

**Unlocking Mutual Gains through Ubuntu: A Reimagined Approach to
Human Resource Management Practices and Employee Well-being
A case of Zambia**

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

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Abstract

Human Resource Management (HRM) serves as a basis for organisational success and a key determinant of employee well-being. However, HRM's traditional focus on organisational outcomes has been increasingly criticised for its insufficient attention to employee well-being, and prioritising employer gains. Consequently, HRM has progressively evolved into a mechanistic function, usually at the expense of its human-centric core functions. This imbalance highlights the necessity for a more holistic approach, one that integrates employee well-being alongside organisational performance, fostering a mutual gains approach. Less recognised is the role of contextual sociocultural values in shaping employee well-being and fostering mutual gains. The thesis addresses this gap by exploring how HRM practices, informed by the African philosophy of Ubuntu, can advance employee and employer outcomes. Grounded in the ideologies of mutual respect, collective care, and shared humanity, Ubuntu provides a culturally relevant framework for a more synergistic model of HRM. Using constructivist research paradigm, the empirical study utilised an ethnographic methodology involving a mixed qualitative approach, including interviews, observations, and document analysis to gather diverse insights from three Zambian case study organisations (one in the public sector and two in the private sector). Data was collected from 50 purposively selected participants, including HR managers, line managers, and employees, and analysed thematically. Findings underscore Ubuntu's vital role in fostering ethical policies, employee autonomy, social support, constructive feedback, personal growth, and a positive business reputation in organisations. By analysing Ubuntu's existence and application in people management practices, this study highlights the role of contextual sociocultural values in shaping employee well-being and fostering mutual gains. The study's contributions manifest across four interconnected theoretical domains including, challenging Western informed HRM theorisation, enhancing contextual cultural sensitivity in well-being theorisation, mutual gains through contextual culture, and enhancing the Job Demands Resources model with a contextually sensitive perspective.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CIPD- Chartered Institute of Personal and Development.

COR- Conservation of Resources Model.

DCM- Demand Control Model.

DCSM-Demand Control Support Model.

ERI- Effort Reward Imbalance model.

HRM – Human Resource Management.

HPWS- High Performance Work System.

ILO- International Labour Organisation.

JDR – Job Demands Resources Model.

OECD- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

QWL – Quality of work life

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Employee well-being has emerged as a central point of focus in contemporary workplaces, profoundly influencing employee productivity, attributing to actualising organisation goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006; Jian et al., 2012; Turban & Yan, 2016; Schaufeli, 2017; Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Li et al., 2022). Human Resource Management (HRM) literature has posited that employee well-being is a direct outcome of HRM practices (Legge, 1998; Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). Consequently, a growing body of research has underscored the essence of integrating well-being into HRM strategies, contending that such an approach is essential for optimising both individual and organisational performance (Boxall & Macky, 2009; Van De Voorde et al., 2012; Guest, 2017; Cooper et al., 2019; Li et al., 2022). This discourse highlights the critical interplay between HRM practices and employee well-being, positioning them as fundamental determinants of workplace success (Li et al., 2022).

Promoting employee well-being through HRM practices represents both a justified and strategic approach, underpinned by several key considerations. First, scholars have increasingly acknowledged the ethical imperative of embedding employee well-being within HRM frameworks, positioning it not only as a moral obligation but also as an inherent component of contemporary HRM practices (Legge, 1998; Guest, 2017; Cooper et al., 2019). Moreover, the responsibility for employee well-being has evolved beyond an optional initiative to a core organisational obligation, comparable to the way organisations are held accountable for their profitability and overall performance (Peccei et al., 2013; Bryson et al., 2017). This paradigm shift reflects a growing recognition that an organisation's long-term success is not solely contingent upon traditional performance metrics but also hinges on the well-being of its workforce (Guest, 2017; Ho & Kuvaas, 2020).

Additionally, scholars have highlighted how evolving workplace trends including heightened competition, and digital transformation pose significant challenges to employee well-being (Guest, 2017; Cooper et al., 2019). These societal and organisational shifts have made employee well-being an even more critical factor in ensuring organisational sustainability (Cooper et al., 2019). Empirical studies reinforce this argument, demonstrating that higher levels of employee well-being are positively associated with increased organisational commitment, work engagement, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Daniel & Harris,

2000; Hauff et al., 2020). Moreover, enhanced employee well-being contributes to tangible organisational benefits, including reduced absenteeism and lower turnover rates, thereby strengthening overall organisational effectiveness, and competitiveness (Wright & Huang, 2012; Beer et al., 2015; Hauff et al., 2020). The growing recognition of these outcomes has ignited substantial interest in means to promote and enhance employee well-being within HRM frameworks (Van De Voorde et al., 2013). Reinforcing the argument that HRM practices play a pivotal role in shaping employee well-being (Huang et al., 2015; Turban & Yan, 2016; Otoo, 2018). Consequently, the integration of employee well-being into HRM practices is not only ethically sound but also a critical driver of organisational success and competitiveness (Cooper et al., 2019).

In light of this, attention has increasingly turned to how HRM practices can be leveraged to enhance employee well-being (Van De Voorde et al., 2012; Cooper et al., 2019; Li et al., 2022). This shift has led to increasing demands for HRM frameworks that prioritise workplace resources and cultivate positive employee experiences and relationships through effective policies and strategies (Edgar et al., 2015; Schaufeli, 2017; Hauff et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022).

However, despite the growing recognition on the significance of HRM in fostering employee well-being (Li et al., 2022), critiques persist regarding traditional performance focused HRM approaches. Conventional HRM strategies including commitment-oriented, motivation-enhancing, and skill-enhancing practices, often prioritise performance outcomes over employee well-being, resulting in one sided benefit (Edgar et al., 2015; Guest, 2017; Cooper et al., 2019; Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). These forms of HRM see employee well-being as a means to an end rather than an end to itself (Edgar et al., 2015). This critique has fuelled calls for more employee centered HRM strategies that balance organisational goals with the well-being of the workforce (Van De Voorde et al., 2012; Guest, 2017; Hauff et al., 2020). By building workers into HRM and shifting focus towards employee outcomes, organisations can create a more supportive and empowering work environment that brings in gains for employees and employer (Gust, 2002; Peccei et al., 2013; Guest, 2017; Cooper et al., 2018). This alternative approach not only enhances employee well-being but also supports the dual objectives of the "mutual gains" model, where both employees and employers' benefit from enhanced performance and well-being (Kochan & Osterman, 1994; Edgar et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2019; Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2019).

This 'mutual gains' perspective posits that employees experience enhanced well-being and job satisfaction, while organisations reap the benefits of enhanced performance and productivity (Peccei et al., 2013). Although the principles of the mutual gains model have garnered renewed attention in recent years, their origins can be traced back to the 1980s in the Harvard model of HRM, developed by Beer et al. (1985), commonly referred to as the 'soft' approach to HRM. This approach emphasises the necessity of integrating employee well-being as a fundamental component of organisational success (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020).

Nonetheless, in an ongoing effort to ascertain the most effective HRM strategies for enhancing employee well-being, various frameworks have been developed. One example is the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model, proposed by Demerouti et al., (2001). This model highlights the significance of HRM resources that not only reduce job-related pressures but also motivate employees, providing them with the necessary tools to succeed in their tasks while encouraging personal growth (Bakker et al., 2003; Schaufeli, 2017). By fostering employee well-being, the JD-R model, much like the mutual gains approach, creates a dynamic where both employees and employers' benefit, supporting increased satisfaction and enhanced performance.

Building on the argument of mutual gains and the role of HRM in promoting employee well-being (Edgar et al., 2015), there remains a lack of consensus on effective approaches to achieving mutual gains. One of the key reasons for this is the ongoing inconsistencies and paradox within well-being literature (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). Specifically, researchers differ in how they conceptualise well-being, some treat it as a single, unified construct (Peccei et al., 2013), while others argue for a more multifaceted approach, considering psychological, physical, and social dimensions (Diener, 1994; Wright, 2014). This inconsistency complicates and contradicts efforts to integrate well-being into HRM frameworks because different definitions of well-being lead to different HRM priorities and interventions. As a result, HRM practices aiming to enhance well-being within the mutual gains perspective struggle to fully address employee needs, as well-being is not always conceptualised in a way that captures its full complexity. Addressing this requires a more cohesive understanding of well-being within HRM to ensure that strategies are both comprehensive and effective in promoting sustainable mutual gains.

Nonetheless, it is also crucial to understand that well-being further lacks a global universal understanding or definition and is significantly shaped by contextual culture (Joshani, 2018).

This perspective has led to an interest in examining how various cultural frameworks, such as those prominent in Africa influence perceptions of well-being (Fellman, 2018). The African philosophy of Ubuntu provides a distinct approach to understanding societal and organisational well-being. Ubuntu emphasises values of mutual compassion, respect, and interconnectedness, which are fundamental to fostering well-being in African contexts (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005; Nzimakwe, 2014). Historically, Ubuntu has been instrumental in advancing mutuality, justice, freedom, and human welfare during the post-colonial period (Karsten & Illa, 2005), and its principles are increasingly recognised as relevant in organisational and HRM practices (Sigger et al., 2010; Mangaliso et al., 2021).

Thus, by incorporating Ubuntu values into HRM strategies, organisations can effectively and sustainably promote employee well-being, fostering a workplace culture rooted in respect, compassion and mutual respect (Tauetsile, 2021). This approach not only strengthens the bond between employees and organisations, aligning with the mutual gains' perspective, but also resonates with broader visions of a harmonious and inclusive workplace (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Brubaker, 2013). Moreover, Mbigi (2001) points at Ubuntu as a management style that prioritises mutual benefit by encouraging and empowering individuals to reach their full potential. It is argued that principles of mutuality within Ubuntu contribute seamlessly to the common good for both employees and the employer within organisations (Nzimakwe, 2014; Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019), enabling both the organisation and its members to thrive (Sigger et al., 2010). Furthermore, Ubuntu's inherent focus on collective well-being and the common good aligns seamlessly with efforts to mitigate the negative effects of contemporary HRM practices, particularly high-performance work systems, which often compromise employee well-being (Van De Voorde et al., 2012; Boxall & Macky, 2014; Huang et al., 2015; Guest, 2017; Li et al., 2022). As Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) assert, any system that undermines human well-being is fundamentally incompatible with Ubuntu's values, which prioritise the intrinsic worth of people (employees) above all else.

In the context of HRM, Ubuntu underscores the importance of organisations focusing on the support and care of their employees (Sigger et al., 2010; Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019). However, this approach does not imply that HRM should neglect performance and profitability, as demonstrated by high-performance work systems (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). Rather, Ubuntu promotes the integration of its human-cantered and morally responsible principles to expand beyond the narrow focus of maximising owner value (Lutz, 2009). As a result, it encourages a

balanced approach that meets the expectations of all stakeholders and generates value for everyone within the organisation (Woermann & Engelbrecht, 2017). Building on this foundation, the thesis explores the application of Ubuntu within HRM practices considering the potential for mutual gains. Further rationale for the research is presented in the next section.

1.1 Research rationale

This research is driven by two critical needs: the culturally sensitive approach in HRM and the need to harmonise employee well-being with organisational outcomes. Using the African philosophy of Ubuntu as a cultural lens.

Firstly, the embedding of contextual culture including Ubuntu within employee well-being conceptions remains insufficiently explored, despite its recognised potential to enhance collective well-being from an African perspective (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Nzimakwe, 2014; Chetty & Price, 2024). Research on well-being across cultures has highlighted variations at multiple levels, including differences in definition, interpretation, lived experiences, and influencing factors to this, which all have differencing impact on employee well-being (Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Taylor et al., 2004; Joshanloo, 2014; Bieda et al., 2017). Consequently, a significant gap exists in the understanding of how cultural value systems shape employee well-being within the workplace context (Joshanloo, 2014). In response to this gap, the present study seeks to provide empirical insights into the effects of Ubuntu-based HRM strategies/approaches on employee well-being (Schaufeli 2017; Hauff et al., 2020). Through this focus on Ubuntu as a foundational element to employee well-being strategies in an African workplace (Chetty & Price, 2024), this research not only expands the understanding of culturally embedded management practices but also brings to light alternative, context-sensitive approaches to fostering employee well-being. This argument is further enhanced and explored in Chapter 2 and relates to RQ1.

Secondly there is lack of understanding on the apparent intersection between contextual culture and HRM practices. In the case of Ubuntu, previous studies have explored its influence on management practices (Mangaliso, 2001; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Sigger et al., 2010; Poovan, 2006; Nzimakwe, 2014;) but give limited insights on how specific cultural values can shape HRM frameworks across different workplace levels (Molose et al., 2018; Meyer & Boninelli, 2021).

Despite growing recognition of the significance of contextual and cultural factors in shaping organisational practices, a substantial gap remains in HRM research regarding how local cultural values and societal contexts influence the design, implementation, and effectiveness of HRM policies and practices, especially in non-Western settings. Much of the prevailing HRM literature is still rooted in universalist models developed within Euro-American contexts, often presuming the transferability of HRM practices across cultures while neglecting the deeply embedded socio-cultural logics that inform workplace behaviours and management philosophies (Jackson, 2004; Horwitz & Budhwar, 2015). This oversight has led to a deficiency in well-developed HRM frameworks that account for diverse cultural contexts, rendering HRM strategies less applicable and relevant across various global perspectives.

In the African context, this gap is particularly evident. Although cultural philosophies such as Ubuntu have been extensively recognised for their potential to foster ethical, people-centred, and relational management approaches, empirical understanding of how these values can be effectively integrated into HRM systems at multiple levels including organisational policy, task design, and individual experiences remains limited. Consequently, Ubuntu is frequently perceived as abstract or rhetorical, with its practical applicability in HRM largely undertheorized and underutilised (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Lutz, 2009; Molose et al., 2019; Tautsile, 2021). This study seeks to address this gap by employing Ubuntu as a case study to examine how culturally rooted values can inform context-sensitive HRM frameworks, with a focus on enhancing employee well-being across both public and private sector organisations in Africa. A more detailed exploration of this gap and literature is elaborated in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4, and further investigated under RQ2.

Thirdly, a research gap exists in understanding how contextual factors influence the application of Ubuntu in HRM practices. While there is much speculation about Ubuntu's presence in African organisations (Sigger et al., 2010; Chetty & Price, 2024), there remains limited clarity on the specific contextual factors that may shape its effectiveness and applicability within HRM. To address this gap, this study examines how Ubuntu can be applied differently in HRM across the public and private sectors, each with distinct organisational context. By uncovering sector -specific dynamics, this research provides HR managers with insights on how to adapt Ubuntu informed HRM strategies more effectively, ultimately enhancing the impact of Ubuntu

in HRM practices. This argument is expanded in Chapter 4 and further investigated under RQ3.

Finally, a significant research gap exists in contemporary HRM practices regarding mutual gains approaches that balances and equally prioritises the outcomes and needs of both the employer and its employees (Guest, 2017; Cooper et al., 2019). Due to intensified global business competition and escalating business pressures, HRM approaches are increasingly focused on performance outcomes, at the neglect of employees (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Guest, 2017; Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). Consequently, modern HRM practices tend to emphasise efficiency and profitability, sidelining employee well-being and fostering an environment where organisational performance success is pursued with limited attention to employee needs (Li et al., 2022; Hauff et al., 2020). This prevailing emphasis on performance metrics highlights the urgent need for alternative HRM models that embed employee well-being as an integral aspect of organisational success (Van De Voorde, 2010; Ogbonnaya et al., 2017; Pecci & Van De Voorde, 2019; Cooper et al., 2019; Park & Park, 2020; Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). Addressing this gap, the mutual gains approach advocates for HR frameworks that yield benefits for both employers and employees, suggesting that placing well-being at the forefront of HRM can complement and even enhance overall performance rather than compromise it (Kochman & Osterman, 1994). This study therefore seeks to explore how Ubuntu values can support a mutual gains HRM framework that aligns organisational performance goals with employee well-being and ultimately fostering a dual process and sustainable workplace success. Rooted in values of mutual support and respect (Poovan et al., 2006; Chetty & Price, 2024), Ubuntu provides a valuable cultural perspective for understanding HRM practices supporting mutual gains. This perspective is explored in Chapter 4 and investigated under RQ4.

1.2 Research questions, methodology and contributions

This research aims to investigate how HRM practices, guided by the African philosophy of Ubuntu, can simultaneously promote employee well-being and performance or organisational success. As part of this overall aim, the thesis considers the relationship between the understanding of Ubuntu principles and individual experiences of well-being. It then develops a theoretical framework to explore organisational factors influencing the operationalisation of Ubuntu in HRM practices considering the perspectives of both individual employees and

managers. Building upon the research gaps identified in section 1.1, four key research questions are developed in Chapter 4.

1. To what extent do Ubuntu values contribute to individual employee experiences of general life well-being including sense of purpose, meaning and fulfilment?
2. In what ways are Ubuntu values reflected as resources in organisational HRM practices at multiple levels, including (a) organisational/business policy level, (b) job/task level, (c) individual employee level?
3. How does external and internal organisational context influence the application of Ubuntu values in HRM; specifically, what role is played by (a) the African context in terms of historical and cultural legacies, (b) sectoral dynamics (public versus private sector), and (c) leadership and management styles?
4. How does the influence of contextual factors and the utilisation of Ubuntu within HRM practices, shape the likelihood of achieving mutual gains for employers and employees?

The empirical study involved an ethnographic investigation conducted over a three-month period, focusing on three case study organisations in Zambia, one in the public and two in the private sector. This involved observing the daily management and employee behaviours and practices of Ubuntu in the workplace. Interviews were carried out with management, HR staff and employees in lower positions who were purposively selected. The interviews were open ended allowing for participants to give unlimited response and be as much detailed as they possibly could be. The study also made use of document analysis by reading the organisation manuals, employee handbooks, conditions of employment, job offer letters, job descriptions to understand the existing HRM policies and practices of Ubuntu within these organisations.

The findings make four key contributions around the theoretical understanding and practical relevance of Ubuntu within HRM in diverse organisational settings. Firstly, the study details Ubuntu's role in achieving mutual gains within HRM in the African context. By integrating Ubuntu values such as mutual care, and respect, into HRM practices, the research introduces a fresh approach to HRM, demonstrating how Ubuntu-informed HRM practices promote employee well-being and organisational success, thereby fostering mutual gains through a cultural perspective. This challenges the dominant Western performance-focused HRM models by prioritising employee dignity and community-oriented values, offering a more ethical HRM model applicable to both regional and global HRM practices.

Secondly, this thesis demonstrates how Ubuntu can be integrated into HRM practices and serve as a work-related resource within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. Specifically, it provides practical insights into how Ubuntu values of solidarity, compassion, respect, and survival function as key resources across different organisational levels, including policy, job/task, and individual levels. At the job/task level, the study illustrates how Ubuntu fosters autonomy, social support, and constructive feedback, aligning with essential resources in the JD-R model. This linkage highlights the complementary role of Ubuntu in enhancing employee well-being and motivation.

Third, the study contributes to the broader understanding of well-being by illustrating how Ubuntu solidarity, respect, and relatedness foster positive individual well-being experiences. In doing so, the study positions Ubuntu as more than an Afrocentric or cultural philosophy. It broadens the scope of Ubuntu as a universal model of well-being that transcends cultural boundaries, enriching academic discourse and challenging the Western-centric epistemologies often dominant in well-being studies.

Lastly, the study has practical implications for effectively integrating Ubuntu-based HRM practices in both public and private sectors. The exploration of specific individual needs, organisational context and sectoral differences presents a nuanced understanding of how Ubuntu can be operationalised in diverse organisational settings. This goes beyond general claims of Ubuntu's benefits, offering context-specific insights essential for the successful implementation of Ubuntu in HRM practices and the achievement of meaningful outcomes across sectors.

1.3 Thesis structure

This thesis is organised in 10 chapters, including the introduction and conclusion.

Chapter 2 begins by engaging and exploring the concept of well-being from a general perspective, then narrowing down to the workplace. It does so through an African lens of Ubuntu using culture as a backdrop. The rationale here is threefold. First, this discussion speaks directly to RQ1, which seeks to examine how Ubuntu contributes to individual well-being. Second, it responds to the wider contextual argument as introduced in section 1.1 where Ubuntu is recognised to have potential to influence well-being perceptions and experiences in

an African context. Third, as the broader research aim considers the relationship between the understanding of Ubuntu and individual experiences of well-being. Chapter 2 provides an exploration of how the interlinked and interconnected concepts within Ubuntu values can lead to wellbeing. This conceptual synthesis is necessary to understand how wellbeing is experienced, interpreted and perceived in the context of Africa. In this way, Chapter 2 presents Ubuntu as both an indigenous worldview and a culturally grounded explanatory framework for understanding peculiar well-being interpretations in Africa. This for the cultural and conceptual basis for subsequent empirical inquiries in the thesis.

Building on this, Chapter 3 moves from the cultural -philosophical framing of Ubuntu and well-being to a more HRM orientation within the workplace. It critically explores contemporary HRM approaches, and in particular evidence linking workplace resources with well-being. The chapter deliberately broadens the analytical scope to consider the multiple HRM perspectives of mutual gains, conflicting interests and well-being centred models and how these interact or intersect withing a workplace setting. It also serves as a way to establish the relevance and impact of HRM and its varied perspectives on well-being in the workplace. This analytical shift in Chapter 3 is purposeful, to bring in to view the HRM aspects that influence on well-being of employees. This chapter echoes the significance of HRM practices providing effective resources, thus preparing the ground for deeper engagement with how Ubuntu may operate as a resource within HRM practices and ultimately investigating RQ2: in what ways Ubuntu acts as a resource in HRM practices at different workplace levels.

Chapter 4 presents the case for exploring mutual gains by applying Ubuntu within African HRM practices, specifically in the context of organisational dynamics. This chapter examines how Ubuntu philosophy can be integrated into HRM to foster mutually beneficial outcomes for employees and employers. It also considers key historical, social, and cultural factors influencing its adoption within African workplaces. Furthermore, Chapter 4 synthesises the literature from the preceding chapters to present the research questions and a conceptual framework that guides the empirical analysis of Ubuntu's role in achieving mutual gains.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodology, detailing the research approach for data collection and analysis, with a particular emphasis on the case study organisations in Zambia. Chapter 6 presents the findings relating to the influence of Ubuntu on individual well-being (RQ1). It offers a detailed examination of how Ubuntu shapes personal experiences and overall life well-being.

Chapter 7 presents findings on a multilevel perspective on the application of Ubuntu within HRM practices (RQ2), while Chapter 8 presents findings on how organisational contexts including African historical and cultural legacies, industry sectors, and leadership roles influence the use of Ubuntu in HRM practices (RQ3). This chapter offers a deeper understanding of contextual factors shaping Ubuntu's implementation in HRM. Chapter 9 then integrates these insights through RQ4 examining the ways Ubuntu contributes to mutual gains within varying organisational contexts, highlighting how Ubuntu can balance employee and employer interests within African workplaces. Finally, Chapter 10, discusses key research findings, theoretical and practical contributions of the research, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Understanding General and Workplace Well-being from a Cultural Perspective - the Case of Ubuntu

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses well-being within the African context, providing an understanding of how the notion is distinctly interpreted and practiced within this context. The arguments presented in this chapter highlight the values associated with well-being experiences in African societies, emphasising that cultural values have a central function in shaping people's perceptions and understanding of well-being (Ryff et al., 2014; Schwartz, 2017; Fellmann, 2018). Particular attention is drawn to Ubuntu as an African philosophy that embodies principles of humanity, and reciprocity or mutuality in all life endeavours (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019; Chetty & Price, 2024). This philosophy offers a distinctive perspective on well-being emphasising the strength of communal bonds, familial interconnectedness, and respect, contrasting sharply with the individualistic paradigms common in the Western culture (Mangaliso et al., 2018; Metz, 2021 Chetty & Price, 2024).

The inclusion of philosophical and theoretical perspectives on well-being in this chapter is intentional as it serves a foundational role within this thesis. Firstly, these perspectives provide conceptual foundation for understanding how well-being is culturally constructed in the context of Africa. By grounding the discussion in both theoretical constructs and cultural philosophy, this chapter establishes a basis for analysing the relational values of Ubuntu that shape well-being perceptions and experiences in African societies. This discussion directly contributes to RQ1 which examines how Ubuntu influences individual well-being. By situating well-being within the cultural and social dynamics of Ubuntu, the Chapter proposes that well-being is not solely an individual experience, but one embedded in and shaped by contextual culture. In doing so, it illustrates the culturally situated ways in which well-being is pursued, experienced and expressed in both daily life and in the workplace in African context.

2.1 Perceptions of well-being in a broader life context

The concept of well-being, as explored by researchers, encompasses multiple dimensions and is deeply rooted in both philosophy and psychology (Dana & Griffin, 1999; Kashdan, 2008; Lamarche & Marchand, 2019). Foundational studies by Danna & Griffin (1999), Ryan & Deci (2001), Fisher (2014), and Huta & Waterman (2014) have extended the understanding of well-

being beyond mere physical health, emphasising its complex and multifaceted nature. These studies consider a broad spectrum of influential factors that contribute to an individual's overall well-being experience, reinforcing its inherently interdisciplinary characteristic (Brailovskaia et al., 2022).

Even though the concept of well-being is complex, it is generally linked to optimal functioning and experience (Deci & Ryan, 2001; Cvenkel, 2018). This encompasses notions of a good life and happiness (Ryff, 1989; Deci & Ryan, 2001; Sahai & Mahapatra, 2020). However, due to the broad nature of how these concepts have been covered, well-being is understood in a variety of ways (Ryff et al., 2013). Such variability arises because the factors that bring optimal experience amongst individuals and societies vary significantly and are not tied to specific aspects of life experiences and orientations (Deci & Ryan, 2001). Despite such diversity, a common perspective on well-being emphasises its fundamental association with life satisfaction (Huta, 2015). However, researchers like Warr (2002) contend that well-being goes beyond satisfaction involving a more positive perception that includes contentment with one's environment. One can also assert that well-being is beyond satisfaction but encompasses a holistic, meaningful, and fulfilled life; each of these concepts are more complex than satisfaction. Moreover, Baumeister et al., (2013) further reasons that meaningfulness is substantially more complex because it requires a consideration and interpretation of various circumstances drawing from culturally mediated ideas and different abstract values. Warr (2006), on the other hand, defines well-being as the feeling of good or bad.

Although most well-being researchers recognise well-being as a multidimensional concept (Diener et al, 2018; Thorsteinsen & Vitterso, 2018), it is often categorised into two primary perspectives: hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Henderson & Knight, 2012; Tov, 2018).

Hedonia, a foundational concept in the study of well-being, is centred on the feeling of pleasant or unpleasant experience and the pursuit of fun, comfort, pleasure, and avoidance of pain (Thorsteinsen & Vitterso (2018). It posits that human fulfilment is derived from successful pursuit of human appetites and enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Huta, 2013). Consequently, proponents of hedonic well-being argue that the maximisation of individual pleasure and self-interest is essential to building a good society (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Nonetheless, in contemporary research, hedonia is closely associated with subjective well-being focusing on individual evaluation of life through the lens of positive emotions and experiences (Disabato et al., 2016; Lamarche & Marchand, 2019). Moreover, the philosophical roots of a hedonic

well-being perspective can be traced back to Aristippus, the Greek philosopher who posited that the ultimate goal of life is to achieve pleasure and happiness (Disabato et al., 2016).

Given that hedonia was among the earliest conceptualisations of well-being, it has remained a central reference point in philosophical and psychological discourse of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Lamarche & Marchand, 2019). Consequently, many scholars argue that the pursuit of pleasure enjoyment and happiness is the foundational driver of well-being (Fisher, 2014). However, the concept has been criticised for its narrow focus, as it equates happiness solely with pleasure, overlooking the complexities of human experiences (Henderson & Knight, 2012). Critics of hedonic well-being perspective argue that activities such as engaging in harmful behaviours like substance abuse may provide short term pleasure but do not necessarily contribute to enduring well-being (Henderson & Knight, 2012). Thus, while hedonia highlights the significance of pleasure, it remains limited in its capacity to fully capture the full breadth of human flourishing. Moreover, Aristotle's critique of hedonia as a superficial and vulgar pursuit, suitable only for lesser beings, underscores his belief that it enslaves humans to transient pleasures and bodily desires, diverting attention from the more profound elements of life that foster long-term fulfilment (Henderson & Knight, 2012). Despite the criticism levelled against the concept of hedonia being notable, (Ryan and Deci, 2001), one can compellingly contend that it remains a crucial aspect of overall well-being (Huta, 2015). This is because hedonia encompasses both affective and cognitive components of well-being, offering an essential perspective of individual life experiences (Huta & Ryan, 2010). The affective component representing a balance of the pleasant effects and the cognitive component representing an evaluation of life based on one's priorities (Chebotareva, 2015). However, several Western and Eastern scholars posit that happiness and subjective well-being, while important, are insufficient as the sole criteria for holistic well-being (Huta, 2013). They argue that true well-being transcends momentary happiness, involving a more complex state of functioning well, flourishing, pursuit of meaningful goals and fulfilment of core values (Thorsteinsen & Vitterso, 2018; Sahai & Mahapatra, 2020).

In contrast, the second historical concept of well-being, eudaimonia shifts its foci towards cultivation of meaning, excellence, personal growth, flourishing, and the realisation of one's full potential through moral and virtuous conduct (Deci & Ryan, 2006). In contemporary well-being studies, eudaimonia is often equated to psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2001; De Simone, 2014; Huta, 2015). Originally conceptualised by Aristotle in the fourth century

B.C.E in his seminal work *Nicomachean Ethics*, eudaimonia represents the pursuit of a virtuous and reasoned life as the goal of human existence, standing contrastingly to a life cantered on hedonic pleasures (Aristotle, 1985; Huta, 2015). As posited by Ryff and Singer (2008), the essence of eudaimonic well-being lies in the positive human experience and functioning which emanates from fulfilling deeply held values and priorities. Proponents of this approach argue that well-being is intrinsically tied to living a purposeful life in line with one's authentic self, personal goals, and guiding principles (Waterman, 1993; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Consequently, Deci & Ryan (2006) and Schwartz et al., (2018) assert that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are grounded in a variety of human values and beliefs that influence societal behaviour. For example, Huta (2013) posits that religion is the cornerstone of eudaimonic well-being, suggesting that religious beliefs play a significant role in cultivating meaningful and deeply fulfilling life. As a philosophical concept, eudaimonia advocates for justice, kindness, generosity, and courage (Huta, 2015). These aspects are also deeply embedded in religious traditions, including Islam and Christianity which both emphasise living a virtuous and morally upright life (Aquinas, 1981; Al-Ghazali, 1991; Abdul-Rahman, 2018; Griffiths, 2019).

By aligning these principles, individuals are believed to attain a sense of peace, fulfilment, and well-being (Huta, 2015; Seligman, 2002). To strengthen this perspective, De Simone (2014) highlights that principles within eudaimonia are intertwined with Confucianism, which provides ethical principles guiding individuals towards moral ethical behaviour. The Confucian concept of Ren, emphasising compassion, kindness and empathy fosters morally virtues essential to eudaimonia well-being (Wahing, 2021). Similarly, Li a Confucian concept, promotes social harmony through orderly conduct to society (Wang & Liu, 2017), as also emphasised in eudaimonia well-being (Huta, 2015). Other Confucian principles include Xin, focusing on truthfulness, Yi, emphasising moral integrity and self-discipline, and Zhi, stressing practical wisdom, further relate to the concept of eudaimonia. This intersection of eudaimonia with Confucianism suggests a broader connection between moral principles within eudaimonia well-being and cultural values. This includes parallels with African values such as Ubuntu, which similarly emphasise respect and humanness (Elejo, 2014).

Despite ongoing research, a clear distinction between hedonia and eudaimonia as constructs of well-being remains elusive (Henderson & Knight, 2012). Adding on to this, Disabato et al., (2016) notes that while these dimensions sometimes diverge, they also complement one another. This ongoing debate has yet to reach consensus (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Huta, 2020),

leading to the development of a combined conceptualisation in which both perspectives are viewed as integral to the full experience of well-being (Henderson & Knight, 2012; Giuntoli et al., 2021). Their interaction highlights the role of personal values in shaping the perception of a good and meaningful life. The distinction between these constructs lies primarily in their differing life orientations and focal points and is deeply influenced by the values associated with each well-being perspective (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Consequently, well-being is not a fixed notion but is contingent on both individual and societal values, which may emphasise hedonic, eudaimonic, or a synthesised approach to well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Chebotareva, 2015). Therefore, the definition of well-being is context-dependent, shaped by the values prevalent in a particular context (Joshanloo, 2014; Fellman, 2018).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020) and contemporary discourse on well-being often equate life well-being with a high standard of life emphasising material security and wealth acquisition as primary indicators of well-being. While material conditions are undeniably important for human survival, they do not fully capture and represent the essence of well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Because their effects on long-term happiness and fulfilment are limited (Diener & Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). This is also supported by Easterlin (1974), who categorically argued and observed that increase in material conditions including income do not correspondingly and consistently lead to greater well-being, suggesting that the correlation between income and happiness is weak.

Waterman (1993) further asserts that ethical values contribute more to well-being than material wealth. Moreover, Veenhoven (2008) and Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002) maintain that while material conditions contribute to well-being to some extent, other factors, such as meaningful relationships, become increasingly pivotal to well-being. Therefore, Joshanloo (2014) emphasises the importance of moral and ethical principles in shaping life satisfaction, aligning with Aristotle's (1925) view that true well-being arises from virtuous living rather than material wealth. In line with this, Deci and Ryan (2006) argue that well-being is achieved when an individual's activities align with their deeply held values. Consequently, Joshanloo (2012) and Ryff et al., (2014) highlight the critical role of societal cultural values in determining what brings individuals fulfilment and happiness.

2.1.0 Significance of cultural values to life well-being perceptions

It is widely recognised that the values associated with well-being differ across societies, primarily due to variations in cultural backgrounds (Joshani, 2012; Schwartz, 2017; Fellman, 2018). This perspective challenges the prevailing assumption that well-being can be understood in a culturally neutral manner. Despite the increasing interconnectedness of the world, where globalisation seemingly harmonises many aspects of life, cultural distinctions remain powerful forces that continue to shape people's perceptions and values concerning well-being (Ryff et al., 2014). Scholars have long stressed that individuals' evaluations of well-being are intricately tied to societal norms, deeply held beliefs, and longstanding traditions (Chebotareva, 2015; Steel et al., 2018). Christopher (1999) expands on this by arguing that the very concept and dimensions of well-being are inextricably linked to cultural contexts, as all interpretations of well-being are inherently moral constructs, shaped by the specific values and ethical frameworks of respective cultures. Thus, the understanding of well-being cannot be universally defined but must be considered within the moral and cultural fabric of each society (Fellman, 2018).

Modern scholars increasingly highlight the critical role of culture in shaping our understanding and experience of well-being. Researchers such as Joshani (2019) argue that well-being is not a universally applicable or static concept; rather it is deeply intertwined with cultural values and concepts. This suggests that any meaningful assessment of well-being must be culturally grounded, acknowledging the specific norms, values, and societal frameworks of individuals and communities involved or rather in question. However, despite these insights, much of the current literature, particularly from Western perspectives, continues to adopt culturally neutral frameworks for conceptualising and operationalising well-being (Joshani, 2019). These models often assume that well-being can be understood and measured independently of cultural context, overlooking the fact that well-being is inherently tied to cultural beliefs, and practices across different contexts (Dodge et al., 2012; Fellman, 2018; Schwartz et al., 2018). This oversight is a significant shortfall of well-being, as culture plays a pivotal role in shaping how individuals perceive and pursue their well-being throughout life. For instance, Ryff et al., (2014) demonstrates how cultural differences influence well-being orientations, whether emphasising individual achievement and autonomy or communal harmony and interdependence. Similarly, Fellman (2018) notes that what is considered essential to well-being in one culture may be viewed differently in another, reinforcing the idea that a culturally neutral approach may miss crucial dimensions of well-being that are context dependent. In light of these complexities, it is essential for researchers to move beyond the one-size fits all models

and embrace a more nuanced, culturally informed understanding of well-being that reflects the diverse ways in which people conceptualise and strive for a good life.

Gerhart and Fang (2005) underscore the significance of culture in offering profound insights into the shared values and distinctive elements that shape the diverse lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals within a society. Culture, as a multifaceted construct, encompasses a broad spectrum of components, including capabilities, habits, practices, beliefs, laws, morals, values, and customs (Spencer-Otey, 2012). Given its complexity, culture serves as a foundational lens through which well-being can be understood as a cultural construct, reflecting the deeply held beliefs and values regarding what constitutes a fulfilled, satisfied, and high-quality life (Ryff et al., 2014). This perspective aligns with Lu's (2012) assertion that well-being encompasses a full spectrum of elements that contribute to a meaningful and worthwhile life.

The intricate relationship between well-being and culture highlights their inherent interconnectedness, revealing what individuals prioritise and value most in their lives. Tov and Diener (2007) further argue that each society has unique aspects of well-being, best understood through the lens of its local culture. This suggests that well-being is not a universal concept but is instead shaped by cultural specifics (Fellman, 2018). Therefore, to fully comprehend what constitutes well-being in different societies, it is crucial to consider the cultural contexts in which these conceptions are embedded. Viewing well-being through a cultural framework allows for a richer and more nuanced understanding of what makes life meaningful across various contexts (Fellman, 2018).

This cultural perspective on well-being also implies that deep-seated beliefs about well-being differ across contexts, as highlighted by scholars such as Lu (2012) and Joshanloo (2012). For instance, there is a marked distinction between how well-being is perceived in Eastern, Western, and African contexts (Hu et al., 2014). In African societies, well-being is often anchored in the concept of Ubuntu, which emphasises moral humanism and the intrinsic value of respecting and supporting others, a principle that is deeply treasured as a cornerstone of well-being (Elejo & Kanu, 2014). In contrast, Eastern - Chinese culture tends to value well-being through the pursuit of the greater good and the cultivation of virtuous relationships, exemplified by the concept of Guanxi (Lu, 2012). On the other hand, Western societies often equate well-being with material success, status, and financial prosperity, reflecting a focus on tangible achievements as indicators of a well-lived life (Fellman, 2018; White, 2008). White

(2008) conceptualises well-being in Western societies as encompassing “doing well and feeling good”. In Western contexts, “doing well” is primarily linked to the material dimension of well-being, with a principal focus of attaining and sustaining material success and economic stability (Aisyahrani et al., 2020). This materialistic perspective positions tangible achievements such as financial prosperity and economic security as central indicators of a good life and overall well-being.

In contrast, the concept of well-being in African contexts places a stronger emphasis on “doing good” through maintaining communality, morality, virtuousness, humanness as primary ways for having a fulfilling life (White, 2008; Nzimakwe, 2014). The patriots of Africa believe that doing well-materialism is hostile to the African community (Kanu, 2014), but the bedrock of African values is held in social, as well as spiritual and religious values (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005).

Given this, it can be emphasised that the values and approaches of well-being cannot be explained in one single construct, because some values in some contexts are invisible, and others are visible (Schein, 1985). Artifacts are easier to observe (visible surface culture) such as wealth, income, and status for the Western context. The espoused values, which are invisible but important to humans, include a virtuous life and humanness for Africa (West, 2014). For example, courage, humour, honesty, and justice are invisible values of well-being (Huta, 2014). Therefore, it can be argued that some societies treasure the invisible well-being values such as humanity and social connections, whereas other societies treasure the visible well-being values.

Furthermore, the cultural values of society in relation to well-being can be grouped in “*the doing*”, “*the being*”, “*the indulgent*” and “*the human oriented*” (McCarty & Hattwick, 1992; Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). The “doing and indulgence societies” are the ones that believe in pleasure seeking activities, luxury, making a difference to the world, expecting a wealthy life with good facilities and materiality (Hofstede, 2001). Such societies with doing and indulgence values also have a high value towards actualising one’s full potential and participating in society activities. Other cultural values such as being alive and living in peace, is sufficient to life (Hofstede, 2011). To the “being” just being alive, fitting in the world and having social relations is enough for well-being. According to Hofstede (2011) the “being” societies are reluctant with a low sense of urgency and pay less attention to having good material conditions.

Other cultural values include being “human oriented” (House et al., 2004). For the human oriented society, harmony, generosity, compassion, fairness, respect and being treated with empathy is sufficient for well-being. “Human orientation” is the state in which a society encourages its members to be caring, generous, altruistic, fair, kind, and friendly to other members of the society (House et al., 2004). The human oriented culture can also be likened to the embedded culture that believes a meaningful life is established through social connections and collectivist (Schwartz, 2008). In an African cultural context, well-being is valued with a human orientation and embeddedness rich in human ethical values of Ubuntu (Mnyaka & Moltlhabi, 2005; Elejo, 2014).

Mbiti (1969) stated that *“Africans have their own ontology - but it is an extremely anthropocentric ontology in the sense that everything is seen in terms of its relation to man”*. Overall, the values of Africa are based on treating man in a dignified way with a belief in the “being human” concept of Ubuntu (Poovan, 2004). This perspective is further reinforced by Nzimakwe (2014), who notes that true happiness and fulfilment in life are achieved through embracing the collective sense of humanity that is championed in Ubuntu.

