**Dissertation Interview - Participant G – 26 April 2024**

Participant G: The organisation I'm working for is a consulting business that mainly focuses on helping small to medium entrepreneurs, mainly black to scale and create efficiencies so that their business can grow. My role is the Managing Director and founder of the business.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay. And do you have a team that works with you?

Participant G: Yes, I have a direct report to managers, a portfolio of, let's say three or four clients and then I've got other eight employees that are clerks the combination of supervisors and a manager on a contract that we're doing for a public sector contract.

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

Participant G: Self-sustained, so we don't micromanage by virtue, funny enough the culture that are relation, which is led by my leadership style is growth need your own targets? I don't micromanage. However, the contract that we have that has these other clerks is a very painful, demanding project which I'm taking it for the last year and a half, but it most goes against the grain of how I run my day to day culture because it's a lot of manual work and by virtue that it's public sector going to contact a whole lot of other customers that hold public sector money it's a very painful contract like so painful that you know when you see the long hours and it the pricing, the public figures done, don't reward the work. It actually makes you realise how you should carefully choose your contract, because this contract, by virtue of it goes against the grain of how I value people's working conditions.

Fanie Mordaunt: And so in terms of your team, do you guys work in a virtual setting or do you go to an office?

Participant G: So the business before I got this contract was virtual because my side office it's work from home. So, you manage your own time hence what I described around the culture. So, I created a space where people have the option because as much as work from home made sense that it got to the stage was certain people wanted to just get away from home, whether their homes will not be enough or they just needed to just environment they could work. But this contract requires us to come to the office, cause you need to be phoning, printing, and so all those facilities you can't do from home.

Fanie Mordaunt: So, when you were fully remote and what were some of the challenges that you encountered when you were managing people in that sort of setup?

Participant G: The collaboration is very difficult because it was a fairly young business part of my leadership style is mentoring. It's difficult to mentor people and you don't see them or be with them. And that I think that created a challenge. So, it's difficult to implement culture when you're not civically present.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yes, that's true.

Participant G: So remote working works for well-established running organisations that have invisible hands instruction. Startups and small to medium business and very difficult.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yeah, okay. I can actually imagine that and obviously then then when you got this contract, everybody came into the office, but when you were when you were going through just those challenges and trying to collaborate, you said collaboration is difficult.

Participant G: Yeah.

Fanie Mordaunt: How did you overcome that?

Participant G: So it would have meeting by virtue of you need to discuss a couple of things. But our collab is monthly, I mean weekly Monday morning check in status because that must be in the diary and it doesn't have to have a structure.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay.

Participant G: It's a check-in. How are you? How was your weekend? Is family, good. And then you discuss other the week coming, you know what I mean? So that's a status meeting around projects and just the check-in, it's not specific.

Fanie Mordaunt: It's interesting that you said. How are you? How's the family doing? So, you do you believe then that you know, just going on to that interpersonal emotional intelligence layer is important for managing people virtually?

Participant G: I think it's critical. So, when, I was doing my studies even in virtual meetings and we were the first to build virtual because it's just after COVID hit there was a quote that used to say a person hasn’t arrived in the meeting until they speak. So, check-in became a thing. You check in and check in. Is not about work. If somebody logs in, it's each person must speak before we start the agenda.

Fanie Mordaunt: That's very powerful. I'm going to write that down and then now obviously that you guys are in the office. I'm sure that your staff members get impacted by things like load shedding, power cuts, you know, strikes. What all of that that's happening around us, how do you manage for that?

Participant G: So I'm ensure that the facility, I should change in that the facility I got myself now. So, I had the benefit of subleasing from one of my main contractors, who’s in ICT a listed entity, so they were pregnant with space like most organisations’ post COVID. So, I and they just bought a state-of-the-art facility and that space so, I said to them and let me sublease. But on the sub supply development point of view, so I actually got the benefit of supply development because I understood how it worked. I went to them and said, listen, you're paying for this space anyway, charge me rent for the eight people really doesn't even move your balance sheet and you're give me a discount anyway. So, I crafted a structure that made me pay less rent, but I know there had furniture that had backup power that had what that everything. So, we never offline. So, I think should change that. So, we weren't impacted by that. And in fact, it made come into the office more beneficial for staff because when they're at home and then right back up power and they and electricity dies, it became a problem for them just from a productive for them. And also, I'm invested in … I'm big on investing in the environment, so as much as we had that and showed that when was thought up, we had so we can team once in a while we buy muffins for the team. Do you know what I mean?

