**Dissertation Interview - Participant E – 18 March 2024**

Fanie Mordaunt: Describe the name, the organisation that you work for. You don't have to say the name, but just what kind of business is it?

Participant E: Okay, it's a financial service company specialising in various, financial services across insurance, wealth management, asset management.

Fanie Mordaunt: And your role in the organisation?

Participant E: So I am the head of the project management office.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay, how would you describe the culture in your organisation?

Participant E: Big flat structure, access to a lot of the top management. So, I think that's the one part to it and the other part very fast paced, high performance type of culture, the demand for good performance, it's always high. But then again, on the other side also be diverse. I think very interactive when it comes to people when it comes to management as well. A lot of the management, is entrenched in the daily activities that take place even on the ground level, which I think is great and I think that's something you don't often see a lot of the other financial service companies.

Fanie Mordaunt: And do you how many people do you manage currently?

Participant E: So I manage a team of thirteen people.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay. And how long have you been managing people in total?

Participant E: Probably around three years, some of them, some of them are mentors, some of them are directly managed. Some of them are they managed cross the board.

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

Participant E: I think I'm very much one for self-organised team so I believe my people should have a bit of independence when it comes to their work. I believe in empowering people to obviously grow themselves, but also when I have to step in and be the leader and assist them to be the best that they can. So not very much micromanaging, but more, it's enabling them to be better.

Fanie Mordaunt: And do you work remotely and does your team work remotely? Or are you all together?

Participant E: I don't work remotely currently. I used to work remotely, but my job has become sort of prefer being in the office, but my team works in remotely so I don't have a set rule on them having to be here every day we go with our companies, let's say hybrid approach. So, they would come into the office as planned for three days and not be around for two days.

Fanie Mordaunt: And now you all based in the same office?

Participant E: No. So, we are across the country We have some sitting in in Johannesburg and some in Cape Town, so I think the team is evenly split across the two, let's say geographical locations.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay, so how did you adapt your leadership style now to be able to support a virtual setting? Cause your team is separated.

Participant E: So for me it wasn't the problem because I've always been in the digital space, so I've always been an advocate to, do things digitally, so has never been a challenge for me when we started doing all hybrid approach. I've always been very close to the team and even with being digital it didn't seem to me to be a big different for me. Obviously, when it comes to my specific role, the people that I need to keep in touch with on a daily basis and follow up with them, you know, getting that's with those, it's probably to further my team because you know that's for me a little bit of it in managing my team. But in terms of the team management and you know checking up on how things are going on this side and also jumping in where I need to. I'm completely comfortable with it being you know digital, there is going to be situations where we need to you know to be face to face maybe engagements with other individuals or business units, workshops etcetera. But as and when.

Fanie Mordaunt: So I mean, if you just think back when you started managing people and what were some of the challenges that you encountered and how did you overcome some of those challenges, especially if there was through a virtual platform specifically?

Participant E: Yeah, I think the difficult part was managing people virtually, as usually the emotion sort of difficult when it comes to managing things you know across let's say the Internet or digitally because you can't really see the person’s emotion a lot. I mean as you can put on your camera, etcetera. But I mean with the digital space that has also kind of faded, people just don't put on the camera. So that is usually difficult. Also, we need one is to show people things you know and get things across very quickly. It is kind of difficult because now you have to obviously check is the person online? Is the person the available or they're not in the call? So, either a little bit difficult, having my team in person at the office is for me sometimes the best because I can talk to somebody's desk and I can. I can ask them something or they can come to me immediately if they want something they don't have to check if I'm in a call all day, and sometimes I am in a call all day. But when I'm working remotely, it's not easy for them to check if they can just ask me something very quickly because I'm on a call and they work from there. So, management managing the team is definitely better in person for me and I think the biggest challenge for me has been being able to get things done very quickly while being digital because I think you won't.

Fanie Mordaunt: You've touched on accessibility and you have an added layer of complexity. It's not just about the virtual hybrid working it's also the fact that you've got staff members in other provinces.

Fanie Mordaunt: You know so how do you how do you guys as a team of upcoming accessibility challenges?

Participant E: So I do my weekly catch ups with the team with each and every team member. So, if I don't get to call them in, you know any other slot, I usually use my one-on-one sessions with them to actually discuss a lot of the things. I am also in a couple of their meetings where they need me. So, we do touch on things there as well. And then as and when I have to, have a conversation with them and I try and call them or they try and call me as well. I've always said that if I'm, unless I'm in a call, you know, try and call me. So, I think I try and keep the same type of lines open that we have at the office virtually as well. Sometimes it is difficult because you do see somebody busy presenting, know you can't touch that person. Can’t phone or them in a call they also wouldn't do it. So yeah, I think the accessibility is it is an issue. But I mean with the daily catch-ups that we have and the other sessions that we do schedule, we kind of get around it.

Fanie Mordaunt: So you've almost put like a how you would have an open door. You have like an open phone policy when you say, just call me.