2.1.1 Ubuntu’s influence on life well-being in Africa

African well-being is deeply rooted in the concept of Ubuntu (Nzimakwe, 2014), a rich and enduring, social philosophy emphasising collective humanity and moral integrity (Nusbaum, 2003; Sigger et al., 2010). As described by Tutu (1999), the quality of Ubuntu contributes to well-being by fostering resilience through community interconnectedness, support, and respect. Tutu (1999) asserts that Ubuntu principles of human dignity provide a framework for well-being as it helps individuals to survive and retain their humanity despite efforts to dehumanise them.

According to Ramose (1999), Ubuntu encapsulates the fundamental idea that commonality among all humans is more significant than any differences that exist between humans. This principle underscores the significance of unity and shared purpose in fostering well-being in society (Mbigi, 1995; Tutu, 2000). Lutz (2001) recognises that shared humanity and interconnectedness inherent in Ubuntu underpins societal well-being.

This was well eloquently articulated by Nelson Mandela (2006) who stated: *“the common ground of our humanity is greater and more enduring than the differences that divide us, it is so, and it must be so because we share the same fateful human condition, we are creatures of*

blood and bone, idealism, and suffering. Though we differ across cultures and faiths and though history has divided rich from poor free from unfree powerful from powerless and race from race, we are still all branches on the same trees of humanity”.

Brubaker (2013) posits that Ubuntu is a fundamental disposition in which individuals manifest their humanity within the community. This view is reinforced by Mangaliso et al., (2018) who perceives Ubuntu as a collective obligation of preserving human dignity through the communal aspects of human existence. Furthermore, Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2009) describe Ubuntu as the essence of ethical human behaviour.

Originally Ubuntu is a South African Xhosa term that is termed differently across different countries of Africa but denotes the same meaning of “*I am because we are*” or “*because we are, “therefore I am”, umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (Bolden, 2014). A person is a person through other people. A human is made human through humanness, therefore without Ubuntu a person cannot be human (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019) Ubuntu is believed to have been constructed from the bantu terms of “Ubu” which means being and “ntu” which means human (Ramosa, 1999). Consequently, these aphorisms of Ubuntu have led to a wide understanding that Ubuntu is being human- to act responsibly and considerably as human and to live responsibly and considerably as human (Pooven et al., 2005; Molose et al., 2019), to be respectful and polite towards others.

In their study, Mutwarasibo and Iken (2019) note that Ubuntu is a belief that human life is bound with the lives of others, because humans need humans to be human. Just as Molose et al., (2019) put it that Ubuntu expresses the humanity of an individual in relation to others. Mangaliso (2001) tells that Ubuntu is about being a person only through recognition and relationship with others, with essence of togetherness that is advocated for in different African proverbs. In emphasis of its nature of collectiveness, Molose et al., (2018) conceptualise Ubuntu as the promotion of human relations for the good of collectivism. The emphasis of collectiveness within a community is also echoed much in many quotes such as that of Desmond Tutu (2018) “*We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world, when you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity*”. Based on Thakhathi & Netshitangani (2020) some of the African proverbs denoting the essentiality of togetherness in Ubuntu are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Different African proverbs denoting Ubuntu-togetherness value of well-being

Country	Proverb	Translation in English
Zambia	<i>Umunwe umo tausala inda</i>	<i>One finger cannot pick lice</i>
Zambia	<i>Twenda babili temwenso kusosha nya</i>	<i>moving together is not fear but it is relation</i>
Malawi	<i>Mutu umodzi susenza denga</i>	<i>a single head cannot carry the roof</i>
South Africa	<i>Kgetsi ya tsie e kgonwa ke go tshwaraganelwa</i>	<i>numbers have got strength</i>
South Africa	<i>Matimba ya ngwenya i mati</i>	<i>a person is stronger when his or her own people are around</i>
Democratic Republic of Congo	<i>Amagezi muro bagwisha nzweri</i>	<i>wisdom is like fire. People take it from others</i>
Ethiopia	<i>Ballaan fira qabu ila qaba</i>	<i>blind person who has relatives can see</i>

Source: Thakhathi & Netshitangani (2020)

Other conceptualisations of Ubuntu suggest that Ubuntu is the quality of being a person, linking a person to a collective group (Nzimakwe, 2014), stating that “*your pain is my pain*”, *your wealth is my wealth*”, “*your salvation is my salvation*”. Nonetheless, the philosophical tenet of Ubuntu is well articulated by King Martin Luther (Jnr): “*An individual has not started living until he (or she) can rise above the narrow confines of his individual concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity*”.

Bolden (2014) stresses that Ubuntu is best understood as an African social philosophy based on social principles of hospitality and harmony. Because of Ubuntu, the African life is described by Kanu (2017) as “*a way of life emphatically centred upon human interest and values; a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, and by consideration and compassion for human beings*”. Nzimakwe (2014) explicitly gives examples of the practical Ubuntu behaviour.

- The way an individual talks - with good thoughtful words that are uttered in a positive and relaxed manner, considerate of how another person might feel because of the words spoken.
- The way an individual treats other people - in a selfless way that is respectful.
- The way one reacts - in an understanding and compassionate way with willingness to care, help and support other people.
- The way one greets other people - in a friendly manner that shows genuine interest to extensively inquire about the well-being of someone.

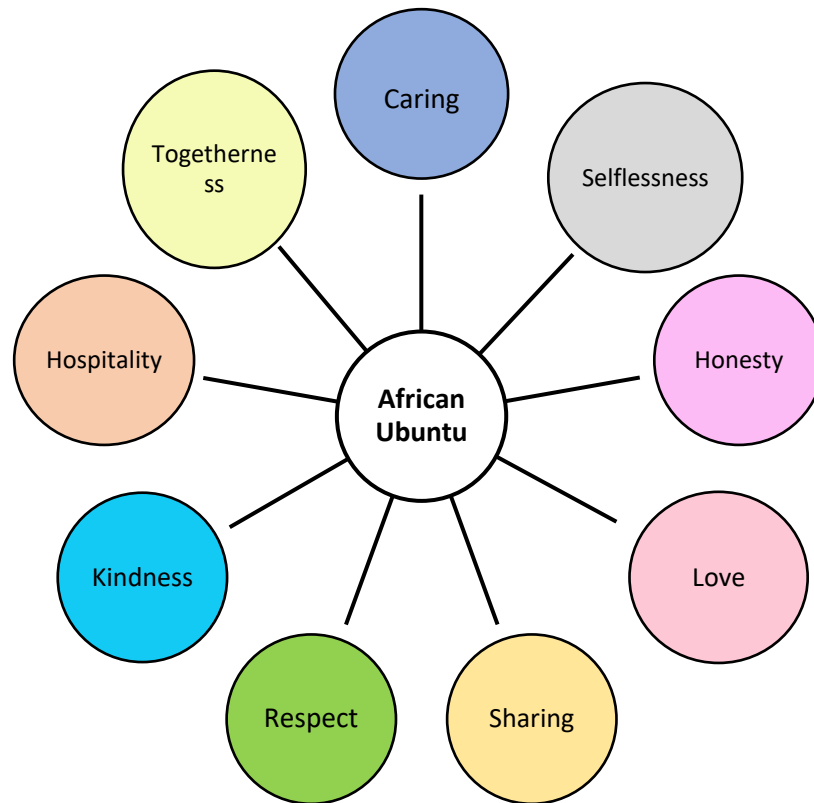
West (2014) identified the ontological and epistemological premise of Ubuntu as lying in its communitarian nature captured in its aphorism of “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, stressing the essence of values such as tolerance of all humankind. Similar concepts denoting Ubuntu have been drawn in societies including China with the term *Jen* (love for humanity). Whilst the Filipino have a term called *Loob* (debt of gratitude). And the Russians have a term called *Obschina* (community).

While Ubuntu has been proposed as a unifying African philosophy (Mangaliso et al., 2018), its applicability may not extend uniformly across the entire continent. The concept manifests under different names and cultural interpretations throughout various African nations, yet it consistently embodies core values of collectivism, mutual care, and shared humanity (Molose et al., 2019). For instance, in Uganda it is known as *Umuntu*, in Zimbabwe's Shona language as *Unhu*, in Botswana's Tswana culture as *Botho*, in Tanzania as *Ujamaa* and *Bumuntu*, in the Democratic Republic of Congo as *Bomoto*, among the Kikuyu of Kenya as *Umundu*, in Angola as *Gimuntu*, in Mozambique as *Vumuntu*, in Malawi as *Umunthu*, in Nigeria as *Omoluabi*, and in Zambia it retains the term *Ubuntu* (Mungumbate & Nyanguru, 2013; Tauetsile, 2021). Despite this linguistic and cultural diversity, the philosophy is globally recognized under the term "Ubuntu."

Ubuntu is argued to be a comprehensive foundation of the African basic thought system, an imperative for social conduct and behaviour (Karsten & Illa, 2005). Despite its philosophical significance, the question of whether Ubuntu is exclusively African or embodies universal human values remains a subject of scholarly debate. Broodryk (2002) contends that Ubuntu is an inherently African value system, deeply rooted in the lived experiences and communal life of Black African communities. In contrast, Nzimakwe (2014) argues that Ubuntu encompasses universal principles such as respect, compassion, and communal interdependence values that transcend cultural and geographic boundaries and resonate with the broader human condition. Supporting the view of Ubuntu's pan-African cultural embeddedness, Rwelamila et al. (1999) assert that both the peoples of Southern Africa and Bantu-origin communities in West, East, and Central Africa regard Ubuntu as a central cultural paradigm grounded in the human capacity for empathy, solidarity, and collective responsibility. As illustrated in Figure 1, the core values associated with Ubuntu vary across regions, suggesting that its interpretation is context-dependent and shaped by individual and collective life experiences. This diversity in

interpretation underscores Ubuntu's fluidity as both a philosophical construct and a lived reality.

Figure 1: Illustration that Ubuntu can mean differently and anything



Mangaliso (2001) argues that such values of Ubuntu are a perfect scale to weigh between good and bad, right, and wrong, just, and unjust. Because of Ubuntu warm, harmonious, and friendly values, Nzimakwe (2014) characterises Ubuntu as.

- A non-racial indigenous system of values that regard and treat people as human beings.
- A universal philosophy that regards humankind as one with a mix of racial groups.
- A social philosophy of compassion and tolerance for all human beings.
- A philosophy that breathes supreme goodness in human beings by offering moral values that strengthens human well-being.
- A code of being that espouses quality and dignity for human personality.

Sigger (2010) points out that the African value of Ubuntu is inherited from its unique historical experience. This African philosophy was mainly spearheaded by post-colonial African leaders including Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Bolden, 2014), that adopted Ubuntu, recognising that the way to survive during apartheid was through the spirit of humanness. Because of the ethical content and historical premis of Ubuntu in Africa, having

brought solutions to the challenges encountered by the black African people in difficult times (Mutwarisabo et al., 2019). It is pointed out that Ubuntu helped in conflict resolution and peace building in many African states (Bolden, 2014; Akinola & Uzodike 2018). The helpfulness of Ubuntu to Africa to reinstate the well-being of people during and after apartheid has led to a proliferation that Ubuntu is the yardstick of well-being to Africans (Nzimakwe., 2014). Several scholars, insist that Ubuntu has relevance in the African workplace management sphere, because of its distinctive virtues rooted in humanity, placing central interest in people in consistence with human beliefs, needs and nature (Lutz, 2009; West, 2014).

2.2 Well-being and work

The literature on well-being has undergone a notable shift transitioning from a broad, generalised perspective to a more nuanced exploration specific to the workplace context (Cvenkel, 2018). Initially, well-being was approached as a universal concept, encompassing various dimensions of physical, mental, and social health mostly applicable to general life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This wide-ranging approach has proven insufficient in addressing the unique dynamics present within a professional environment. Consequently, scholars have recognised that workplace well-being necessitates a more targeted framework accounting for specific factors influencing employee satisfaction, engagement, commitment and productivity (Larmache & Marchand, 2019). This reflects that well-being in the workplace is shaped by a distinct set of variables – including job demands, work life balance, organisational culture, interpersonal relationships at work which are not adequately captured by general perspective of well-being. Because there is a distinction between general well-being and work-related (Richter & Naswall, 2019), focusing on workplace-specific well-being allows for a more nuanced and practical understanding, which is essential for developing effective interventions and policies tailored to the needs of employees and organisations alike.

According to Jeffrey et al. (2014) employee well-being is a multifaceted and dynamic concept, stretching beyond a singular focus to encompass multiple dimensions, including psychological and social aspects. Collectively, these dimensions shape how employees grow, thrive, and function at their highest potential within the workplace (Turban & Yan, 2016).

Researchers agree that well-being at work has been conceptualised in a variety of ways (Fisher, 2013; Renwick, 2003; Simone, 2014). Warr (1999) refers to a worker's feelings and evaluation of work. On the other hand, the International Labour Organisation defines workplace well-

being as all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, working environment, the climate at work and work organization (ILO, 2019).

However, such definitions of workplace well-being have been criticised to be too narrow because well-being at work is arguably multifaceted with multiple dimensions that fall under different constructs (Ryff, 1995; Baptiste, 2009, Ryan & Deci, 2001, Diener et al., 2003). For example, Grant et al (2007) points out that well-being comes in a psychological form (reflecting an employee's satisfaction, emotions, and attitudes in relation to work), social dimension (reflecting an employee's interpersonal relationships, teamwork, and the management style), and the physical form (reflecting an employee's safety at work and health). Fisher (2014) contends that well-being at work straddles around subjective workplace well-being (gleaned from Aristippus hedonic viewpoint), psychological workplace well-being (gleaned from Aristotle's eudemonic viewpoint) and social workplace well-being. The conceptualisation of well-being by Fisher (2014), correlates with Ryff's (1989) and Deci and Ryan's (2006) conceptualisation which integrates subjective and psychological well-being constructs at work. Each of these dimensions of well-being at work (subjective, psychological, and social) emphasise, and identify different understandings, perspectives, and components of employee well-being, which together evidence that workplace well-being is multifaceted.

2.2.1 Subjective workplace well-being

Subjective well-being at work is represented as the attitudinal and emotional responses employees have towards their work environment. Bakker (2010) highlights that subjective well-being involves an employee's positive attitudinal judgments about their work, reflecting a cognitive assessment of their job. This perspective is complemented by Fisher (2014), who emphasises the affective dimension, where employees experience positive or negative emotions in response to their workplace environment.

Sahai and Mahapatra (2020) advance this understanding by defining subjective well-being as an employee's holistic evaluation of their workplace experience, blending affective responses with cognitive assessments. Similarly, Turban and Yan (2016) emphasise that subjective well-being is grounded in experiences of enjoyment, comfort, and pleasure, reflecting an employee's overall sense of pleasantness and fun at work.

The significance of fostering subjective workplace well-being becomes clear when considering its outcomes. Enhanced subjective well-being is associated with happier, more content, and more engaged employees (Bakker, 2010; Turban & Yan, 2016). This is because when employees make favourable cognitive judgments about their work and experience pleasant emotions, their engagement and job satisfaction naturally increase (Fisher, 2010). Drawing from the work of Deiner et al., (1991), employees with high subjective well-being are those who consistently experience positive emotions in the workplace, such as enjoyment and comfort, and are content with their job. Conversely, employees with low subjective well-being experience recurrent negative emotions, which undermine their overall job satisfaction (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2010).

Operationally, subjective well-being at work is characterised by a high level of job satisfaction, a low level of negative affect, and a high frequency of positive affect (Deci & Ryan, 2006). Thus, maximising an employee's subjective well-being equates to fostering a workplace environment that promotes frequent positive emotions, such as joy, pleasure, and comfort (Bakker, 2010). Further, Deci & Ryan (2006) and Sahai and Mahapatra (2020) point out that, when employees are happy and experience positive emotions regularly, their overall experience of happiness is maximised, underscoring the critical role that subjective well-being plays in shaping an employee's workplace experience.

2.2.2 Psychological workplace well-being

In the conceptualisation of workplace well-being, psychological well-being emerges as a critical, yet historically underrepresented dimension (Fisher, 2014; Lamarche & Marchand, 2019). Psychological workplace well-being is broadly understood as the pursuit of achievement, prosperity, and optimal functioning within the work environment (Huta, 2013; DeSimone, 2014). Capturing the extent to which employees experience personal growth, and self-actualisation through their professional activities. In the same way, Turban and Yan (2016), define psychological workplace well-being as the employee's experience of growth and purpose, emphasising the significance of engaging in work that fosters a meaningful existence.

Despite its importance, psychological well-being has often been overlooked in workplace well-being research (Fisher, 2014). However, this oversight is problematic as psychological well-being encapsulates employee's ability to engage in work that feels important, and brings about

professional advancement (Turban & Yan, 2016). This dimension of well-being at work is not just about feeling good but is deeply tied to the employee's sense of achieving purpose and contributing to the workplace in a positive way that aligns with personal values (Turban & Yan, 2016). Central to the notion of psychological well-being at work is the assumption that employees can flourish while simultaneously realising their potential and contributing positively to the organization and society (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

One of the critical components within psychological well-being is autonomy, where employees are granted the freedom to make choices about their work and how they engage with their tasks, which fosters a sense of self-direction and personal agency (De Simone, 2014). Equally important is inclusivity, which ensures that employees feel they are part of the workplace community and that their contributions are recognized and valued. These elements are foundational for cultivating a sense of psychological thriving at work.

Researchers suggest that psychological well-being in the workplace can be broken down into three core components (Turban & Yan, 2016). The first is personal growth, which is the process through which work provides opportunities for employees to develop their talents, skills, and potential. Ryan et al., (2008) highlights that these growth opportunities including professional development programs, career advancement, and systems of recognition and reward, are essential for fostering a sense of achievement and competence. Employees' perceptions of progress and development are crucial for their long-term psychological satisfaction and sense of accomplishment (Turban & Yan, 2016).

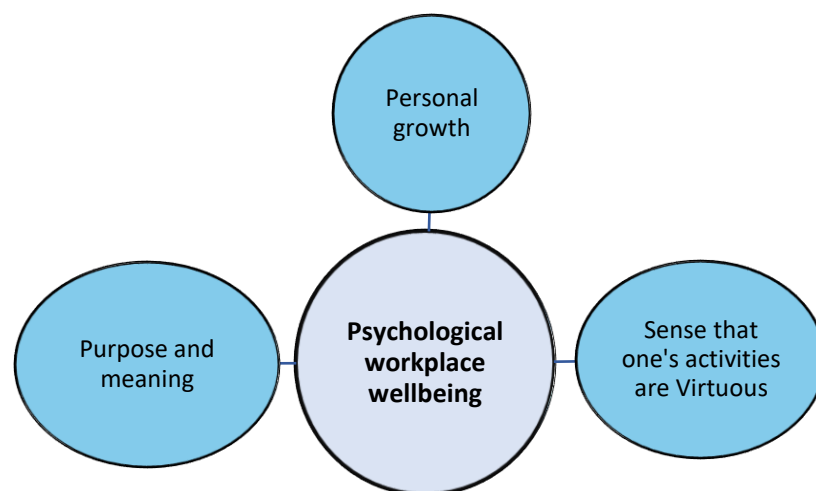
The second component is a sense of purpose, which involves aligning work activities with clear, goal-oriented endeavours. When employees perceive their tasks as meaningful and directed towards significant outcomes, they are more likely to experience fulfilment and engagement in their roles (Baumeister, 1991; Turban & Yan, 2016). Purpose-driven work not only enhances job satisfaction but also fosters a deep connection between the individual and their broader societal impact.

The third and final component of psychological well-being, is the perception that one's work is virtuous and morally aligned with personal values (Huta, 2013). This facet of psychological well-being emphasizes the importance of ethical alignment in the workplace, where employees feel that their efforts contribute to a greater good and are consistent with their own moral

framework. By engaging in work that is perceived as virtuous, employees experience a deeper sense of satisfaction and integrity, which further contributes to their overall well-being.

Overall, psychological workplace well-being is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond mere job satisfaction. It encapsulates the complex interplay between personal growth, purpose, and virtue, all of which are essential for fostering a fulfilling and meaningful work life. By enabling employees to achieve their potential in ways that are aligned with their values and contribute to the broader organizational and societal good, psychological well-being serves as a vital pillar in the broader structure of workplace well-being. Consequently, organisations that prioritize the psychological well-being of their employees not only enhance individual flourishing but also contribute to a more engaged, productive, and ethically grounded workforce. Figure 2 gives an overview of the meaning of psychological well-being.

Figure 2: Psychological well-being at work.

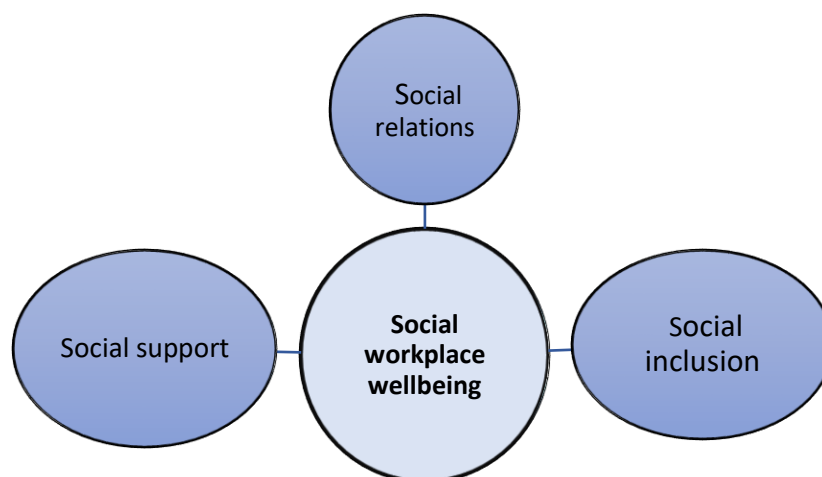


2.2.3 Social workplace well-being

Social well-being in the workplace, as described by De Simona (2014), represents a crucial yet often underexplored dimension of employee well-being that is fundamentally concerned with the quality of interpersonal relationships and overall social environment within the workplace. Fisher (2014) defines social well-being as the cultivation of positive, healthy relationships within a collaborative and supportive work environment. This includes aspects such as social coherence, integration, and acceptance. In practice, social well-being is reflected in an employee's interactions with coworkers and supervisors, as well as their overall sense of

belonging and inclusion within the workplace (Simone, 2014). It extends beyond mere participation to encompass feelings of being valued by both colleagues and the organisation. Spreitzer et al., (2005) further highlights that this sense of connection is integral to fostering workplace well-being. Moreover, when employees experience respectful and supportive relationships, they often report greater fulfilment and a sense of achievement (Fisher, 2014; Cvenkel, 2018; Liu, 2021). The quality of these relationships, particularly the care and respect received from supervisors, is believed to cultivate a positive and supportive workplace culture, thereby enhancing overall well-being (Fisher, 2014). Social relations, social support, and social inclusion, identified as the core components of social workplace well-being are essential for fostering the positive interactions and connections that employees need to thrive at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Figure 3 illustrates the three key aspects of social well-being.

Figure 3: Social well-being at work



While subjective, psychological, and social dimensions of workplace well-being have been widely discussed (Fisher, 2014). Some researchers, like Liu (2012), argue that focusing solely on these dimensions is overly narrow and fails to account for the broader, more holistic understanding of workplace well-being. Liu (2012) contends that this idiocentric approach diverts attention from a more comprehensive conceptualisation and operationalisation of well-being in the workplace. Similarly, Ryff (1999) highlights that researchers have neglected a full definition of workplace well-being within the bounds of its essential characteristics, leaving important dimensions underexplored or unexplored. The challenge of defining and measuring workplace well-being has only grown with time (Turban & Yan, 2016). As the nature of work have evolved, becoming more sophisticated and multifaceted, it has hence become increasingly

difficult to capture the full scope of what constitutes well-being at work (Cvenkel, 2018; Kowalski & Lorreto, 2017). This complexity underscores the need for a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of workplace well-being that adapts to the changing nature of work, advancements in technology, gig and freelance economy, remote and hybrid work, health crisis including Covid-19- which collectively affect quality of work (Guest, 2017). Therefore, Grant et al., (2007) argue that well-being is also a judgement of quality of work.

2.2.4 Workplace well-being as quality of work experiences

The increasing complexity of modern work has led the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to place greater emphasis on enhancing job quality to support employee well-being. Contemporary research on workplace well-being aligns with this focus, often defining it in terms of the quality of work life (QWL) (IP, 2009). In this context workplace well-being is understood as “the *overall quality of an employee’s experience and functioning at work*” (War, 1987). Green (2006) expands on this by describing job quality as the degree or level to which a job offers attributes that positively impact employees such as promoting their well-being . Similarly, George et al., (2007) reinforces this perspective suggesting that workplace well-being reflects how employees perceive and judge the quality of their work experiences within an organisation. This growing consensus underscores the link between the quality of work and employee well-being, emphasising that improving the work environment is essential for fostering overall satisfaction and health among workers.

2.3 Culture and workplace well-being; An Ubuntu perspective

Some researchers view well-being at work as a subjective construct related to social culture, proposing that experiences and feelings drawn from work are culturally driven by traditional values (Yang & Zhou, 2017; Liu & Jia, 2019) and deeply held ethics (Yang & Zhou, 2018; Liu & Jia, 2019). This is because values are standards used by people to evaluate their experiences and events within the workplace, shaped by their beliefs (Schwartz & Sortheix, 2018). The cultural conceptualisation of workplace well-being bases its judgment of well-being through evaluation of workplace experiences on cultural ethics for a specific context (Liu & Jia, 2019).

Liu (2021) argues that the values of well-being at work are different in the West, East and Africa, as similarly discussed under general life well-being earlier. Therefore, it is presumed

that the operationalisation of well-being at work is different in the West, East and Africa (Hu et al., 2014). For example, the Western workplace has central interest on personal accomplishment, personal autonomy, and efficiency (Hu et al., 2014; Mangaliso, 2019), whereas in the East workplace well-being is about Guanxi, harmonious social relations at work (Yang & Zhou, 2017; Liu & Jia, 2020). On the other hand, in Africa workplace well-being is claimed to be premised in Ubuntu (Nzimakwe, 2014). Overall, this literature shows how Ubuntu, and similar cultural frameworks can be of influence in shaping well-being at work. This highlights the need for culturally aligned approaches to employee well-being, particularly in settings like Africa where cultural values of Ubuntu notably play a crucial role in defining collective and individual notions of a good quality life (Nzimakwe, 2014).

2.4 Chapter conclusion

Chapter 2 presented the diverse and complex nature of general life well-being, revealing its varied interpretations across different cultures and among scholars. The chapter identified two dominant historical perspectives on life well-being: the hedonistic view, centred on life pleasure and the eudaimonic view, with a foci on a meaningful fulfilled life. Despite these established well-being frameworks, the chapter highlights that general life well-being is perceived differently across cultural contexts, with cultural values playing a pivotal role in shaping these perceptions. In the context of the workplace, the chapter explored how the concept of workplace well-being is multifaceted, encompassing subjective, psychological, and social dimensions. However, modern workplace dynamics including technological advancements have created challenges that impact workplace well-being. As organisations navigate these evolving dynamics, the role of HRM becomes increasingly significant in influencing employee experiences and ultimately contributing to workplace well-being. The influence of HRM practices on well-being is continued in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: HRM, Workplace Resources and Well-being

3.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the interplay between HRM practices and workplace resources which help to facilitate employee well-being. It begins by discussing the relationship between HRM and employee well-being, focusing on the contrasting paradigms of "soft" and "hard" HRM, which represent different levels of emphasis on employee well-being versus organisational objectives and outcomes. The chapter further explores tensions within performance-focused HRM systems and their impact on employee well-being. While these systems are designed to enhance productivity and engagement, critics argue that they often result in unintended negative consequences resulting from increased workload, and work intensification, ultimately compromising employee well-being (Ramsay et al., 2000; Pecci et al., 2013). This discussion contributes to the ongoing debate between the mutual gains and critical perspectives of HRM, particularly in relation to their effects on employee well-being (Van De Voorde et al., 2021). The chapter explores the role of workplace resources in supporting employee well-being drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to analyse how resources offset job demands and contribute to well-being. Key resources including autonomy, social support, and career development are identified as crucial enablers of employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

3.1 “Soft vs. hard” HRM

HRM is a fundamental organisational function, encompassing a wide range of practices aimed at effectively managing people (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Its primary goals include fostering and cultivating a motivated and productive workforce while simultaneously promoting employee well-being (Pecci et al., 2013). Within this framework, traditional HRM practices are often distinguished in different practices, particularly the "soft" and "hard" paradigms reflecting differing HRM orientations towards management of employees that influence employee well-being (Storey, 1992; Boxall & Purcell, 2011). The distinction between "soft" and "hard" HRM provides insight into the varying practices that underpin HRM strategies and shaping employee well-being.

Rooted in a humanistic perspective, the “soft” HRM focuses on treating employees as valuable assets rather than mere costs (Guest, 2002). This HRM approach centres on the well-being of employees, considering them as integral organisational stakeholders whose satisfaction and

engagement are directly linked to organisational performance (Truss et al., 1997). In contrast, the "hard" HRM approach is more strategically focused, aligning HR practices with organisation goals to maximize productivity, profitability, and efficiency. Here, the primary focus is on ensuring that human resources are utilised in a manner that enhances organisational outcomes, often at the expense of employee well-being (Storey, 1987; Ho & Kuvaas, 2019). The divergent perspectives on HRM demonstrate the duality within the field, where approaches can either prioritise employee well-being or organisational outcomes, thus engendering opposing operationalisation of HRM (Storey, 1987; Ho & Kuvaas, 2019), consequently shaping the well-being of employees (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020).

A further nuance in HRM practices is revealed through the "low road" and "high road" approaches (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). The low road approach, which closely aligns with the hard HRM perspective, focuses on the strategic, calculative, and quantitative management of human resources (Legge, 2005). In this approach, employees are viewed as assets to achieve short-term organisational gains of productivity, often at the cost of their well-being (Milkman, 1997). Conversely, the high road approach parallels soft HRM by emphasising investment in employees, fostering their development and well-being with the goal of achieving long-term organisational success (Appelbaum, 2000).

Such distinctions suggest that HRM practices can be tailored to organisational or employee goals. However, HRM practices often gravitate towards either the soft or the hard paradigms (Truss et al., 1997; Guest, 2002). Moreover, debate between these paradigms has become increasingly nuanced. Scholars have argued that the dichotomy between soft and hard HRM may be overly simplistic, suggesting that successful organisations often integrate elements of both approaches to create a balanced and dynamic HRM strategy (Delery & Doty, 1996). For example, an organisation may adopt a high road approach to employee development while simultaneously embracing cost-effective practices of a low road approach in other areas, such as operational efficiency and resource management. This integrative perspective suggests that the most effective HRM strategies are those that can reconcile the often-competing demands of employee well-being and organisational performance, creating a symbiotic relationship between the two (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2008). This framework underscores the complex interplay between organisational HRM practices and employee well-being; these are explored in greater detail in the subsequent sections.

3.1.1 The quest for organisational performance and employee well-being

HRM has been conceptualised in various ways, often reflecting the diverse objectives organisations aim to achieve through managing their workforce (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). However, the evolution of HRM highlights a significant shift from the traditional, administrative role of personnel management to a more integrative and strategic function within organisations. This change highlights the increasing significance of HRM in synchronizing human resources with long-term business goals while also focusing on employee well-being (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Dessler, 2022). Instead of just handling traditional functions like hiring and payroll, modern HRM is now recognised as a key player in cultivating company culture, enhancing employee engagement, and creating a competitive edge (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Dessler, 2022). Researchers have since pointed out that this dual emphasis on organisational performance and employee care requires HR professionals to balance the company's objectives with the needs of a diverse and continuously changing workforce (Boxall & Purcell, 2016; Ulrich, 1997; Guest, 2017). As HRM has evolved, so has its interpretations, which now stresses a balance between advancing organisational objectives and nurturing employee well-being (Ho & Kuvaas, 2019). Such a shift mirrors a heightened acknowledgment of the interdependence between organisational performance and well-being of the workforce within HRM, underscoring the significance for a strategic integration of both aims in contemporary HRM practices (Beer et al., 2015).

Armstrong and Taylor (2014) describe HRM as a comprehensive, integrated, and strategic approach promoting both organisational growth and the well-being of employees. This dual focus in HRM conceptualisation aligns with the principles of soft HRM, which positions employees at the heart of the organization's success (Storey 1992). Similarly, Armstrong (2008) defines HRM as a strategic and cohesive method for managing an organisation's most assets, its people. Under this perspective, employees are viewed as invaluable assets, and their development, well-being, and intrinsic value are paramount (Armstrong, 2008; Truss et al., 1997). Advocates of this approach, such as Guest (2018), argue that HRM's primary responsibility is to foster the development and well-being of employees, thereby enhancing their contributions to their employers.

In contrast, a divergent conceptualisation of HRM is offered by proponents of hard HRM, where the focus shifts towards aligning employees with the strategic goals of the organisation. Within this perspective, Boxall et al., (2007) asserts that HRM involves managing people and

their work to achieve specific organisational goals. While such definitions of HRM stress efficiency, they have faced significant criticism in HRM literature for reducing employees to mere objects for realising organizational objectives (Keenoy, 1997; Cvenkel, 2018). Critics argue that this narrow focus often neglects the human aspect of management, including employee well-being, which is increasingly recognised as a crucial element in contemporary organisations (Guest, 2017; Elorza et al., 2021). Despite these criticisms, substantial theoretical and empirical work continues to position HRM as an integrated system of practices aimed at enhancing organisational performance (Hu & Bear, 2012; Ho & Kuvaas, 2020).

3.1.2 Tensions between employer and employee needs

The literature surrounding modern HRM demonstrates enduring tensions, particularly in HRMs struggle to reconcile the needs of both employees and organisations, a challenge underscoring the complexity within the HRM discipline (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). A consensus on a universal set of HRM practices that could cater the needs of both parties remains elusive (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). Van De Voorde et al., (2012) highlights that achieving a balance between employee and employer needs may requires a blend of diverse HR practices, rather than reliance on a singular approach or model. For instance, high-performance work systems (HPWS), which aim to foster performance through high-commitment practices including performance-based rewards, have been both praised and critiqued (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Elorza et al., 2021). While the HPWS are designed to enhance employee engagement and productivity (Guest, 2002), critiques argue that these systems often prioritise employer needs of performance to the detriment of employee well-being needs (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Edgar et al., 2015).

Edgar et al., (2015) argue that employees respond to high-commitment practices by exerting greater discretionary effort, a dynamic grounded in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Based on this theory, employees reciprocate perceived organisational support with increased effort, creating a reciprocal relationship benefiting both parties (Blau, 1964). However, despite the intentions to foster mutual benefits, these practices withing high-commitment approaches can inadvertently pressure employees to work harder under heightened stress and limited control over work (Elorza et al., 2021). This imbalance, while potentially advantageous for productivity, can undermine employee well-being (Pecci et al., 2013; Edgar et al., 2015). Consequently, HRM approaches face a persistent tension: the more organisations focus on

performance metrics, the greater the risk of negatively impacting the very workforce they seek to empower (Guest, 2016).

Another influential framework within HRM is the high-involvement approach, which emphasises employee empowerment, skill development, and motivation through task discretion, participatory decision-making, and continuous training (Boxall & Macky, 2014). While this approach is lauded for driving both performance and well-being (Mackie et al., 2000; Huan et al., 2015), it too is limited by organisations' persistent focus on performance metrics. As a result, the potential benefits for employee well-being may be overlooked or underutilized in practice (Pecci et al., 2013; Guest, 2016).

In essence while HRM has evolved into a complex and multifaceted discipline, the ongoing tension between advancing organisational goals and safeguarding employee well-being remains a core challenge (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). Consequently, it remains crucial to explore integrative HRM approaches that seek a harmonious balance, ensuring that organisational success does not undermine the human dimension or rather employee needs (Beer et al., 2015; Van De Voorde et al., 2012).

3.2 Mutual gains vs. critical perspectives in HRM

An optimistic position holds that HRM practices have positive effects on employee outcomes including well-being (Peccei et al., 2013). The alternative pessimistic standpoint of HRM suggests that HRM practices have negative effect on employee outcomes including well-being (Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015). This has resulted in two competing theoretical and empirical forms of HRM strands one as the “*mutual gains perspective*” and another one as the “*critical perspective*” with the former looking at HRM practices that benefit both the employee and the employer and the later that benefits the employer (Guest, 2002; Van De Voorde, 2012; Ho & Kuvaas, 2020; Li et al., 2022).

The mutual gains perspective emphasises HRM practices offering value to both employees and the employer (Cooper et al., 2019), thus challenging the traditional view suggesting that HRM practices are mainly tools for enhancing organisation performance (Li et al., 2024). The mutual gains perspective includes practices that develop skills for employees, enhance employee participation and foster a supportive working environment that is crucial to the well-being of employees (Kossek et al., 2011; Van De Voorde et al., 2012). Notably, providing employees

with opportunities to participate at work enhances their abilities and sense of belonging (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Also, the mutual gains perspective offers employees the opportunity to engage in decision making processes, thus enhancing their sense of control, and ownership at work, which contributes to their well-being (Wood & DeMenezes, 2011). In addition, the provision of opportunity for employees to develop their skills in the mutual gains enhances the capabilities and confidence of employees which are also crucial for well-being (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009). Such practices are seen as signals of organisation support and care which in turn lead to positive employee behaviours and attitudes that ultimately benefit the organisation (Pecci, 2004). Moreover, Van De Voorde et al., (2012) argues that out of the caring and supportive practices of HRM, employees are more likely to reciprocate with commitment, trust, and satisfaction. However, such reciprocity roots from the social exchange theory which posits that positive treatment of employees through supportive HR practices in organisations leads to positive behaviours and attitudes (Blau, 1964; Wajda & Angela, 2012).

More importantly the mutual gains perspective of HRM view practices of HRM as those that must reduce stress, increase job satisfaction, trust and consequently benefiting both employee and employer, as this sees the employer in terms of performance and the employee in terms of performance (Van De Voorde et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the wide affirmation is that the components of well-being oriented HRM practices must be myriad and mutually reinforcing (Barling & Iverson, 2005; Bartram et al., 2014).

More critical perspectives argue that HRM practices and systems primarily benefit employers, thus neglecting the concerns and needs of employees in such HRM practices and systems (Ho & Kuvaas, 2022, 2022). Critical perspective argues that HRM practices seek to leverage human capital or employee inputs to maximise and or increase organisation efficiency, which has potential damage on employees physical and psychological well-being out of increased workload (Ramsay et al., 2000). Guest (2002) further criticised this form of HRM that favours the employer, by suggesting that such a “low road” HRM strategy which seeks to efficiently exploit workers, while disregarding their well-being through increased work intensity, may negatively impact and harm employee well-being leading to conflicting outcomes.

The mutual gains and conflicting outcomes HRM perspectives have spurred debate, as there is lack of agreement on the right and best composition of bundles of HRM practices for organisations to enhance well-being (Guest, 2002; Cooper et al., 2019). Current research has neither ruled out nor concluded on either the critical perspective or the mutual gains

perspectives of HRM and the impact on employee well-being (Harley et al, 2010; Ho & Kuvaas, 2020).

Current literature and empirical results on the link between HR practices/systems and the well-being of employees is far from straightforward but rather complex, contradictory, mixed, not accurately demarcated, and non-conclusive (Appelbaum, 2002; Ho & Kuvaas, 2020; Li et al., 2023). Several studies have shown a positive association between HRM practices and well-being through mutual gains (Kochan & Osterman, 1994; VanDeVoorde et al., 2012). For instance, research has demonstrated that employees can benefit from job enrichment, training, and development from the mutual gains - thus having a positive impact on employee well-being (Pecci & Van De Voorde, 2019). In contrast, other empirical results show negative impacts of HRM practices on employee well-being particularly work intensification and increased performance through the critical or conflicting perspective (Ramsay et al., 2000; Bamberger et al, 2014; Van De Voorde et al., 2012). Moreover, Legge (2005) underscores that HRM often functions as a mechanism for managerial control often leading to worker exploitation.