Fanie Mordaunt: Yeah.

Participant G: I like I went out and got cutlery and we had small fridge I'm sure that I'm investing in that type of stuff so that work environment is conducive.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yeah. And how do you develop trust with people when you're managing them virtually?

Participant G: I think benefit working in with professionals so, I had to hire professionals, so those are minimum qualification and also, I looked for specific type of individuals like people done articles in example because it just changed it differently then I'm power the manager to manage their people because it doesn't work if I'm now micro-managing people who are two three levels below.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yeah.

Participant G: So I believe in starting with you trust I don't believe in you earn trust other time I've interviewed employed you. I've tried you so it's up to the individual to maintain the trust. It seems to have worked out. I mean that one, bad quality example, but it was managed. What example bad employee, but it was it was managed and it was less charged, it was more capability, so I've been fortunate to not have experience. So, it's been not abused and I and like I said, I don't micromanage. So, I think by virtue of that, when you said to the individual manage your own time, you've got a personal life, things happen. So, there's going to be times where you put in the work. There’s going to be times where you need to take some time to do your own personal stuff. Without, that's my leadership style.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yeah, that’s excellent. And when you have people who, I mean this is go back to the time when you guys were fully remote, when you had new people coming into the team, how did you integrate them if it was a virtual setup?

Participant G: So that was that was insane. Was actually very tough that they don't get into that remember I spoke about culture, so even your weekly status doesn't do enough. But I was fortunate enough that it doesn't last long, by that time we're back. So, I didn't have to experience that tough induction online.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yeah, because I think that's one of the challenges that a lot of managers in virtual setups has been how do we make people who have never met anyone in the team understand our culture and work with us? That's perfect. I think it helps a lot and then in terms of conflict management, will you even in a situation where you were in a virtual meeting and or in a situation where everyone's working remotely and there's just a conflict in the team, maybe between you and someone or two members and how do you, how do you manage conflicts in that sort of situation?

Participant G: So some reason I've been fortunate to have an experience of virtue. It's always been like if there was, then you're address it face to face because you don't hide behind the phone or a screen. But I am really digging in deep that it was a conflict that was virtual. No, I don't have an example. So that's where I've been fortunate.

Fanie Mordaunt: But you can imagine, but you can imagine that in that case you said you would have had to have the conversation face to face, ultimately.

Participant G: Yeah. So, it's an example. Then cameras must be on because.

Fanie Mordaunt: Or you would have asked to meet somewhere.

Participant G: Yes, that I definitely would have done.

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay. And you said that you don't micromanage. You guys are self-driven individuals and but could you just take us through how you measure performance in your team with all these people? I mean, it seems like quite a self-driven organisation, but how do you guys manage performance?

Participant G: So one take is a love of tech. So, the time we had time sheets and how many so the there's an app is covered with problem and I'll say what this is just you click it on like a times it's like a support when you log in, you upload your customers you upload your project, and when you start a project, you press in and out so it's self-governing the person because now you can't sounds doing this and that. And so that's kind of the first thing. The second thing is, by virtue of that project outside the weekly status meeting, there was strict deadlines like it was the thing. That's why I said, drove at different culture because you almost running a sweatshop for professionals. So, by virtue of that project, you can't slack because you have to call to waiting for document. You can't work a little document for the with shared folders on teams, so structure and putting in those things you can't really hide by select so that by virtue of it manages performance because then you have status on where you and you have a checklist. So, it's a spreadsheet that sits on SharePoint and everybody had to complete their status on that document. So, I rely on tech a lot.

Fanie Mordaunt: So if you were advising somebody who's going to manage a virtual team like the way you had to do I especially post covid what things would you say are key like competencies that they must or behaviours that they must adopt if they're going to be effective?

Participant G: So one needs to have project management skills so that's generally the managers, it's part of the manager's job. So, if I would be the director expected, the manager says below me has project management skills. So, the other thing is I keep going about tech use the tools, so not things don't have to be manual. So, when we're using SharePoint or teams, if you look at teams, it's got it the latest app now, which means I was called planner. So, planner allocates tasks, so my advice is just use tools. Microsoft got a book called Tools that that help manage productivity, so planner now also this is your task and you allocate to different people you task, comments you write on there and you don't have to be emailing different talking to each other because you're working in one SharePoint and I find those things helped manage productivity. Someone wants it don't turn an honest person into a thief.

