEA), and other organisational bodies to educate their members on the importance of incorporating emergency preparedness plans into core business functions that can be easily activated in the event of a future emergency crisis, as the study found that most firms do not have these plans in their strategic plans and are thus at high risk of being affected by future crises. As a result, it is critical for businesses to learn from the COVID-19 pandemic incident and begin implementing emergency preparation strategies.

Third, organisations are encouraged to include some of the suggested capabilities, such as augmenting L&D and R&D, strengthening human resources, establishing and leveraging IT infrastructures, and developing strong effective management systems, into their core business operations to enable survival, growth, and competitive advantage in the post-pandemic era.

Organisations are also urged to support employee training and development to develop their skills and mind-set to match needed for the post-pandemic era as findings from this study show

that the post-pandemic is about re-tooling and reskilling of employees to have the vital skills required for driving innovation. Therefore, in order to ensure innovativeness and competitiveness, management must position themselves to acquire skilled, qualified, and motivated workforce to fill key technical positions.

Additionally, it is important to note that organisations should be adaptable in their work practices, including alternative work modules and flexible work schedule, since the contemporary corporate world is all about flexibility that will support quality work-life and improve employee wellbeing.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Future Studies

To begin with, the study's focus on some carefully chosen sub- sectors of the tertiary sector in the Greater Accra region of Ghana ultimately allows future studies to analyze other sectors of the Ghanaian economy. Although the initial study plan was to consider firms from various economic sectors in Ghana, the researcher did not receive any response regarding approval for data collection, necessitating the need to focus the research on certain tertiary sub-sectors because these companies are the ones from whom data was obtained and because the research is constrained by a set time frame in order to meet the research deadline. As a result, future research should invest more effort, to include various sectorial businesses from other regions in Ghana in order to improve the generalizability of the findings revealed in this study.

In addition, future studies should consider employees as research participants as their thoughts and opinions are equally significant in the study, as there is also the tendency for respondents in managerial positions to withhold vital information relevant to the study findings.

Furthermore, because this study employed a qualitative technique, future research should consider alternate approaches, such as the mixed method approach, when selecting study participants and doing data analysis because they can provide substantially different findings.



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT (RESEARCH RESPONDENTS)

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA



DEPARTMENT OF ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Respondent,

I am a Year II student offering an MPhil in Human Resource Management at the University of Ghana Business School. As part of the requirement for the award of an MPhil Degree, I am conducting a research on *“The Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Organisations’ Work Systems, Human Resource Management Practices and Employees’ Wellbeing in Ghana”*.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and responses are only for academic purposes. This study will not disclose the identities of participants or the firms in which they work in order to maintain total anonymity and confidentiality, as required by ethics approval. I therefore seek your support and cooperation in this regard.

.....
Respondent’s Signature

Date

Thank you very much for your acceptance to take part in this research !! !! !

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE (RESEARCH RESPONDENTS)

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA



DEPARTMENT OF ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Dear Sir/Madam

This interview guide which is in three sections is to serve the sole purpose of an academic research on the title, *“The Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Organisations’ Work Systems, Human Resource Management Practices and Employees’ Wellbeing in Ghana”*.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

1. Could you kindly tell me what your work position and responsibilities are?
2. Could you kindly tell me what your highest educational qualification is?
3. Do you have any professional certifications, if any?
4. How long have you been with the organisation and how long have you been in your present position?
5. What is the estimated number of personnel now employed by your company?

6. Would you please classify your company as a medium or large firm? And also, under what sector will your reputable firm be classified?

SECTION B: QUESTIONS ON EMPLOYEE KNOWLEDGE OF COVID-19

1. Can you describe for me your understanding of COVID-19?
2. How were you personally affected by the pandemic (socially, economically, etc.)?
3. Did you lose any workdays as a result of the pandemic?

SECTION C: COVID-19 IMPACT ON THE FIRM

1. How did your firm plan for COVID-19?
2. To what extent was your planning for the pandemic successful?
3. How has your organisation redesigned their work systems to tackle the effects of government mitigation and reaction policies on COVID-19?
4. What are the functional dynamics of the organisations digitalized HRM practices?
5. What are the challenges your company has experienced in embracing emerging technology and digital platforms for your company's new business models?
6. What capabilities do you believe are critical for your firm's survival and competitiveness in the post-COVID-19 era?
7. How is your firm positioning itself to acquire and or utilize these capabilities to ensure survival and competitiveness?

8. How do the COVID-19 and organisational responses affect the mental and emotional well-being of your employees and what strategies have the firm put in place to:
- Manage and/or ameliorate the effects of COVID-19 on employee wellbeing?
 - Ensure work-life balance of employees?
9. In terms of ensuring your firms survival, competitiveness and the capabilities essential for the adoption of new business models, how does your firm facilitate employee training and development so as to develop their skills and mind-set to match up with these adjustments?

Thank you very much for your time. Your responses are much appreciated!!