Aside from that, the effectiveness of HRM practices for employee well-being can be significantly influenced by the context in which they are applied (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Various factors including cultural norms, industry characteristics and organisation environment can alter how HRM practices affect well-being. This complicates the ability to make a broad generalisation on HRM-well-being link (Nishii et al., 2008). Studies have shown the inherent and critical role that cultural norms play in shaping employees' reactions to HRM practices (Caligiuri et al., 2020). One example is drawn from a study by Farndale and Sanders (2017), who outlined how cultures prioritising group harmony and interdependency respond favourably to HRM practices promoting collaboration and teamwork, whilst individualistic cultures may find this unfavourable but place greater emphasis on other aspects such as individual autonomy and development as facilitators of well-being. In essence HRM practices viewed as favourable for employee well-being in one context may be viewed unfavourable in another context. Similarly, it can be argued that industry specific factors also influence employee perceptions of HRM practices (Pecci & Van De Voorde, 2019). In particular, Van De Voorde & Beijer (2021) argued that in high-stress industries including finance and healthcare, HRM practices focusing on stress management and work-life balance may positively influence well-being, compared to industries with less stress where professional

development may play a crucial role on employee well-being. This argument implies that there is no one size- fits all approach to HRM practices for enhanced employee well-being. Instead HRM approaches must be attuned to broader cultural and industry specifics to maximise their positive impact on employee well-being (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

The ambiguity in the link between HRM and well-being is elaborated by Van De Voorde et al., (2012), who highlights that HRM systems or practices often focus on dual outcomes of performance and well-being, that can conflict with each other, thereby creating an inherent tension between the two (Peccei, 2004). This duality raises difficulties in determining which HRM systems are most effective for fostering employee well-being because such systems are designed to meet both objectives. However, the pursuit of organisational performance and employee well-being is arguably driven by different HRM strands, each with distinct goals (Boxall & Purcell, 2008). These divergent goals complicate the development of HRM systems that can cater effectively to both. Peccei (2004) adds to this debate by asserting that HRM practices that enhance well-being are different from those that enhance performance. Thus, the challenge lies in creating a balance or integration between HRM practices that target both performance and well-being, which may necessitate a more nuanced and strategically aligned approach to HRM systems in organisations. Such complexity in these two areas only make it tough to draw tangible conclusions on the best HRM practices that positively influence well-being (Appelbaum, 2002).

Another argument contributing to the inconclusiveness regarding the relationship between HRM practices and well-being is encapsulated in what Ho and Kuvaas (2019) describe as the “well-being paradox”. This paradox arises from the oversimplified approach of measuring well-being against HRM practices or systems based on a single dimension, despite well-being being a multifaceted construct (Diener, 1994). Based on this perspective, well-being has multiple dimensions that interact in complex ways. Grant et al., (2007) suggests that there is a trade-off amongst different dimensions of well-being, while a particular HRM practice may enhance one dimension of employee well-being, it can simultaneously diminish another.

Such complexity underscores the need for a nuanced measurement understanding of the interplay between HRM practices and the multiple dimensions of well-being (Peccei et al., 2013). As such, the conflicting impact of HRM practices or systems on different facets of well-being complicate the establishment of a clear, consistent, accurate and definite conclusion on the relationship between HRM and employee well-being (Ho & Kuvaas, 2019).

Nevertheless, there is still considerable evidence advancing the relationship and impact of HRM practices on employee well-being (Elorza, 2021).

3.3 The case for worker well-being

Given the evolving nature of the workplace, marked by the rise of remote work and shifting employee expectations around work-life, it remains crucial to reassess and broaden traditional HRM frameworks. It is argued that the primary focus and enduring result of all HRM practices should be the well-being of employees, irrespective of the modern shifts in work environments (Legge, 1998; Hauff et al., 2020). Scholars have emphasised the importance of incorporating a more inclusive approach that looks into employee goals and needs within HRM practices (Harney & Dundon, 2021). This perspective acknowledges employees as key stakeholders whose insights are vital for the sustained success of an organisation. By embracing a more comprehensive HRM model that aligns organisational objectives with the well-being of employees, companies can cultivate a healthier work environment. For example, encouraging employee voice, providing autonomy, fostering inclusive leadership, and adopting flexible work policies can significantly improve employee satisfaction and overall well-being (Ramsay et al., 2021).

Besides that, the concept of sustainable HRM underscores the significance of prioritising employees' long-term well-being as a key factor in achieving organisational success (Ehnert et al., 2020), highlighting the importance of aligning the goals of the organisation with the well-being of its employees. Thus, advocating for a strategy that promotes shared benefits instead of one where the organisation's achievements are gained at the cost of employee well-being. This approach calls for HRM policies that nurture resilience, adaptability, and engagement among employees, which in turn contributes to improved overall organisational performance (Kramar, 2022).

Over the past two decades there has been a heightened argument for the need to have alternative HRM practices/system that serve as a resource and offer an alternative route to well-being (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019; Guest, 2017; Li et al., 2023). Despite the widespread call for modernised HRM practices (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019), the challenge in effectively transforming HRM practices to enhance employee well-being persists due to the conflicting and inconclusive findings regarding the interplay between HRM practices and employee well-being (Li et al., 2023). Nonetheless, it becomes imperative to delve into ways in which HRM

practices can serve as resources for enhancing well-being. Building on Demerouti et al., (2001), and Posthuma et al., (2013), HRM practices when strategically designed and implemented transcend their traditional administrative functions and evolve into essential resources that not only nurture but also sustain employee well-being.

In this way, HRM practices are viewed as crucial job resources that significantly impact on well-being (Li et al, 2022; Bakker et al., 2023). HRM practices help employees achieve their goals at work, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal development and growth, thereby supporting overall well-being (Li et al., 2022; Bakker et al., 2023). For instance, employee participation, autonomy are classic examples of opportunity enhancing HRM practices that serve as essential resources (Posthuma, et al., 2013). Furthermore feedback, training, and professional development are viewed as growth and skill enhancing resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), commonly recognised within the Job-Demands Resources model (JD-R). Hauf & Gillardi (2020) argue that HRM practices aimed at well-being can be broad and encompass supportive measures that explicitly foster a culture of respect and care for employees. Therefore, by implementing such HRM practices that act as job resources, organisations contribute towards a positive work environment that promote well-being (Li et al., 2023).

In contrast, HRM practices can sometimes act as challenging job demands fostering employee growth and development. For instance, performance-related pay requires employees to exert more effort, which can lead to promotions and pay raises, that ultimately benefit workers by providing tangible rewards (Li et al., 2022). However, these demanding HRM practices can simultaneously both increase the well-being of employees while at the same time increase stress levels as employees must sustain high mental and physical efforts to meet the elevated expectations that potentially lead to energy depletion (LePine et al., 2005). Therefore, the challenge-hindrance demand framework postulates that such challenge demands can simulate psychological well-being, but they also deter the physical and social well-being of employees (LePine et al., 2005). It is thus argued that such demands, enhance employee well-being by leveraging on both resources and demands.

Building on an understanding of HRM practices as crucial resources playing an important role in shaping the experiences of employees by balancing job demands and providing essential job resources (Li et al., 2023), the chapter next considers the broader spectrum of workplace

resources that play a critical role in creating a sustainable and enriching workplace where employees can thrive through enhanced employee well-being.

3.6 Workplace resources at multiple levels

Workplace resources encompass any elements or characteristics within the workplace that assist employees with task completion and goal attainment (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Venz & Sonnentag, 2015). Acting as a critical support system for the workplace, resources provide a foundation for personal growth and development (Schaufeli, 2017; Lee et al., 2020). Therefore, workplace resources are instrumental in enhancing well-being and the performance of employees, while ensuring job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Nielson, 2017). Moreover, Hobfoll (2001) categorically argued that the prime motivation for human is pointed towards the accumulation and maintenance of resources. This is because of the inherent importance and broader impact of resources on employees (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Resources are not just a mere instrument that address different aspects such as demands at work, they hold an intrinsic value of protecting other valued resources within work (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Since workplace resources provide the necessary tools, and support to mitigate negative effectives from work demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Nielson, 2017), these further foster positive work outcomes and a conducive working environment suitable for a diverse workforce (Schaufeli, 2017).

Workplace resources are mostly generalised as one whole concept within organisational psychology, but such generalisation of resources come with a critique that workplace resources are not clearly identified and classified (Nielson, 2017). Nonetheless, researchers contend that resources are classified at different and multiple levels (Van De Voorde et al., 2011), and these levels are categorised as individual, group, leader, job, and the organisation (Nielson, 2017; Nielson et al., 2019). Nielson (2017) and Demerouti and Bakker (2011) also categorise job resources at the organisational level, the task level, the specific job position, and interpersonal level. This thesis focuses on organisation, job/task, and individual resources, which are all suggested to have a role in the shaping of well-being for employees (Schaufeli, 2017).

3.6.1 Organisation business/policy level resources

Based on Nielson et al., (2017), organisation level resources are those resources inherit and shaping the policies, values, practices, processes, procedures, and overall design and management of the work. Valaitis et al., (2018), expand on this by describing organisation level resources as mechanisms for coordination, communication, and embodiment of organisational values, which in turn guide and direct all other resources within the organisation. Therefore, it is suggested that organisation resources must have a unique combination of attributes that not only support but also safeguard the rights of employees thereby enhancing and facilitating their well-being (Guest, 2017; Cordero et al., 2019). The critical value of organisational resources lies in their ability to lead and control other functions and resources in the workplace effectively (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006).

Bakker et al., (2003) identify several key resources located at the organisational level, including job security, compensation, and career development opportunities. Additionally, organisational values are highlighted as foundational resources that define the purpose and direction of the organisation through articulated beliefs (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013). These values are integral to the formulation and implementation of organisational policies, particularly those related to HRM (O'Riordan, 2017). HR policies derived from these organisational values provide clear and essential guidelines for management practices, delineating acceptable and unacceptable behaviours within the workplace (Armstrong & Taylor, 2015).

At organisational level, effective HR policies create a solid framework supporting fair and efficient decision-making, encouraging optimal standards of practice among employees (Guest, 2002). Key policies outlined in HRM at organisation level include, recruitment, and selection, disciplinary and grievance, equality, performance, and reward, anti-harassment policy, health, and safety. Collectively these policies form essential resources for fostering a positive, supportive, and inclusive work environment (Guest, 2017).

Moreover, HR policies further act as a vital communication bridge between the organisation and its employees, outlining responsibilities and expectations of the two parties (Kapur, 2020). As resources, HR policies are fundamental in addressing any issues, problems, complaints that may arise ensuring they are appropriately and systematically resolved (Cvenkel, 2018). HR policies also form organisation conditions which largely contribute to workplace well-being (Lamarche & Marchand, 2019). However, these can vary based on the type of organisation (i.e

public or private). Nevertheless, HR policies are universally regarded as crucial for enhancing employee well-being, as they directly influence the resources available at the job and task levels (Cvenkel, 2018). This underscores the critical importance of organisational policy-level resources in facilitating and sustaining employee well-being across different types of organisations.

3.6.2 Job/Task level resources

The second tier of workplace resources encompasses job resources at the job/task level (Nielson et al., 2017). Nef (2014) described job resources as the elements that shape both the design of the job and the experience of employees as they engage with their tasks in the workplace. Other researchers view Job resources as the characteristics, terms, and conditions of employment for employees within the workplace (Demerouti et al., 2001). On the other hand, Schaufeli & Taris (2014) refer to job resources as aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reducing associated work demands, and stress. However, job resources can be broad and multifaceted but covering different aspects such as autonomy, task design, social support, performance feedback, growth opportunities, work schedules (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli, 2017), that sum up to a decent and quality work advocated for by ILO (2019).

As suggested by Keiser et al (2020) autonomy or decision authority is a widely recognised job resource contributing significantly to employee well-being, as advocated by several researchers within various well-being models including the resource-based JD-R model. Autonomy, defined by Ryan & Deci (2020) as the sense of ownership and initiative regarding an individual's actions towards their work. As a proclaimed universal human need, autonomy is further defined as the sense of self determination and self-endorsement over actions and behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Besides that, Fielding (1990); Wheatley (1997), further elaborate on autonomy by describing it as the control workers possess over decisions related to their work tasks and conduct as further discussed by Karasek (1979). Despite the overarching consensus on the positive impacts of autonomy as a resource on well-being, Boxall & Marckey (2014) caution that excessive autonomy or greater control might have adverse effects such as intensifying workloads and possibly offsetting the potential benefits it has on well-being. Nevertheless, ILO (2019) contends that decent work involves granting employees autonomy or control along with the freedom of expression over their jobs. Additionally, Demerouti &

Bakker (2011), highlights that autonomy plays an intrinsic motivational role by fulfilling a basic human need. Researchers suggest that when employees have a high level of autonomy or control over their work conditions, they experience a great sense of fulfilment, which in turn positively influences their overall well-being. Studies by Wong & Lin, (2007); Di Marco et al., (2018); Lecca et al., (2018); Ariz-Montes et al., (2018); Lee, (2019), supports this argument by highlighting the beneficial impact of workplace autonomy on employee well-being.

Autonomy is further argued to give employees a sense of mastery and ability to succeed and grow in the workplace, because employees can fully utilise their skills when there is autonomy (Meyer & Gagne, 2011, Saragih, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2020), hence making it a relevant resource to employee well-being. In their research, Ryan & Deci (2001), also argue that people with higher autonomy have greater well-being than those with lower autonomy. The essentiality of autonomy is not only emphasised in the workplace but also outside the workplace, with the economics Nobel Laurette Sen (1999), arguing that autonomy and freedom is a rational goal for development because it improves the quality of life. Sen (1999) supported this argument by advancing that cultures with expanded freedom have enhanced economic growth and quality of life. This contention is also expanded in the workplace where several researchers including the ILO advocate for workers autonomy as quality of work life for employee well-being. In Africa the essence of human freedom is shown in Ubuntu, which expresses that every person deserves to have liberty, through the tolerance characteristic of Ubuntu (Nzimakwe, 2014).

Social support is another crucial job/task level resource that significantly influences employee well-being, as recognised by Botero & Van Dyne, (2009); Mayo et al., (2012) and Kaiser et al, (2020). The absence of social support in the workplace can severely impact employee well-being as noted by DeSimone, (2014). Although workplace social support can be argued to manifest in different forms including interpersonal relations, co-worker, and crucially supervisor support (Aryanti et al., 2020). Several studies suggests that supervisor social support to a subordinate is the most important of all and directly correlating with higher levels employee well-being (De Simone, 2014; Ariza- Motes et al., 2018; Barger et al., 2019; Aryanti et al., 2020). This is anchored by an argument that supervisor social support effectively helps to solve problems by seeking dialogue and thereby fostering a supportive environment that enhances well-being of employees (Doef & Maes, 1999).

The significance of social support as a resource is further emphasised in the job stress models such as the Job-Demand Control Support model (Derdoef & Maef, 1999) and the JD-R model which underscores the critical role of social support to employee well-being. In addition, Lamarche & Marchand (2019), highlight that social support satisfies the basic need of recognition and belongingness, hence being a source of pleasure for employees at work. In an African context social support is one aspect that is deeply embedded in the Ubuntu emphasising values of survival, compassion, and solidarity, as it is believed that one needs the other to survive and well-being is through helping each other (Mbigi, 1997; Muller, 2019). Ubuntu cultural perspective of solidarity (Sigger et al., 2010), reinforces the consensus that well-being thrives in an environment of social support, this makes social support such an indispensable resource of the workplace. Social support as identified by Bakker et al., (2003), functions as an extrinsic job/task resource.

Another job resources suggested and recognised to be relevant and vital to employee well-being is professional growth and career development (Aryanti et al., 2020). As an intrinsic job/task resource, career development plays a crucial role in enhancing employee well-being and serves as a powerful motivation tool. Since it facilitates the acquisition of substantial knowledge, thereby fostering a sense of growth and advancement (Bakker et al., 2003). Additionally, Proponents argue that that career growth opportunities facilitate professional growth and development, (Simone, 2014; Aryanti et al., 2020), hence making it fundamental to employee well-being. This perspective aligns with Aristotle (1925) in his *Nicomachean ethics* where he advocated for individuals to fulfil their potential through personal growth (Waterman, 1993).

Equally important, performance feedback and appraisal are other job/task level resources intrinsic to the job (Bakker et al., 2003). It is echoed by several researchers including Deci & Ryan (2006), Dhewe et al., (2012), Guest (2017), Cvenkel (2018), that the amount of feedback that an employee receives on job performance significantly impacts their well-being. Bakker et al., (2003) and Schaufeli (2017), further elaborates that feedback functions as an intrinsic job resource with potent motivational effects thereby influencing well-being on employees.

However, Guest (2017) delves into an extensive body of research on the antecedents of well-being within the context of job resources, providing a robust evidence base for the approaches, practices and policies that might promote employee well-being.

Drawing on Warr (1987), Guest (2017) identifies critical antecedents of well-being including opportunity for skill use, opportunity for control, interpersonal contact, physical security, environmental clarity. These factors as highlighted by Warr (1987), underscore the characteristics of job/task resources that are instrumental in promoting employee well-being. The list of antecedents is argued to offer valuable insights for organisations to concentrate on the job/task resources that are most valuable to employee well-being (Guest, 2017).

In addition, quality work is another aspect of job resources and is a strong foundation for decent work (Guest, 2017; ILO, 2019), serving as a fundamental element of sustainable well-being (Grote and Guest, 2017; Ariza-Montes et al., 2019). None the less, it is argued that not all organisations offer quality work. The ILO (2018) highlights of lack of rights for workers and severe quality work deficit for those that are in employment particularly in Africa. The working conditions in many African organisations are described to hardly provide quality work, and a solid base for employee well-being (ILO, 2018).

3.6.3 Individual level resources

As indicated by Pluta & Rudawska, (2021) and Bakker & Demerouti (2017) individual resources are individual characteristics that help employees to respond positively to demands in the organisations. Withing the conversation of resources model (Hobfoll, 1989), individual resources are understood as personal traits, conditions, and or energies possessed and valued by individuals. This is also supported by Schaufeli (2017), who describes personal or individual resources as a person's resilience, sense of ability to respond positively and control the factors of their environment. On the other hand, Baek et al., (2018) views individual resources as those attributes related to personal dispositions including self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism, which are also recognised by Hobfoll (2002) as important elements for a person's successful adaptability to factors within a given environment. However, it is argued that these individual levels resources are largely shaped by particular factors within an environment (Pluta & Rudawska, 2021), in particular cultural beliefs (Bandura, 2000).

The exploration of workplace resources at the organisational, job, and individual levels underscores the critical role these resources play in employee well-being (Nielsen et al., 2017). Despite this recognition, there remains a substantial interest in identifying which specific resources are most effective in promoting well-being (Broek et al., 2006; Schaufeli, 2017; Cvenkel, 2018).

However, to comprehensively understand which resources are most conducive to well-being, it is essential to examine their roles within various theoretical frameworks informing occupational well-being. This approach will provide a more nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of different resources in enhancing employee well-being.

3.7 Theoretical foundations of workplace resources for well-being

Theoretical advancements on how workplace resources impact well-being are limited. Many studies in this area have heavily relied on a somewhat arbitrary selection of job resources, drawn primarily from two most prominent job stress frameworks - the structural and transactional models (Arnold et al., 2016). These models have significantly influenced the perception of job resources at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006), yet reliance on these frameworks highlights a gap in theoretical exploration taking into account cultural context, thus hampering their practical applicability to well-being of employees at work in a variety of cultural contexts. This section presents the key approaches to understanding workplace resources for well-being – categorized in terms of structural, transactional and resource-based models – reflecting on their suitability for integrating concepts such as Ubuntu in understanding employee well-being.

Structural approaches, particularly the Demand Control Model (DCM) developed by Karasek (1979), have been influential in shaping the discourse on workplace well-being (Arnold et al., 2016; Węziak-Białowolska et al., 2019; Lamarche & Marchand, 2019). The DCM posits that job demands (such as time pressure and workload) and job control (autonomy) are the primary determinants of workplace well-being (Melinda et al., 2016). However, this model has been criticised for its narrow focus, primarily addressing psychological demands while overlooking other complex workplace demands, including social and emotional pressures that are highly prevalent in the workplace (Bakker et al., 2000; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Critics argue that by neglecting these elements, the DCM offers an incomplete picture of the resources for fostering workplace well-being (Bakker et al, 2000). This is despite the characteristic of control within the DCM being important to well-being (Fox et al., 1993). Such criticisms led to the expansion of the DCM to Demand Control- Support model.

In response to these limitations, Johnson and Hall (1988) expanded DCM by adding social support resulting in the Demand Control-Support Model (DCSM). This model recognizes that support from supervisors and coworkers can mitigate the negative effects of job demands, thus enhancing employee well-being (Daniels et al, 2009). While this expansion addresses some of the shortcomings of the original DCM, it still falls short of capturing the full complexity of workplace dynamics. As Holman (2013) suggests, the benefits of job control and social support may be limited if other critical work conditions, such as feedback mechanisms and organizational culture are left out or ignored (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2001).

The Effort-Reward Imbalance model, a transactional approach, offers another perspective of workplace well-being (Dhewe et al., 2012). According to Siegrist (1996), two resources or factors are intrinsically important in transactions, and these are efforts and rewards, hence making the transaction process. However, lack of appropriate rewards to employee efforts in the work is said to have poor effects on well-being (Arnold et al., 2016). Siegrist (1996), proposes rewards as the most important aspect of well-being dictating the Effort Reward Imbalance model (ERI). The proposition in the Effort Reward Imbalance model is that an employee's exposure to lack of reciprocity (high cost/low gain) between efforts and rewards (salary, career opportunities such as training and promotions, job security, esteem reward, respect) rises the risk of poor well-being which is reflected in the form of burnout on an employee (Siegrist, 1996). Although the Effort Reward Imbalance model is said to offer dynamic job facets that act as rewards to employee efforts (Arnold et al., 2016) and contributing towards well-being. The Effort Reward Imbalance model is largely criticized for been narrow in scope by failing to capture other important job resources (such as performance skill utilization, social support, etc.) that are argued to be of relevance to workplace well-being at a broader perspective (Bakker and Demerouti, 2006).

Despite the contributions of both structural and transactional models to the understanding of workplace well-being, they are not without significant shortcomings (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006). A key criticism is that these models tend to simplify the concept of well-being, reducing it to a limited set of work characteristics while failing to account for the broader, more nuanced factors that influence employee experiences (Bakker and Demerouti, 2006). This simplicity, while making the models accessible, also limits their applicability to the complex and dynamic nature of modern workplaces.

Additionally, the static nature of both the DCM and ERI models (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006) does not adequately accommodate the evolving social and cultural factors that shape workplace dynamics. For instance, as workplaces become increasingly diverse and globalized, the influence of cultural values and social norms on employee well-being becomes more pronounced (Yan & Zhou, 2017; Dhiman, 2021). The failure of these models to integrate such contextual factors limits their relevance and applicability, in contemporary discussions of workplace well-being. This is notwithstanding that workplace well-being is conceptualized broadly and takes the form of cultural values (Yang & Zhou 2017; Dhiman, 2021) as also discussed in Chapter 2. The transactional and structural models do not adequately consider contexts to allow social norms and cultural values that also influence workplace well-being (Joshnloo, 2014).

Another cardinal argument is that, while both models offer valuable insights into the individual-level aspects of well-being, they fall short when it comes to addressing organisational and policy-level factors that are crucial in shaping the broader work environment. The recent development of the JD-R model attempts to address these limitations by incorporating a wider range of job resources at both the individual and organisational levels (Schaufeli, 2017). The JD-R model represents a more holistic approach, recognising that workplace well-being is influenced by a complex interplay of factors beyond just job demands and rewards.

The resource-based models of stress and well-being, such as the Conservation of Resources (COR) model (Hobfoll, 1989; Arnold et al., 2016), offer a robust framework for understanding resources shaping workplace well-being. The central premise of the COR model is that individuals endeavor to obtain, retain, and protect things that are of high value to them (Hobfoll, 1989), which in an African context can be related to Ubuntu that was discussed in Chapter 2 as a value that African people hold on to (Mnyaka and Motlhabi, 2005; Poovan et al, 2006).

The COR model is often praised for its comprehensive approach, as it considers both cognitive processes and environmental factors in shaping an individual's experience of well-being (Dhewe et al., 2012). This dual consideration gives it an advantage over the more narrowly focused transactional and structural models. Unlike DCM, which primarily emphasizes autonomy, the COR model provides a more holistic view by encompassing a wide array of resources, including personal attributes like optimism and self-efficacy, condition resources

such as autonomy and feedback and energy resources like knowledge (Nelson & Simmons; 2003; Hakanen et al., 2008).

However, the COR model's strengths are not without critique. One notable issue is its broad application, which while theoretically appealing, can lead to challenges in empirical testing and practical implementation. For instance, the model's assertion that resource loss has a greater impact on well-being than resource gain (Holmgren et al., 2016) highlights a critical area of focus but also raises questions about the nuanced differences between types of resources and how they interact in complex work environments.

Despite these critiques, the COR model remains a significant theoretical contribution to workplace well-being, especially when considering its applicability across different work settings. Schaufeli et al (2006), noted that employees with greater resources have better well-being experience than those employees with a low level of resources. However, the COR, has not been widely applied in the workplace (Arnold et al., 2016), this is notwithstanding its popularity in work psychology and organizational behavior (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

The second popular resource-based model is the JD-R (Bakker and Demerouti, 2006) which is one of the leading resource theories of well-being trending in the twenty first century. Arnold et al., (2016) contends that the JD-R model, is a developed model of Hobfoll's (1989) COR model idea of resources. The JD-R is also known to be a jack of all trades, because it integrates rather than replaces the earlier approaches and ideas in the older (DCM and ERI models) workplace well-being theories (Schaufeli, 2017). Moreover, the JD-R is also broader than the earlier well-being models in the sense that it factors in job resources and job demands (Schaufeli, 2017), thus argued to be overarching or all-embracing in nature.

Because of the overarching nature of the JD-R, one of the JD-R model's key strengths is its flexibility and adaptability across various occupational settings, from white-collar to blue-collar jobs, and across different cultural contexts. (Bakker & Demerouti 2006; Yoland et al., 2013). For example, studies in Nigeria and South Africa have applied the JD-R model to understand the impacts of job demands and resources on employee stress and well-being, revealing important insights into how specific job characteristics, such as work overload and supervisor support, influence employee outcomes (Out et al., 2018; Yoland et al., 2013).

While the JD-R model's broad applicability is a significant advantage (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) it also faces criticism for neglecting non-work-related factors, such as cultural values, which play a crucial role in shaping employees' experiences of well-being. This limitation is particularly evident in African contexts, where cultural values like Ubuntu and communalism are deeply intertwined with individual and collective well-being (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Nzimakwe, 2014; Akinola & Uzodike, 2018). The JD-R overlooks these critical cultural resources, thereby limiting its explanatory power and practical applicability in non-Western settings (Hakanen et al., 2008). The resources in the JD-R are questioned with applicability, acceptability, and adequacy to African organisations, whose indigenous people have long believed in Ubuntu as a social resource (Nzimakwe, 2014; Molefe & Magam, 2019), for promoting social support, respect for human rights and fulfilment of human basic needs (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Poovan et al., 2006; West, 2014; Akinola & Uzodike, 2018).

Importantly, critics argue that theories rooted in Western civilization may not adequately address the cultural specificities of African societies, which are deeply embedded in Afrocentric values (Mbigi et al., 2021; Tauetsile, 2021). These Western theories are often seen as culturally foreign and unfamiliar to indigenous workers in African organizations, as they do not reflect Africa's ontology, which is grounded in Ubuntu (Mangaliso et al., 2018, 2021). The application of these theories in African contexts has led to a misalignment between organizational values in Africa and local ontologies and epistemologies (Siegger et al., 2010). Mangaliso et al., (2018) contends that the individualistic practices promoted by Western theories may conflict with the communal and interconnected values inherent in Ubuntu. Virtues such as justice, courage, respect, and wisdom emphasised in Ubuntu are also recognized by Aristotle as essential to well-being. This highlights the importance of cultural values as foundational resources for theories of workplace well-being (Sahim et al., 2021). Therefore, integrating Ubuntu into models like the JD-R model could enhance their applicability and operationality in African contexts, where the interconnectedness of individuals and communities is central to life and work.

Another argument is that job resources within the JD-R may be triggered or initiated differently based on specific social cultural values embraced in different contexts. For example, autonomy at work as a resource may be triggered differently in the Western context, and the same resource of autonomy may be triggered differently in Africa, where it is for instance suggested to be triggered by the Ubuntu resource of solidarity where individuals withing

communities are encouraged to serve the community with unified efforts that allow people to have freedom to work at their will and control their work tasks (Muller et al., 2019). Moreover, Bertels et al., (2019) argues that well-being resource for one context do not necessarily translate to be a resource for another context, because culture differs from context to context.

Overall, there is a lack of a dual process, that indicates potential ways in which the so-called resources in the JDR can be initiated, these resources can potentially come from or initiated by different types of sources such as cultural values. Essentially, while the JD-R model represents a significant advancement in resource-based theories of workplace well-being, its effectiveness may be enhanced by addressing its limitations, particularly regarding the integration of cultural values. This underscores the significance of exploring ways to expand the JD-R model to better reflect the diverse experiences of employees across different cultural and organisational contexts, thereby providing a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive framework for understanding and promoting workplace well-being.

3.8 Chapter conclusion

This chapter considered the relationship between HRM practices and employee well-being, stressing the importance of adopting a balanced approach of HRM practices benefiting both the employer and the employee - a mutual gains perspective. It also presented the shortcomings of contemporary HRM practices that tend to prioritise performance over the well-being of employees, highlighting the need for a more holistic perspective. Additionally, the chapter explored how workplace resources present across various levels of the organisation and can serve as valuable tools for fostering employee well-being. The chapter concluded by drawing on key theoretical frameworks of well-being, demonstrating how the concept of workplace resources within these theories can effectively promote employee well-being , although fall short in considering the implications of cultural context. The next chapter presents an African perspective on mutual gains and HRM and within an African context.

Chapter 4: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Ubuntu in African HRM: Exploring Mutual Gains and the Influence of Contextual Factors

4.0 Introduction

Chapter 2 identified Ubuntu as a cultural lens shaping perceptions of well-being in Africa, and Chapter 3 highlighted the diverse ways HRM influences employee well-being through both mutual gains and critical perspectives. This chapter seeks to integrate these insights by chapter exploring the prospects for fostering mutual gains in an African context by applying Ubuntu values through HRM practices while also accounting for contextual factors unique to the region. The significance of Ubuntu to HRM is especially pronounced in African countries, where traditional communal values continue to shape organisational practices (Sigger et al., 2010; Chetty & Price, 2024). However, understanding Ubuntu as a strategic HRM resource requires an exploration of its historical and cultural roots. Both pre- and post-colonial African contexts, along with the unique sectoral dynamics of African organisations, provide valuable insights into factors influencing Ubuntu's reflection in HRM. This chapter delves into these socio-cultural influences to illuminate the broader framework that shapes the application of Ubuntu in management practices. Additionally, it elaborates on the research questions and introduces the conceptual framework guiding this study.

4.1 Ubuntu and HRM as a pathway to mutual gains

Ubuntu is argued to be an essential management philosophy as it prioritises welfare for all stakeholders, aligning personal and organisational goals in a manner that promotes sustainability and collective growth (Muller et al., 2019; Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019; Chetty & Price, 2024). Therefore, the application of Ubuntu in HRM holds potential to serve as an influential framework for promoting mutual benefits within organisations (Chetty & Price, 2024). Despite the growing prominence of Ubuntu in African management philosophy (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019; Molose et al., 2019; Chetty & Price, 2024), there is a lack of consensus regarding which specific values of Ubuntu are most relevant for promoting the discourse of well-being in the workplace (Sigger et al., 2005).

Mbigi (2005) proposed an important Ubuntu conceptual framework known as the “five fingers theory”. This framework articulates Ubuntu as a social resource in a workplace by using the human hand as a metaphor in accenting the essence of each Ubuntu value (Poovan et al., 2006). Each finger on the human hand represents a distinct resource required for effective functionality within the workplace- much like fingers on a hand working collectively for functionality (Mbigi & Maree, 1995) (see Figure 4). As articulated by Mbigi (1997), the Five Fingers theory identifies the essential values of Ubuntu including solidarity, survival, compassion, respect, and dignity, as integral components of an African culture since time immemorial (Poovan et al, 2006). The five fingers metaphor illustrates the African traditional resourcefulness emphasising that “*a thumb though strong cannot kill aphids on its own*” but requires the assistance of the other fingers (Poovan et al., 2006). Therefore, the meaning of the five fingers theory in the workplace serves a dual purpose (Mbigi & Maree, 1995; Poovan et al., 2006). Firstly, the five fingers symbolise the collective effort that individuals put together in achieving goals for mutual well-being (Poovan et al., 2006; Sigger et al., 2010; Molose et al., 2018). Secondly, the fingers are a representation of essential resources and values required in attaining and maintaining a collective well-being for all humanity (Hailey, 2008) (see Table 2). Given the fruitful nature of these five Ubuntu resources, researchers posit that Ubuntu is a fundamental social resource serving various purposes within African organisations (Molose et al., 2019; Tauetsile, 2021). The five fingers are described as the “*assegais*” which is a South African Zulu term for spear or weapon utilised as a tool or resource to manage society, the workplace, and a guide for effective interpersonal relations (Broodryk, 2002).

Figure 4: Distinctive resources of Ubuntu on each finger in the collective five finger theory

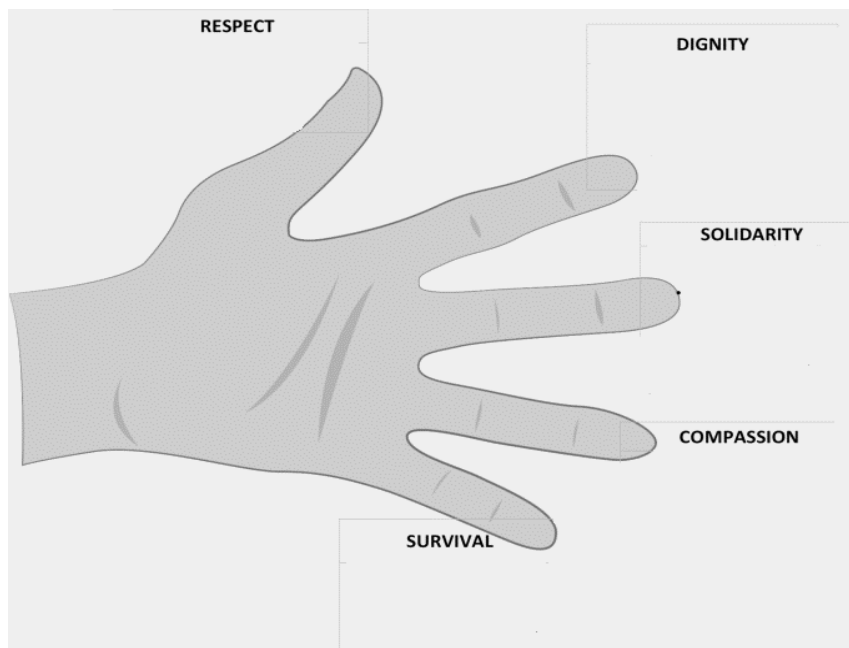


Table 2: Antecedents of Ubuntu Five Fingers theory resources within the workplace

Survival	Solidarity
Organisation responsibility towards its employees (Poovan et al., 2006)	Having 'we' spirit (Molose et al., 2018)
Sacrificing for employees (Lutz, 2009)	Organisations viewed as one body existing to benefit employees (Lutz, 2009)
Shared will to survive (Molose et al., 2018)	Strong relationships and support for employees (Mbigi, 1997)
Management spirit of service towards employees (Poovan et al., 2006)	Combined efforts – accomplishing tasks collectively (Sigger et al., 2010)
Living Inspite of difficulties through brotherly care (Sigger et al., 2010)	Cohesive force to create supervisor and subordinate understanding (Poovan, 2006).
Compassion	Respect and dignity
Showing concern and understanding to others (Nzimakwe, 2014)	Valuing others (Mangaliso, 2001)
Caring for others (Molose et al., 2019)	Listening to other people's voices
Understanding the dilemmas of others (Brubaker, 2013)	Considering others (Poovan et al., 2006)
Willingness to help others, generosity (Poovan, 2006; Molose et al., 2019)	Showing that others are worth
Genuine concern on the well-being of others (Broodryk, 2002)	Regard for rights, beliefs, backgrounds, and values (Nzimakwe, 2014)
Having sympathy for others (Nzimakwe, 2014)	

4.2.1 Survival as a workplace resource

Survival is at the heart of Ubuntu in a community setting such as the workplace (Sigger, 2010; Tauetsile, 2021). Nzimakwe (2014) posits that during the colonial era, Africans mastered the art of survival by uniting in the face of adversity and transcending social differences. This perspective aligns with Mbigi and Maree (1995), who articulated that survival embodies accountability, responsibility, and spirit of service, which are crucial for the community or members of the workplace to survive and endure during challenging times and circumstances. This view is further anchored by Sigger et al., (2010) who indicated that individuals harness the spirit of survival to take responsibility for achievement of group goals. This ultimately promotes goal achievement and makes relevance to well-being (Schaufeli et al., 2012).

As a resource, survival encourages organisations to sacrifice the best valuable resources for its employees in the workplace (Muller et al., 2019). The importance of sacrificing the best for employees is also supported by Guest (2017), who believes that organisations that sacrifice the best for employees have better well-being as opposed to those organisations that seldomly sacrifice for employees. Given that survival advocates for an organisation to be responsible towards employees and provide suitable resources in the interest of maintaining a healthy workplace. Survival is seen as a vital resource enabling organisations to live through and navigate hardships, by fostering mutual support for the better of all individuals in the workplace (Sigger et al., 2010; Brubaker, 2013). Similarly, Poovan et al., (2006) points at the African survival spirit to overcome communal and individual difficulties, arguing that Africans believe in a collective psyche of putting resources together to sustain the well-being of all humanity as selfish attitudes are believed to destroy communities. Therefore, Mangaliso (2001) suggests that an organisation with the value of survival is assumed to have the well-being of its employees at its heart.

4.2.2 Solidarity as a workplace resource

Researchers of Ubuntu propose that solidarity and survival, while conceptually linked, manifest and are operationalised distinctively within the workplace setting (Sigger et al., 2010; Muller et al., 2019). Brubaker (2013) delineates solidarity as the combination of employee efforts aimed at attaining collective well-being. The rationale behind solidarity in an African workplace setting is that two fingers perform better than one and that a person needs the other person to accomplish tasks (Poovan et al., 2006), which makes solidarity a resource for task

accomplishment. Given that solidarity underscores the innate interdependence among individuals (Nzimakwe, 2014). This is as expressed in African local terms of “simunye” (we are one) and “shosolozza” (working as one) in South African Zulu (Muller et al., 2019). In a workplace setting, there is a reciprocal relationship wherein people depend on the organisation, just as the organisation depends on its people (Molose et al., 2018). Solidarity as a social resource posits that organisations should serve the interests of their employees (Molose et al., 2018), hence regarding it as a vital resource for the workplace. Muller et al., (2019) further points out that solidarity empowers employees to flourish and thrive because all employees feel that they are part of the organisation by working together with inclusivity.

Sigger (2014) highlights that solidarity in the workplace is about collective bonds that foster a sense of belonging among employees. This sense of belonging is critical for employee well-being as highlighted by Ryan and Deci (2001), as it creates emotional well-being (Chetty & Price, 2024). Solidarity further encourages the spirit of appreciating others when they achieve something by celebrating their achievement. In so doing Sigger et al (2010) highlights that employees feel happy. Moreover, Lutz (2009) points out that by working as one through solidarity, employees are more likely to achieve work goals (Nzimakwe, 2014) and thus enhance a feeling of achievement that is important for well-being (Turban & Yan, 2016). In addition, Solidarity is said to encourage social support in the workplace through social relations that come up during the process of collective working (Molose, 2018); such social support can alleviate stress and reduce the burden of work on individuals which ultimately contributes to well-being (Tauetsile, 2021). Therefore, scholars believe that solidarity is a resource that has influence on the well-being of employees at work (Schaufeli, 2015), because it encourages social support (Tauetsile, 2021). Besides that, when individuals at work engage with each other through solidarity with mutual support, this leads to better relations and teamwork which contributes to a healthy working environment supporting optimal experience and functioning.

4.2.3 Compassion as a workplace resource

The third resource of Ubuntu in the Five Fingers conceptual framework is compassion. Compassion is postulated to be an African communal lifestyle (Siegrist, 2014), where people practice love and kindness towards one another and reach out to others to establish and maintain communal relations (Pooven et al., 2006). It is argued by Nzimakwe (2014) that Africans believe that humans have a common responsibility of compassion towards one other. In this regard, Mangaliso (2001), Mbigi (2005) and Molose (2019) propose that compassion is about

showing sympathy and understanding the dilemmas of others such that there is a concern and an urge to help them out. Gilbert (2009) contends that compassion in Ubuntu involves tolerance, sympathy, caring, sensitivity, and overall being responsive to the emotions of others in perception that they need assistance, help or support.

Brubaker (2013) argues that organisations which are compassionate towards their workers are very considerate of employee needs and values on account of the deep conviction of interconnectedness, hence the argument of compassion as a resource for generating well-being . Based on Muller et al., (2019), leaders or managers can express compassion by being there for their employees and showing concern for members in both good and hard times. The Ubuntu resource of compassion brings in aspects of employers taking time to actively listen to their employees (Broodryk, 2006), such that employee's feel that they are valued. Researchers also agree that compassion cares about the sorrows for employees in the workplace following an African belief that *"your pain is my pain, and your sorrow is my sorrow"* (Nzimakwe, 2014), hence lifting the burden that one might bare on their own (Mangaliso, 2001; Siegrist, 2014). Collectively, several researchers including Muller et al., (2019) find that Ubuntu compassion is a resource where leaders are sensitive to the problems of employees and help them to reduce stress and achieve their goals.