Fanie Mordaunt: Well.

Participant G: And what they meant by, you know, you know the phrase that the cats gone mice play. You don't have to micromanage people, but you have to create tools and controls and processes that make them know that listen the minute I start dropping the ball, I'm not working, it's going to be evident there's not going to be a, he said, she said. So, it's the responsibility of the executive or the manager to put those things in place to protect the individual and protect them when it comes to productivity. So as much as you don't micromanage, there's still work that has to be done, and ensuring that the tools are there so that people can check their own productivity, but also know that if they're not being productive, somebody can tell.

Fanie Mordaunt: Very interesting. No, I think you've shared a lot, but I think it's in line with a lot of other comments that I've received from other leaders. So, I've spoken to people at junior management, people like you senior and they all seem to share the same sentiments. What we're trying to do is we're trying to create a tool where we can understand what competencies are required, when you're going to be recruiting or, you know, hiring up leaders in a work environment that's hybrid or fully remote, because we found that, you know, now that things have changed, covid and all of that has made us consider hybrid and remote work, some managers have just not been able to adjust their behaviour and they're struggling a lot and we have to learn to teach them how to manage in a virtual space. So now that we're getting closer and closer to understanding those competencies, we can recruit, select and also develop for those specific competencies. So, I really appreciate your time. Is there anything else you wanted to mention that I haven't maybe asked you?

Participant G: Is it purely on remote working? Because I also find interesting that with certain science over micromanaging and you've got the opposite problem, where the concept of flexible remote working doesn't exist, especially owner managed or entrepreneurs. And it's almost causing the opposite problem, because employee value propositions become a big thing, become a topic. Well, at least if you're a progressive leader and it does the things with virtual created and necessary meetings to justify your time. So, you're just in meeting after meeting after meeting and never breathing space.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yes.

Participant G: So you, you're always on virtual meetings because it seemed like I'm justifying that I'm working, but it does not downtime to actually think and reflect on the last meeting so that you can strategise how you execute and then leading into that is people who want people in the office all the time. The concept of and it's not going to happen to corporate saying like to people. Listen like, what don't come back. So, this is sort of the one or two days a week so I’m not saying this in the back five times a week so what’s the have you have you come across any data around how that behaviour also still touching ways of work the opposite of it.

Fanie Mordaunt: Yes, I mean so we and I know that some managers are just not comfortable with managing virtually and it comes down to that control element. So obviously with managing people, you know that you plan, your organise, you lead, but control is a difficult one because if some people feel that to control, they must be whereas other and we finding it more and more in the call centre sort of environment, those operational spaces where these cut off, split certain files need to be uploaded on systems by certain times and then you get people who have bandwidth issues at home and maybe they miss cut offs for reasons outside of their own control like for example the file is huge and they don't have the bandwidth to upload it and it, you know, the upload fails. They missed their cut offs, so all of those factors are what is pushing, especially managers in virtual in operations and call centre administrative, clerical roles to get people back into the office.

Participant G: Okay.

Fanie Mordaunt: And if you think about organisations, that is usually the majority where you see people like actually finance people who are thinkers like you said, the job requires more time to think than it does to do. You find that manager is actually more comfortable to allow them to continue to work from home because their time is not measured through quantitative metrics. You see outputs based on feedback that sometimes comes a month later, a week later, gauging with clients, it's not the same. So, organisations are also just trying to make sure that they can control better. And so yeah, I think it's difficult because a lot of our managers are old school, but I've seen that the, like you, you're very tech savvy. Those managers tend to feel more comfortable managing and virtual settings because they use tools to manage and embed controls, with the old school managers they don't know how the tools you've mentioned, they think they think I'm a see you and then I'm managing you which is Interesting, but thank you so much. I really appreciate all your input. I've written quite a lot of notes, but yeah, I really appreciate it and if there's anything else, please let me know.

Participant G: Cool.

Fanie Mordaunt: And please don't forget to send me the consent form.

Participant G: Yes, I have to please

Fanie Mordaunt: Okay.

Participant G: And it's just like it now while you're here.

Fanie Mordaunt: Thank you so much.

Participant G: Otherwise, it's not going to happen. You sent it from your email, right?

Fanie Mordaunt: Yes, work email.