Participant E: Yeah. No, no. Exactly, exactly that. When I'm at the office, I mean the difference. I was checking to somebody now the other day I was saying, you know, just as Teams are saying you busy, I mean I can walk to somebody's desk now and I won't know if they're busy at all. So now somebody's status on Teams is busy. I still call that person and I'm like, if you if you need to call me and I'm on busy just call me. Because if I if I was at the office, you wouldn't know if I'm busy or not. That so just so it's kind of kind of like you say, the open kind of open phone policy.

Fanie Mordaunt: Like that and how do you deal with, you know people… I mean obviously when we managing in South Africa, this things like Eskom power cuts where people might not have electricity for some hours or these water cuts and people, you know can't bath and get into the office or this political instability and these riots and people feel unsafe to drive, maybe how do you deal with that and how does it affect productivity?

Participant E: So that's the good thing about the hybrid approach it, it doesn't just allow you to have it. The one way, as it allows you to have it the other way. So, let's say Eskom crisis I think people outside, if you're not at the office, you probably more affected unless you have, you know, backup power at home, etcetera. In that case, I would just advise you know if you don't have access to Internet or power the period, that you have load shedding come to the office, that's going to be the best. You know, if these obviously water, water shortages, if it's at the office with this, with the shortage, the easiest ways for you then to work at home, if there's no shortage over there, obviously both of those instances, there is and there's nothing we can do to obviously resolve it and the company doesn't have a proper a business continuity planning place. Then we don’t have a choice then it going to interrupt the working arrangement. But the flexibility of the hybrid actually allows you to check which location is actually the best in the situation that you are facing. Company I think will usually have the BCP in place in case of emergencies, but in case that fails the person also has the option of obviously working from home and similarly if there is riots and the person doesn't have access to come to the office, you know the person is able to work from home as long as there actual equipment, etcetera to work from home then then it doesn't really bother me because that's exactly why you also want to have that kind of approach where a person is able to work or at the office.

Fanie Mordaunt: And I'm how do you develop trust while you are working with people through these virtual channels?

Participant E: Yeah, I think I think that's the probably the way the micromanagement becomes important not to organise say to not to micromanage. You still need to ensure that your team is able to, be self-managed, meaning they take accountability for their work and once they can show that they you know they take accountability, they are able to work you know without having somebody over their shoulders and giving them guidance all the time then it actually does help build the trust. If I had to be a manager that on a daily basis comes and asked them, tell me, what you are going to do for the eight hours at all, you know and give me feedback at the end of the day, that's not going to build trust. So, I need to be able to see you know that they are able to do their work the same way they were going to do it from the office at home. Meaning I would be able to see it in the type of updates that give around projects or as an example, or they able to still see where things are or slacking. Are they able to still pick up on the risks and issues before the time so that it's mitigated etcetera, etcetera. Able to do the reporting on time. If they can do all of that there's no sense of me micromanaging them because they're performing at the levels that they supposed to or even above and that's what we just need, whether it is remote or at home.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yeah, you answered my other question around tracking performance. I think that makes a lot of sense and I'm, you know, when you have a new person in the team, how do you integrate them when you're not there?

Participant E: So the important thing for me is making sure that that person has a support structure for when coming to the office the first time. So, if I'm not there, I mean I actually had that not too long ago, when a new person started and I couldn't be here for the first couple of days. Just needed to make sure that there is somebody at the office that's able to obviously help that person settle in. I think the nice thing that we do have is we have a good team culture as well we look out for one another; we make sure everybody's on the same page. So, it's easy for me to talk to them and say, you know, we've been working at home for a while now, two days at home, three days at the office. Just for this week I need you to be there for the entire week because somebody new starting in this person needs to be integrated into the team. Get them to understand that and we generally don't have issue with it. So, I think it's all about teamwork, if I'm not there, there is our team behind me that's going to, you know, be able to help that person.

Fanie Mordaunt: That's wonderful. And have you ever had to manage a conflict? Virtually?

Participant E: I have not in a meeting per say, more on a chat.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay.

Participant E: I wouldn't really call it a conflict because there was a really issues and you know the one person felt a certain way about it, you know.

Fanie Mordaunt: You don't actually have to share about the actual issue, but more what I'm interested in is what tools did you use? What competencies did you use as a leader to manage that conflict?

Participant E: Usually what I look at the objective facts, I look at what is the situation from both sides I've because we both obviously both parties have the opinions. I look at the objective facts of the situation and I look at what the implications is and I try and give that to them to say you know this is you know at the end of the day doesn't matter what you say doesn't matter what you say this is the objective facts of the situation and that's how we actually get to a common ground of equal does make sense after look past, you know, to look past my own judgement, actually see this and then together work on a way of. Okay, so now that we're all on the same page, how do we get to a sort of solution?