4.2.4 Respect and dignity as workplace resources

Ubuntu emphasises values of respect and dignity as a sign of worth for people at work (Mangaliso, 2018). In support of this, Sigger et al., (2010) argues that respect and dignity are fundamental building blocks of Ubuntu as these elements take into consideration the beliefs, rights, values, and diversity of employees in a workplace. Against this background of respect in the value of people's beliefs, Muller et al., (2019) assert that respect is a critical resource for the workplace. This is especially in the context of valuing the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of individuals that foster an inclusive work environment (Shore et al., 2018). Withing the workplace respect recognises the inherent dignity and worth of employees by manifesting through interpersonal respect encompassing how employees treat one another. Procedural respect encompasses fair processes at work and organisational respect encompassing the policies of the organization.

Molose (2018) further highlights that respect and dignity are fundamental social values in an African context because they give due regard in the worth of workers and hence bringing about

a sense of meaningfulness. Respect and dignity in the workplace manifest through being mindful of employees' needs, opinions, and beliefs (Sigger et al., 2010). This includes the thoughtful use of words, gestures, and body languages in communication (Nzimakwe, 2014). This underscores the profound use of Ubuntu in cultivating a respectful working environment conducive for everyone and thus making it resourceful to the workplace (Hammer et al., 2016). Rodgers et al., (2016) argue that respect for individuals at work impacts their psychological well-being as it fosters a sense of self-worth and value. Moreover, the resourcefulness of respect to the workplace is anchored by the argument that when employees feel that they are respected they are more likely to have higher levels of job satisfaction (Ramarajan et al., 2017). Moreover, Hammer et al., (2016) highlight that respectful work environments and respectful HRM policies contribute towards a positive work culture in the workplace.

Siegger et al., (2010) further notes that respect and dignity within the workplace makes certain that the voices of employees are valued. Therefore, one can also argue that respecting the voices of employees upholds workers' rights, making it a further resource for generating well-being in the workplace (Tauetsile, 2021). Mangaliso & Damene (2005) argue: *"After all, who would not like to be appreciated, valued, and respected for their contributions for what they bring to the workplace?"* Everyone deserves mutual respect (Sigger, 2014). With such conceptions on respect Mbigi (1997) and Siegger (2010) echo that respect is a basic human aspect that promotes the sense of happiness and fulfilment for individuals.

Each of the Ubuntu values are argued to be a form of resource which can be harnessed in the workplace. As argued in Chapter 3, several types of workplace resources, captured within the concept of "soft" HRM, have already been shown to support the well-being agenda within HRM literature (e.g., Guest, 2017). The addition of Ubuntu values are proposed as not only enhancing the ability of employees to perform their tasks efficiently, but as contributing to overall well-being.

4.3 Using Job Demands Resources model to explore Ubuntu as a workplace resource.

The JD-R model has served as a foundational framework for researchers seeking to validate, challenge, or extend the concept of job resources as essential elements for employee well-being and performance (Bakker et al., 2003; Schaufeli, 2017). Various scholars have proposed a wide range of job resources, emphasizing their critical role in the workplace, and suggesting that

these resources can significantly influence employee outcomes (Schaufeli & Taris, 2004). In the context of this study, which investigates the relevance and applicability of Ubuntu values as a workplace resource for mutual gains within HRM at organisational, job/task, and individual levels, the JD-R model offers a valuable lens which can be considered for the present analysis.

The JD-R model posits that job resources are crucial for achieving work-related goals, fostering personal development, and mitigating the negative impacts of job demands (Schaufeli, 2017). This conceptualisation of resources aligns closely with the principles of Ubuntu, which have long been recognised for their role in promoting growth, social support and communal harmony within African communities (Nzimakwe, 2014; Muller, 2019), as discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Consequently, this study employs the JD-R model as a theoretical lens to examine the potential use of Ubuntu as a social resource within HRM practices. By integrating Ubuntu values into HRM, this study seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of how these values can be systematically applied in HRM practices to enhance employee and employer gain. The JD-R model, therefore, not only supports the exploration of Ubuntu values in the workplace but also provides a robust framework for assessing their impact on employee well-being, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on culturally informed HRM practices. However, these cultural resources of Ubuntu within the workplace do not just come from a vacuum. They are triggered by several organisational contextual factors including cultural and historical legacies, as considered in the next section.

4.4 Ubuntu in the African public and private sectors

African public sector organisations' policies, practices and systems are rooted in colonial history (Guseh, 2001; Malisase, 2020). Following the wave of independence after Africa's colonialism in the late 1950s and 1960s many African countries adopted a statist economic development approach (state-led economic development) (African Development Report, 2011). This approach positioned governments as the primary actors, instruments, and drivers of economic growth (Guseh, 2001; Okeke-Uzodike & Chitakunye, 2014). This strategy aimed to serve all citizens, thus developed under humanistic policies suitable for all individuals in different social classes, making sure it was as inclusive as possible. This also was influenced by a lingering colonial mindset, where Western powers had exploited African public sectors primarily for-profit extraction from natural resources (Kumssa, 2000). African leaders were

convinced that the statist led economy was the best optimal path for national development. Such an approach also served as means to safeguard against potential neo-colonial influences. The inclination of African leaders to adopt a statist economic development approach is attributed to several factors. One significant reason, as Kumssa (2000) suggests, is the fear of exploitation and domination by Western powers, as in the colonial era. The historical context of colonialism means African nations experienced severe exploitation and economic domination by Western colonisers (Kumssa, 2000).

In addition to fear of exploitation, ideological motivations also played a critical role in the adoption of state-controlled economies by various African countries. For instance, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, the state-controlled economy was embraced for ideological reasons (Sigger et al., 2010). Ubuntu, which is referred to as Ujamaa in Tanzania, was introduced by Julius Nyerere as a social and economic development policy under the blueprint of Arusha declaration (Sigger et al., 2010). In the 1967 Arusha declaration, Julius Nyerere asserted that for Tanzania to have economic justice, the state needed to have full and effective control over the public sectors and all of Tanzania's resources (Ibhawoh & Dihua, 2003), and thus adopting the statist led economy. Julius Nyerere believed that the Ujamaa (Ubuntu) humanist ideology was the most ideal resource to build a desired Tanzania with principles of freedom, unity, equality, respect, dignity, social protection, and equal rights. Zambia also adopted the state led economy for ideological reasons, as an integral part of developing and embracing the national humanism philosophy known as Ubuntu as a resource to foster social justice, equity and to benefit and include poor citizens in the growth agenda (Kumssa, 2000). Other countries including South Africa further adopted the humanist ideology of Ubuntu in the public service as a transformation policy after apartheid (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018).

Aside from introducing the statist economic development approach, African nations emphasised the basic function of the public sector in revitalising economies and making critical decisions regarding goods and services (Haque, 2001; Ayee, 2005). To facilitate this, governments further established state-owned enterprises in key sectors, which were seen as significant sources of national income. For instance, in Zambia, the mining sector was nationalised and become a major revenue generator to Zambia (African Development Report, 2011). However, this strategy, was aimed at harnessing national resources for the broader economic benefit and to ensure that profits from these industries remained within the country

to support development goals. This statist economic development approach in the post-colonial period fundamentally transformed public sector management policies (Vigan & Giaque, 2018). Policies were designed with a strong social orientation, aimed at serving the community, promoting the greater good and providing public services at prices significantly lower than market prices (Kumsa, 1996), often resulting in substantial financial losses. One of the core principles of these policies was to create a more equitable society by ensuring that all citizens had access to basic public services (such as education, healthcare) regardless of their economic status, thus enhancing societal well-being.

In this context, adopting Ubuntu whose communal values align with the public sector's communal focus of social responsibility was a strategic decision reflective of communal needs/values to serve communities and local people more effectively. While such an approach was motivated by the noble goals of achieving economic sovereignty and ensuring affordability for citizens across all social classes, it inadvertently brought significant economic obstacles and challenges in Africa. For example, in Togo, a state-owned dairy company went under administration because of selling dairy products at a very low cost with the aim of making it accessible and affordable to every person, consequently making losses (Kumssa, 1996). In Zambia, the mining and manufacturing sectors controlled by the state suffered challenges of coping with export standards; therefore, Zambia began to fail to trade because of inefficiency in management practices (Fundanga & Mwaba, 2001). Equally, Tanzania's Nyerere's, statist economic policies of Ujamaa failed and led to Tanzania's economic injury (Ibhawoh & Dihua, 2003), with commentaries after Nyerere's death "*how does a leader wreck a country's economy yet die a hero*" "Nyerere's Ujamaas ideological policies dried Tanzania's public funds, but his leadership was irresistible" (Newsweek, October 25, 1999).

Up until the late 1980s, it became evident and a major concern that public sector organisations under the new management policies were unable to substantially meet Africa's economic needs failing to create an upward and sustainable trajectory for economic growth (Guseh, 2001). The African public sectors, hindered by ineffective management policies, struggled to function efficiently. These ineffective policies led to significant issues including lack of accountability, corruption, insufficient innovation to meet export standards for competing on international markets, inadequate resources, and a failure to address public economic needs (Haque, 1994; African Development Bank, 2005). The ineffectiveness of the public sector management policies (Ayee, 2005) exacerbated Africa's poor economic situation (Oliver et al., 1999). In the late

1980s and early 1990s Africa witnessed a severe economic slowdown characterised by trade and fiscal deficits with consequent scarring effects on the continent (Oliver et al., 1999).

By the early 1990s, many African countries had begun to initiate government reform programs known as structural adjustments to revitalise Africa's economy by reducing public sector spending (Vigan & Giauque, 2018). Countries facing economic pressures sought financial assistance from international institutions, including International Monetary Fund. However, a primary condition for financial assistance was privatisation of public sectors, the divestiture of public sector enterprises to private owners or investors and reducing government control in the economy (Guseh, 2001). Because of the divestiture of public enterprises owned by the state to private investors (Guseh, 2001), employment in public sector organisations in Africa only accounts for 10 per cent (World Bank Group, 2019).

The emergence and adoption of socialist policies within African public sector organisations in the late 1960s sparked widespread condemnation and raised serious concerns about their profitability (Kumssa, 1996). This criticism led to the rise of a private sector driven by capitalist policies, positioning itself in opposition to the public sector's adherence to Ubuntu-inspired social policies. These socialist policies were perceived as detrimental to the private sector, as the financial losses incurred within the public sector reinforced a negative perception of Ubuntu-based social policies (Kumssa, 1996). As a result, the private sector was unwilling to incorporate such social policies into its mainstream operations. Nonetheless, As Kumssa (1996), noted policy makers consistently argued that African public sectors failed to generate sufficient and surplus funds and that subsidies provided under social policies were draining governments resources. Such criticism coupled with economic collapse of Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to economic reforms resorting to privatisation of the public sectors.

For example, from the time of independence in 1960, Guinea operated its own state-owned water company (Nellis, 2003). However, by 1989, the company was facing significant challenges due to its social ideological policies, which led to severe financial shortages. These financial issues resulted in interrupted, inconsistent, unclean water supply, ultimately causing a cholera epidemic which was a main cause of infant mortality in Guinea during the late 1980s (Menard & Clark, 2002). Consequently, the state-owned water company became a financial drain and health hazard for the citizens of Guinea.

Faced with these severe challenges, the government of Guinea entered into an agreement with a private sector company, facilitated by the intervention of the World Bank. This transition from state control to private sector management, under new capitalist policies, led to an improvement in the quality of water supply and the resolution of the cholera epidemic (Nellie's, 2003), thus, highlighting the significant impact of policies on financial sustainability to service provision.

Equally, by 1992, Zambia's public sector was financially depleted and operating in significant losses, leading to an acute economic crisis characterised by massive fiscal deficits under the socialist economic system premised on Ubuntu principles (Fundanga & Mwaba, 2000). Faced with imminent economic collapse, the Zambian government sought measures to stabilise its finances and opted for privatisation as a strategic response. The government of Zambia decided to sell some state-owned companies and capitalise on tax revenues from the newly privatised firms. This approach aimed at injecting much needed funds into the national treasury of Zambia to improve the country's fiscals' position. By 1996 these efforts had generated approximately USD 200 million in proceeds of privatisation, significantly boosting government revenues and stabilising Zambia's fiscal situation (Fundanga & Mwaba, 2000).

As noted by Makalou (1999), most of Africa's privatisation between 1989 and 1997 concentrated in 10 countries accounting for 2,804 transactions of privatisation. These include Mozambique at 549, Angola at 331, Ghana at 219, Zambia at 217, Kenya at 155, Tanzania at 124, Guinea at 114, Uganda at 88, Madagascar at 84, Nigeria at 81. The highest transactions of privatisation in the Southern and Eastern part of Africa were only made by two countries Zambia and Mozambique at 739 transactions between 1996 and 1997 (Makalou, 1999). Table 3 details the value of privatisation transactions in the top 10 countries of privatisation in Africa and their value between 1996 and 1997.

Table 3; Top ten Africa's privatisation transactions and their values

Country	Number of Transactions 1993-1997	Total Sales value in US\$ Millions
South Africa	7	2,209
Ghana	219	555
Cote d' Ivoire	47	357
Senegal	50	262
Nigeria	81	207
Mozambique	549	201
Kenya	155	186
Zambia	217	180

Uganda	88	134
Tanzania	124	132

Source: Makalou (1999)

Following the emergence and proliferation of the private sector, the African Economic Report (2020) deliberates that the private sector contributes at least 80 percent of revenue to African governments through company taxes. As such the Economic Report of Africa (2020) highlights that the private sector has been an essential engine and pillar of economic growth in Africa since the wave of privatisation., thus, making it a substantial source of development, job creation and economic booster (Stampini et al., 2019; Spicer and Bousquet, 2019). Consequentially the private sector accounts for 90 percent of job opportunities in Africa (Guseh, 200; Ibrahim Foundation, 2018).

Using economic driven policies of capitalism, the private sector has brought about reduced fiscal burden on African governments and spurred economic development (Oliver et al., 1999). The policies of the private sector make it stand out from those of the public sector that are driven by social and ideological policies (Kumsa, 1996; Economic Report on Africa, 2020; Kumssa, 1996). By its nature of policies, the private sector in Africa has different workplace resources aimed at profit generation (Stewart, 2017), as compared to the public sector whose policies are non-profit making and show roots in Ubuntu values.

4.5 HRM practices within African public and private sector organisations

Okeke-Uzodike & Chitakunye (2014) argue that African public sectors have policies that accommodate and reflect their cultural diversity. This notion is further supported by Kumssa (1996) who argued that management practices within African public sectors are derived from the humanist ideology of Ubuntu (see also Poovan et al., 2005; Mutwarisabo & Iken, 2019). It is asserted that the application of Ubuntu within African public sectors has led to the creation of more friendly and flexible practices that are less stressful and more flexible because they were deliberately developed to foster social justice a core tenet of Ubuntu. This is seen as a response to the historical context of colonial rule (Okeke-Uzodike & Chitakunye, 2014). Such an approach has been acknowledged to be particularly significant in the post-colonial context where there has been deliberate efforts to construct systems that promote equity, justice, inclusivity to rectify historical injustices on Africa (Karsten & Illa, 2005). As such the Ubuntu principles in the public sector organisations are there to enhance overall work experience for employees by prioritising human centric values and practices (Mutwarisabo & Iken, 2019).

The African public sector is suggested to have greater employee autonomy, strong inclusionary culture, good relations, supervisor support and organisational support (Pillay, 2009; Munyeka, 2014; Vigan & Giauque, 2018) based on its inherent post-colonial humanist policies that were developed to aid autonomy, social inclusion, and curb exploitation, after the black-African people lost their autonomy and faced exclusion during the time of white dominance in Africa (Sekwart, 2000). Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia argued that moral social order which is consistent and compatible with the African tradition was ideal for the Zambian public sector to (Sekwart, 2000). Therefore, the perceived autonomy in the Zambian public sector is attributed to the post-colonial policies of autonomy, inclusiveness from the Ubuntu culture (Sekwart, 2000).

However, the public sector workplace is critiqued for its poor wages because of being a non-profit making enterprise, existing solely to serve the larger population (Chirdan et al., 2009; Pillay, 2009; Ibrahim Forum Report, 2018). Despite these lower wages in the public sector, it is deliberated that public sector jobs offer generous paid time off which allows employees to take care of their social-life roles (Admin career, 2019), which is believed to have a positive influence on employee experiences (Cvenkel, 2018). Furthermore, the public sector is characterised with stable employment (job security) and comprehensive benefit plans which are also favourable resources for employees (Larmarche & Marchand, 2019).

Despite the private sector being shaped by capitalist theory and economic policies, it tends to offer competitive rewards and career growth and progression opportunities (Stewart, 2017; Ibrahim Foundation, 2018; Sharma, 2021). These factors are fundamental to employee well-being experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Nonetheless, the private sector is criticised for stricter and stringent policies of less autonomy, poor social support and high performance driven by profit making motives because these organisations were established on economic policies (Sekwart, 2000). Such profit-making centric approach are condemned for prioritising financial outcomes over employee well-being (Guest, 2017). The private sector is also challenged with tight deadlines to meet the demands for services in a timely fashion. Thus, employees in the private sector are often required to put in significant amounts effort and work longer hours, as compared to the public sector (Stewart, 2017; Berman, 2017). The golden rule of surviving in the private sector is performance. However not all employees are able to cope with the challenging work hard culture of the private sector, that is likened to the high-performance work systems (Guest, 2002; Hyde et al, 2013). Such high-performance practices are criticised for happening at the cost of employee happiness (Edgar et al., 2015). Due to the highly

demanding nature of work in the private sector, employees have limited time to balance between work and social roles because they end up putting so much in to work (Admin careers, 2019). One exception is the South African private sector which has been shown to incorporate Ubuntu social policies post-apartheid (Kasten & Illa, 2005; Molose et al., 2018). The integration of Ubuntu social policies in South African private sectors, presents a model where profit and social responsibility can coexist, potentially mitigating the negative impacts associated with the high-performance work system culture.

4.6 Management, leadership and Ubuntu in African HRM

Based on Mbigi (2000), despite Ubuntu been recognised as an important resource within management practices in Africa especially, its application and effectiveness in HRM practices can be determined by the behaviours of those occupying leadership or managerial positions. As stated by Szczepanska and Kosiore (2017), the success of a culture notwithstanding that of Ubuntu within an organisation is dependent on the actions of managers. These actions must align with the cultural principles of the organisation and serve as a model for subordinates to take an example from (McCosker, 2021). Consequently, Tovmasyan (2017) emphasise the importance of management in planning, organising, motivating, and controlling organisational activities to accomplish organisational goals and objectives. In line with this, Gutterman (2023) posits that managers have a function of embodying and coordinating activities aligned with organisational culture, by encouraging and monitoring employees to ensure compliance with cultural values.

Building on this foundation, it can be argued that managers are instrumental in integrating and promoting Ubuntu principles in HRM practices. Managers have a role in leading and directing, thereby creating an environment that motivates employees to embrace organisation culture (Tovmasyan, 2017; McCosker, 2021), which may be rooted in diverse cultural values such as Ubuntu. This argument is further sustained by Van De Voorde et al., (2021) who outline that organisations with supportive leadership are likely to have positive effects on employees.

As inferred by Szczepanska and Kosiore (2017), organisation culture is a tool that management uses through policies such as that of HRM to influence the workforce practices. Managers ensure that actions taken by employees align with the policies (Gutterman, 2023).

Consequently, the use of Ubuntu in HRM practices heavily relies on management and their ability to effectively enforce and exemplify these cultural values.

Essentially, a critical aspect of effective management is the ability to cultivate and sustain a robust organisational culture (Watson; 2006; McCosker, 2021). In support of this, Schein (2004) further reinforces this by asserting that organisational culture and management practices are inherently interconnected. O'Farrell (2006) also contributes to this discussion by contending that organisational culture encapsulated in the form of values, policies and codes of conduct remains mere rhetoric unless it is actively driven by management into reality. Moreover, McCosker (2021) suggests that it is the duty of managers to turn the organisation culture, and policies from abstract concepts into tangible realities by ensuring that cultural values such as Ubuntu principle are not just articulated but actualised. Figure 5 shows the steps and role that management can take to promote the Use of Ubuntu in the workplace.

Figure 5: Role of management in supporting Ubuntu in the workplace

Roles and steps management can take to encourage Ubuntu in the workplace

- **Step 1: Empathise and respect your people**
Applying Ubuntu to your business starts with the leadership styles of senior management. How can you show your employees how much you value them? Empathise with their challenges, listen to their needs, and show them the dignity they deserve. They are not purely “cogs in an engine”; they are the lifeblood of your business. Everyone has a vital role, and each person affects the whole.
- **Step 2: Trust and encourage collaborative working**
By trusting your teams to work collaboratively and encouraging them to work together, you can create a community of co-workers. Instead of measuring productivity on individual achievements, base your metrics on budget and deliverables. Use projects to incentivise teams to achieve, rather than compete. Colleagues can support each other better when tasks and responsibilities are shared.
- **Step 3: Loyalty from feeling valued**
When every employee feels equally included in the workplace, they will feel valuable to the business and valued by their managers. When people feel valued, they will work harder for your company. They will be more motivated to look after each other and to support with any tasks. They will start to buy-in to the overall business goals. And this is when a positive workplace community is borne.

Source; Brink (2023)

4.7 Research questions and conceptual framework

Chapter 2 examined the conceptualisation of African well-being through the lens of Ubuntu cultural dimensions. This exploration highlighted the rich tapestry of social values embedded within Ubuntu, illustrating its significance to well-being in an African context. However, despite these insights, a crucial gap persists in understanding how these Ubuntu principles directly influence and shape individual general life well-being. This unresolved question points to the need for a deeper investigation into the specific ways Ubuntu contributes to individual well-being in Africa, forming the foundation for the first research question addressed in the thesis.

- **Research Question 1 (RQ1):** To what extent do Ubuntu values contribute to individual employee experiences of general life well-being including sense of purpose, meaning and fulfilment?

By addressing RQ1, the study delves into the intricate ways in which the principles of respect, mutuality, and care, planted in Ubuntu, impact personal general life well-being. In this context, the research argues that the values inherent in Ubuntu are fundamental to holistic well-being (Nzimakwe, 2014; Chetty & Price, 2024). This perspective challenges the prevailing Western well-being models, which often overlook cultural dimensions in the conceptualisation of well-being. Consequently, RQ1 provides an understanding of well-being that is informed by the contextual cultural philosophy of Ubuntu. Such an understanding is critical, as it not only bridges the existing gap in the literature but also offers valuable insights into how Ubuntu-inspired practices including solidarity, respect, empathy through compassion and brotherly care- can inform and enhance well-being within general life.

In Chapter 4 Ubuntu's emphasis on humanness and the well-being of individuals was discussed, suggesting its potential as a valuable resource in HRM (Mangaliso, 2001; Brubaker, 2013; Nzimakwe, 2014). However, the existing research lacks robust evidence on how specific Ubuntu values can effectively function as resources within HRM practices or organisations (Sigger et al., 2010; Molose et al., 2019). Additionally, the practical application of Ubuntu in organisational management requires substantial empirical support to validate its effectiveness (Molose et al., 2019). While Ubuntu advocates for principles of mutuality, its theoretical appeal alone is insufficient for widespread adoption in modern HRM strategies and practices. To establish its tangible benefits within contemporary HRM frameworks, it is essential to gather

and analyse empirical data that demonstrates its practical use. This would enhance Ubuntu's credibility as a viable HRM approach or strategic tool and ensure its relevance in diverse organisational settings. Furthermore, as articulated in Chapter 3 (section 3.5) and supported by Nielsen (2017), workplace resources vary by workplace levels, which complicates the general application of Ubuntu principles in HRM without detailed specifications of its representation in various workplace levels. These arguments, informed by literature in Chapters 3 and 4 establish a foundation for the second research question addressed in the thesis.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): In what ways are Ubuntu values reflected as resources in organisational HRM practices at multiple levels, including (a) organisational/business policy level, (b) job/task level, (c) individual employee level?

Taking each level identified in RQ2 in turn, at the organisational level, Ubuntu values provide a critical ethical foundation for shaping organisation culture and HRM policies that guide organisational behaviour with integrity and cultural sensitivity (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019). This perspective asserts that Ubuntu's human-centric approach is integral to fostering policies rooted in respect, fairness, and dignity, thereby advancing ethical organisational practices. Such an approach is not merely idealistic but reflects a practical alignment with scholarly perspectives advocating culturally informed management strategies, especially pertinent within the African context (Sigger et al., 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014). This cultural alignment enhances organisational ethics, positioning Ubuntu as a framework for HRM by embedding ethical values at the policy level.

At the job/task level, Ubuntu's influence and operationalisation in HRM practices is evident in its promotion of work autonomy (emanating from respect and solidarity) constructive feedback (emanating from respect and compassion), and social support (emanating from solidarity and survival), each a key factor in driving employee engagement, employee motivation and job satisfaction. This argument finds support in established well-being frameworks, such as the JD-R model, which underscores autonomy, social support and constructive feedback as essential elements for enhancing employee productivity, motivation, and morale (Bakker et al., 2003; Schaufeli, 2017).

Finally, at the individual level, Ubuntu's principle of respect within HRM practices supports employees' beliefs, by ensuring they feel valued and acknowledged. This, in turn, enables employees to contribute meaningfully to the organisation while staying true to their personal values. The individual level experience (i.e., supporting individual beliefs) ensures that

employees feel that they actualise their full potential whilst pursuing purpose in a virtuous manner, in line with psychological or eudaimonic well-being perspective (Ryan & Deci, 2008; Turban & Yan, 2016).

Summarising how the thesis addresses RQ2, the conceptual framework (summarised in Figure 6) shows that at all three levels of organisational, task/job, and individual, Ubuntu serves important roles in HRM practices, playing several functions that foster organisation success and address needs of employees. These perspectives remain critical within HRM.

Moving to the third research question, Chapter 4 (sections 4.1 and 4.2) argued for the profound significance of Ubuntu in HRM within African organisations since the post-colonial era, highlighting its historical role in enhancing human dignity and addressing workplace injustices (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Nzimakwe, 2014). Further extending this discourse, Mutwarasibo & Iken (2019), contend that Ubuntu promotes common good practices that are universally beneficial in HRM. Important to this argument is that use of Ubuntu within the HRM framework offered mainly in Western contexts is influenced by various contextual factors such as historical background and cultural legacies as earlier argued in Chapter 4 (section 4.4). This intriguing perspective on the contextual factors influencing use of Ubuntu in African organisations raises questions about the extent to which such factors can influence the use of Ubuntu in HRM. More specifically, three key themes are developed from the literature.

Historical legacies: The application of Ubuntu in HRM practices is partly motivated by the desire to restore indigenous values and cultivate a sense of community and ethical responsibility in the workplace (Mangaliso, 2001). This is particularly relevant for organisations aiming to address historical injustices and disparities, as Ubuntu provides a framework for inclusivity. Studies (e.g., Karsten & Illa, 2005; Nzimakwe, 2014) indicate that many African organisations adopt Ubuntu to promote a more humane workplace culture that challenges the remnants of exploitation and alienation resulting from historical legacies.

Cultural legacies: Organisations with cultural legacies grounded in Ubuntu are more likely to adopt these values of Ubuntu as part of their HRM practices. In particular, African cultural legacies including a focus on community, respect for elders, and the interconnectedness of individuals, play a critical role in influencing management practices and decisions (Sigger et al., 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014). In settings where Ubuntu values are deeply ingrained, HRM

strategies are likely to emphasise collective decision-making, empathy, and mutual support in line with respective cultural heritage.

Leadership and management roles: Leadership plays a pivotal role in epitomizing and embedding Ubuntu values into the organisation and ensuring that Ubuntu-based HRM practices are effectively implemented. Theoretical discussions on Ubuntu often highlight Ubuntu leadership as characterised by empathy, inclusiveness, and a commitment to the collective good (Muller et al., 2019). In addition to leadership, HR managers and supervisors are responsible for translating Ubuntu values into day-to-day HRM practices. This involves creating policies and fostering practices that support Ubuntu's cultural values and ensuring that these policies are consistently applied across the organisation. Overall, the argument here is that the success of Ubuntu-based HRM practices is contingent on leadership that embodies and exemplifies Ubuntu values in their practices. This suggests that the extent to which Ubuntu can be operationalised in HRM depends on management's commitment to these principles.

These arguments set the stage for the third research question explored in the thesis.

- **Research Question 3 (RQ3):** How does external and internal organisational context influence the application of Ubuntu values in HRM; specifically, what role is played by (a) the African context in terms of historical and cultural legacies, (b) sectoral dynamics (public versus private sector), and (c) leadership and management styles?

The final research question builds on Chapter 3 which identified a critical tension within HRM practices: the need to balance practices that drive organisational performance with those that bring about employee well-being, thus aligning with the mutual gain's perspective. The central challenge in HRM, however, lies in reconciling performance-driven models, including High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS), with the ethical responsibility to support employee well-being (Ogboonaya & Messersmith, 2019; Elorza e al., 2021). This tension often revolves around contrasting approaches within HRM, others focusing on the employer and others on employees as highlighted by Ho and Kuvaas (2019). Chapter 3 explored the concept of mutual gains as a possible solution to these contrasting approaches within HRM (Ho & Kuvaas, 2019). It proposed that HRM practices can be designed to benefit both the organisation and its employees, theoretically promoting employee well-being without compromising organisational performance. Building on this, Chapter 4 introduced Ubuntu as a potential ethical framework for HRM reinforcing mutual gains. Ubuntu principles including mutuality,

dignity, respect, compassion, and community, align closely with ethical HRM theories that prioritise employee well-being. By fostering mutual respect and a sense of community, Ubuntu presents a sensible, suitable and sustainable approach to achieving mutual gains for both employees and organisations alike.

However, the effectiveness of Ubuntu-inspired HRM practices is subject to various internal and external organisational factors, as exemplified in section 4.4. These factors will determine the extent to which Ubuntu can be integrated and reflected in HRM practices and ultimately contribute to mutual gains. This sets the stage for a deeper investigation into how contextual factors including the application of Ubuntu in HRM may shape mutual gains within the workplace. This leads to the foundation of the final research question.

- **Research Question 4 (RQ4):** How does the influence of contextual factors and the utilisation of Ubuntu within HRM practices, shape the likelihood of achieving mutual gains for employers and employees?

More specifically, RQ4 explores both employer and employee perspectives. From the employer perspective, the focus is on three areas:

Enhanced organisational reputation: Ubuntu's emphasis on ethical leadership, respect, and community builds a strong organisational reputation both internally and externally. Organisations with African cultural and historical legacies that adopt Ubuntu are seen as more humane, respectful, socially responsible, and fair, which enhances their public image or reputation.

Strategic advantage: Organisations integrating Ubuntu into their HRM practices gain a strategic advantage, fostering a unique business environment built on compassion, dignity, and respect. This human-centered approach strengthens the organisation's business position, making Ubuntu an integral part of its business strategy.

Enhanced employee motivation: Ubuntu-based HRM practices enhance employee motivation by creating a workplace culture of compassion, mutual respect, support, and collaboration. These values of Ubuntu encourage employees to see themselves as integral members of a community, which fosters a sense of loyalty and commitment to the organisation and its goals. (Tautsile, 2021). This ultimately, enhances employee motivation, and contributes to better organisational performance.

From the employee perspective, a further three areas are explored.

Personal growth and development: Ubuntu promotes personal development of employees by emphasising the importance of solidarity and survival through mutual support, which brings about growth. HRM highlights policies and initiatives that focus on employee development, including continuous learning, career growth, and skills enhancement (Tautsile, 2021). This fosters a sense of achievement and growth, conducive for employee well-being (Chetty & Price, 2024).

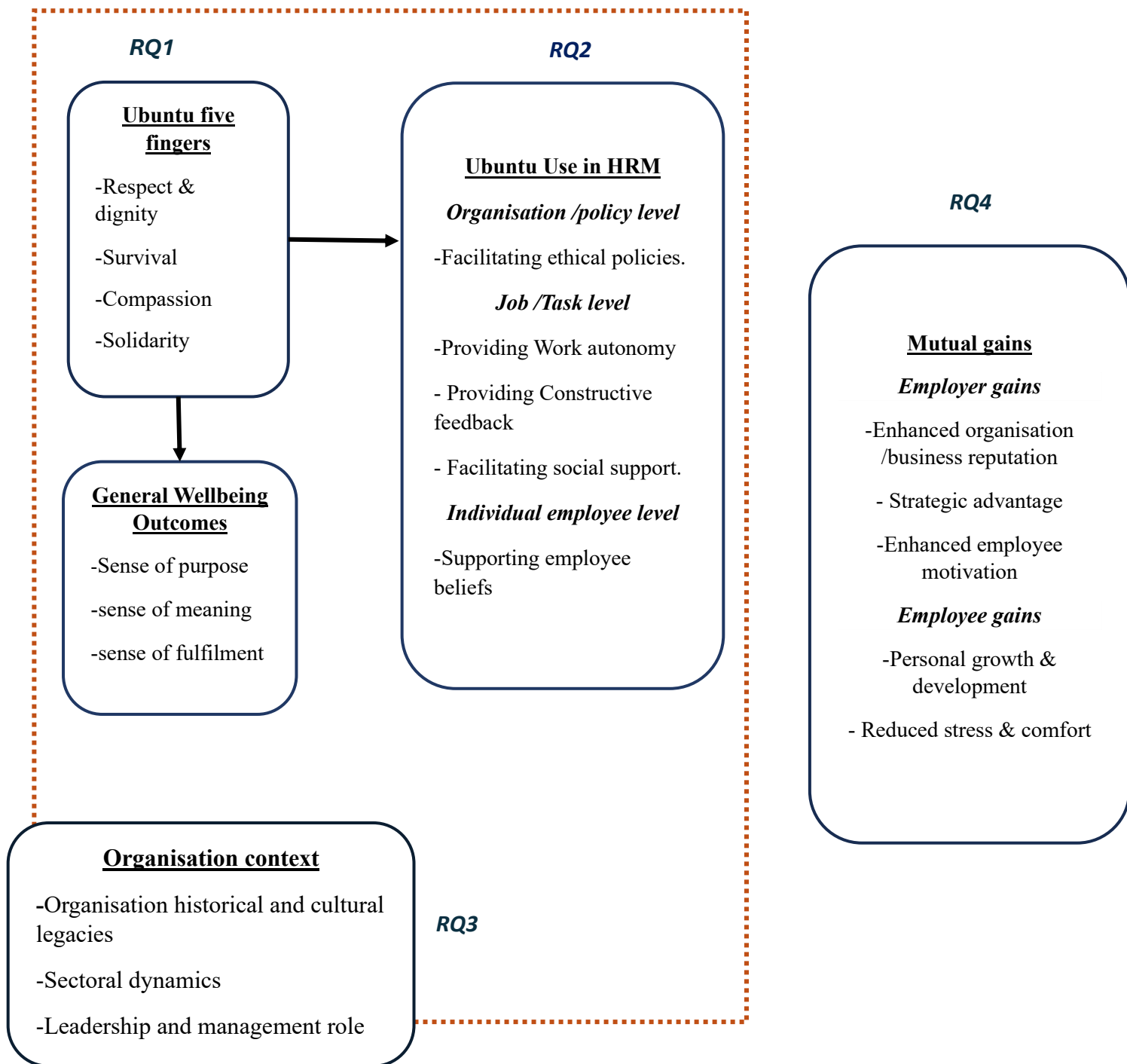
Reduced stress and comfort: Ubuntu's focus on community, respect, and shared responsibility creates a supportive and caring workplace culture, which helps to reduce workplace stress and promote employee well-being. HRM practices that reflect Ubuntu values ensure that employees feel valued and supported, not just as workers but as individuals. This contributes to reduced stress levels and improved mental health, which are critical for sustaining employee well-being (Schaufeli, 2017).

Figure 6 summarises the relationship between the key concepts explored in the thesis (i.e., Ubuntu, HRM, well-being and mutual gains). This framework guides the design of the empirical study and the analysis and interpretation of findings to derive theoretical contributions. In this case, the conceptual framework explores the application of the Ubuntu Five Fingers values as resources used within HRM practices to reinforce employee well-being. By integrating Ubuntu into HRM at individual, job/task and organisational levels, the framework highlights the possibility of fostering ethical, human-centered values that promote mutual benefits for both employers and employees. Figure 6 shows the analysis to unfold in a structured and logical sequence, beginning with an exploration of the foundational values of Ubuntu and their impact on personal well-being (RQ1) and subsequently considering how these values manifest and reflect within HRM practices at the organisational, job/task, and individual levels (RQ2). Following this, the framework situates these HRM practices within the African organisational context, considering how the organisational context influences the application of Ubuntu in HRM (RQ3).

Finally, the conceptual framework highlights how Ubuntu also functions as a strategic resource for generating mutually advantageous outcomes for both employees and employers (RQ4). It is proposed that rather than forcing a choice between the two (performance or well-being), well-designed HRM approaches can provide advantages to both employers and employees

(Pecci et al., 2013). Ubuntu-based HRM practices support this concept by creating a work environment that promotes both ethical behaviour and performance, ensuring mutual benefits for both parties and stakeholders. This aligns well with the argument that mutual benefits arise when employers implement practices that enhance productivity whilst also meeting the employee needs of support, respect, and growth, thus fostering motivation and engagement (Edgar et al., 2015; Ogbonnaya et al., 2019). However, the conceptual framework proposed in this thesis stands out from other mutual gains frameworks of HRM as it introduces cultural values in the simultaneous attainment of performance and well-being.

Figure 6: Conceptual framework



4.9 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has explored how the philosophy of Ubuntu can be integrated into HRM practices as a resource for fostering a more ethical and employee-centered workplace environment. Chapter 4 introduced the 'Five Fingers Theory' as a framework illustrating Ubuntu's core values and their relevance to the workplace. The discussion further examined how these values function both independently and synergistically within HRM frameworks to create a supportive and cohesive work environment that drives mutual gains. The Five Fingers Theory underscores Ubuntu's transformative potential in HRM by promoting collective responsibility, mutual support, and respect for individual dignity. Moreover, this chapter contextualised Ubuntu within Africa's historical and cultural landscape, analysing the influence of these factors on its presence in African workplaces. It also contrasted the application of Ubuntu in public and private sector organisations, highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities each sector faces in integrating Ubuntu values into HRM practices. While the public sector, shaped by post-colonial humanist policies, tends to emphasise social justice and inclusivity within an Ubuntu framework, the private sector- driven by capitalist imperatives often prioritises profitability, sometimes at the expense of employee well-being. However, the South African private sector provides a compelling example of how Ubuntu principles can be successfully embedded in HRM practices within the private sector, effectively balancing profit-making with social responsibility. In addition, the chapter critically examined the role of managers in embedding Ubuntu within HRM practices, arguing that effective leadership is essential in transforming Ubuntu's values from abstract concepts into tangible workplace realities. Furthermore, when effectively harnessed, it is argued, Ubuntu offers a transformative approach to HRM in Africa, aligning organisational practices with the broader African cultural ethos. This alignment contributes to the overall sustainability and success of organisations operating within this context. Finally, this chapter presented a conceptual framework that follows the logic of the literature review and proposed four research questions. Within the conceptual framework, Ubuntu's contribution to HRM lies in its capacity to foster a workplace environment where employees experience well-being and the organization reaps mutual gains. At the core, Ubuntu enhances individual experiences of purpose, meaning, and fulfilment, while at the organizational level, it promotes shared success through values of respect, solidarity, and compassion. However, leadership and the broader organisational context are key factors that influence the effective application of Ubuntu in HRM, shaping the potential for long-term mutual benefits for both employees and the organisation.

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological approach taken to address the research questions developed in the previous chapters. It details the rationale behind the empirical study and research design and presents specific data collection methods. The first part of the chapter outlines the research context of Zambia, the case country for the empirical study, and the reasons for selecting Zambia for the study. Justification for a comparative case study strategy is presented focusing on the contrasts and similarities in practices of Ubuntu HRM practices and employee experiences between the public and private sector organisations. The philosophical approach and the reasons for adopting a qualitative method to explore Ubuntu HRM practices in the workplace are explained. The chapter also talks about the selection of the key informants or participants for the research and the rationale behind their selection. This includes details about the various data collection methods used including interviews, participant observations and document analysis. In addition, issues related to ethics, data quality, credibility, reliability, reflexivity and generalizability are covered to illustrate efforts and measures taken to ensure rigorous data collection. An account of documentation and recording of data collected in the research and the challenges encountered during data collection is presented. Finally, the chapter outlines the thematic approach taken in data analysis.

5.1 The research context of Zambia

Zambia's constitution enshrines values of morality, integrity, national unity, human dignity, and social justice (Posner, 2003). These Zambian ethics mentioned are also a reflection of the Ubuntu cultural values discussed in Chapter 2 and 4. These rich cultural ethics positions Zambia as an exemplary and compelling case to investigate on Ubuntu culture. In addition, Zambia stands out as an ideal country for studying the use of Ubuntu in HRM practices within the workplace, largely due to its culturally rooted national motto. For example, the national motto "One Zambia One Nation" which serves as Zambia's ideal or guiding principle epitomizes the significance of unity and the strong values of solidarity which are rooted in Ubuntu. Other complementary slogans like "tiyende pamoozi na mutima uno" (we move together with one heart) further highlight the nation's dedication towards collective spirit and

shared values. These expressions of solidarity embedded in Zambian culture, showcase a profound embrace of Ubuntu principles making it a suitable country for exploration in this study.

As a landlocked country at the crossroads of southern, central, and eastern Africa (African Development Bank- Zambia profile, 2016), Zambia has a deep cultural heritage due to its diverse population including the Bantu (ethnolinguistic grouping from central, southern, eastern Africa) speaking people (Posner, 2003). Moreover, Zambia is home to over seventy ethnic groups, thus making it a multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multicultural country (Marteen & Kula, 2014). This provides a unique context for exploring Ubuntu in the workplace, because Zambia's diverse social fabric enriches its cultural landscape, with various customs, social norms, practices, and ceremonies, (Safaris, 2020) representative of Africa and ideal for this study.

The ethnic groups in Zambia all have their own peculiar traditional ceremonies, including the Kuomboka of the Lozi people, Kusefypangwena of the Bemba people, NC 'Wala of the Ngoni people, and Mutomboko of the Lunda (Taylor, 2006). Such traditional ceremonies are a celebration of significant aspects of life which cover also different beliefs from other countries of Africa. For example, the NC 'Wala ceremony of the Ngoni is also attended by the Malawian's who share similar beliefs with the Ngoni people of Zambia. Also, the Mutomboko of the Lunda in Luapula province of Zambia is also celebrated by the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, because nearly all the Lunda people trace their origins from the King Mwata Yamvo, now under the kingship of Mwata Kazembe. The Lunda people of Zambia migrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Taylor, 2006). Therefore, having a case of Zambia to explore Ubuntu in the workplace in an African context captures the context of a developing country with peculiar African cultural perspectives with proximate characteristics with the wider African context.

Furthermore, Zambia upholds national values of respect, love which are derived from Christian morals reflective of the African philosophy of Ubuntu (Zambian culture, 2003; Cheyeka, 2022). It is believed that Zambia's colonial history contributed to Zambia's adoption of Ubuntu and Christian values as the guiding principles of the inhabitants of Zambia (Posner, 2003). For example, before the colonisation of most countries in Africa, the continent was explored by several Christian missionaries (Safaris, 2020). The prominent missionary in Sub-Saharan Africa is David Livingstone (a Scottish missionary). During the 19th century, David

Livingstone introduced Christianity to Northern Rhodesia (present Zambia) as he led the way through central Africa for missionaries who initiated health care and education for Africans. At the death bed of the Christian Missionary (David Livingstone) in 1873 in the district of Chitambo based in Zambia. David Livingstone said, *“Lord on this land where I rest my bended knees, let it become a mighty Christian nation, a beacon of hope to the African continent and a light to the rest of the world”*. The influence of David Livingstone on Zambia’s religion is evident enough, because after colonisation the majority of the Zambians (86%) continued to practice Christianity as their religion (Cheyeka, 2016). In 1991, the second republican president Fredrick Chiluba declared Zambia to be a Christian nation. By 1996 the Zambian constitution officially stated Zambia to be a Christian nation (Safaris, 2020). Many other national activities such as the National Day of Prayer and fasting held every 18th day of October signify the importance of religion in Zambia. Because of these moral cultural ethics, Zambia is known to be a beacon of peace, and a host of international business in Africa (Zeburu, 2018). The country of Zambia is ranked as 5th by SADC (2021) and 4th by COMESA (2021) in terms of ease of doing business, which attracts many investors that end up as inhabitants. Zambia’s ease of doing business and its attraction to international investors is said to be because of its rich friendly cultural heritage of Ubuntu (Zambia National Development Plan, 2017).

Also important, as a Zambian national, I had easier access to organisations within the country, facilitating the research process. As a national this meant collecting data from a home country, where I am familiar with the way of life, local language and terminologies, thus making data collection and interpretation easier.

5.2 Comparative case study design and case study selection

A comparative case study strategy was followed in this study. Case studies are recognised to have in-depth inquiry in a real-life setting with real situations and people (Yin, 2018), thus making rich empirical insights that help develop a theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Ridder, 2014; Yin, 2018). Besides that, case studies allow researchers to explore real situations and people in different contexts (Eisenhardt 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) from multiple sources. Comparative case study was relevant in the present study given the research aim of understanding and analysing the practices of Ubuntu in HRM across the public and private sector organisations.

Comparing different information from the two sectors was particularly essential in developing a comprehensive set of findings and building a robust theory. Unlike a single case study, which limits the scope of findings and results into more generalised conclusions (Saunders et al., 2019), a comparative approach provides a broader perspective with sector specific nuances. This method was particularly valuable for uncovering how different values of Ubuntu are implemented or overlooked in HRM practices across the sectors. Thus, the comparative case study provided a clearer and more detailed picture of the operationalisation and application of Ubuntu values in diverse organisational contexts, thereby enhancing the overall validity of the findings.

Yin (2003) posits that the use of multiple cases significantly mitigates the risks and criticisms associated with single case studies, primarily the lack of comparative analysis, which can substantially weaken the robustness of the data. Incorporating multiple cases also strengthens the study's analytical depth, providing more nuanced insights by identifying trends, patterns and variations across different sectors. Without comparisons of multiple cases, interpretation of data findings can be constrained to specific sectoral context, thus limiting the applicability to broader contexts. However, multiple cases enhance the transferability of the research findings.

The public sector organisation selected is the Ministry of Agriculture (PublicOrg), while the private sector cases include two insurance companies operating in Zambia and other African countries (PrivateOrg1 and PrivateOrg2). The Ministry of Agriculture with its large workforce and alignment with the national ethics, provides a comprehensive view of Ubuntu practices and experiences in line with HRM within the public sector. On the other hand, private sector organizations, with their extensive presence across Africa and diverse operational structures, provide valuable insights into the application of Ubuntu principles within a business context. Their cross-regional reach and varied industry engagement allow for a deeper exploration of how Ubuntu is integrated into corporate and business practices, leadership styles, and employee relations in different economic and cultural settings.

The selection of these organisations was strategically based on their accessibility and relevance to the study's aim (Saunders et al., 2019). These three organisations not only facilitated interviews with their workers but also permitted me to engage as a participant observer upon my request. This dual role enhanced the depth of my insights, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of their operational dynamics. Additionally, these organisations provided access to a range of internal documents including organisational manuals, recruitment

and selection documents, employment contracts, performance management documents, and employee relations documents, which were crucial in understanding which Ubuntu values are included in HRM policies. Such a combination of observations and document review significantly enriched the data for this study, ensuring a multifaceted exploration of the organisational practices under investigation.

In selecting the case study organisations, it was crucial to ensure that both employees and management were enthusiastic and corporative in providing insights during interviews. Engaging an organisation where the workforce was unwilling to participate could have severely constrained the study findings, because participants could have given limited data out of their unwillingness to participate. Therefore, I prioritised organisations that demonstrated a genuine readiness and positive energy to contribute to the research. This approach ensured for an authentic exploration of the subject under study, because participants told their side of story enthusiastically. There was lots of humour as participants told their stories and experiences of Ubuntu. Employees and management from the three organisations chosen were fully supportive, eager, and cooperative in sharing their perspectives on Ubuntu in their work experiences. This significantly enhanced the study's depth and validity as well as making data collection a much more efficient process.

Furthermore, the nature of the public and private sector organisation in terms of ownership, and goals detailed in Chapter 4 provides a basis for one to understand that these organisations have varying factors influencing their use of Ubuntu in HRM and the nature of practices and policies in their organisation (Khan & Khandaker, 2016) hence the need to draw comparisons between sectors. Despite the compelling historical background on the differences in adoption of Ubuntu in the public and private sector as explored in Chapter 4, limited research has focused on the comparison of Ubuntu in the workplace between the public and private sector organisations. Instead, research has generalised Ubuntu as an African management practice (Mangaliso, 2001; Sigger e al., 2010) without distinguishing its implementation in the public and private sector. Given this gap, a multi-case study approach was particularly relevant for this study, as it provided a broader and more nuanced understanding of Ubuntu's role in HRM within both public and private sector organizations.

Moreover, comparative case study not only broadens the scope of the study, but it also enriches the data through the inclusion of participants from varied backgrounds. For example, the private sector organisations had participants who are South African by nationality. Such

diversity provided a more holistic understanding on the perceptions on the use and resourcefulness of Ubuntu in different workplace contexts.

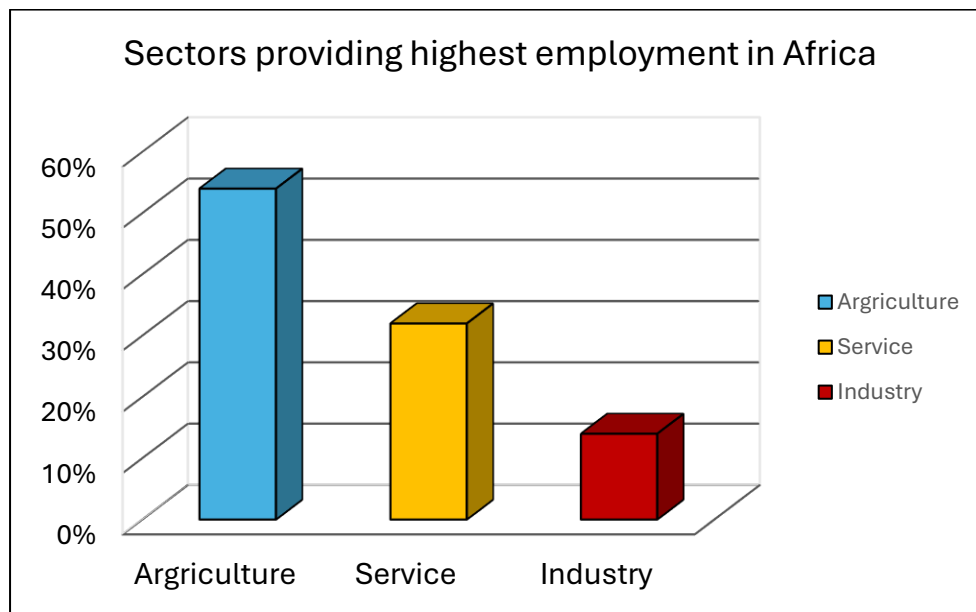
The selection of the public and private sector organisations is also underpinned by literature suggesting that Ubuntu was first introduced in the workplace as ethical values in the public sector organisations to dignify and care about workers' rights that was lost during a time of white dominance that was characterized by racial segregation as discussed in Chapter 4. Even though Ubuntu is suggested to have been introduced in the public sector, Mangaliso et al., (2018) suggest that Ubuntu pervades through an African community including the private sector. This makes it relevant to have a case from both the public and private sector to draw comparisons and identify similarities relating to Ubuntu and its relevance as a workplace resource in these sectors.

The public sector organisation chosen as a case (PublicOrg) has been in existence for more than four decades, operating under government mandate to comply to national ethics of “*one Zambia one nation*”; thus, this organisation explicitly espouses the values of Ubuntu solidarity (Bwalya, 2008). This makes it a valuable case for establishing relevant information in understanding of Ubuntu in the workplace. A further reason for choosing this public sector was because it has a large and diverse workforce of more than 2000 employees originating from and spread across nine regions of Zambia with a mix of cultural beliefs. This extensive geographical spread and diversity offer a diversity of data from people of different regions, ranging from south, east, north, central, western parts of Zambia.

Further such a wide workforce within the public sector organisation allowed interviews with senior management, middle management staff and employees in lower positions including cleaners. This range of occupational positions and job titles provided an opportunity to draw insights across different occupational levels and functions within the organisation.

Furthermore, the reason for selecting this public sector under study, is because it represents the largest employment sector of Africa, although characterised by deficient work conditions (Zambia National Development Plan, 2017; ILO, 2021). The Agricultural sector provides the largest source of employment at over 54% of the public sector workforce (Figure 7). The public sector's vast reach and impact on Africa's economy ensures that the findings are relevant and applicable on both continental and national levels, providing a robust basis for conclusion of findings.

Figure 7: Africa's employment largest sectors



Source ILO (2023)

The selection of PrivateOrg1 and PrivateOrg2 as case studies for this research is strategic, given that they are both in the service industry, a sector that represents the second largest source of employment in Africa (Africa Employment Landscape, 2020). By focusing on these two organisations, the aim was to provide a comprehensive overview of workplace practices and the integration of Ubuntu principles within the private sector in Africa. The insights gained from PrivateOrg1 and PrivateOrg2 offer a representative snapshot of the broader employment practices and trends across Africa's private sector. This approach ensures that the findings are both relevant and reflective of a significant portion of Africa's employment landscape.

Private Org1, a pan African insurance brokers service company with over 300,000 employees, operates not only in Zambia but also in several African countries including, Algeria, Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo, Senegal, Rwanda, Niger, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Togo, Gabon, and Tunisia. Such extensive presence across diverse African nations provides a rich cultural backdrop for studying the significance of Ubuntu principles to HRM practices and employee experiences. The varied cultural context within the same organisation allows for a comprehensive exploration of how Ubuntu is perceived and its impact on individual well-being in an African private sector workforce setting. Moreover, PrivateOrg1's diverse operational landscape, has distinct historical and social contexts, offering a rich ground for identifying factors influencing the adoption of Ubuntu in HRM.

PrivateOrg2 is one of the largest African insurance service companies established 100 years ago (Think Africa, 2022) as of the time of data collection in 2022. PrivateOrg2 has 21,000 employees with an annual revenue of over USD 6.311 billion (Think Africa, 2022). Having operations in South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Botswana, Rwanda, Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi, Swaziland, Namibia, Uganda, Malaysia, India, and the UK. Originating in South Africa, where Ubuntu is a prominent cultural philosophy (Karsten & Illa, 2005), PrivateOrg2 provides a rich context for understanding the application of deeply rooted Ubuntu principles in HRM practices. The South African roots of PrivateOrg2 where Ubuntu is integral (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019), allow for an in-depth analysis of the social and historical factors that have shaped HRM practices within the organisation. Furthermore, its large workforce provides a robust sample size for gathering relevant data from a varied group of employees and HR professionals. The long history and established Ubuntu policies of Private Org2 offer insights into the evolution and current state of Ubuntu HRM practices.

Furthermore, the selection of these sectors for the case study is based on their significant contribution to Africa's economy. The service industry accounts for approximately 55% of the continent's GDP, while agriculture contributes around 20% (African Development Bank, 2024). This highlights the economic importance of the three case study organisations within Africa. Drawing insights from these key sectors enhances the study's relevance by providing a deeper understanding of Ubuntu's role in HRM within industries that are central to the continent's economic output and landscape. Overall, it is argued that the three case study organisations offer a comprehensive and comparative framework for exploring the research objectives by drawing from key sectors that drive Africa's economy and employment.

5.3 Adopting an ethnography approach

Given the study's focus on Ubuntu cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences, an ethnographic research strategy was adopted. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) and Fetterman (2010) noted that ethnographic research takes a cultural lens in the study of the lives of people in their communities, thus suiting this study. In short, ethnography is a "*written account of the way of life for people in a context*" (Trondman, 2017). Ethnography allows for in-depth understanding of social dynamics and human behaviour in their natural setting (Wolcott, 2008; Fetterman, 2010).

This approach involves the researcher being present in the organisation and closely interacting with participants to capture authentic behaviours and practices (Wolcott, 2008; Fetterman, 2010). Therefore, one of the reasons why I embraced an ethnography approach is because I needed to be present in the three case study organisations and have close contact with employees and management, as well as HR staff to observe and hear about their actual behaviours and practices in relation to Ubuntu values in the workplace in their context.

Also, understanding ways in which Ubuntu is a workplace resource and how it shapes management practices required me to be extensively involved in the daily lives of participants covertly or overtly over a period using an ethnographic approach (Fetterman, 2010). Ethnography helped me to gain a deep contextualised understanding of social dynamics and human behaviour on Ubuntu in the workplace, thus helping to avoid or refrain from biased or superficial interpretations. Furthermore, having close participation allowed for a rich narrative, of Ubuntu (Wolcott, 2006). This study, therefore, was informed by three main elements of ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), detailed below.

1. **Interest in cultural understanding and meaning making:** This element of ethnography aligns well with this study, considering that one of study objectives is examining the relationship between the understanding of Ubuntu cultural principles and individual experiences of well-being. This ethnographic element also aligns with the study aim of exploring the relevance and use of Ubuntu within HRM practices across different organisational levels and across different sectors in Africa. A central focus of this study is the understanding of the Ubuntu cultural concept, particularly how employees and HR professionals interpret its significance in daily work life. Ultimately, the study is driven by a strong interest in cultural understanding and meaning making within the workplace context, in relation to Ubuntu.
2. **Being close to the field and collecting firsthand information:** The study objective of exploring the relevance and use of Ubuntu within HRM practices across different organisational levels required being present to the field, thus, suiting this study which involved engaging with three case study organisations through participant observations for three months. This method enabled me to observe and participate in the daily work environment undertakings, capturing the lived experiences of employees and HR professionals. This ethnography perspective ensured that the collected data is grounded in real world observations, providing a robust foundation for analysing empirical data on how Ubuntu is integrated into HRM practices and its actual impact on employees.

3. **Looking at culture from an emic perspective:** Furthermore, ethnography approach has been applied with an emic or native point of view (LeCompte & Schensul's, 2010). This means that I looked at the culture of Ubuntu with an insider perspective being a Zambian by collecting first-hand thoughts of Ubuntu from inside the Zambian based organisations. This perspective of ethnography is crucial for capturing authentic insights and nuanced understandings that an outsider might miss. My background as a Zambian, allowed me to naturally interpret the subtleties of Ubuntu and its application and implication within the Zambian and broader African context. An emic approach was appropriate to ensure an accurate contextualisation of Ubuntu use within HRM practices, understanding the social and cultural factors affecting its adoption and implementation in an African workplace.

With an emic perspective, I was embedded in the case study organisations where I was welcomed and viewed as a part of the team (an insider). I was privileged to have an authentic insider's view in a naturalistic setting of the workplace in which employees and management act naturally focusing on both verbal and non-verbal cues and behaviours. My presence in the three case organisations allowed me to document real everyday practices, unexpected behaviours, social patterns, experiences, and interactions about Ubuntu that cannot be easily captured and adequately understood and conveyed from a distance. Unlike the etic ethnographic perspective where the researcher regards culture from a theoretical conception across different cultures with an outside view (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015), an emic perspective was suitable because the study focused on one culture of Ubuntu looking for culturally specific practices and meanings.

5.4 Constructivist Approach

Saunders et al. (2019) highlights the importance of selecting a research paradigm that aligns with the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions. Constructivism acknowledges and recognises the idea that reality is socially constructed through individual experiences and cultural contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2005). This perspective is particularly relevant to this study which also seeks to explore the meaning and significance of Ubuntu with a specific cultural context of an African workplace. A detailed argument on the use of constructivist paradigm in this research is detailed below.

Firstly, one of the primary objectives of this study is to explore the overlap between Ubuntu principles and individual experiences of well-being. Given this focus, constructivism is well-suited to the study, as it emphasizes how individuals construct meaning based on their cultural and social contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Since Ubuntu is deeply embedded in the cultural and social fabric of Africa, a constructivist paradigm allows for an in-depth exploration of both personal and collective interpretations of Ubuntu within the African social context. Additionally, the study seeks to explore the relevance and application of Ubuntu within organisational HRM practices. Constructivism is particularly appropriate for this objective, as it prioritises understanding participants lived experiences and the meanings, they ascribe to them (Tashakkori et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study aims to identify the organisational factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of Ubuntu in HRM practices. This requires an understanding of historical and social influences, making constructivism an ideal paradigm due to its emphasis on contextualizing phenomena within their broader socio-historical frameworks (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Secondly, constructivism resonates with this study's epistemological and ontological perspectives whose nature of reality is constructed from cultural beliefs and perspectives (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2005). This study analysed ways in which meaning and knowledge of Ubuntu as a workplace resource is socially constructed in a specific cultural setting of Zambia in Sub-Saharan Africa, a region where Ubuntu is historically believed to have emerged (Karsten & Illa, 2005). The importance of studying a phenomenon within its social, historical, and cultural context is a core principle of constructivism, making it well-suited for this research. Constructivism underscores that knowledge is acquired through understanding experiences and the contexts in which they emerge, reinforcing the study's approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Thirdly, a constructivist world view ontologically emphasises that individuals socially make sense of the world based on their unique beliefs and experiences that often this results in an emergence of diverse perspectives and realities (Adom & Ankrah, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a researcher that adopted this paradigm, I based my understanding on participants' own constructions of meaning, their narrations and lived experiences of Ubuntu in the workplace (Tashakkori et al., 2021). This led to the emergence of multiple realities. Employees and management had varied experiences, narratives, and knowledge about Ubuntu. This gave me an opportunity to delve into the different meanings and interpretations that came from participants and organisation documents. Constructivism supports this by acknowledging that

diverse perspectives are valid and can co-exist. This was particularly essential in a study of a phenomenon like Ubuntu, which is inherently multifaceted and complex (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019). Since Ubuntu is a multifaceted phenomenon (Nzimakwe, 2014), there was a need to adopt a paradigm that has flexibility to allow me to be open to diverse interpretations that emerged instead of being fixed to a single reality. As such, the flexibility of constructivism (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2005) also made it suitable for this study.

In summary, adopting a constructivist research paradigm is justified for this study because it aligns with the ontological and epistemological foundations of understanding socially constructed realities. Constructivism also offers flexibility needed to explore diverse perspectives and emphasises the importance of cultural and historical contexts, making it well suited to achieving the research aims and objectives for this study.

5.4 Participant selection

I was privileged to be given access by three case study organisations to interview any workers from various positions including management, HR, and employees. All workers in the three organisations were eager to participate in the research. According to one of the workers at *PrivateOrg 1*, the workers hoped that this research could bring a positive transformation to working conditions in the workplace. Although all employees in the three organisations were willing to participate, it was not feasible to interview everyone. After spending time in the organisations and interacting with workers, I prioritised the quality of the sample focusing on those who could offer in-depth relevant insights. I identified participants from management, HRM, and employees in various positions. This approach recognises that opinions and narratives about work may differ or align depending on an individual's roles and experiences within the organisations.

While Baker et al., (2012) suggest that a typical study involves 12 to 30 participants, I set an ambitious target of interviewing 50 individuals. This 50 was reasonable to gain sufficient spoken insights from participants considering that the study also had other sources data collection including observations and document analysis. Specifically, 27 were from *PublicOrg*, 15 from *PrivateOrg1* and 8 from *PrivateOrg2* as specified in Table 5. This achievement not only exceeds standard expectations but also provides a richer dataset. The participants represent a diverse range of demographics as outlined in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Profiles of interview participants

PublicOrg			PrivateOrg1			PrivateOrg2		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Provincial Director	1		Chief Executive Officer	1		Managing Director	1	
HR Director		1	HR Manager		1	Branch secretary		1
HR Manager	1		HR Officer	4		HR manager		1
HR Officers	3	3	Debt Collections Officer	1		Insurance officer	3	
HR Clerks	2	2	Administrative Officer		1	Receptionist		1
Marketing Officer	1		Receptionist		1	Cleaner	1	
IT Officers	3		Secretary to CEO		1			
District operations Officer	1	1	Administrative Clerk	2				
Provincial secretary	1		Accounts clerk	1				
Receptionist		1	Cleaner		2			
Administrative officers	2	2						
Cleaners		2						
27			15			8		

Table 5: Demographic profiles of interview participants.

		Gender			Case organisation		
		<i>Female</i> 22	<i>Male</i> 28		<i>PublicOrg</i>	<i>PrivateOrg</i> 1	<i>PrivateOrg</i> 2
Age group	20-25	2	3	5	1	2	2
	26-30	5	5	10	6	3	1
	31-35	3	3	6	4	2	
	36-40	3	4	7	4	2	1
	41-45	3	6	9	5	2	2
	46-50	4	3	7	5	1	1
	>50	2	4	6	3	2	1
Level of Education	PHD	0	1	1	1	0	0
	Masters	7	10	17	10	4	3
	Bachelors	6	8	14	6	4	4
	Diploma	6	7	13	6	7	0
	Secondary education	3	2	5	4	0	1

5.5 Data collection

Qualitative methods require the researcher to make sense of socially constructed meanings about a phenomenon under study (Saunders et al., 2019). Qualitative data collection methods research is also typically applied in constructivist research to provide the desired understanding of a particular phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 1988). It is therefore appropriate for capturing data relevant to the context and socially constructed meanings and complexities of Ubuntu at work. Strauss & Corbin (1990) assert that qualitative research serves as a valuable tool for exploring, examining, and explaining people's behaviours and narratives. Additionally, it can be applied to studying organisational functioning and the social dynamics within an organisation. By providing participants with a platform to express their feelings, thoughts, and opinions about Ubuntu in their own words through interviews, the study captured rich, personal narratives essential for understanding Ubuntu in the workplace and paid particular attention to participants' perspectives (Creswell, 1998), rather than relying on pre-existing research in the subject area. Also, qualitative methods are appropriate for this research because the nature of the topic is one that required exploration (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023), to gain deeper insights on Ubuntu as a workplace resource. Interview questions sought an in-depth and open-ended

response from participants with questions that start with asking ‘in what ways’, ‘what’ and ‘how’.

The qualitative data collected in this study focused on theory building (Saunders et al., 2019), as presented in the conceptual framework (Chapter 4). It was, therefore, accompanied by abductive reasoning, which entails a dynamic interplay between data and theory to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Abduction is different from the more linear approaches of deduction and induction, as it involves oscillating between empirical data and theory. This methodological choice allowed me to iteratively refine and develop the theoretical framework by drawing insights from the field data and existing literature. Initially, I collected data from the field, focusing on the meanings and significance of Ubuntu in shaping well-being. This empirical data provided a foundation for exploring how Ubuntu principles influence individual and collective experiences within various sectors. Simultaneously, I engaged with relevant theoretical frameworks that offer insights in HRM and cultural practices, as presented in Chapters 2-4, thereby grounding my field observations in established scholarly discourse.

As the research progressed, I moved from the field data back to theory, interpreting and reinterpreting the data through different theoretical lenses (e.g., Ubuntu Five Fingers model, Job-Demands Resources model). This iterative process of moving from the data to theory and back to data enabled a nuanced understanding and facilitated the generation of new theoretical insights. By borrowing logic from both empirical evidence and literature, I was able to construct a more robust and contextually relevant theoretical framework. By utilising an abductive approach, this study bridges the gap between empirical data and theoretical development. An abductive approach not only enhances the validity and relevance of the findings but also contributes to the broader discourse on the intersection of cultural values and HRM practices in Africa.

To support this abductive approach and thoroughly explore the intricacy of the research questions, this study used multiple methods - interviews, observations and documents analysis. The selection of a multi-method qualitative approach was driven by the nature of the research questions, which could not be adequately addressed using a single data collection method.

Firstly, since Ubuntu is deeply embedded in social life (Poovan et al., 2006), interviews were essential for capturing subjective, lived experiences. Personal narratives provided a platform

for participants to reflect on how Ubuntu values of respect, solidarity, and compassion, manifest in their personal and professional lives. This method facilitated the capturing of the nuances of Ubuntu and its contribution to well-being. By allowing participants to share past and present experiences, interviews offered insights into the evolving relationship between Ubuntu and individual well-being (RQ1). Interviews with both management and employees were crucial for understanding how Ubuntu values, such as community and mutual respect, are integrated into HRM practices like recruitment, performance management, and feedback mechanisms. Firsthand accounts helped illuminate how different stakeholders perceive and experience Ubuntu in the workplace, capturing a range of perspectives on its role in HRM (RQ2). Additionally, interviews with management and employees provided personal perspectives on how historical and cultural changes have shaped the use of Ubuntu in HRM. Interviews were further important to offer insights into the importance of leadership and management practices in reinforcing Ubuntu values (RQ3). Interviews also explored both employer and employee perspectives on how Ubuntu adds value to the organisation. Interviews allowed respondents to share specific examples of how Ubuntu's principles, such as mutual respect and shared responsibility, lead to tangible benefits like employee motivation and a supportive work culture. Thus, interviews were important for both management and employees to reflect on how Ubuntu creates a balance between organisational and individual goals, offering mutual benefits (RQ4).

Secondly, observing workplace activities and HRM processes helped reveal how Ubuntu values are practically applied in everyday activities and practices, adding an essential layer to the interview data relevant for all research questions. It was important to observe tangible evidence of how Ubuntu manifests in behaviour, teamwork, and decision-making, revealing insights that might not be fully verbalized by interview participants. Observation also allowed me to see how leadership styles, workplace culture, and employee relations influence application of Ubuntu within the workplace. For instance, observing leadership interactions revealed whether they embody the collectivist and community-centred aspects of Ubuntu in decision-making (RQ2) and to what extent Ubuntu values practically contribute to mutual gains (RQ4).

Thirdly, document analysis focused on HRM manuals, employee handbooks, and other formal documents. These provided a structured view of how Ubuntu is formally recognized in organizational policies. This analysis also helped identify any discrepancies between policy

and practice. For example, while official documents might promote Ubuntu-based recruitment, observations and interviews provided insights into whether these principles were genuinely implemented in daily HRM operations (RQ2). In addition, given that cultural and historical legacies (Karsten & Illa, 2005) are relevant for Ubuntu's application in the workplace, government reports, industry publications, and organisational archives provided essential data on the broader socio-historical and cultural context which influences the extent and nature of adoption of Ubuntu in HRM practices (RQ3). These documents provided context and background, illustrating how Ubuntu has evolved in different organisational sectors including public versus private entities, and how these legacies affect contemporary HRM policies in PublicOrg, PrivateOrg1 and PrivateOrg2. Organizational reports and HRM documents also were important as formal evidence of how Ubuntu is conceptualized as a resource for mutual benefit (RQ4). For instance, HRM policies that emphasize Ubuntu in terms of employee welfare programs, performance incentives, or team-building initiatives demonstrated a formalized approach to realizing mutual gains.

Overall, the adoption of multiple methods of data collection allowed a rich and in-depth understanding of various aspects of the phenomena under study, for example observations helped to capture the non-verbal cues of Ubuntu at work, whilst interviews were able to capture the verbal cues on Ubuntu and the individualised experiences of Ubuntu, that are non-observable and not depicted in organisation documents. More detail of each method is provided below.

5.5.1 Interview process

Exploratory (unstructured) and semi-structured interviews were utilised to facilitate open based narratives about how things happen, what causes things to happen the way they happen at work based on reported experiences and practical examples. Semi-structured interviews primarily targeted management and HR, while the unstructured were directed at employees. Semi-structured interviews provided necessary flexibility to ask predefined questions, ensuring a consistent framework for comparison across different participants across sectors. This was crucial for identifying commonalities and differences in the perception and application of Ubuntu within HRM practices. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews encouraged management and HR to express their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of how Ubuntu is integrated into particular HR practices such as recruitment and selection, performance

management, teamwork, and conflict resolution. As participants shared their perspectives, and experiences, new themes emerged that were not anticipated, offering deeper insights into the role of Ubuntu in HRM practices. This allowed identification of unexpected but significant aspects relating to the subject under study. Semi-structured interviews also allowed for clarification of unclear responses and follow up questions on specific areas of interest and themes that emerged during the interview. This ensured that I captured the full range of views on Ubuntu and HRM, revealing the underlying reasons behind certain practices and behaviours and providing a more complete understanding of Ubuntu's relevance to HRM. On the other hand, unstructured interviews allowed me to probe participants more based on what was observed during observations.

Overall, interviews provided an insight on the invisible unobserved and undocumented aspects of HRM practices in relation to Ubuntu. For example, during observations some practices that were observed were contrary to what was told in the interviews. This makes interviews relevant to such an ethnographic study because there is more to be known than what is observed, by getting the participants real experiences, thoughts and views through verbal expressions.

The interview questions were constructed according to research questions that are based on the literature review and research objectives. There were two separate interview sets, one for management and HR and the other for employees at various levels. Part A of the interview questions served to set the stage, helping to ease participants into the conversation while introducing the fundamental concepts of Ubuntu and its core values. Part B of the interview questions constituted an introduction to Ubuntu aimed at elucidating participants' perception of Ubuntu and exploring how these perceptions of Ubuntu influence individual experiences of well-being. This section of the interview drew from Chapter 2's literature review. Part C focused on exploring Ubuntu values as integral resources in HRM and how it fosters mutual gains. The primary objective of this section was to investigate perceptions surrounding the application and integration of Ubuntu principles into HRM practices across the three organisations. To achieve this, HR officers and management personnel were asked on how they incorporated and used Ubuntu values at business policy level, as well as within job design level. Part C also focused on the specific application of Ubuntu within an African context in HRM, examining various factors that influence its usage in organisations. Employees in lower-level positions were asked to reflect on their experience of the application of Ubuntu principles within HRM and how this influences their work experiences. A sample set of interview questions is shown in Table 6 and the full set of questions is included in Appendix 1 and 2.

Table 6: Example interview questions

Interview questions for employees	Interview questions for management
<u>Part A: Introduction to Ubuntu values and general life well-being</u> Please tell me what you understand by the word Ubuntu, what it means to you and how important it is to your life. Please tell me how relevant these values are to your life. In what ways do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values of solidarity, survival, compassion, respect, and dignity to be of importance to your experience and sense of – well-being such as purpose, meaning and fulfilment, please explain why.	
<u>Part B: Ubuntu values in working life</u> Please tell me what the values of Ubuntu mean to you in the workplace setting and how relevant the same values are to your well-being in the workplace? In your own opinion as an employee, do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values to hinder or facilitate your sense of happiness and well-being in the workplace, in what way please explain?	Do you consider Ubuntu values to be important to the organisation? Please explain how? Please tell me the importance and use of Ubuntu values to you in your management practices. In your own opinion as management, do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values to hinder or facilitate the sense of well-being for employees in the workplace, in what way please explain?
<u>Part C: Ubuntu and African HRM</u> Based on your experience, how is the concept of Ubuntu usually applied in HRM within your workplace? Based on your experience and understanding, please tell me the usefulness and importance of Ubuntu to HRM practices and how these impacts on your well-being as an individual at work? As an employee what benefits do you experience as individual from use of Ubuntu in management practices such as HRM?	In what ways is Ubuntu reflected or implemented in your organisation HRM practices? As management, what factors do you consider influencing the implementation of Ubuntu in management policies and practices? As management what do you consider as the benefits of using Ubuntu in HRM practices to the employer on policies and job /task design?

Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were informed about the objectives and scope of the research through a participant information sheet. This document provided an opportunity for participants to fully understand the study's aims, and they were encouraged to ask any questions or seek clarification regarding the research. In addition, the participants were informed of privacy and data security in line with the research ethics for the study. Following this, participants were required to sign a consent form, which formalised their voluntary participation in the study.

To further ensure participants comfort and willingness to engage, I explicitly reiterated the purpose of the interview, fostering an environment favourable to open dialogue. Before commencing the interview, I confirmed with each participant that they were happy to proceed. The interview began with a neutral open-ended question related to Ubuntu, which was designed to facilitate a natural flow of conversation and to establish rapport, thereby enabling participants to fully engage and connect with me during the interview.

In conducting interviews, I prioritised creating a conducive environment for participants to express their perspectives in-depth, thus maintaining an open and flexible interview structure. I actively encouraged participants to share their views comprehensively by refraining from interjecting and allowing them to articulate their thoughts fully. This approach was grounded in a commitment to demonstrating genuine interest, respect and valuing each participants contribution.

Although I endeavoured to keep discussions aligned with the interview's thematic focus, I remained receptive to new ideas that emerged during the conversations, recognising the potential value of these insights. I also exercised flexibility in accommodating participants scheduling constraints, particularly for those who requested that the interview be limited to 30 minutes due to work commitments even though most interviews lasted 45 minutes. Nonetheless, all interviews were conducted face-to-face, ensuring a consistent personal engagement with each participant.

At the end of the interview, I thanked the research participants for sacrificing their effort, time, and for their valuable contribution towards the research. I further asked them if they had any questions or comments regarding the interview. The closing remarks by the interviewees were intriguing, because most of them (interviewees) expressed interest in the topic and made the following statements.

“Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this interview, Ubuntu is important to our lives and happiness and fulfilment, but do you think it is something that you will convince our organisation to fully embrace?” PrivateOrg1- E8R38

“It was lovely to have this interview, indeed as management I am reminded that I am because we are, we need to manage our people well, It is a time of reflection to shift our thought as management and pay attention to making our people happy” PrivateOrg2- M8R45

“This is a great interview; I hope you will come back to us and give us feedback because Ubuntu can turn around management practices and we as employees can benefit more from it if management adopts it”. PrivateOrg1- E7R37

“It is an honour to know that young people like you still think of Ubuntu and how to integrate it in the workplace, it means we haven’t lost our roots as Zambians- since I practice Ubuntu – join me for lunch”. PublicOrg- M1R1

5.5.2 Observation

Observation allowed close contact and interaction with the participants thus having authentic everyday behaviours, practices, interactions and experiences of participants. This involved “being a part member, part spy, part fun and part voyeur in the organisation” as Maanen (2011) put it. I was present and actively engaged and integrated in the three case study organisations - on Mondays and Tuesdays I was at PublicOrg, Wednesdays, and Thursdays I was at PrivateOrg1 and Fridays and Saturdays of every week I was at PrivateOrg2 starting April 2022 until July 2022.

I approached the HR team, employees and management with an open and friendly attitude. I shared stories, such as how cold and rainy Glasgow is, and just how much I was enjoying the Zambian weather whilst on field visit. I engaged in conversations with employees and shared lunch/tea and sweet treats with them, e.g., I shared lunch with employees which involved traditional local meals of Nsima with visashi and Kapenta from a matebeto local restaurant all eating from the same plate. This I enjoyed so much as it made me feel at home, a typical cultural practice that locals in Zambia embrace. I also offered help with work tasks especially HR related, smiled often, greeted everyone I came across and maintained a respectful demeanour, as per the Zambian cultural norms. This helped me to connect with everyone in a genuine way, allowing them to feel comfortable around me. By being approachable and adapting to the

organisation's culture with friendliness, I was able to build trust and establish strong rapport. Once such a rapport was established, I faced the challenge of balancing my role as an "insider participant" actively engaged in daily activities and an "outsider-observer critically examining the workplace practices particularly through the lens of Ubuntu. This dual role required me to be both social and professional, as I participated in the work environment while also keeping an analytical eye on the behaviours, actions and social interactions observed.

Through this method, I gained a deep understanding of the workplace's day-to-day operations and how they reflect Ubuntu values. My active participation, combined with careful observations, provided me with a rich, empirical basis to document and describe the organisational practices and the underlying ethos of Ubuntu in a detailed and comprehensive manner.

5.5.3 Document analysis

The document analysis served to corroborate findings from other data collection approaches, such as interviews and observations. For instance, in one case study, the convergence between the content of the documents and observed behaviours highlighted the importance of document analysis as complementary method, enhancing the reliability and depth of the overall analysis.

Document analysis played a crucial role in this research, enabling a thorough examination of the formalised organisation values within the three case study organisations. This was instrumental in assessing the extent to which Ubuntu principles are explicitly integrated into the written values of the three organisations. By scrutinizing the organisation documents, I was able to ascertain whether Ubuntu values are present in form of written policies, and if so, how they were articulated in the official discourse of the organisation. Moreover, this analysis facilitated a comparative evaluation of the organisations' policies allowing understanding of how each organisation aligns with or diverges from Ubuntu principles. Through this process, the research identified which of the three case study organisations incorporates Ubuntu values into their operational ethos.

I also reviewed and read the HRM manual for the PublicOrg, and the HR handbooks for PrivateOrg1 and PrivateOrg2. The insights derived from these documents provided a foundational basis for evaluating the extent to which Ubuntu values are integrated within the framework of HRM practices of the three organisations under study. The review of the HR manual at PublicOrg and HR handbooks at PrivateOrg1 and PrivateOrg2 focused on analysing

key employment issues including performance management, recruitment and selection, disciplinary and grievance procedures, diversity, anti-harassment, staff development, compensation and benefits, time off and leave policies.

I further had an opportunity to examine employee records, which included sensitive personal information such as job offers, job descriptions, performance appraisal feedback, disciplinary action reports. By analysing these records, I was able to contrast the implementation of Ubuntu in both the public and private sectors, thereby deepening my understanding of its practical application and potential discrepancies in these sectors.

5.6 Data triangulation

Data from organisation documents, interviews and observations was triangulated. For instance, organisational HR policies were initially scrutinised through formal documentation, which was later cross verified through interviews to determine whether the stated policies were aligned with actual organisational practices. Discrepancies occasionally surfaced between documentary representations, observations and participants' accounts. Conversely, there were instances where convergence across all three data sources affirmed consistency among policy, perception, and practice. Table 7 exemplifies the data triangulation process.