Participant E: What is it? Where we want to work towards and how do we get there and together work towards that? Because what happens usually in conflict is the one person has their opinion, the other one has the opinion and we don't look at the actual facts around the situation and it and it might be just we both are blind to actually see that and at that and then we kind of get to a conclusion. But it's the important part is to bring people together to actually solve it together and work towards that common thing. So that's what I usually try and do. Also, I think to look at you know different people have different personalities. That's usually how I also look at things. Not everybody's the same. Not everybody communicates the same way. Not everybody understands things the same way, and because we all are different. And what I tried to usually do is think of that whenever. Whenever team members have conflict or I have conflict with anybody. I always think of that as well. Because personalities do clash, that's general. So, it's important to actually understand where somebody else is coming from, who? The perception that they might have on you know, on you or the situation.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yeah, that's true. Just, I mean just wrapping up in conclusion, so based on our conversation, what are the key competencies that you believe you know as a leader you must persist that leadership behaviour that you think is critical if you're going to be managing a virtual team?

Participant E: I've always believed that, leadership is all about serving the people right and developing people, whether it's virtually or in person. And I think virtually it doesn't make a difference for me. I strive to be a servant leader, so for me it's not going to be different, I think. In a in a virtual world, being a servant leader is still there to develop people you still there to check how you can remove, blockers from the part, that that enables them to help your team perform added space and the only difference obviously now is I have to also make sure that I understand it right. That you are able to reach out to me whenever you have issues. I'm able to reach out to you whenever I see issues. I'm able to reach out to you whenever the solution to whatever you are dealing with and also, I need to be able to reach out to all the other people that you know that I need to reach out to make your job more successful it's general, even if it's virtually or in person for me it works out the same way. The only difference is obviously like I said earlier, virtually it just makes it a little bit more difficult to be able to immediately go to somebody which is generally we. I think the best part of it is impersonal. I can talk to somebody's office very quickly, and I asked him a question. Whereas has now virtually have to wait. I can maybe type a message. Sometimes the people's, you know, Teams are spammed through messages, so they only get through it in the evening or the next day, which is usually the problem. But I mean, for me, servant leadership, definitely. I think for me is one thing that I that I obviously want to be. I also think you know you still need to listen to people if you want to be a servant leader. You're going to listen to people. So, you're going to have to make time for them and just read the, you know, the one-on-one catch-ups comes in. You need to be aware, so sometimes you're going to have to keep your eye on the with the ears on the ground. And actually listen, but also be aware of things that you know the person might not be saying, you know that's important. And then you need to be able to look ahead, need to have normal empathy. You need to be committed to, you know, helping these people grow, your team members and that that again comes performance management tying into setting expectations. You know, sitting in your role within their career also there and now you want to help them grow. So, I mean, being a servant leader, you need to be committed to that. So, I think that's also something. I want to make sure that I build the community right, not just not just these bunch of individuals that you know that want to compete or you know be the best possible PM you want to be a community. We want to help each other.

Fanie Mordaunt: And that's very important.

Participant E: Because they don't otherwise, I'm not. Yeah otherwise, I'm not going to be a good leader. I want I want to make sure that we are able to use each other’s strengths and help each other. I want seniors to be able to help juniors. I want juniors that come out of our city fresh with ideas to be able to speak up and bring the new perspectives to the team. I want seniors that are maybe much older than me or even have more experience than me to be able to tell me Shane, I know the head I know you. They had, but I think this is how we should do things, you know, and I'll be like, cool. I'll focus on ensuring that the team is managed well, is developed well, he's growing well, etcetera. You focused it on the technical side of things, so I want to while balanced team and to do that, I want to make sure that I build that community.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yeah, that's wonderful. Thank you so much, Shane. Thank you for your time. That's all the questions that I have is there. Are there any questions that you might have for me?

Participant E: No, actually I don't. It was an interesting interview, so that's good to see it.

Fanie Mordaunt: So just basically to give you some context, I'm busy with my masters and I'm looking at Leadership, my goals is so the Masters are just for personal development, but my goal is to obviously work on leaders moving forward in my career, just developing strong leaders and I'm very passionate about that. This research is feeding into bigger research where actually she's the head of people at the South African Reserve Bank.

Fanie Mordaunt: She's developing a screening tool that we can use now psychometric tool that we can use for leadership, which is like exciting. So, all of us are all going to share our information. But like, there's nothing I hope that you've shared, that you're not comfortable with. But I think we didn't really talk about where you work and the names and the people. It's more about you, but I'm just again. Thank you for your time and really, really appreciated you doing me a huge favour.

Participant E: It's a pleasure Fanie and I'm glad I could help. And if there's anything you need, let me know because it was good sharing some of that experience.

Fanie Mordaunt: Thank you, Shane.

Participant E: I always I always feel-good talking about it and it makes me. Yeah, I enjoy it again.

Fanie Mordaunt: And proud. You should be proud as well. You've done well.

Participant E: What I do? That's yeah. Thank you.

Fanie Mordaunt: Thank you so much.