Table 7: Data triangulation across methods

Illustrative example of Data triangulation in this study			
	Document notes (policies)	Interview feedback	Observation notes
PublicOrg	Exerting due respect and regard for others in all conduct (HR Policy) Being respectful and courteous of the opinions and beliefs of others be it equals, peers, or juniors” (HR policy)	“In few situations where we are invited for meetings, our views are not welcomed, regarded and respected, this makes us feel that we are not really valued at work” (cleaner)	During a meeting, other staff members were given the opportunity to discuss their work challenges, but cleaners were not afforded the same chance. The chair of the administrative meeting denied a cleaner the opportunity to speak while allowing others to contribute; such actions demonstrated a lack of regard for proper conduct.
PrivateOrg2	conducting business with kindness (Organisational policy)	“Out of the policy of kindness, we basically practice Ubuntu because we have all learnt to centre our attention on the well-being of those involved in the business, we want them happy, we show kindness to them, this strengthens our relationship with them” (HR Manager)	During observations, management put customers first by responding to their concerns with understanding, flexibility, and kindness. PrivateOrg2 was flexible and understanding with customers who had been late on payments for several months, for example. Management heard the customer's plea for an extension of payment deadlines and renegotiated for a more open payment plan and arrangement instead of going to court against them. PrivateOrg2 operates according to the Ubuntu value of kindness.
PrivateOrg1	The organisation shall remain committed to business growth through enhanced performance and commitment to conduct of business with due skill and innovation to minimise poor performance (Organisational policy)	We are careful not to jeopardise the performance of the company- because employees can be more relaxed with the Ubuntu soft values (Director)	During routine workplace interactions, management has consistently reinforced a performance-driven organisational culture by emphasising output. Employees were often reminded of the need to meet individual targets, with reference to established performance metrics. This ongoing focus on quantifiable outcomes reflected a managerial orientation that prioritised productivity and efficiency, influencing both formal communications and informal supervisory practices within the organisation.

5.7 Data quality, reliability, credibility, reflexivity and generalizability

A pilot study was conducted to ensure the quality and rigour of the process. Given the centrality of interview questions to this research, it was essential that these questions be free from any flaws that could inadvertently limit the study findings (Majid et al, 2017). Flawed questions can significantly impact the validity and credibility of the research, so the pilot study played a crucial role in refining them. A total of nine participants from each case study organisation (three from each) were chosen for the pilot testing of semi structured and unstructured interviews. The pilot study provided valuable insights that informed revisions to the interview questions. Specifically, it revealed instances of repetition, where certain questions elicited overlapping responses. Consequently, I eliminated the repetitive questions. Additionally, participants indicated that several questions lacked clarity and succinctness. In response to this feedback, I refined the questions to enhance their clarity and make them easier for participants to comprehend. Furthermore, the pilot study enabled me to organise the interview questions in a logical sequence, facilitating a coherent and progressive flow of information from participants. This phase also allowed me to gain practical experience and build confidence in conducting interviews within the context of the topic under inquiry.

Furthermore, the multi-method approach to data collection (incorporating observations, interviews, and document analysis) allowed for a methodological triangulation which mitigated the potential bias inherent in relying on a single data collection source. By cross validating the data across multiple methods, I enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings, obtaining a more comprehensive, corroborative, and accurate representation of the workplace realities. Ultimately, triangulation provided a conflux of evidence, further bolstering the credibility of the research findings.

Additionally, in approaching the case study organisations from an insider perspective, I was acutely aware of the need to mitigate the risk of data reflexivity. To address this, I consciously allowed the data emerging from the field to guide both the data collection and analysis processes. I entered these organisations with an open mind, deliberately avoiding the imposition of preconceived notions or abstract ideas that could compromise the objectivity and credibility of the research. By remaining vigilant against preconceptions and potential biases, I aimed to maintain the integrity of the study. Also, the use of triangulation provided an

additional layer of validation, further minimising the risk of the bias and enhancing the robustness of the findings.

As a qualitative researcher, I was also fully cognisant of the controversial issues surrounding generalizability of qualitative data (Flyvbjerg, 2001). In simple terms, generalizability is the forming of broad and general statements from specific cases to wider populations or contexts (Schwandt, 2001). In qualitative studies generalizability is frequently dismissed in favour of their primary goal of offering deep insights into specific contexts (Ayres et al., 2003). To counteract the issue of lack of generalizability in this qualitative research, I ensured diversity in my data collection through different sectors (private and public), and employees from different countries including South Africa, Zambia and France. Furthermore, I compared the findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks to identify themes that contribute to broader theoretical insights, thus enhancing generalizability.

5.8 Recording and documentation

Recording and documentation were primarily determined by participant consent. Despite this, I employed both audio recordings and detailed notetaking to capture the data. Audio recordings were consistently transcribed throughout the research process, ensuring a true representation of participants responses.

With *PublicOrg*, I conducted interview with 27 participants, of which only 10 participants consented to audio recording. This reluctance among employees stemmed from a prior incident, in which a researcher leaked an audio recording to social media, breaching mistrust among *PubliOrg* workers. Although I made significant efforts to establish trust with the participants, this past had a lasting impact on their willingness to be recorded. Nevertheless, I emphasised my respect for their decision, drawing on the principles of Ubuntu which prioritises dignity and respect for individuals. For those who declined recoding, I politely requested that they speak slower, allowing me to accurately capture their responses through written notes.

In contrast, all 15 participants at *PrivateOrg1* and all the 8 participants at *PrivateOrg2*, consented to audio recording during the interviews. The observation notes were meticulously transcribed into written format, and all data was securely stored on the University's OneDrive, within a protected folder system. Each organisation has its own folder, with further subfolders categorising data type for example management, HR, employees. The transcripts were

continuously imported into NVivo for coding and thematic analysis, ensuring systematic identification of emerging patterns and insights.

5.9 Ethical considerations

In conducting this research, I adhered strictly to ethical guidelines. Given the direct interaction with participants, first I obtained ethics approval from the university, which covered the participant information sheet, consent form, and research instruments. With this approval in hand, I sought and secured permission from the three case study organisations. After presenting the ethics approval to each organisation and clearly outlining the research aims and objectives, all three case study organisations granted me authorization to proceed with the study.

I further provided participants with a privacy notice and thoroughly explained its contents to ensure they fully understood their rights and the use of their feedback solely for research purposes. I also emphasised that their participation would remain anonymous. To further support their understanding, I ensured that all participants carefully reviewed and read the participant information sheet, which detailed the research purpose, objectives and their rights. Those who agreed to participate signed a consent form, thereby granting informed consent. Participants were clearly informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary, and they retained the right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. To maintain privacy and confidentiality, all personal information was anonymised.

5.10 Challenges in data collection

During data collection, several challenges arose, despite receiving a warm welcome from all three case study organisations. The primary difficulty occurred with the *PublicOrg*. I was scheduled to work at the *PublicOrg* from 8am to 5pm every Monday and Tuesday of every week starting 25th April 2022 to 25th July 2022. However, there were instances when participants would arrange an interview with me after lunch, but they would fail to show up at the agreed time.

Another general challenge was that multi method data collection was resource depleting because I had to commute to three different workplaces for three months. The cost of transport was significant and a personal financial burden. Additionally, on many occasions, participants asked me to buy lunch for them, and some even requested for money, which placed me in a

difficult and uncomfortable position. Aside from this, the research was also time consuming and demanded considerable amount of effort, as I worked with the three case study organisations from Monday through to Saturday each week of the three months. A final challenge was that my fieldwork was cut short due to flight disruptions with the airline I booked through a third-party agent. I was given the choice between returning early or accepting a minimal refund for the airfare, which was insufficient to cover the cost of a new ticket. Despite all such challenges, the data collected offers a rich insight for the purposes of the research questions.

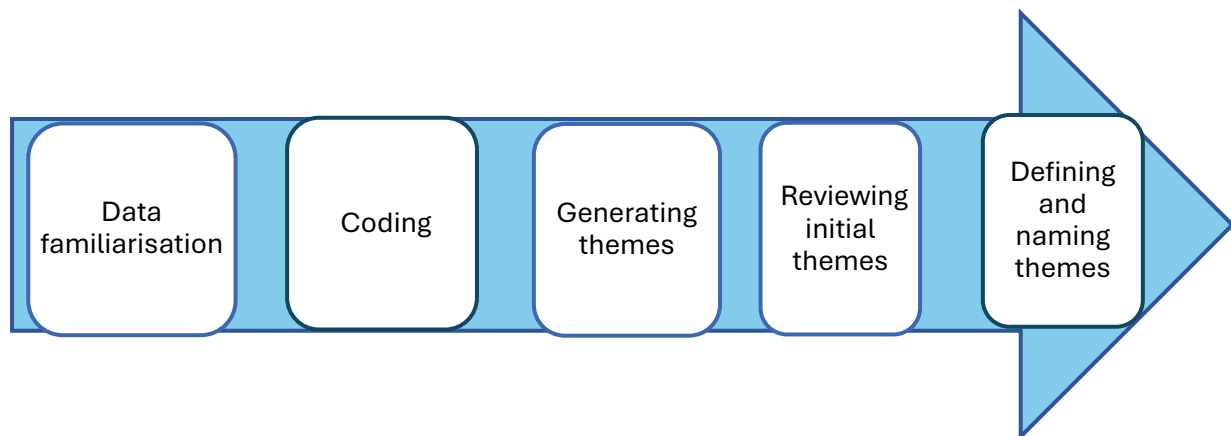
5.11 Analytical approach

With qualitative data from three methods, and from management and employees in three organisations, a large volume data was gathered. Bryman & Bell (2007), and Miles (1979) described qualitative data as an attractive “nuisance” owing to its richness that attracts researchers but the same richness in data turns out to be cumbersome to analyse. As such Bryman & Bell (2007) insist that researchers need to guard against being carried away by the richness of the data to avoid failure in carrying out true data analysis. Lofland (1971) once called this condition of difficulties in qualitative data analysis as “*analytic interruptions*”. However, analytic interruptions and failures can be avoided by adopting the suitable type of analysis for the research (Saunders et al., 2019). Several types of data analysis methods are possible in qualitative research, including thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2021), grounded theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007), content analysis (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017), discourse analysis (Rapley, 2007) and narrative analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

After a critical assessment of the research analytic methods, I chose thematic analysis. Thematic analysis systematically identifies, organises, and offers insight of the patterns of data by making sense of the qualitative dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis suited this study because it focuses on the meaning of the data, by allowing the researcher to understand shared experiences and meanings. Also, thematic analysis has the advantage of flexibility of being used in different research paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thus suiting a wide variety of research topics and questions. Such flexibility of thematic analysis permitted the ontological and epistemological assumptions of constructivism paradigm. Furthermore, thematic analysis can be applied on a wide range of qualitative data including interviews, document analysis, observations (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Data analysis for ethnographic study takes place throughout the research process (Saunders et al., 2019) and so making sense of the data started right after commencing data collection in the field. This continued for the entire period of the PhD study. Figure 8 details the data analysis process and steps adopted in this study which are described in detail below.

Table 8: Data analysis process



Source: Braun & Clarke (2012)

5.11.1 Familiarisation with the data

This phase was crucial to gaining a preliminary understanding of the data, identifying patterns, and beginning to discern its underlying meanings. To thoroughly immerse myself in the data, I engaged in multiple rounds of reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, observational notes, and organisational documents. Additionally, I listened repeatedly to the audio recordings no fewer than four times per interview to ensure that I accurately captured the participants' initial perceptions and experiences without risk of misinterpretation and misrepresentation.

Throughout this stage, I concurrently transcribed the data, carefully annotating both electronically and manually. I made detailed notes and comments in the margins, flagging segments of potential importance and relevance (Tuckett, 2005). By underlining and highlighting key excerpts, I began to engage with the data critically and analytically, contemplating its broader implications and its alignment with the research questions and theories (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

This process of familiarization was indispensable for the subsequent stages of analysis, as it enabled me to develop an intimate understanding of the data content. This deep familiarity allowed me to identify significant elements, patterns that were crucial to answering the research questions. I revisited my notes multiple times, carefully refining my understanding until I was confident in my grasp of data. Although the process was demanding, both intellectually and in terms of time, it was foundational in preparing me for the next phase of analysis, namely the first order coding.

5.11.2 Coding

Coding identified features of the data that were necessary to the research questions, provided a summary of data portions and described its contents (Brawn & Clarke, 2012). Through coding, data was categorised based on observed relationships and distinctions, enabling the disaggregation of the dataset into more meaningful units (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Importantly, preliminary codes were initially established during the data familiarisation stage (phase 1), as discussed earlier in section 5.10.1. As such in this second stage, I deliberately engaged in systematic identification of codes, actively searching for similar data sets, and grouping them under the predefined codes. Following this, I conducted a detailed analysis of the texts within each code, examining them line by line and phrase by phrase. This meticulous process facilitated the fragmentation of the data into smaller, precise segments, unveiling underlying meanings and ideas. This allowed the first order coding to be grounded in the data itself. Through first-order coding, I was able to discern variations, commonalities, and contradictions within the data, which laid the groundwork for the subsequent stages of analysis, by identifying patterns, defining, labelling concepts, categorising and organising them based on their characteristics, dimensions, and properties. First order coding illuminated discernible trends within the data. These trends in turn contributed to a more coherent and robust framework for data analysis.

As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012), coding within qualitative analysis can be approached by either latent or semantic level meaning, each representing a distinct level of interpretation. Semantic coding focusing on the surface-level meanings, remaining closely aligned with the explicit content of the data- what is overtly stated or observed. In contrast, latent coding seeks to unearth the underlying structures, assumptions and implicit meanings that may be embedded with the data but are not immediately apparent. In the context of this study, both semantic and latent coding were employed to facilitate a more comprehensive analysis.

The first order coding of this study was at a semantic level, where I stayed close to the participants' surface and apparent meanings. The first order coding was drawn from what the thoughts, expressions, opinions, words of participants directly implied, and was more descriptive, mirroring the participants original concept idea. This ensured that the immediate and surface level meanings were accurately captured. An illustration of the first order coding is given in Table 9.

Table 9: Illustration of first order coding.

Participant's expression	First order coding
<i>"Ubuntu serves as a guide to our organisation policies with justice in our operations and respect for our workers in the policies."</i>	Ubuntu shaping the policies with respect Ubuntu shaping the policies with justice

The second order coding was at latent level, where I went into more detail of uncovering the interview feedback and observation notes meanings laying underneath the semantic surface of the data identified in the first order coding. In the second order coding I was more interpretive and concise of the data content meanings and subtle nuances. The second order coding invoked my theoretical and conceptual interpretation to make sense of the observation notes, participants expressions. An illustration of second order coding derived from first order coding illustrated above is illustrated in Table 10.

Table 10: Illustration of second order coding.

First order coding	Second order coding
Ubuntu shaping the policies with respect Ubuntu shaping the policies with justice	Policy decisions based on principles of Ubuntu

The process of data coding lasted for more than a year after data collection to ensure accuracy and precision. This process of coding was iterative rather than mechanical as emphasised by Braun & Clarke (2021), where I constantly reflected on the coded data and questioned its relevance to the research questions. The coding process was back and forth because the codes were refined and modified time and again, since I kept on checking and validating the coded data to ensure they represent an actual picture of what the data suggested and meant (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). This whole process allowed me to have a more analytical and critical engagement and understanding of the data. The coding of data was firstly done on a hard copy paper in a notebook. The second coding used NVivo to digitally organise the data in a much easier way to follow and locate by case, category of data collection (i.e., interviews, observation notes, document notes), and by management, HR and employees

5.11.4 Generating themes

At this stage of data analysis, I started reviewing the coded data more critically to recognise areas of overlap and similarities between the codes and gathering the codes in to their relevant themes. To begin generating initial themes, I had to cluster or collapse the codes sharing unifying or similar features to have much more meaningful and coherent pattern of data. As advised by Braun and Clarke (2021), a theme captures or apprehends important aspects from the data in relation to the research question and then represents a patterned level of shared meaning within a dataset, normally expressed by numerous observations and more than two participants. Whilst generating the themes from the coded data, I had to explore the possible relationships existing between themes and I started to consider ways in which the themes will collectively tell the whole story of the data to answer the research questions and arrive at the research aim. I was cognisant that themes need to work collectively as a whole to provide a meaningful picture of the data, just as the jigsaw puzzle pieces collectively provide a meaningful puzzle.

However, the generation of themes was done both inductively and deductively, thanks to the flexibility nature of thematic analysis that allows generation of themes flexibly without restrictions. Using the inductive approach, the themes were extracted from the data coming from the field, and this brought in themes that were not anticipated. Another approach taken to generating themes was deductive where the themes were informed by theory, concepts, and existing literature. Such themes were developed from pre-existing theories (e.g., the JD-R model, pre-post-colonial history of Ubuntu in the public and private sector organisations). Moreover, Saunders et al., (2019), recommends qualitative researchers to use both inductive and deductive – an approach known as abductive. In practice this approach was more suited for this study as it gave room to generate both new themes from data and pre-existing themes from literature and theory. Generating themes was based on relation and relevance of data to research aim and questions, rather than following the quantity of data occurrence in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the themes in this study are not based on the prevalence

(quantity of occurrence) of data, but they are based on their relevance and relation to the research aim, objectives, and questions. An illustrative example of generating initial themes in this study is detailed in Table 11.

Table 11: Illustrative example of generating initial themes.

Sample extract from transcripts	First order coding	Second order coding	Initial theme
<i>“Ubuntu has been the answer to challenges of employee poor performance, when we show care and listen to employees, they also care to perform better”</i>	Ubuntu being a solution to work performance challenges.	Ubuntu values encouraging work performance.	Ubuntu as a people management tool.
	Compassion from Ubuntu used to win employee performance.		
	Motivating performance using Ubuntu compassion.		

5.11.5 Reviewing initial themes

The fourth phase of data analysis involved recursively reviewing the themes in relation to the entire data set and the coded data (Brawn & Clarke, 2006). This phase was mainly for quality purposes. I checked the initial themes against the data set and collated data extracts, whether the themes are related with the data. Where I found that some themes did not suit and work in line with the data, I had to either discard the codes and or relocate them to suitable themes. This process allowed for coherence and helped me to meaningfully capture the applicable and relevant data.

5.11.6 Defining and naming of themes

Following the review of themes, I then had to clearly define the themes and name them appropriately to tell a coherent overall story that is relevant and appropriate to the research aims, objectives, questions and chapters of the thesis. I checked whether the names of the themes are informative, telling the readers intended information right from seeing the name of the theme before engaging in to reading its details. As suggested by Brawn and Clarke (2012),

a good name for a theme is informative and catchy. This phase of analysis made sure that the themes have a clear scope, focus, purpose, are meaningful, make sense and easy to understand and made a representation of the detail and depth of the data (Brawn & Clarke, 2006). This process of defining and giving names to the themes was necessary to easily organise the findings in a meaningful way that is easy to follow by the reader. As such, I made sure that the themes flowed in a logical way.

5.11.7 Report writing

After going through a rigorous analytic process, I then had to tell a compelling story of the research based on the analysed data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This thesis organises the findings into four chapters of findings (Chapters 6,7,8,9) and one chapter for the Discussion (Chapter 10) which tells a compelling story that is embedded in theory and scholarly literature.

5.12 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework underpinning this study. It justifies the adoption of a qualitative approach rooted in ethnographic and comparative case study design, aimed at thoroughly exploring Ubuntu-based HRM practices in Zambia. The chapter has discussed that the study is grounded in a constructivist epistemology, which recognises the socially constructed nature of reality and is particularly suited for investigating how Ubuntu cultural principles influence workplace practices in an African context. The selection of Zambia as the research context is theoretically justified by its rich cultural heritage rooted in Ubuntu values, which are enshrined in its national values, making it an exemplary setting for this research. In addition, the chapter has outlined the relevance of a comparative case study design which was chosen to deepen understanding of how Ubuntu manifests differently across sectors, offering insights into sector specific dynamics and the variability in the operationalisation of Ubuntu in HRM.

The combination of interview, observations and document analysis was deployed to generate rich and comprehensive data. Such a combination of methods allowed the research to capture both overt practices and cultural nuances of Ubuntu in the workplace. The chapter has further shown how ethnographic immersion in the case study organisations was relevant to the study to engage closely with participants and capture the nuanced and often implicit ways Ubuntu influences HRM practices and employee well-being, thus contributing to a rigorous and contextually grounded study. This chapter has also touched basis on the efforts made to ensure data quality, credibility and reliability through pilot testing, data triangulation. Importantly to this chapter was the thematic analysis approach taken to analyse the data.

In sum, this chapter not only detailed the specific methodological choices made but also provides a robust justification for their relevance to the study. These choices strengthen the study's capacity to address the research questions, offering a substantive contributing to understanding Ubuntu as a critical resource in HRM practices within African organisations.

Chapter 6: Exploring Ubuntu: It's Contribution to Individual Well-being

6.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter explored the research method adopted in this study. In this chapter the focus shifts to addressing RQ1, drawing, and building upon the foundations laid in chapter 2 to understand the perception of well-being within an African context through the lens of Ubuntu

The insights of RQ1 in this chapter are informed by interview narratives, since an understanding of how Ubuntu contributes to life well-being hinges upon participant articulation of their interpretations, emotions, feelings, experiences, encounters, and thoughts, verbally. Consequently, despite ethnographic nature of this study, RQ1 does not rely on observational notes as the essence of Ubuntu transcends mere observation and document analysis.

Nonetheless, this chapter is organised into one primary section, looking at the link of Ubuntu to individual life well-being, articulated in two key themes of (1) Sense of purpose and meaning from Ubuntu love and relatedness (2) Sense of fulfilment from Ubuntu kindness and generosity. Giving a nuanced understanding of ways in which Ubuntu shapes individual life experiences of well-being, based entirely on individual life experiences.

Overall, this chapter contributes to achieving the research objective of exploring the relationship between the understanding of Ubuntu principles and individual experiences of well-being within an African context. By providing an exploration of ways in which Ubuntu values shape life well-being, this chapter also plays a critical role in informing and shaping the initial part (1) of the conceptual framework, illustrated in Figure 6. Thus, enhancing empirical discourse on well-being In an African setting and offering a robust foundation for subsequent analysis.

6.1. The link between Ubuntu values and individual well-being in general life

Ubuntu has been recognised and noted for its significant role in facilitating life well-being (Nzimakwe, 2014). This is exemplified and revealed in this study where interview participants highlighted on Ubuntu's core characteristics of solidarity and survival (relatedness, brotherly love), and respect and its connection to providing life basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2001), which are fundamental to life meaning and purpose. Secondly, Ubuntu's characteristics of compassion (kindness, generosity, caring for others) are associated to providing well-being as

these are said to be sources of fulfilment (Philips et al., 2020). Before delving in to detail, a summary of findings for *RQ1* are presented in a table below, notably the contribution of Ubuntu to well-being in this regard is purely based on individualised general life experiences.

Table 12: RQ1 Findings Ubuntu relation to life well-being based on individual life experiences

Ubuntu Value	Expression in real life experience Sample quotes	Contribution to Individuals	Theme
Solidarity & Survival	Community belonging, warm welcome, brotherly love, social inclusion “Being part of a friendly community brings me a sense of meaning” (interview) “With Ubuntu I am welcomed with open arms, it’s such a great a feeling, I know I have a place in my community, and this gives me purpose – I don’t just exist, I have a place and purpose” (interview)	Fosters a sense of belonging, emotional connection, and social identity.	Meaning & Purpose
Respect	Recognition, dignity, being appreciated, and valued “Respect in Ubuntu is one of the major human needs that defines well-being and fulfilment because it is something that brings significance, meaning, and makes one feel special, appreciated and needed” (interview)	Enhances self-worth, affirms individual value, and builds self-esteem.	Meaning & Purpose
Compassion	Generosity and kindness “I can also say that Ubuntu helps those in need and the less privileged, this is the same with Islam Zakat and contributes to life fulfilment” (interview) “Ubuntu adds to well-being in the sense that it concerns practice of religiosity, the good things acts of kindness, support and sharing, such things bring joy and fulfilment to the soul” (interview)	Generates inner joy alignment with individual spiritual and moral values.	Fulfilment
Compassion	Forgiveness when I think about forgiveness which is part of Ubuntu and my faith in Christianity and how making peace with people and myself brings down my anxiety and even stress, I am convinced this is part of contribution to well-	Cultivates inner peace.	Fulfilment

	being, because it also meets me at my point of faith” (interview)		
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6.1.1 Sense of meaning and purpose: Ubuntu solidarity, survival and respect

Fifteen (out of the 50 interviewed) participants highlighted on the impact of interpersonal connections found in Ubuntu (Mutwarisabo & Iken. 2019) on their personal well-being, emphasising that when they feel a part of the community from solidarity and survival, they experience a sense of connection which leads to a sense of meaning that life is worthwhile.

“Ubuntu has shown me that love and connection are at the heart of a meaningful life, without love and a spirit of connection there is no happiness to life, no meaning to life” E1R23-Provincial Secretary- PublicOrg.

“Being part of a friendly community brings me a sense of meaning” E7R37 Receptionist – PublicOrg.

Aside from that, respect within Ubuntu philosophy constitutes a fundamental and crucial human necessity fostering a sense of meaning (Poovan et al, 2006; Nzimakwe, 2014). In this study, it was underscored that this respect within Ubuntu enhances individual capacity of sense of reputation, recognition, worth, appreciation and self-dignity, which are essential components of human needs to foster sense of meaning (Cremer & Bulmer, 2007). This is articulated in the following statements.

“Respect in Ubuntu is one of the major human needs that defines well-being and fulfilment because it is something that brings significance, meaning, and makes one feel special, appreciated and needed”. A13R49-Insurance Officer - PrivateOrg2.

“Respect alone is fulfilling it is a recipe for happiness; I find meaning to life from the respect in Ubuntu” M6R31-Debt Collections Manager - PrivateOrg1.

In addition, Ubuntu, with its ethic of hospitality emanating from solidarity not only fosters a sense of belonging and connection which further imparts individuals with a sense of purpose. But the ethos of Ubuntu extends beyond merely offering a welcoming environment; it aligns with the deep human yearning for life significance affirming inclusion in society. As Nzimakwe (2014) notes, Ubuntu’s foundation in hospitality cultivates a sense of belonging and affection, which resonates with Baumeister & Leary’s (1995) assertion that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation. In this study, participants highlighted that experiencing Ubuntu's hospitality through solidarity weaves people into a social fabric that recognises and

values their existence, affirming they have a reason to show up and a role to play in society, consequently fostering a deeper sense of purpose.

“With Ubuntu I am welcomed with open arms, it’s such a great a feeling, I know I have a place in my community, and this gives me purpose – I don’t just exist, I have a place and purpose” H5R8- HR Officer PublicOrg.

Ubuntu is deep in wisdom, it is a tradition that offers us with what we want in life like hospitality, just having this from people creates great feeling that is satisfying because it makes us feel warmly welcomed in society” E11R41- PrivateOrg1.

Furthermore, participants argued that since Ubuntu is tied to the well-being of others, it provides a sense of purpose by being able to contribute to collective community good through showing love by means of help through solidarity, hence reinforcing a sense of significance in life. Such orientation of contributing towards the community affirms one’s identity as an active and valued member of a social fabric.

“The focus of Ubuntu in helping out people, gives me a life purpose of supporting others, this alone is important to my life well-being”. E5R27- Cleaner- PublicOrg

Furthermore, grounded in the perspective that the concept of Ubuntu is characterised with its focus on love for others, and relatedness wherein people find their being or existence mirrored in others (Mangaliso, 1997). This ethos of Ubuntu is revealed to satisfy social needs that are essential and critical in attaining and facilitating life well-being. Moreover, such basic life needs of love are akin to those also articulated by Maslow (1978) as human basic psychological needs. This was echoed by participants who delineated the idea that every person possesses needs inside them and aspirations that they long to have in life to support and cultivate their well-being.

“Ubuntu brings well-being because it is full and deep of love that we all as people aim to have in life for contentment and good life” (M2R2 -HR Director- PublicOrg).

“Ubuntu gives us what we want life, with love from Ubuntu, you naturally feel happy you can’t be depressed, so that is how I can relate ubuntu to life well-being” (A6R20- District Operations Officer- PublicOrg).

6.1.2 Sense of fulfilment from Ubuntu compassion

Ubuntu compassion manifests act of forgiveness, kindness, justice, and generosity (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2009), which transcend the mere social norms and resonates with religious principles including Christianity and Islam (Newman, 2018). In this study participants explained such principles as ethical imperatives important to individual well-being since these also align closely with religious ethics that prioritises justice, generosity, forgiveness, and kindness as pathways to life and spiritual fulfilment believed in by individuals. Fifteen (32% of the 50 interviewed) participants across the three case study organisations expressed that justice, generosity and kindness bring about fulfilment.

“Ubuntu adds to well-being in the sense that it concerns practice of religiosity, the good things acts of kindness, support and sharing, such things bring joy and fulfilment to the soul (A6R20-District Operations Officer- PublicOrg).

“Fulfilment is more about having a quality good life endowed in supreme uprightness of religion, we find these upright values like honesty in Ubuntu and also in religion” (M6R31-Debt Collections Manager- PrivateOrg1).

“Since Ubuntu gives a sense of right and wrong like the Bible for example, it strengthens the quality of life such that as a person you feel that your life is deeply accomplished through quality acts that are right” (A12R48- Insurance Officer- PrivateOrg2).

“I find contentment and fulfilment for well-being in Ubuntu since it mainly talks about, justice, charity that are found in my faith and considered to have a greater meaning in human life and in my life “(E9R39- Administrative Clerk- PrivateOrg1).

“Fulfilment as in well-being is experiencing things that are Godly, things that are not evil but good as guided in the values of Ubuntu such as honesty” (E13R43- Accounts Clerk- PrivateOrg1)

An illustrative example of Islamic Alms and Zakat was used to express an understanding of how Ubuntu practice of generosity is intrinsically connected to well-being. As a form of almsgiving, Zakat is part of the Five Pillars of Islam signifying the importance of generosity for individual well-being (Masrom et al., 2020). This is akin to the philosophy of Ubuntu which emphasise on generosity for survival as a form of brotherly care (Sigger et al., 2010), thus providing a sense of fulfilment. This, practice of Ubuntu not only fulfils the ethic of Ubuntu

itself but also fulfils religious obligation of Zakat which contributes to well-being as articulated by one of the participants.

“I can also say that Ubuntu helps those in need and the less privileged, this is the same with Islam Zakat and contributes to life fulfilment” (H2R5- HR Officer- PublicOrg).

There was an emphasis that life is mainly fulfilling when individuals practice things that make life worthwhile by observing ethical guidelines found in Ubuntu as also in Christianity.

Ubuntu brings spiritual and emotional value and purpose to my life because of its virtues, such that I feel that life is worth living, life is meaningless and useless when you chase after things that are not right by law, by religion, by tradition, we only have social order that is fulfilling because of virtues like fairness in Christianity and Ubuntu” (M2R2-HR Director- PublicOrg).

It was further argued that gratefulness and forgiveness that are found in both Ubuntu and religion are important for mental health because these fosters inner strength, and harmony for life and hence bringing about life fulfilment. These virtues of forgiveness were highlighted to be essential to well-being since they facilitate inner strength and promote harmony in life, ultimately leading to a sense of fulfilment contributing to well-being.

“When I think about forgiveness which is part of Ubuntu and my faith in Christianity and how making peace with people and myself brings down my anxiety and even stress, I am convinced this is part of contribution to well-being, because it also meets me at my point of faith” M1R1- Provincial Director- PublicOrg.

“fulfilment is the totality of the good things that come from customary and religious morals and representing a high degree of esteem for people and God, we talk of being thankful and forgiving- this is what we get from Ubuntu, such that one has strong emotional and mental health from the hope, peace and strength that comes with Ubuntu” (A10R46- Branch Secretary - PrivateOrg2).

6.3 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has delved into ways in which Ubuntu contributes to individual experiences of well-being. The chapter has detailed that Ubuntu kindness, forgiveness and generosity are intrinsic ethics resonating principles of religion including Islam and Christianity which are said to contribute to individual well-being through providing a sense of fulfilment. The chapter has further highlighted how the Ubuntu ethos of relatedness, love and respect underpin individual well-being by nurturing fundamental human needs, hence providing a sense of purpose, and meaning. Besides, this chapter has also linked the perception of Ubuntu to well-being based on individual experiences and life encounters encompassing practices of morals, being good, respect for people and living united. Nonetheless, as we move to the next chapter, we embark on exploring the practical use of Ubuntu withing HRM in the workplace.

Chapter 7: Ubuntu as Resources in HRM Practices: A Multilevel Perspective.

7.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses RQ2, exploring the ways in which Ubuntu values are integrated into HRM practices across various organisational levels. Building on the theoretical foundations established under Chapter 3 where HRM approaches are perceived to influence employee well-being and where the importance of workplace resources across multiple workplace levels are explored. And, Chapter 4, where Ubuntu values through the five fingers framework are introduced as essential resources for HRM practices. Consequently, this chapter advances the development of the second part of the conceptual framework, illustrated in figure 6.

The analysis of RQ2 focuses on three primary dimensions: (1) Ubuntu at the organisational or business policy level, (2) Ubuntu in job and task design, and (3) Ubuntu at the individual employee level. Each of these dimensions include specific themes. To examine the role of Ubuntu in HRM at these levels, the study draws on a combination of observational, document analysis, and interview data. By providing a critical perspective on the use of Ubuntu in HRM, this chapter contributes to the broader objective of exploring the relevance and practical application of Ubuntu across different organisational levels.

Before delving into the detailed findings for RQ2, the table below presents a summary of the key illustrative insights derived from the empirical data.

Table 13: RQ2 Findings- Use of Ubuntu as a resource in HRM at multiple levels

Theme	Organisation	Illustrative insights
Facilitating ethical policies	Public org	based on the Zambian gazetted public service codes of ethics of respect, selflessness, impartiality, and loyalty, our ethics provide direction to all employees (Document analysis). “Ubuntu is not just important to us it is something at the centre of this organisation, clearly you can see my office having such principles, it tells you a big story on our dependence on Ubuntu alike values to the practices” (Interview). Ubuntu ethics posters on walls; values like respect emphasized in meetings and displayed visibly on offices (observation).
Facilitating ethical policies	Private org 2	“Ubuntu is the ethical lens through which we review and revise company policies...” (interview). the organisation shall always create and maintain a friendly and harmonious working environment with ethical conduct of (a) acting with integrity, (b) serving with compassion, (c) caring because of respect for others, (d) leading with courage, (e) conducting business with kindness.” (document analysis) Company policies and legal structure grounded in Ubuntu values like respect, compassion, and kindness. (document analysis)
Providing work autonomy	Public org	Employees control their schedules and work styles; observed self-directed actions like adjusting lunch breaks. (observation). “I should say that our workers have a lot of freedom, when it comes to the work they do, they set their own process to complete their work, they even have an input on their schedules, for example our lunch break is from 12:30pm- 1:30pm, but you find that other employees have decided to shift their lunch break to another time, our workers even create their own schedule for leave as management we don’t create or impose a leave timetable for workers- they do it themselves, because we have created an environment of belonging by following Ubuntu” . (interview)
Providing work autonomy	Private org2	Employees autonomously handled tasks, e.g., IT team redesigned app autonomously; debt team used slogans independently. (Observation) Relations and teamwork from the belief in Ubuntu has brought confidence in workers to make informed decisions about work, in management we don’t express strict control over workers, but instead they themselves as workers instil control in their own work”. (interview)
Providing constructive feedback	Public org	The appraisal of employees shall be conducted in the most impartial way with the highest level of respect, integrity, and responsibility whilst being mindful of the employee and exerting a high degree of ethical standards of constructive helpfulness and concern during the process (document analysis)

		Performance reviews began with gratitude and involved two-way feedback discussions fostering openness. (observation) ““As HR – we believe that appraisals are not a platform to rebuke and reprimand, so we apply Ubuntu to make these appraisals as supportive and interactive to boost the confidence in employees” (interview)
Providing social support	Private org2	Manager adjusted deadlines and assigned extra help to ease workload stress; flexible remote work granted informally (observation) . “Ubuntu based work practices offer support... no matter how challenging...” (interview)
Providing social support	Public org	Mentoring, coaching, and assisting during work challenges (observation) . “As management we use Ubuntu to offer and provide support to our workers as they perform their work assignments, we are there whenever employees need mentoring or any guide in their work because that is what Ubuntu asks us to do, to be there for others, but we are only careful to ensure that we don’t seem to be pressuring employees as we offer our service of support to them” (interview)
Support for employee personal beliefs	Private org 2	Luncheon menu adapted for SDA (pork) and Muslim employees (hallah), reflecting accommodation for religious dietary needs. (observation)
Supporting employee personal beliefs	Private org	Muslim staff allowed to attend mosque during work hours; Jehovah’s witness staff permitted evangelism during work hours; faith observance respected. (observation) “I think Ubuntu does good to my well-being because with its values I am allowed to attend to my religious programs during working hours on Friday, so my belief in religion is fulfilled because of the respect that the organisation holds for various religions, they allow me to go to the mosque for congregation on Fridays during working hours”. (interview)

7.1 Use of Ubuntu at organisation/business policy level.

7.1.1 Facilitating Ethical Policies

❖ PublicOrg

Ubuntu is operationalised at the policy level in the PublicOrg as a foundational structure for ethical policies. In this context ethical policies reflect the organisation’s commitments to human dignity, collective well-being, human care, and responsibility. These policies are grounded in relational accountability, which underscores that actions gain ethical significance through their impact on others. Consequently, the study's interpretation of Ubuntu ethical

policies hinges on their ability to foster humane, respectful, and inclusive relationships in the workplace.

For instance, during observations at the PublicOrg, it was observed that the codes of ethics (i.e., selflessness, respect, impartiality, objectivity, loyalty, accountability, honesty) which align and resonate with Ubuntu values (Sigger et al., 2010; Chetty & Price, 2024) are placed on the walls along the passages or corridors of the PublicOrg office building serving as a visual and practical guide to work decisions and everyday behaviours and practices. The presence of Ubuntu ethics and signages in office corridors around the PublicOrg premises reinforces the significance of ethics of Ubuntu to organisation operations. All the offices I had been to at the PublicOrg during my field work also had posters images of the different types of ethical values of Ubuntu on the office walls. Even though some of the posters of Ubuntu values were worn out, torn, old and faded in colour but they were kept on the wall, this showed the commitment of the PublicOrg to Ubuntu values as a cornerstone of ethical decision-making processes and practices.

The posters in the PublicOrg serve as an everyday visual reminder of the workplace ethics and helps employees to keep these fresh in their mind as they work daily. The posters of ethical policies also help employees to be reminded that their behaviour and actions must align and resonate with the ethical policies of Ubuntu. This underscores the resourcefulness of Ubuntu in influencing and fostering of organisation ethical policies within the PublicOrg.

The importance and use of Ubuntu to guiding organisation policies is also echoed by interview participants who recognised such an indispensable role by pointing at the office wall and emphasising that the presence of Ubuntu values on the wall speak volumes and tells it all that Ubuntu is a critical aspect to PublicOrg policies and practices.

“As you can see, we have stack these Ubuntu ethics everywhere in our premises, because they guide the way we behave as an organisation”M1R1- PublicOrg.

“Ubuntu is not just important to us it is something at the centre of this organisation, clearly you can see my office having such principles, it tells you a big story on our dependence on Ubuntu alike values to the practices” M3R3- PublicOrg.

The observations activities at the PublicOrg consistently showed the integration and implementation of Ubuntu policies as a guiding framework even during the meetings. To illustrate this, during my field visit, the director at the PublicOrg arranged for a quarterly

meeting with a central focus on the need to adhere to work policy. During the meeting the provincial director prominently underscored the organisation values of respect, selflessness, impartiality. Expressing concern, the Director remarked on how recurrent instances of misconduct and dishonest behaviour within the PublicOrg could be averted through strict adherence to ethical policies denoting Ubuntu. Whilst stressing on the significance of ethical conduct in the meeting, the Director emphasised on the need of basing all decisions on the ethics of Ubuntu that are visibly displayed in the office walls. The director further reiterated on aligning the PublicOrg projects with Ubuntu ethics of respect and selflessness spelled out and delineated in the policies. During the same quarterly meeting, the HR Manager at the PublicOrg further emphasised to employees that “even if you are alone, but as long as you are working or doing something for work, let your conscious be guided by the ethical procedures”.

At the PublicOrg HR department decisions on handling of employees that violated the company policies always started with review and reference to ethical policies and remained committed to the ethical standards in the confines of Ubuntu values. Hence showing that Ubuntu is the blueprint and cornerstone of crafting and implementing of organisation policies in the PublicOrg. This was the case when two employees in middle management travelled out of town for work, upon return from a business trip, one employee reported alleged bribery activities by their travel companion (a co-worker) to HR department. In response to this HR initiated a thorough investigation guided by ethical policies of Ubuntu, emphasising transparency, integrity, and truthfulness. This demonstrates and exemplifies how Ubuntu not only inform decisions but also form a framework of policies within the PublicOrg HRM system.

Aside from that, thirteen participants, emphasised the usefulness of Ubuntu in formulating policies for the PublicOrg. From managements perspective, all the 3 senior management that were interviewed at the PublicOrg acknowledged Ubuntu as a foundational framework for shaping policies that reflect ethical principles inclusive impartiality, justice, and respect. Participants argued that such ethical principles of Ubuntu not only align with organisation HRM policies but also contribute to the well-being of employees. hence recognising Ubuntu as an intrinsic organisation resource to the PublicOrg.

“Ubuntu, more like controls everything starting from company values, in such a way that our policies have moral ethics that institute respect and most importantly fairness on employees and unity in the public service” M3R3. HR Manager - PublicOrg.

“Ubuntu shows us a guide to our organisation policies with justice in our operations and respect for our workers in the policies and all the decisions we make” M2R2- HR Director- PublicOrg.

Moreover, the PublicOrg HRM handbook (2015) underscores on the usefulness of Ubuntu related values as a basis for guiding the organisation. “Based on the Zambian gazetted public service codes of ethics of respect, selflessness, impartiality, and loyalty, our ethics provide direction to all employees”. Furthermore, the document analysis from the HR handbook reflects the influence of Ubuntu in design of ethical policies at the organisational level with the publicOrg. The use of the phrase “our ethics” signifies operational relevance, implying that Ubuntu-inspired values are not merely aspirational but serve as active frameworks that shape organisational policy implementation. This articulation underscores the role of Ubuntu as a normative resource that informs ethical governance and guides behaviour across all levels of the PublicOrg.

❖ **PrivateOrg2**

In a similar vein, document analysis at PrivateOrg2 revealed that Ubuntu serves as a foundational reference point in the formulation of ethical policies. The policy statement asserts that “the organisation shall always create and maintain a friendly and harmonious working environment with ethical conduct of (a) acting with integrity, (b) serving with compassion, (c) caring because of respect for others, (d) leading with courage, (e) conducting business with kindness.” This reflects a strong alignment with Ubuntu's core principles, particularly its emphasis on the collective good (Poovan et al., 2006; Broodryk, 2006). Terms such as compassion, respect, caring, and kindness directly echo Ubuntu’s humanistic ethos, suggesting that these values influence the organisation’s ethical policies.

Furthermore, based on the interview statements at PrivateOrg2, it is evident that Ubuntu goes beyond being a mere philosophical concept, but it is the cornerstone of the company's legal structure, ethical decision-making, and overall business strategy.

“In our organisation, Ubuntu is not just ordinary, it forms the core of our legal compliance framework, with emphasis on respect and integrity, we make sure that every action we take is in line with our moral obligations, both to employees and the wider community. We emphasis respect, kindness, compassion in every policy and decision we make from employee relations to our broader business strategies” M7R44- Managing Director -PrivateOrg2.

“The principles of Ubuntu in particular selflessness, respect and kindness are at the heart of how we operate business. Every policy we implement, whether it’s related to employee behaviour or corporate governance, aligns with these values. To us Ubuntu is very important as it serves as a moral guide driving ethical decision making in business” M8R45- HR Director-PrivateOrg2.

“Ubuntu ensures that we treat every employee with dignity, respect, and fairness. We constantly remind our team that the collective good is our priority in everything. For us Ubuntu is the ethical lens through which we review and revise company policies, especially when handling ethical dilemmas” M8R45- HR Director PrivateOrg2.

“The impact of Ubuntu is felt in everyday decision, whether it’s a team meeting or a one-on-one discussion with management, Ubuntu values are always at the front and centre, it’s not just something we talk about, it’s built into the policies that guide how we work “A10R46- Branch Secretary. – PrivateOrg 2

Based on the interview feedback at PrivateOrg2, Ubuntu helps to ensure that the organisation remains in compliance to ethical principles, fostering a culture of respect, fairness, and empathy in both internal and broader business operations including customer service.

7.2 Use of Ubuntu at job/task level by management in HRM

Ubuntu is acknowledged as a social resource within organisational settings (Mangaliso, 2001; Brubaker, 2013; Tauetsile, 2021). This is demonstrated in this study, where it is identified as a tool for people management in both PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2. Since Ubuntu is based on respect and compassion for people (Nzimakwe, 2014; Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019), this is viewed as beneficial in managing people effectively in several ways in this study. This encompasses facilitation of autonomy of work, provision of constructive feedback, and provision of social support. Each of these will be explored and elaborated in detail in the subsequent sections, highlighting the use and applicability of Ubuntu as a resource in organisations job/task level.

7.2.1 Providing work autonomy

The study found that Ubuntu values, in particular, respect and solidarity are key social resources that supporting worker autonomy in carrying out tasks. This realisation is consistent with well-known HRM and motivational theories, such as the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker et al., 2003), which both recognise autonomy as a fundamental psychological need and vital resource for worker motivation and well-being.

In a broader sense, autonomy refers to the extent to which employees perceive they have the freedom, discretion, and agency to make and act on decisions related to their work (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, In Ubuntu-informed HRM practices, autonomy is understood as a socially embedded condition that stems from a profound sense of belonging, mutual care, and relational support. Thus, autonomy is conceptualised in Ubuntu as freedom through belonging, which enables individuals to act freely due to the support, respect, and inclusion they receive in a relational web of care and accountability.

At PrivateOrg2, the observation notes show that employees exercise authority and autonomy in organising their work tasks and determining the strategies to take to accomplish their goals, without being micromanaged. This is attributed to a prevalent belief in Ubuntu principles of consensus building and group cohesion (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019), which fosters a work environment that encourages autonomous work practices. This is further detailed below.

This was for example the case with the debt collections team at PrivateOrg2, that had the autonomy to use their own strategies to collect financial debts from customers out of respect for them from their manager. Their team lead gave them authority, to be creative, think outside the box and use their own strategies that can work to recover the company's finances from customers. The debt collections team used different new strategies with promotion slogans of "with a discount awaiting you why not pay on time and experience more from less" "pay it- and enjoy a hustle free discount". Such promotion slogans were put across and implemented or done without direction from management, which demonstrated autonomy in the decisions about work. Employees at PrivateOrg2 demonstrated autonomy in work projects by taking authority and responsibility of the projects throughout all the project phases or cycles without close supervision and any interference from management. At PrivateOrg2, employees were

self-organised, by also organising how to carry out work from the inception to the completion of tasks.

Observations indicate that the autonomous work environment at PrivateOrg2 was made possible by close and constructive relationships between management and employees, fostering trust and confidence. The high level of openness between both parties, rooted in the friendliness inherent in Ubuntu, has been shown to enhance employees' sense of autonomy in their work.

In addition, the trust and respect for people and sense of responsibility (Molose et al., 2018) coupled with communalism attitude in Ubuntu (Nzimakwe, 2014), further proved to facilitate autonomy where senior management put their trust in employees and placed full responsibility on them to work on important projects. For instance, during observations, the Managing Director at PrivateOrg2 assigned the IT team to improve the customer app by adding new features to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. The Managing Director gave the IT team all the authority to improve the design of the app in an innovative way without giving instructions or directions of how to go about it because he had the confidence in the team. All the Managing Director said to the IT team was “I would like customers to have all the information and documents they need on the app”. The statement was broad, but he left it open to the IT team to decide on how to improve the app and ways to design it. In this observation, the Managing Director showed the worth or respect of employees by expressing confidence and empowering the team with autonomy to develop the app. The Managing Director at PrivateOrg2 showed interest in the results but did not mind about the process taken because of having trust in the team. The Managing Director’s focus on the results motivated and gave the IT team more autonomy to develop the app in their own style innovatively. The IT team felt so valued and trusted to an extent where they worked so hard to improve the app with comments such as “we can’t let down the boss, he has trusted us with this work”. Others within the team were heard saying in bemba local language “imwe bane tiyeni tubombe, ba boss twibalekelesha” (IT 1- PrivateOrg2) (translation in English – friends come on let’s work, we should not let down the boss). The IT team was highly engaged and enthusiastic in their work, driven by the autonomy granted to them and the trust the Managing Director placed in them to oversee the most critical unit of the business. They also took full responsibility and ownership in enhancing the app, making independent decisions on new features to improve its

functionality. The IT team also made statements like “guys if we do this very well, we will surprise and impress the boss”. (IT 1-PrivateOrg2).

In the following statements expressed by management at PrivateOrg2, Ubuntu is demonstrated to facilitate work autonomy.

“Relations and teamwork from the belief in Ubuntu has brought confidence in workers to make informed decisions about work, in management we don’t express strict control over workers, but instead they themselves as workers instil control in their own work” M8R45- HR Director - PrivateOrg2.

“One thing that Ubuntu has done is broken the barrier between top- middle management and the junior officers to an extent where there is openness. This has made work easier for us in management because workers have been empowered with authority over work and projects. It means that we have workers that work independently, this reduces the work on our side” (M7R44- Managing Director- PrivateOrg2)

Furthermore, observations revealed that employees at PublicOrg have the autonomy to actively participate in important decision-making without requiring management approval. This is attributed to the Ubuntu-inspired culture of friendliness, which fosters a sense of belonging (Brubaker, 2013), making employees feel welcomed and empowered to contribute to decisions. For example, when the HR manager at PublicOrg was on leave for two weeks, a major decision arose regarding an employee’s transfer request to join their spouse in another province or district. Without seeking the HR manager’s consent, middle management HR officers took the initiative to authorize the transfer by signing on the manager’s behalf. While this decision could have been postponed until the HR manager’s return, the officers deemed it appropriate to proceed, demonstrating their autonomy and active role in decision-making. This reflects the Ubuntu-driven culture of inclusivity and openness, where employees feel empowered to act independently.

Observations also revealed that employees at PublicOrg have the autonomy to solve problems independently, without requiring direct involvement from their supervisors. A notable example occurred in the last week of May 2022, when the PublicOrg ran out of cleaning detergents, leaving the office premises untidy. With no supplies in storage and the management team unavailable to approve a petty cash request, the cleaner took the initiative to resolve the issue. Instead of waiting for senior approval, she approached the accounts department directly and

successfully raised a petty cash request to purchase the necessary cleaning supplies. This incident highlights how Ubuntu's influence at PublicOrg has cultivated a work environment where employees feel empowered to act in the best interests of the organization in problem solving. In the absence of senior management, the cleaner could have been unable to perform her duties. However, the autonomy fostered by Ubuntu's culture enabled her to make a proactive decision, ensuring that work continued seamlessly without disruption.

When asked about how useful Ubuntu is to work, some of the employees at the PublicOrg boasted of having the liberty to work in a way that suites them without necessarily following management way or order of work. This was for example highlighted by the receptionist "I enjoy the work culture here, I am able work in whichever way I want, I have my own powers in my work, and it gives me joy" (E2R24- Receptionist – PublicOrg.

Senior management at the PublicOrg also stressed on the usefulness of Ubuntu in creating a feeling of belongingness that motivates autonomy and highlighted to develop from a sense of connection and familyhood in Ubuntu solidarity spirit (Sigger et al, 2010). During interviews, Ubuntu was highlighted to be useful in allowing workers to manage their time, have control in work schedule and in the way to work.

"I should say that our workers have a lot of freedom, when it comes to the work they do, they set their own process to complete their work, they even have an input on their schedules, for example our lunch break is from 12:30pm- 1:30pm, but you find that other employees have decided to shift their lunch break to another time, our workers even create their own schedule for leave as management we don't create or impose a leave timetable for workers- they do It themselves, because we have created an environment of belonging by following Ubuntu "

M3R3- HR Manager - PublicOrg.

Because of the tolerant and understanding environment from Ubuntu compassion (Molose, 2019) in the PublicOrg. It was observed that employees at the PublicOrg have autonomy over their work schedules as they could walk into the workplace place even after the standard time for reporting to work. Employees could further leave work before the standard time for knocking off. Public organisation employees also had autonomy over their schedule for lunch breaks, instead of sticking to the traditional lunch break of 12:30pm to 1;30pm. Employees at the PublicOrg left for lunch earlier than the standard time and returned to work from lunch later than the one-hour standard lunch break. Such flexibility shows the autonomy that employees at the PublicOrg have towards work schedules. However, this autonomy over schedule was

observed to be helpful to some employees that needed to come to work later than the standard time because of commitment of dropping their children to school. Similarly, some of the employees chose a different time of lunch breaks to collect their children from school. So, the schedule control gained from Ubuntu compassion in the PublicOrg works to the advantage of employees and helps to address work-family conflicts hence contributing to people management.

At the PublicOrg it was suggested that autonomy of work is what employees have enjoyed most in the public sector as they have been able to set their own goals regarding their work and successfully manage the work they do.

“Freedom is what I enjoy most from working in the public sector, by having Ubuntu, I have been able to set targets for the work that I do, in other ways I manage my work” (E5R27-Cleaner – PublicOrg).

Ubuntu has further promoted freedom for expression within the PublicOrg. According to the PublicOrg handbook (2015), codes of ethics which depict Ubuntu have created a sense of belonging by encouraging leaders to prioritise serving employees and having employees to share and express their opinions about work. “The organisation strives to create a sense of belonging for everyone through open communication and servant leadership enriched in the codes of ethics”.

Ubuntu also creates an enabling environment for workers to voice out and express themselves. At PrivateOrg 2, employees openly expressed themselves to their superiors. There was no fear in speaking out and approaching management about any issues, suggestions, challenges, and preferences concerning work. The freedom to speak was observed from both managed and employees who interacted cordially with a sense of humour. This was also seen during meetings at PrivateOrg 2, where all employees speak out about issues relating to work. But this freeness in speaking was further noticed to come from the friendly and jovial spirit withing PrivateOrg2. The work environment at PrivateOrg 2, was one filled with laughter and joy, employees were always in high spirits throwing jokes here and there as they worked. So, speaking out on anything was very easy, since these employees were already empowered to joke freely at PrivateOrg 2, owing to the Ubuntu existence of friendliness and interconnection.

Participants at the PublicOrg also emphasised on the role of Ubuntu in liberating employees from lack of freedom to talk or speak up in their work and providing privilege for employees to voice out their opinions about work.

“because of the Ubuntu ethics here in the public organisation, we are free employees, we can speak no one will threaten us- we boast of that even though our salaries are not as high, but here we are advantaged with more freedom, we participate in decision making - we are not prisoners- so our Ubuntu is important for the empowerment of workers to work freely and be able to participate in work aspects without fear” A2R16 - IT officer - PublicOrg .

“Ubuntu is necessary to work because it has given us the privilege to express ourselves, for example here at work everyone is free to speak so long as it is in a respectful manner that doesn’t, disgrace, hurt or injure others” E1R23 (Provincial secretary- PublicOrg)

“Even though the wages might not be adequate and appetising in the Zambian public sector, we have empowered employees with the liberty to participate freely at work with our Ubuntu guided policies, our employees feel welcome and are at liberty to speak and work since we practice togetherness where everyone feels that they are part of us, no one feels like a stranger” M1R1. Provincial Direct - PublicOrg

The observations at the PublicOrg showed how free employees are to express themselves in the workplace. Employees at the PublicOrg were free to complain and speak to management regarding any complaints even on poor pay and how the poor pay was affecting their personal lives. Employees at PublicOrg could speak to management before speaking to union representatives because management at the PublicOrg are open for communication and approachable by employees, because of the spirit of Ubuntu in the PublicOrg. But it was noticed that freedom to speak comes with the golden rule of Ubuntu respect of politeness, consideration, mindfulness of the feelings of management. Because the way employees would speak to management was very respectable as they were very cautious by showing regard to management and avoiding hate speech.

Ubuntu was further described to enable skill utilisation out of a feeling of warm welcome, empowerment, and connection from Ubuntu solidarity. For example, The IT officer at the PublicOrg stressed on how Ubuntu enabled him to utilise and apply his skills, become more innovative and confident in his work. “My bosses are cool, I work in my own way, this has made me to be more innovative and discover the IT potential that was hidden inside me, I think this freedom to explore my IT skills has developed more here in the public sector because I feel more welcome and more accepted with my skills, there is that feeling of belonging and confidence, I get from here” A2R16- IT Officer- PublicOrg.

7.2.2 Providing constructive feedback

Ubuntu serves as a foundation for providing constructive feedback by fostering a culture of respect, valuing employees and demonstrating compassion through understanding of employee's perspectives (Broodryk, 2006), during performance appraisals. The study reveals that Ubuntu's core principles play a crucial role in facilitating performance appraisal with minimum friction and misunderstandings between management and employees (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019). This approach was firstly observed at the PublicOrg. During a performance appraisal meeting, it was observed that management apply respect in providing feedback to employees. Management at the PublicOrg began the feedback sessions by expressing gratitude for the efforts that employees put in at work. Thereafter, management asked for input and suggestions from employees about how they think they are performing and ways they think they could improve. Through Ubuntu respect, management created openness in the feedback process where employees were made to feel comfortable to express themselves in the appraisal meeting. As employees expressed themselves about their work performance, management applied compassion with empathetic language of active listening, understanding (Broodryk, 2006) and willingness to support and embrace any challenges that employees were facing. Irrespective of an employee's weaknesses, management expressed and instilled confidence in employees by encouraging and emphasizing that every person has room and potential to get better. During the appraisal process, management addressed challenges amicably and focused on employee's strengths and used the strengths as a platform to motivate employees. Management further showed interest in employee's perspectives and concerns by being understanding in a compassionate way. In addition, management focused on the growth of employees and refrained from using personal attacks, harsh language, or derogatory remarks in the feedback process. Management further applied an Ubuntu collaborative approach (Sigger et al, 2010) in the feedback process, by allowing for a two-way flow of suggestions between employees and management. In this way, action points from feedback were based on input ideas from both management and employees. Because of the respect, understanding, support shown in the feedback process, Ubuntu is found to facilitate constructive feedback enabling a pleasant and cordial environment during the feedback where employees feel valued, supported, and find the feedback motivating and encouraging. The feedback process at PublicOrg, influenced by Ubuntu, eliminated hostility, blame-shifting, and rigidity in management's approach to performance appraisals.

Ubuntu was also described as a vital tool that has shaped senior management and HR's approach to facilitating job assessments and evaluations, making them more supportive and interactive at PublicOrg.

“As HR – we believe that appraisals are not a platform to rebuke and reprimand, so we apply Ubuntu to make these appraisals as supportive and interactive to boost the confidence in employees” M3R3- HR Manager- PublicOrg.

“You know, Ubuntu is important because it strengthens and enhances supervisor support for workers even during appraisal no matter how poor an employee might perform- the reaction that a supervisor makes to the subordinate should be supportive to see the employee get better, because the reaction of supervisors during performance appraisal can break, devastate, demotivate or motivate and make an employee to develop” H1R4-HR Officer- PublicOrg.

“Management has always applied Ubuntu when assessing us, they are more supportive because they make the assessment more of a growth session to learn from” E2R24- Receptionist- PublicOrg.

Management at the PublicOrg also expressed ways in which they do everything possible to cover the weaknesses of employees as a way of helping them to get through the performance appraisals successfully.

“We are very helpful, we sacrifice for employees in many situations, without helping them- some of them would be out of employment, an example is where an employee is hired and fails to fully perform because they are incompetent, but as management we sacrifice for such employees, we cover up their weakness and train them to become better” M1R1 Provincial Director- PublicOrg.

Ubuntu was also observed to be resourceful when making decisions on selecting recipients for labour day awards at the PublicOrg. For example, I was privileged to attend a management labour day award selection meeting in May 2022 for labour day recipients where management based their decision to reward and recognise an employee that served the organisation for over twenty years with diligence, conforming to the PublicOrg ethics of selflessness, respect, objectivity, loyalty, and honesty. Amongst the names of employees shortlisted and considered for labour day award recipients included excellent and exemplary performers at work, however management decided to recognise a staff that had for many years diligently abided to the PublicOrg ethics relating to Ubuntu. Such an observation can be explained with support from

a quote in the PublicOrg employee handbook “rewards may not be necessarily based on performance but other factors conforming to the codes of ethics”. In this case, assessment of reward recipients seems to be determined by Ubuntu characteristics instead of merely or entirely being influenced by performance factors.

7.2.4 Providing Social support

At PrivateOrg 2, the observation activities further revealed the effective application of Ubuntu in providing support to employees. At the end of each month, employees in PrivateOrg2’s debt collections department faced a heavy workload and significant challenges in collecting payments from customers while meeting reconciliation deadlines with the accounting department. As the deadline approached, the managing director demonstrated compassion and empathy by easing the pressure on employees. This was achieved by adjusting the deadline to alleviate stress and providing additional support by assigning extra staff to assist in the process. This act of leadership reflected the application of Ubuntu’s values of compassion and collective support in the workplace, fostering a supportive and resilient work environment.

Observations further revealed that Ubuntu was actively used as a tool for supporting employees at PrivateOrg2. Although the organisation does not have a formal work-from-home policy and all employees are required to work from the office, management demonstrated flexibility by accommodating those facing personal challenges. For instance, the branch secretary at PrivateOrg2 encountered difficulties with childcare when her babysitter was unavailable, leaving her with no one to look after her child. After informing the HR manager of her situation, she was granted the option to work from home. Despite remote work not being part of the company’s standard practice, the HR manager demonstrated compassion and understanding by making an exception, ensuring that the employee received the necessary support while balancing work and family responsibilities.

Management and HR at the PublicOrg highlighted how they put Ubuntu solidarity or social support to use by extending and offering a helping hand to employees whenever they struggle with work or carrying out their tasks. It was argued that Ubuntu helps to reduce task ambiguity through mentoring and coaching that comes from Ubuntu spirit of support. This was expressed in the following statements.

“As management we use Ubuntu to offer and provide support to our workers as they perform their work assignments, we are there whenever employees need mentoring or any guide in their

work because that is what Ubuntu asks us to do, to be there for others, but we are only careful to ensure that we don't seem to be pressuring employees as we offer our service of support to them" M1R1- Provincial Director PublicOrg.

"Ubuntu encourages management to be as supportive to employees in carrying out their responsibilities, because there are many situations when an employee is unable to fully or effectively carry out their task because their roles are complex and not well explained, or rather they have not been sufficiently trained on a new role, without supportive management, employees end up to struggle to do their best at work, consequently this poses a risk on their job due to failure to successfully perform their roles as a result such employees develop a sense of guilt of being a failure and they develop low self-esteem which affects them psychologically" H7R10 - HR Officer - PublicOrg.

"Ubuntu provides work with means to support employees to successfully perform well in their work agendas, without Ubuntu at work, employees can be left to fail and condemned without assistance" H8R11- HR Clerk-. PublicOrg

Ubuntu was also cited to be important in providing social support to employees by understanding any difficulties they encounter in their job roles given the demanding and challenging nature of the business at PrivateOrg2.

"Ubuntu based work practices offer support to employees in their roles because it seeks to understand employee viewpoints no matter how challenging the situation can be in" M8R45- PrivateOrg2.

The Managing Director at PrivateOrg2 further elaborated more on the importance of Ubuntu support by explaining how workers in different positions may require different extents or levels of support because of the nature of their responsibilities. The Managing Director explained how other responsibilities might appear more involving and demanding and hence requiring special support for such roles to be successfully performed.

"When it comes to work I think what is more important is understanding how we all require guidance and advise in form of support from anyone at work, but you will find that the responsibilities that others have are so overwhelming such that it becomes very hard and nearly impossible for them to make it in their positions, but you find that Ubuntu support has made It easier and possible for those with the most involving positions to succeed in their positions M7R44 Managing Director - PrivateOrg2.

Moreover, Ubuntu was recognised to facilitate the smooth running of work for both management and employees by investing in employee support in working towards a unified goal. “Without Ubuntu idea of support, it is a challenge for both management and employees to succeed in their job responsibilities, working on a task requires support even senior management require support from those in the lowest positions, for work to be successful support must be there no one should be left carrying out their responsibilities whilst they struggle, work can fall apart without support A10R46- Branch Secretary- PrivateOrg2.

Ubuntu also helps in minimising workload, through social support in solidarity, management at the PublicOrg gave an example of how she was pressured with work by senior government officials and how the assistance from workmates helped to lessen the workload. “during general elections, I was asked by a government minister to quickly run an audit of authenticity of qualifications for staff members, it had to be done in a short period of time but considering we have many staff members this exercise was not easy, I initially felt stressed, but I was relieved of work stress with the overwhelming assistance that I got from administrative and HR officers” M3R3.HR Manager- PublicOrg

Ubuntu further provides social support by facilitating friendly and flexible job characteristics and qualities in consideration of how employees feel. This is elaborated in the following statement. “work itself should be flexible, and the work policies need to be set in regard of (a) how workers feel about the policy, (b) the effects of the policy on workers and their work, (c) whether the policy addresses the workers values, (d) whether the policy addresses the expectations of workers regarding work in their positions which they occupy” M8R45- HR Manager- PrivateOrg2.

7.3 Use of Ubuntu at the individual level- Employee perspective

7.3.3 Supporting employee personal beliefs.

Ubuntu is underpinned to fostering respect in the beliefs for employees (Poovan et al., 2006). This fundamental principle helps align organisational practices with individual values, creating a workplace that acknowledges and accommodates diverse beliefs. Respect contributes to supporting of employee’s personal convictions what matters to them that brings a sense of purpose. As a result, employees are more likely to engage authentically in their beliefs,

knowing that the organisation recognises and respects them through Ubuntu's ethos of inclusivity and understanding.

At PrivateOrg2, during a workplace luncheon planning meeting it was noted that PrivateOrg2 was cautious and considerate of the dietary restrictions for employees tied to religious beliefs. PrivateOrg2, demonstrated awareness, acknowledgment, and respect for religious dietary principles. This was exemplified by PrivateOrg2 careful attention to the beliefs of Seventh Day Adventist (SDA's) employees who desist from consuming pork meat and products due to religious tenets. Management deliberately included a wide option on the order list to accommodate these religious dietary restrictions. PrivateOrg2 also demonstrated sensitivity towards the dietary restrictions for an employee that practices Islam, by making an option of halal food on the menu for the luncheon. This observation in PrivateOrg2, reflects respect towards the beliefs of employees, hence contributing to facilitating of personal beliefs for employees in PrivateOrg2.

At the PublicOrg, it was noted that employees practicing Islam were permitted to attend congregation at the mosque on Fridays, commencing at 1:30pm, which coincide with working hours, without facing constraint and restrictions from management. This underscores and reflects that PublicOrg, values the religious beliefs of its employees. This facilitates and accommodates practice of personal beliefs.

Similarly, the practice of Ubuntu at work was said to be important to employees in providing meaning through practice of faith by permitting employees that are Jehovah's Witness (JW) to attend to evangelism to visit homes in the field and distribute Watch Tower books, during regular working hours. Consequently, Ubuntu is posited to be important to employee's well-being by providing a sense of purpose derived from a practice of religious activities.

"since i am a Jehovah's witness, sometimes we go in the field to evangelise on Wednesdays once in a month, I manage to attend to this without hesitation from my supervisor, mainly I feel this is because of the belief in respect and value for beliefs that comes from Ubuntu, whenever I am allowed to evangelise it brings me a feeling that I have a purpose to life because that is a calling I have from God " E1R23- Provincial Secretary- PublicOrg.

Management showed respect for religious beliefs and observances, by being flexible to allow workers to attend to religious programs. As such, Ubuntu was described as something facilitating fulfilment of personal beliefs.

“I think Ubuntu does good to my well-being because with its values I am allowed to attend to my religious programs during working hours on Friday, so my belief in religion is fulfilled because of the respect that the organisation holds for various religions, they allow me to go to the mosque for congregation on Fridays during working hours” H2R5- HR Officer- PublicOrg

During the Africa Freedom Day celebrations, an intriguing observation unfolded amidst the festivities: employees at the PublicOrg partook in a procession through the streets. However, it is notable that individuals whose religious beliefs precluded them from participating in street marches were respectfully excused from this collective activity. This occurrence underscores the embodiment of Ubuntu principles within organizational practices, where the recognition and accommodation of diverse beliefs not only honour individual beliefs but also enrich the overall well-being experience for employees.

During green area daily meetings for the PublicOrg, it was observed that the meeting proceedings would begin with a prayer, which would often be delivered by any staff member appointed by the meeting chair. However, a discernible pattern was noted where certain staff members remained uninvolved in the habit or ritual of saying a prayer, because of respect and sensitivity to their religious beliefs or tenets that stop or preclude them from leading prayers in gatherings exceeding two individuals. This observation not only underscores the PublicOrg commitment to honouring the beliefs of employees, but it also suggests that the PublicOrg creates a conducive environment that nurtures the fulfilment of diverse religious beliefs within the workplace hence facilitating individual beliefs at work.

Furthermore, it was noted that the PublicOrg would celebrate birthdays for staff members often with a celebratory cake procured through the money raised from contributions by staff members. However, other staff members refrained from participating in such celebrations, owing to personal religious beliefs. Such a distinctive belief was acknowledged and respected. This observation shows support and accommodation of individual beliefs thereby fostering fulfilment of beliefs from Ubuntu mindful respect and recognition of employee’s beliefs.

Ubuntu was lauded for its inclusivity and welcoming of a diverse range of religions in the PublicOrg. It was explained that Ubuntu is a source of personal religious satisfaction where employees feel comfortable, free, and safe to pursue activities pertaining to their religious belief without facing prejudice, bias, or discrimination. This contributes significantly to employees’ overall sense of well-being by ensuring they are not only free from discrimination but also embraced for their religious beliefs.

“I feel like any other person here because of Ubuntu, in some workplaces it’s all about one religion other religions are sort of side-lined, but here my religious beliefs are not side-lined this makes me fulfilled; indeed, Ubuntu has satisfied my personal beliefs in religion” (H2R5-HR officer - PublicOrg).

Ubuntu also satisfies individual traditional way of life in the workplace. This is the account for a cleaner at the PublicOrg who explained how her modest way of dressing reflective of her traditional cultural background and heritage has been respected welcomed and accepted in the PublicOrg because of Ubuntu policy of respect for others in the workplace.

“coming from a strong traditional background Ubuntu meets my background I have been able to fit in this workplace, my dressing is in moderation, it does not really suite the modern way of dressing, but people respect me just the way I am, this is good for my well-being , “the practice of respect here has always kept my traditional life satisfied, i am not judged or laughed at for my way of life” E3R25- Cleaner- PublicOrg

7.4 Complexities in Ubuntu use by management and employees.

The findings highlight that Ubuntu practices at PrivateOrg2 are characterised by complexities that go beyond their intended objectives. Although Ubuntu is traditionally based on principles of interdependence and mutual support (Poovan et al., 2006), the study indicates that these values can sometimes manifest as patterns of over-reliance and over-dependency among employees. At PrivateOrg2, this dependency is particularly noticeable, with employees frequently turning to their co-workers for additional assistance, creating an unequal distribution of responsibilities.

This over-reliance, arising from the interdependence described by Poovan et al., (2006), inadvertently increases the workload for those who are dedicated to maintaining Ubuntu’s value of solidarity. These employees, driven by the belief in mutual support, often take on the extra duties of their colleagues, which leads to significant stress. As Sigger et al., (2010) pointed out, this dynamic can shift Ubuntu’s original purpose of fostering collective support into one that creates uneven expectations and burdens. The complexity lies in how these interdependencies, while consistent with Ubuntu’s principles, can introduce unintended organisational challenges, where the distribution of responsibilities becomes unbalanced, ultimately complicating the fair application of Ubuntu in the workplace. This is further elaborated in the following statement.

“even though HR is a skill I am happy to have learnt, but I feel that the HR manager has become so reliant on me such that I end up doing most of her work, as I also carry out my receptionist responsibility, I am overloaded with work, I feel that since Ubuntu encourages people to help one another at work, others become so reliant on others and end up putting work pressure and workload on others in the name of co-worker support, you find that others end up carrying the burden of others that are lazy” E14R50- Receptionist- PrivateOrg2.

The taking advantage of workers through excessive workloads, in the context of the Ubuntu solidarity spirit, highlights the importance of adopting a balanced approach to practising Ubuntu solidarity within the workplace. Such action is crucial to prevent overburdening employees and to ensure the sustainable operation of collaborative Ubuntu initiatives.

Secondly, tolerance nature of Ubuntu (Nzimakwe, 2014) at PublicOrg is criticised to be exploitatively used by both employees and management in work practices. Wherein out of tolerance employees have developed a habit of repetitively and deliberately reporting late to work knowing that management tolerates them with the spirit of understanding deliberated in compassion value of Ubuntu (Brubaker, 2013), ultimately this tolerance has breed into poor work habits of non-schedule adherence.

The poor work habits developed out of tolerance from Ubuntu was observed where most of the employees from the public organisation were seen habitually reporting late for work and barely staying for work. Some of the employees including management would only stay for work for three to four hours – just to show their face at the office and after that they could disappear without anyone knowing their where abouts. A term referred to as ghosting in the PublicOrg of Zambia. Even though this practice appeared unusual to someone external like me, this practice is not strange within the PublicOrg. However, all such practices appeared to have developed in the PublicOrg because of tolerant work culture adopted from Ubuntu.

The tolerant characteristic of Ubuntu shielding poor work practices was further evidenced during observations when auditors came to audit the PublicOrg. During the auditing, an accounts clerk from the PublicOrg, failed to account for an amount of money. After being questioned by the auditors to account for the money, the accounts clerk asked help from her supervisor to cover her up. The supervisor covered up the accounts clerk by explaining to the auditors that the unaccounted money would be receipted later because the organisation had just made a purchase of office stationery, and the supplier was yet to provide receipts. Such

covering up of employee weakness, illustrates how tolerance in Ubuntu can lead to poor work habits.

Management also stressed on the negative side of Ubuntu compassion to work from a management's perspective. It was explained that Ubuntu tends to shield bad work practices because of a belief in compassion that is taken for granted by employees, hence them employees becoming complacent with the leniency and compassion from management.

“Because of its tolerance Ubuntu can also hide and attract bad behaviour since people take advantage of being too soft to them, sometimes employees report to work late because they have seen that management is very tolerant” M1R1-Provincial Director- PublicOrg

“Due to the good nature of Ubuntu, as managers we tend to be too lenient on employees, this bites us back because employees develop bad practices like taking long lunch breaks, knowing that management is lenient and soft on them, most of the time as management we fail to report and discipline bad behaviour because Ubuntu asks us to be tolerant, we feel pity for employees fearing they can lose their jobs” M2R2 HR- Director -PublicOrg

“By practicing kindness and compassion, we avoid exposing the weaknesses of employees for example if our accounts clerk fails to account for something, we cover them up and privately ask her to replace the money” M3R3- HR Manager- PublicOrg

7.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter narrated several ways in which Ubuntu has been harnessed in the workplace. In the PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2 Ubuntu is embedded deeply within organisational policies, serving as a core guiding principle for HRM policies at the organisational level. Ubuntu use is extended to the job/task level where it is used in different ways including fostering autonomy of work from Ubuntu respect, where employees are given the freedom to manage their own tasks thus enhancing their sense of responsibility and ownership. At task level Ubuntu also provides constructive feedback, where feedback is delivered to employees with respect and compassion, consequently promoting a positive and growth-oriented working environment. Additionally, Ubuntu strengthens social support, providing a strong network of support where everyone feels part of the community. For employees at an individual level, Ubuntu is used to support employee personal beliefs through respect.

While Ubuntu offers numerous benefits, the chapter has also uncovered the complexities associated in the practices of Ubuntu by both management and employees. Employees take advantage of management leniency leading to issues like chronic lateness. Management also misuses solidarity and survival by overburdening employees, expecting them to take excessive workload.

Overall, the findings deepen our understanding of how Ubuntu principles can inform HRM practices in African organisations, showcasing its transformative potential in reshaping HRM strategies to enhance organisational effectiveness and employee well-being.

Looking ahead, the next chapter will discuss about organisational contextual factors influencing the application of Ubuntu in HRM within Africa.

Chapter 8: Influence of Internal and External Organisational Context In The Application of Ubuntu In HRM Practices

8.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings that answer RQ3. How does external and internal organisational context influence the application of Ubuntu values in HRM; specifically, what role is played by (a) the African context in terms of historical and cultural legacies, (b) sectoral characteristics (public versus private sector), and (c) leadership and management styles? The findings in this chapter not only inform RQ3 but also relate to the third section of the conceptual framework depicted in figure (6). The relationship between organisational contexts and the implementation of management philosophies remains a focal point of scholarly inquiry, particularly in contexts characterised by diverse historical, cultural legacies and sectoral characteristics or dynamics.

The argument in this chapter is built on the premise that organisations are not isolated entities. Rather, they are embedded in their socio-historical and cultural contexts from which they arise and operate in (Scott, 1995; Dade, 2011, 2012). As such, the implementation and non-implementation of Ubuntu in HRM practices reflects not just managerial preferences, but the broader contextual forces shaping organisational values, behaviours, and leadership styles and practices. The findings in this chapter are derived from empirical data collected through interviews and document analysis, highlighting how historical and cultural legacies, both African and Western influence the implementation, and perception of Ubuntu within HRM practices. Additionally, this chapter explores how sector-specific factors, particularly the distinctions between public and private organisations and the values they prioritise, either support or hinder the integration or application of Ubuntu in HRM. Finally, leadership is identified as a key factor in determining the extent to which Ubuntu is incorporated into HRM practices. The chapter underscores the role of leaders not only as implementers of management practices but also as cultural instigators whose practices and behaviours either promote or obstruct the principles of Ubuntu within HRM and organisational practices. This perspective positions leadership as a crucial force in shaping organisational culture, with significant implications on how Ubuntu is applied in HRM. Ultimately, the chapter reveals the different factors attributing to Ubuntu's use within HRM practices across different sectors.

8.2 Organisation contexts and their influence on Ubuntu in HRM practices

The integration and application of Ubuntu into HRM practices within organisations is influenced by a variety of contextual factors, including historical legacies and events, Gade (2011;2012), cultural beliefs and norms Mbigi (1997). As well as traditional practices, systems of governance and communal settings (Olinger et al., 2007; Tladi, 2021). As an African ontological concept, Ubuntu is typified by complex contextual cultural realities (Anderson, 2003) that are often at odds with certain elements and characteristics of the Western thought (Broodryk, 2002). In contexts where values of interconnectedness and humanness are highly esteemed, including African communities, there is a greater potential for integrating Ubuntu principles into HRM practices (Khomba & Ulaya, 2013). For these communities, Ubuntu is more than just an ethic, it is an inherent belief system that is deeply embedded in their way of life (Nussbaum, 2003).

Consistent with such assertions, through the findings in this study, country context of an organisation can either have a positive or negative influence on Ubuntu use within HR practices in an organisation. Depending on whether the organisation originates from a context with a belief in the importance of Ubuntu principles as a source of social meaning and fulfilment (Mangaliso, 1999; 2001) and further based on the historical events for the country context of an organisation.

8.2.1 Western historical and cultural legacies as hindrances of Ubuntu use in HRM at PrivateOrg1.

To begin with, the analysis reveals that PrivateOrg1 originating from a Western context have limited alignment with Ubuntu principles. Rooted in Western cultural ideals, PrivateOrg1, tend to lack the emphasis of interconnectedness, relatedness, group strength that are fundamental and common in the culture of Ubuntu (Mangaliso, 1999; Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019). As Ubuntu is an inherently African concept (Mbigi, 1997), its cultural underpinnings are not seen as integral within the Western organisational context, making it less relevant and thus rarely integrated within HRM strategies or practices in these settings (Tlabi, 2021) as PrivateOrg1. This perspective is further substantiated by interview data, which consistently reflects similar attitudes and practices, highlighting the cultural disconnect and limited applicability of Ubuntu principles in a Western organisational setting of PrivateOrg1.

The establishment of PrivateOrg1 in Paris- France, a Western context was found to have a negative influence on the use, recognition, perception, and impact of Ubuntu in HRM strategies, processes, and practices within the organisation. This is despite PrivateOrg1 operating in North, West, East and Central Africa where Ubuntu is practiced as a cultural norm (Sigger et al, 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014). Interview participants expressed that the non-recognition and non-use of Ubuntu in HRM at PrivateOrg1 is due to the company having adopted a Western culture where the organisation originates from. This was demonstrated in the following statements from management at PrivateOrg1.

“Realistically our company has inherited the Western reality in management practices, since that is what seems logical or favourable to our company, Ubuntu is not appealing to our company that comes with a Western mind” (M5R30-HR Director- PrivateOrg1)

“It is more like we have borrowed the way we look at Ubuntu from a European perspective I think Ubuntu is not so much of a factor shaping our mindset of business and managerial practices- it is much to do with our group chairman and CEO the co-founders of our company that have roots in France where they founded it, that side life is not based on Ubuntu collectivism everything is fast and focused on individualistic hard work” (M4R29 CEO - PrivateOrg1).

“How we take Ubuntu in this organisation is kind of coming from a European point of view since that is where our company is coming from”, (E8R38- Secretary to CEO- PrivateOrg1).

Participants also highlighted that since the two owners and founders of PrivateOrg 1 have held senior positions in a France based company with Western origin, they have adopted Western ethos that are individualistic and focused on wealth creation, such that they are relaxed about Ubuntu as illustrated in the following comments.

“Before co-finding this company, it is well known and rumoured that the two owners worked in the same company as directors in France, from such a business background I think both did not see and acknowledge any use of Ubuntu in the successful positions they held in France- in short, they don’t find Ubuntu as relevant to the workplace as maybe others who might have held successful senior business positions within Africa.... this has run down to this company where Ubuntu is not recognised” (M6R31-Debt collections manager- CEO - PrivateOrg1).

“Even though we work and operate in Zambia and other African countries mainly in South Africa, our perception of Ubuntu, where we don’t appreciate it as much is coming from where it was founded in Paris and the owners of the company” (M5R30- HR Manager - PrivateOrg1).

8.2.2 African historical and cultural legacies as enablers of Ubuntu use in HRM at PrivateOrg2 and PublicOrg

The analysis indicates that PrivateOrg2 and PublicOrg, both of which originating from African contexts, find the principles of Ubuntu particularly relevant to their organisational management practices. Their cultural/ historical alignment with Ubuntu beliefs shapes a management approach underscoring Ubuntu (Mangaliso, 2001; Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019). After all, the prerequisites of Ubuntu are intrinsically considered to be more substantial and feasible in an African context (Bolden; 2014; Tlabi, 2021). Therefore, the national historical context of Ubuntu plays a significant role in shaping how both PrivateOrg2 and PublicOrg integrate Ubuntu into their management and HRM practices (Sigger et al., 2010).

For example, Zambia has actively adopted Ubuntu as a unifying principle in the post-colonial period, rejecting divisive colonial power structures and addressing the injustices rooted in colonialism (Taylor, 2006). This Zambian national historical perspective on Ubuntu has in turn influenced PublicOrg’s approach, to integrating Ubuntu not merely as an organisational framework but as a cultural imperative resonating with Zambia’s broader societal goals anchored in historical legacies.

Interview insights from the PublicOrg further underscore the deep-rooted influence of Zambia’s historical and cultural context in shaping organisational practices. During discussions, participants referred to the social movement song ‘Tiyende pamodzi ndimutima umo (local term meaning – let’s walk/move together with one heart), which symbolises unity and has spurred the integration of Ubuntu principles across Zambian organisations (Kanduza, 2004) including the PublicOrg under study.

“Senior citizens, I mean us the older citizens understand that Ubuntu is in management from our history, the song “Tiyende pamodzi ndimutima umo, instilled in us the love for Ubuntu, those days we sang this song with joy and today this song has led the government to use the principles behind it In managing the public sector (M1R1- Provincial Director PublicOrg).

“KK (Kenneth Kaunda), started this thing of Ubuntu, with his song which he sang joyfully tiyende pamodzi, that is where we all began this journey” (M2R2-HR Director PublicOrg)

The analysis suggests that the enduring and historical song, “Tiyende pamozi” (let’s move together) has played a foundational role in embedding Ubuntu principles within Zambia’s organisational and social frameworks. Serving not only as a social movement for unity and brotherhood, but the song also became a symbolic and practical tool in resisting oppressive, racially divisive governance, fostering solidarity amidst systemic injustices (Kanduza,2004). The details of the song are as follows.

Tiyende pamodzi nimutima umo (let’s walk together with one heart)

Amai tiyenemwe (Ladies let’s move united together)

Ayusi tiyenemwe (Youths let’s move united together)

Africa tiyenemwe (Africa let’s move united together)

Tiwoloke Zambezi nimutima umo (We cross Zambezi with one heart)

In addition, the PublicOrg use of Ubuntu in HRM practices and strategy is influenced by the organisation being founded in Zambia under humanistic beliefs and social norms (Taylor, 2006). This is illustrated in the following statement.

“It doesn’t just come from nowhere, it comes from somewhere- this is about us being in Zambia, the local beliefs by the local people, their belief in community, respect for people and mutual support... this is what compelled the republic of Zambia to put across principles that are people driven you know the Ubuntu culture”M1R1- Provincial Director – PublicOrg).

Other participants in the PublicOrg explained on the belief in unity that Zambians are said to have towards life (Kanduza, 2004; Taylor, 2006) as a contextual culture shaping the recognition of Ubuntu as an important philosophy to successful HRM practices and a conducive work environment in the PublicOrg. This was made clear in the following comments.

“The way we embrace and recognize Ubuntu as very important to daily work life all comes from our mother Zambia and the general approach that we Zambians have towards life where we embrace interconnectedness” H1R4- HR Officer - PublicOrg

“Ubuntu is highly recognised, and we find it to be very useful here in the public sector obviously because the society we live in has these social beliefs, in one way or the other this has made our workplace more comfortable about the spirit of Ubuntu” E1R23- Provincial Secretary- PublicOrg

❖ PrivateOrg2

Post apartheid South Africa has embraced Ubuntu in management practices including HRM and business ethics as part of building an inclusive employee centred workplace (Gade, 2011; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Sigger et al, 2010; Jo-Ansie, 2019). This applies to PrivateOrg2. where it was equally highlighted that the company being established and founded in South Africa where Ubuntu proliferated (Ncube, 2010; Akinola and Uzodike, 2018) has contributed to its embrace, positive perception, and application of Ubuntu in HRM strategies, practices, and processes.

“Since we are a South African organisation, this has influenced our high regard of Ubuntu values in our workplace, South Africa is where our background as an organisation begins from, and this is where norms of Ubuntu are common and widespread” M7R44- Managing Director-PrivateOrg2).

“Our belief and practice of Ubuntu comes from South Africa, where our company was founded. where the culture of Ubuntu was born and where it comes from “M8R45- HR Director-PrivateOrg2.

The context of South Africa and its influence on Ubuntu is even evident in the 1993 South African interim constitution where Ubuntu is prevalent with intentions of providing a historic and notable bridge between a pre-Apartheid South Africa branded with divisions, strife, suffering and injustice and a post- Apartheid South Africa branded with reconciliation, justice, and democracy (Gade,2011;2012). The interim constitution of South Africa (1993) understood Ubuntu as part of the deep cultural heritage of the majority people and that there was need for Ubuntu rather than victimisation, reparation rather than retaliation (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200 of 1993: Epilogue after Section 251). The term Ubuntu permeates the South African constitution epilogue (Gade; 2011). The appearance of Ubuntu in the interim constitution of South Africa is neither unimportant nor coincidental but of Importance as suggested by the South African constitutional court (1994). The South African constitution commands that “human dignity of all people should be protected and respected based on ideals of Ubuntu (Sigger et al., 2010).

This historical context of South Africa has had an influence in the way Ubuntu has been widely adopted in HRM and management practices in South African organisations (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019), notwithstanding PrivateOrg2 that has enshrined Ubuntu in its HRM strategy stating that “creating a working environment that respects human dignity and values diversity

in which the company employees can excel and flourish “(PrivateOrg2- HRM strategy statement)

8.3 Sectoral dynamics influencing Ubuntu in HRM

Sectoral dynamics specifically organisation values have been established to have a role to play in the way Ubuntu shapes HRM within organisations in this study. The organisation values that are aligned to Ubuntu were found to impact HRM practices as these portray Ubuntu values that in turn manifest in HRM policies, practices and decisions on recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, rewards.

This section presents and discusses on how sectoral organisation values shape HRM practices with Ubuntu, drawing from case study organisations. Additionally, the role played by management in instigating Ubuntu values is also another organisation characteristic with an important role in the way Ubuntu shapes HRM practices. The comparison between PublicOrg, PrivateOrg2, and PrivateOrg1 illustrates the pivotal role played by sectoral dynamics in determining the effectiveness of Ubuntu in HRM practices.

8.3.1 PublicOrg: values of selflessness and respect as influencers of Ubuntu in HRM

At the PublicOrg, selflessness is the first organisation value that was recognised to be one of the organisation factors that aligns with Ubuntu and influencing Ubuntu use in organisation HRM practice, strategy and decision making. As the concept of Ubuntu is oriented towards a common ground of selflessness for communal good in the interest of sustaining community through a collective, we (Mbigi, 1997; Poovan, 2005; Mutwarasibo & Iken ,2018). This is consistent with the selflessness organisation value, where HRM encourages selfless discharge of duties by prioritising group gain over personal gain (Zambia PublicOrg codes, 2015), thus eliminating the I in the thought system of HRM practices. This is also supported in the following sentiments.

“Our practices in HR think about everyone, everything is done for everyone because of the code of ethics of selflessness” (H5R8. HR Clerk- PublicOrg)

“We embody selflessness in management practices, by being in support of practices that benefit groups of employees, unlike an individual” (M2R2. HR Director- PublicOrg)

Adherence to selflessness organisation value at the PublicOrg calls for management and employees to be attentive and conscious towards co-workers within the workplace. It underlines the significance placed in advancing a considerate professional environment favourable for the entire workforce, as delineated in the selfless value. “Carrying out responsibilities in an unselfish, thoughtful, and gallant manner” PublicOrg- handbook, 2014).

The value of selflessness also highlights on the need to fulfil work commitments for the greater good without selfish motives (PublicOrg, 2015) hence having an influence on the use of Ubuntu in the public organisation HRM because it encourages a selfless social responsibility for a favourable impact on the workplace or community (Nzimakwe,2014). This further displays that management, and employees must be in cognisant of how their actions might impact on others at work (Zambia PublicOrg, 2015).

Moreover, HRM practices prioritising the interests of others and work goals over own personal interests is influenced by the selfless PublicOrg organisation value that emphasises on acting thoughtfully and responsibly, thus contributing to the extent at which Ubuntu ethic of selflessness is embraced in the organisation. This was for example explained in the following statement by one of the management staff. “Whatever is done by management is for the interest of employees, it is never about management or one single person” (M1R1-Provincial Director. PublicOrg).

The selfless organisation value at the PublicOrg also highlights on commitment, carefulness, and thoroughness in serving employees which promotes and enriches a spirit of care and altruism in Ubuntu (Sigger et al., 2010; Molose et al., 2018). Thus, having an influence in the use of Ubuntu in management practices. This is as stated in the PublicOrg handbook “The organisation is dedicated to serving employees with diligence and selflessness in compliance to laws, standards, and ethics”.

Based on the PublicOrg, people at work must not only achieve goals for the organisation, but they must do so with a sense of integrity and nobility. “Being noble, avoiding conduct for personal gain, conflicting with the fulfilment of corporate goals for the entire workforce”. As such, this attributes to shaping the use of Ubuntu in management practices. This is evident in how selflessness as an organisation value stresses on the importance of delivering organisation goals that centre on public service to the benefit of people at work.

Furthermore, the PublicOrg actively discourages employees and management from being swayed by negative influence from people to do things for individual profit that might

compromise human integrity. Instead, the PublicOrg ethics encourage on sticking to moral judgement when making decisions at work, as guided in the following policy. “Not being influenced by improper pressures from others with the prospect of personal gain”.

It was explained that such a policy has influence on management practice of avoiding persuasion of compromising integrity in work practices solely for personal benefit. Hence influencing HRM practices, and decision with Ubuntu that promotes pursuits that are favourable for a larger group (Nzimakwe, 2014). This was expressed in the following comment. “The policy of Ubuntu impels us to practice Ubuntu to maintain integrity. We face many offers of bribery in our work, but what keeps us strong is the policy guiding us not to be influenced by offers of money in exchange for promotions and hiring new workers,”M3R3. HR Manager - PublicOrg

The second organisation value that was found to be a way in which Ubuntu influences the use of Ubuntu in HRM in the PublicOrg is respect, as this is also one the values of Ubuntu (Muller et al, 2018). According to the PublicOrg handbook (2015), the respect organisation value echoes on the importance of recognising employees and upholding their dignity and legal rights, which also resonates with principles of Ubuntu (Gade, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014; Mutwarasibo and Iken, 2019).

- “Being courteous to the needs, beliefs, opinions, and rights of others refraining from using intimidating, offensive and derogatory gestures, language and words”.
- “Being protective and courteous of everyone’s rights and dignity as enshrined in the Zambian constitution”.
- “Discharging functions reasonably and respectfully, according to law”.

As an organisation value, respect was cited as a fundamental facet of Ubuntu that is taken very seriously in the PublicOrg HRM strategies and policies to keep a united workplace, thus having an influence in the PublicOrg management practices as detailed in the following comment. “Ubuntu provides respect as an important value for the organisation to remain united and operate well; this impacts the way we perceive Ubuntu respect as something very important” M2R2-HR Director- PublicOrg

Another way in which Ubuntu is believed to influence the dynamics of Ubuntu in the public organisation is through the impartiality organisation value. Impartiality was said to be implemented at work with a dedication to serving workers equally and giving them the same opportunities, which align with Ubuntu principles of justice (Gade, 2011). This is revealed in

one of the PublicOrg value policy statements. “Carrying out responsibilities in an equitable, fair and just way that shows commitment to equality by complying with ethical standards”.

With such a policy of commitment to ethical practices of equality, the HR director at the public organisation commented on how such an organisation value policy of equality shapes Ubuntu practices in the organisation. “Policy of equality shapes our actions of Ubuntu whose emphasis is on treating all humans the same” M2R2.

The PublicOrg further places significance on avoiding actions deemed unjust and unfair on any individuals in the workplace, thus influencing Ubuntu use in HRM by stressing on practices of fairness and justice which are maintained in Ubuntu (Mutwarisabo & Ikan, 2018). “Avoiding acts that unjustly and unfairly favours or discriminates against specific individuals based on their social, cultural, ethnic, religious or any other considerations”.

Treating employees fairly without looking at their social and or ethical backgrounds is also emphasised in the PublicOrg, hence aligning with Ubuntu (Nzimakwe, 2014) and shaping the use of Ubuntu in the organisation HRM practices as outlined in the following policy. “Dealing with the affairs of the organisation efficiently, promptly without bias or maladministration”.

Loyalty is the fourth organisation value for the PublicOrg that was recognised to influence Ubuntu use in HRM. The PublicOrg identifies that an employee is part of the larger and entire collective workforce and therefore actions, practices and behaviours should reflect a sense of responsibility and loyalty towards the communal and collective group. As an organisation value, loyalty highlights on a commitment to the organisation by being helpful and supportive to others in achieving goals which also contributes to Ubuntu in the organisation. “At all times having undivided and absolute loyalty to the organisation in the discharge of duties, giving support to the organisation operations and that of staff members”. The policy on loyalty underscores on the importance of taking responsibility, ownership in fulfilling the organisation goals and the need for individuals at work to contribute positively to the growth of the organisation. “Serving the organisation diligently in a very helpful way to allow successful, efficient, and effective discharge of duties”.

Moreover, management and HR at the PublicOrg stressed on Ubuntu as having a basic role in shaping management policy and practice with Ubuntu.

“Ubuntu has a basic role to play in the shaping of organisation policies and practices, because almost all the policies are informed by the code of ethics with respect, selflessness, impartiality”. M2R2 -HR Director – PublicOrg.

“Ubuntu coordinates the activities of the organisation, playing a big role to all organisation activities” H9R12- HR Clerk- PublicOrg.

“it is clear enough from our organisation handbook that Ubuntu has a big role to play in this organisation starting from the policies every time we gather as management in the public sector our starting reference point are the organisation codes of ethic, we don’t want the policies and practices to drift away from the ethical codes because we understand that our employees are people of values” M3R3- HR Manager – PublicOrg.

8.3.2 PrivateOrg2: values of compassion and respect as influencers of Ubuntu in HRM

The organisation values in PrivateOrg2 play a role in shaping Ubuntu in HRM management practices and decisions by emphasising on creating a conducive workplace through practice of ethical values of respect and compassion, as elaborated in the following policy “

- The organisation shall always create and maintain a friendly and harmonious working environment with ethical conduct that aligns with ethical values” (PrivateOrg2- Organisation handbook)
- Culture is fixed in sincerity, respect and consideration for one another and the company’s external extended communities (PrivateOrg2- Organisation handbook)

The first ethical value that manifests in PrivateOrg2 and influences the application of Ubuntu in HRM practices is “serving with compassion.” As highlighted by Nussbaum (2003), compassion is one of the core values of Ubuntu. Through this ethical principle, PrivateOrg2 emphasizes the importance of empathy and care in workplace practices. “Management must fulfil work obligations by showing genuine willingness to address and understand the needs of employees in a caring manner”.

“Caring because of respect for others” is another ethical value that shapes the application of Ubuntu in management policies and practices at PrivateOrg2. This value aligns with Ubuntu by emphasizing the significance of care and respect within the organisation. Since this ethical principle underscores the organisation's commitment to showing genuine concern for

employees, recognising their value and appreciating their contributions to the workplace (Sigger et al., 2010), it reinforces the integration of respect and care in HRM practices.

PrivateOrg2, further places emphasis on respect for employees by recognising their importance and inherent worth as individuals in line with Ubuntu principles.

Additionally, “conducting business with kindness” is also another organisation characteristic influencing the use of Ubuntu in management policies at PrivateOrg2. Based on this policy, PrivateOrg2 is committed to prioritising ethical practices and moral conduct in business dealings, as also emphasised in Ubuntu (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019).

During observations, PrivateOrg2 management were prioritising customers by addressing customer concerns with empathy, flexibility, and deep understanding. For example, PrivateOrg2, showed flexibility and understanding to customers that were owing the company for several months. Rather than taking legal action against such customers, management understood customer concerns and re-negotiated for a more flexible payment arrangement and plan. This display’s how practices at PrivateOrg2 are shaped by Ubuntu value of kindness.

Moreover, management and employees at PrivateOrg2 identified the policy of kindness as shaping the way in which practices at PrivateOrg2 are committed to practicing work with compassion and empathy, which are seen as fundamental aspects of Ubuntu for sustaining community well-being (Nzimakwe, 2014).

“Out of the policy of kindness, we basically practice Ubuntu because we have all learnt to centre our attention on the well-being of those involved in the business, we want them happy, we show kindness to them, this strengthens our relationship with them” M8R45 HR Manager - PrivateOrg2.

“Kindness is one of the most crucial values that tells us the essence of Ubuntu. You know we have good relations and harmony in and out of the organisation because of kindness. Kindness is something from Ubuntu that we practice in our work lifestyle” A13R49 Insurance Officer- PrivateOrg2

All the 8 interviewed participants from PrivateOrg2 further confirmed that the organisation policies and practices at PrivateOrg2 are influenced by Ubuntu through the organisation ethical values, based on the following comments.

“The ethical values of caring because of respect for others and serving with compassion amongst others are ways in which Ubuntu shapes the policies of the organisation”. E14R50 Receptionist - PrivateOrg2.

“In this organisation, practices and policies involve ethical values of Ubuntu this company purely understands the importance of human dignity because it operates in a complex culture that is well off in Ubuntu”. M7R44. Managing Director- PrivateOrg2

“Ubuntu is the main structure of our policies; it frames policies by setting the agenda and means of successfully implementing the same policies following the ethical values” M7R44 Managing Director- PrivateOrg2.

“Indeed, our policies are spelt by ethical values derived from an Ubuntu thought, we are strategic enough to know that ethical values drive our business, we understand that the success or failure all come from the ethical values of an organisation- in our organisation it is about Ubuntu our organisation works to serve with pride- driving the policies with a rich culture for the success of our employees, the organisation and the communities we serve” (M8R45- HR Manager- PrivateOrg2

The findings presented shows how useful and influential Ubuntu is in influencing the HRM practices at PrivateOrg2.

9.3.3 PrivateOrg1: performance centred values as obstacles of Ubuntu in HRM Practices.

At PrivateOrg1, the organizational values of innovation, excellence, superior performance, independence, and integrity do not appear to influence the integration of Ubuntu in HRM processes and practices. This is primarily because these values are more performance-driven (Cooper et al., 2018), opposing with Ubuntu which is centred on humanism (Nzimakwe, 2014).

PrivateOrg1’s strong emphasis on performance-oriented values and policies contrasts with the core principles of Ubuntu, creating a misalignment that hinders its application within the organization HRM. This is further reflected in PrivateOrg1’s policies highlighted below, which focus primarily on strategies for business growth and performance.

- “The organisation shall remain committed to business growth through enhanced performance and commitment to conduct of business with due skill and innovation to minimise poor performance”.

- “The organisation shall maintain a decent market share and leverage over competitors through supreme performance”.

According to management at PrivateOrg1, the role and influence of Ubuntu in HRM is barely recognised and invisible because the attention is on sustaining business through characteristics that motivate excellence.

“We might have Ubuntu here and there, but its role is less and almost not seen in the policies, our organisation is more focused on excellence and work input” M6R31- Debt Collections Manager - PrivateOrg1

“as a company we remain committed to business growth through enhanced performance with due skill and innovation to minimise poor performance as guided in our core values, we are very cautious when it comes to practices, we know that we must keep the company surviving with revenue and the best way to do it is by having a talent pool that is dedicated to work, one that is innovativ”M4R29. CEO – PrivateOrg1

It was also explained that the organisations have a fear of affecting performance hence refraining from embracing use of Ubuntu values in HRM practices. “We are careful not to jeopardise the performance of the company- because employees can be more relaxed with the Ubuntu soft values” M5R30- HR Manager - PrivateOrg1

8.4 The Role of Management in promoting Ubuntu in HRM practices.

Use of Ubuntu within organisations requires management active participation and commitment to displaying a culture of Ubuntu through actions and behaviour that portray Ubuntu characteristics of survival, solidarity, respect, and dignity to inspire the use of Ubuntu to members of the organisation (Ncube, 2010). This entails that management has a role to lead by example in committing to and promoting the use of Ubuntu in the workplace, by demonstrating a people-oriented leadership with humanness qualities (Mangaliso,2001). Managers are seen as cheerleaders, coaches, champions reinforcing culture withing the workplace (Mangaliso, 2001). Management set the tone of culture in an organisation by modelling the way through expressing culture in their attitudes and behaviours (Kane-Urrabazo, 2006). The role of management is, therefore, a key organizational characteristic influencing how Ubuntu shapes HRM in Africa. This is because Ubuntu culture can be fostered through leadership behaviour (Ncube, 2010).

8.4.1 Leadership active role in promoting Ubuntu at PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2

Firstly, at the PublicOrg management have a role of ensuring that all employees are trained in ethical compliance for the purpose of promoting the skills, and use of Ubuntu selflessness, respect, impartiality, and honesty. As a mandatory training requirement, every employee of the PublicOrg attends the ethical compliance training once every year and the trainings are facilitated by management. This shows that management contribute to ensuring that employees recognise the importance and role of Ubuntu to the workplace by providing trainings in line with Ubuntu ethics.

PublicOrg also monitors employee compliance to Ubuntu respect and corrects actions that are non-respectful. Out of anger, one of the cleaners used offensive swearing words to confront a colleague that was gossiping about her being lazy behind her back. Immediately the HR Manager (PublicOrg) overheard the cleaner screaming and using swearing words, she summoned the cleaner to her office and cautioned her to be respectful and never utter swearing words at work under any circumstance. The HR manager played a role of controlling and correcting the disrespectfulness by guiding the cleaner to comply to the respect value of the organisation, hence encouraging use of Ubuntu in practices.

Besides that, management at the PublicOrg also explained that it is a part of their job description to enforce ethical practices, which further suggests that management at the public organisation contribute to the use of Ubuntu at the public organisation. This was explained in the following statement. “As management one of our duties in the job description is to administer the ethical policies that are gazetted by the government of Zambia, it means that we also have to ensure that employees comply to the ethical practices because it is a general rule for all government workers” M1R1- PublicOrg.

When asked on ways in which management promotes the use of Ubuntu in HRM practices, management explained that they make sure that they practice Ubuntu in everything they do, to lead the way for Ubuntu use.

“As management we encourage Ubuntu, personally I make sure that my ways of work are those that manifest Ubuntu, starting from the way I greet my juniors, to how I make decisions about work, and essentially how I do everything it communicates respect, care for them and support, I know I lead by example” M1R1- Provincial Director- PublicOrg.

“We nurture Ubuntu, we are all dedicated to social humanly skills that advance Ubuntu, the use of this culture all comes from us top leaders Whatever we do, they also do. M3R3-HR Manager- PublicOrg.

“We are the cheerleaders and facilitators of Ubuntu, we make it possible for employees to see light in Ubuntu because we lead by example, we understand our employees, we are servants that are here to serve workers because we believe in humanity to serve the people” M1R1.

PublicOrg management further demonstrate respect that serve as an example for HR and employees to practice Ubuntu respect. It was observed that the manner of addressing individuals in the workplace is taken very seriously in the PublicOrg, management speak to and address employees with their pronouns of Mr/Ms/Mrs/ Dr etc. Addressing people by their names without a pronoun is regarded as disrespectful in the public organisation. Since management demonstrate respect by addressing employees respectfully, employees also take the example from management by showing respect and addressing their superiors as Sir/Mr or madam or boss.

At the PublicOrg, it was further observed that management lead the way by constantly emphasising on employees to work collectively in teams as one whole, hence promoting and encouraging the spirit of solidarity amongst workers. This was often seen in staff meetings when the Provincial Director would tell staff members that “lets always work together, together we can and together we will always win”. In addition, the HR manager at the PublicOrg was also heard emphasising on the importance of collaboration to an employee by saying that “this habit of thinking that you can do it alone is the reason why you keep having challenges- involve others”. With such emphasis on collaboration coming from management, it showed that management at the PublicOrg is very influential in promoting Ubuntu.

Employees in lower positions at the PublicOrg also suggested on the important role of management in influencing use of Ubuntu.

“Going by what our leaders do by engaging in Ubuntu practice, we are encouraged to work together, to be collaborative, to avoid isolating people at work and be respective to fellow employees, and everyone else” A1R15- Administrative Officer - PublicOrg

“The sympathy I get from management also motivates me to practice sympathy on my colleagues here at work because from my personal experiences being good and sympathetic is really beneficial even to others” E2R24.- Receptionist – PublicOrg

“Our managers are a perfect example of Ubuntu, them giving us support, motivates us to also practice it, because from their deeds and actions we know Ubuntu is a nice thing to do and to have in a community” E12R23 Provincial Secretary – PublicOrg.

On the other hand, At PrivateOrg2, management displayed an active role in taking a lead in promoting Ubuntu collaboration through facilitating and initiating team building functions (such as- group lunch, barbeque, dinner, picnics) to encourage unity of shared goals and common purpose. The team building was held once every month, and management at PrivateOrg2 were spearheading these activities. The coming together of all employees across the departments at the team building functions promoted collectiveness, cooperation, and integration that is in Ubuntu (Poovan, 2006).

It is also the role of managers at PrivateOrg2 to make sure that Ubuntu ethics are practiced and made use in the organisation. This is stated in the employee handbook as follows “to maintain such ethical conduct, management shall be responsible that employee’s behaviour align with the groups ethical conduct policies”. This policy illustrates that managers at Private Org2 have the active responsibility to ensure that behaviours of employees are in line with the organisation ethical principles.

Furthermore, during observations management at PrivateOrg2 was seen leading Ubuntu by promoting welfare checks (one- on- one meetings) where management showed genuine concern by listening to employee’s needs, ideas and assisting address any challenges with available resources in the organisation. Because of such meetings called “welfare checks”, that were held every Friday of the week, employees felt that management is very concerned about their well-being and thus contributing to the use of Ubuntu within PrivateOrg2. This was made clear in the following statement.

“These guys... I mean our bosses have done so much in showing us the importance of Ubuntu. They have shown us the importance of knowing how a friend at work is doing, the HR manager holds these welfare checks where we are open to discuss about the challenges we are facing. That alone gives us a sense and motivation to know that our bosses worry about us... they try by all means to address our needs... since they do this, we know that Ubuntu makes this place great, so we also apply it in the work, to customers and any other person. In a nutshell our bosses contribute so much to the current state of Ubuntu in our organisation” E14R50- Receptionist PrivateOrg2.

8.4.2 Lack of Ubuntu support in leadership practices at PrivateOrg1

On the other hand, the example set by PrivateOrg1 management is one that does not encourage members of the organisation to use or practice Ubuntu. It was observed that PrivateOrg1 management are very controlling and make directives to team members about work and expect employees to follow their commands, which is contrary to Ubuntu which seeks for a consensus building and collaboration (Sigger et al., 2010). Management at PrivateOrg1 were seen making decisions without engaging, involving employees. Such practices by management counteract Ubuntu within the workplace, thus not promoting Ubuntu.

The strict and non-tolerant management displayed in PrivateOrg1 was also found to limit Ubuntu solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity on employees. This form of management was said to pose a challenge and hinder the development and application of Ubuntu use in the organisation. This is explained in the following statement.

“How can we practice Ubuntu when our managers don’t? They have no respect for us, not even empathy. All they do is command and impose work on us, they shout at us and have no respect even if you are older than them. Their way of managing us discourages us from working together as a team, their leadership undermines respect from Ubuntu. Their leadership basically undermine every aspect of Ubuntu including teamwork. To them working together is a waste of manpower and time, each person must do their work. It is each man for himself. Respect has flown out of the window in this company, because of how disrespectful our managers are” E8R38 Secretary PrivateOrg1.

8.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter delved in to how the unique historical and cultural contextual values of each organisation significantly influence the adoption and integration of Ubuntu principles in HRM. Chapter 8 has also underlined on the critical role that management and leadership play in championing Ubuntu principles at work. The findings underscore the symbiotic relationship between organisational ethos and the effective implementation of Ubuntu in HRM practices. The subsequent chapter will provide an understanding of how Ubuntu practices within HRM contribute to mutual gains.

Chapter 9: Impact of Contextual Factors and Ubuntu in HRM on Mutual Gains for Employers and Employees

9.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the mutual benefits for both employees and employers when Ubuntu values are integrated and operationalised into HRM practices. It builds on the conceptual and empirical insights from the conceptual framework (Figure 6), which illustrates how Ubuntu values within HRM can generate mutual gains when applied in HRM.

For conceptual clarity, this study conceptualises mutual gains as the simultaneous and interdependent achievement of the objectives and needs of both employers and employees, as informed by Ubuntu five fingers in HRM practices. This perspective transcends the instrumental framing of mutual gains as merely a trade-off between organisational and employee needs. While both employers and employees have differing priorities, employers typically concentrate on motivation, performance, and business growth, whereas employees prioritise well-being, including personal growth and development; their needs are evidently distinct. However, this study illustrates how, through the application of Ubuntu's five fingers within the conceptual framework, employers can fulfil their own needs, while employees can also satisfy theirs, resulting in mutual gains. Specifically, in this context, mutual gains refer to a dual benefit system whereby: Employers achieve outcomes that align with their organisational interests, such as enhanced employee motivation, an improved organization's reputation, and strategic advantages. Concurrently, employees experience enhancements in their well-being, which include reduced stress through solidarity and survival, a sense of meaning and belonging derived from respect, emotional comfort, and personal development facilitated by social support stemming from solidarity.

This conceptualisation stands out because the same Ubuntu-informed HRM processes and practices co-produce these benefits rather than achieve them independently or sequentially. For instance, the implementation of compassionate and respectful management practices not only boosts employee motivation but also encourages deeper commitment and work engagement, thereby fulfilling the employers' objectives. In this way the five fingers of Ubuntu serve as a common denominator that addresses the needs of both employers and employees without necessitating the sacrifice of one for the other.

By situating this conceptualisation within an African philosophical tradition, the study not only addresses the prevailing calls for mutual gains in HRM (Van De Voorde et al., 2012; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019) but also offers a novel theoretical framework for how mutuality can be ethically, contextually, and practically realised in non-Western contexts.

The findings in this chapter are framed around three sections. The first section delves into the benefits employer's experience when adopting Ubuntu values for HRM, with a particular focus on organisational settings shaped by African cultural and historical legacies. The discussion highlights how Ubuntu values, including respect and compassion, enhance organisational outcomes for employers with employee motivation, enhanced organisation reputation. The second section of this chapter shifts its focus to employee, exploring how these same Ubuntu values contribute to employee gains of well-being. In contrast, the third section explores contexts in which Ubuntu values may be less effective, particularly in organisations influenced by Western cultural norms, where the alignment between Ubuntu principles and organisational practices is less apparent. This highlights the varying degrees of mutual gains emanating from Ubuntu, giving also a broader understanding of Ubuntu's impact in HRM frameworks.

As understood by scholars like Mutwarasibo & Iken (2019), Ubuntu is centred around promoting the collective well-being of the community, which includes advancing the welfare of all individuals. This research shows that Ubuntu has been included in African organisations to enhance HRM practices in ways that help both employers and employees, creating benefits for everyone involved. However, as the analysis in Chapter 8 (relating to RQ3) shows, organisational context plays a prominent role in shaping the impact of Ubuntu in HRM. Specifically, Ubuntu has positively influenced HRM practices and mutual gains in PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2, whose contextual background is aligned with African cultural and historical legacies. The table below provides a structured overview of the findings related to RQ4 on Ubuntu's contribution to mutual gains in HRM across the three case organisations, offering an empirical foundation for the analytical discussions that follow.

Table 14; RQ4 Findings Contributions of Ubuntu to Mutual Gains (Employee and Employer gain).

Theme	Case	Data based illustrations
Enhanced organisation business reputation (Employer gain)	Private org 2	“Ubuntu has had a direct impact on our image in the public, particularly through our CSR initiatives. By adopting a philosophy that focuses on the well-being of the broader community, we’ve earned a reputation as a company that genuinely cares. Our partnerships with local communities have flourished because of this shared commitment to Ubuntu values” (Interview – employee) “Ubuntu has become a cornerstone of our corporate identity; it has elevated our reputation in the industry. By embedding Ubuntu principles like respect and community-mindedness in our operations, clients and partners see us as an ethical and trustworthy organisation that prioritises people over profit. Prospective clients and partners often cite our ethical reputation as a key reason for choosing to work with us, to do business with us and that's directly linked to our Ubuntu-driven policies (Interview- management) People outside the organisation talk about how we are different, especially when it comes to how we treat our people and our ethical standards, this enhances our standing in the marketplace It’s something that makes me proud to be part of this team (interview) Management was seen actively communicating ethical values to customers as a way to market the company services and to win customer loyalty. The Managing Director was observed articulating ethical values of Ubuntu when speaking to customers through statements like “come to our company for insurance services and be assured to be served with compassion, nothing beats a service with compassion” (Observation) The organisation manual for PrivateOrg2 indicates that the core ethical values (serving with compassion, conducting business with kindness,) that also align with Ubuntu are the essential drivers to business and organisation prosperity (document analysis)
Enabling motivation (Employer gain)	Public org	Our approach to Ubuntu means that every team member feels valued, which is a huge enabler of motivation. People perform better when they know their efforts matter and contribute to the greater good. It’s been incredible to see how motivated our teams are to achieve both individual and organisation success” M1R1- Provincial Director- PublicOrg. (Interview) “Ubuntu has instilled respect and responsibility in the workplace; respect motivates me to perform at my highest level. I want to succeed, not just for myself, but because I know my actions directly impact my colleagues and the organisation as a whole. So, the shared sense of responsibility pushes me to work harder”. E2R24- Receptionist – PublicOrg (interview)

	Private org2	Ubuntu has been the answer to challenges of employee poor performance, when we show care and listen to employees they also care to perform better” (interview) “anytime we notice that the performance of our staff goes down, we show more care to them, by the time we realise it they are back on track, It is like a psychology, if employees develop a habit of coming to work late, we are not aggressive, we respectfully ask them if they have any personal challenges that we as management can help, in doing so you find that employees repent and get back to normal behaviour” (interview)
Personal development (Employee gain)	Private org 2	Observations at PrivateOrg 2 revealed compelling insights into how Ubuntu collaboration and support among employees facilitate a culture of continuous learning, growth, and self-improvement. Through active knowledge sharing and mentorship at PrivateOrg2, employees engaged in learning and teaching amongst themselves. Employees with more expertise and experience in specific tasks such as IT would impart knowledge in fellow staff, through teaching and mentoring, with a belief in showing interests in the weaknesses of others in the organisation (observation) “our workers learn skills from each other, we encourage our workers to exchange knowledge because of caring for one another and in so doing employees grow their personal knowledge and become better” (Interview- management) . “Personally, the support that is shown from a heart of Ubuntu, is a base for self-improvement because from the guidance that is provided in the form of support, I am able to improve myself and develop from that” (interview employee) personally, Ubuntu has helped me in many ways even just from the guide and support I have from my workmates about work, it has helped me grow my knowledge even in HR, since I learnt HR work, I put it on my personal profile on linked in and applied for an HR position in another organisation and I have been successful, but had I not learned about HR, I could not have secured a new job” (interview- employee).
	PublicOrg	In an environment where formal training can be scarce, the Ubuntu culture acts as a bridge to learning. I’ve gained so much from the shared knowledge among my peers, particularly around teamwork and adapting to different personalities. It’s a personal development journey for me because the insights I gain here don’t just help me with my work but also in how I manage relationships outside of the office” (interview- employee) “ Ubuntu has being beneficial to me since I just came from University, my goal has been to develop myself better to prepare myself for my dream career, so far I have learnt so many things from people that have voluntarily taught me many skills, I have also learnt people management skills on how best to work with people, Ubuntu has taught me to be an attentive listener and understanding as I pursue

		growth because I have noticed that working with people requires these two things, I feel like a better and happier person each day because I am developing from Ubuntu culture” (interview- HR)
Employee comfort & reduced stress (Employee gain)	Public org	During the time I lost a close family member, my colleagues rallied around me, not just with words but by actively supporting me. They visited my home, helped with funeral arrangements, and even provided financial assistance. This compassion from my coworkers really eased the emotional burden I was carrying. Knowing that I wasn't alone in such a difficult moment brought me a sense of comfort and relief. It's this sense of care that helped me cope with my grief; It significantly reduced the stress I was going through.” (interview) It was observed that employees at the PublicOrg could support, encourage, and help one another during adversity, hardships, and good times outside and inside work, which was found to be beneficial to employees, strengthening their resilience and overall well-being (observation)
	Private org 2	Ubuntu provides a unique kind of relations, people that stand by you, but knowing you have people around that empathise with you, understand your struggles and listen to your cry in your misfortune is comforting, uplifting and strengthening enough to support well-being” (interview) "The Ubuntu spirit brings a sense of connection on all of us, this lessens feelings of isolation, anxiety, and even burnout. We're all in it together, which makes work feel less overwhelming” (interview)

9.2.1 Employer gains from Ubuntu integration in HRM in PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2 with African historical and cultural legacies

9.2.1.1 Enhanced organisation reputation and strategic advantage

Verhoef (2021) points out the essence of Ubuntu values within African management practices. The analysis finds that Ubuntu's principles create a framework that fosters ethical behaviour, community engagement, and social responsibility, which in turn elevates a company's internal and external reputations. Firstly, the PublicOrg, operating within an African cultural framework, demonstrates a positive impact from the integration of Ubuntu values into its HRM practices. Secondly, PrivateOrg2, another organisation with African cultural legacies, also benefits significantly from Ubuntu values in its HRM practices, although its private sector nature means that the integration of Ubuntu is more strategically aligned with business goals.

Nonetheless, one of the main insights of this study is that organisations known for their ethical conduct, guided by Ubuntu values, cultivate a strong and positive reputation, which reinforces their competitive advantage in the marketplace. This is not just limited to public perception but also resonates internally among employees, creating a sense of pride and commitment to the organisation's ethos. Below are key insights and accounts from interviews demonstrating how Ubuntu brings about organisation gains of enhanced reputation at the PublicOrg 2.

“Ubuntu has had a direct impact on our image in the public, particularly through our CSR initiatives. By adopting a philosophy that focuses on the well-being of the broader community, we’ve earned a reputation as a company that genuinely cares. Our partnerships with local communities have flourished because of this shared commitment to Ubuntu values” A11R47- Insurance Officer – PrivateOrg2.

“Ubuntu has become a cornerstone of our corporate identity; it has elevated our reputation in the industry. By embedding Ubuntu principles like respect and community-mindedness in our operations, clients and partners see us as an ethical and trustworthy organisation that prioritises people over profit. Prospective clients and partners often cite our ethical reputation as a key reason for choosing to work with us, to do business with us and that's directly linked to our Ubuntu-driven policies" M7R44- Managing Director- PrivateOrg2.

“Incorporating Ubuntu into our corporate values has helped us build a reputation as a socially responsible and community-driven company. Our clients and stakeholders commend us for

being an organisation that not only delivers excellent results but also operates with fairness, compassion, and integrity” M8R45- HR Director PrivateOrg2.

“People outside the organisation talk about how we are different, especially when it comes to how we treat our people and our ethical standards, this enhances our standing in the marketplace It’s something that makes me proud to be part of this team " A10R46-Branch Secretary- PrivateOrg2.

"Ubuntu has allowed us to build stronger, more trust-based relationships with our clients. They appreciate that we operate from a place of mutual respect and fairness, which enhances our reputation as a reliable and ethical partner. The goodwill generated through Ubuntu has led to long-term business relationships and positive word-of-mouth” A13R49 – Insurance Officer- PrivateOrg2

Furthermore, drawing from observations at PrivateOrg2. Management was seen actively communicating ethical values to customers as a business strategy to market the company services and to win customer loyalty. The Managing Director was observed articulating the ethical values of Ubuntu when speaking to customers through statements like “Come to our company for insurance services and be assured to be served with compassion; nothing beats a service with compassion.” The Managing Director at PrivateOrg2 seamlessly integrated the ethos of Ubuntu when negotiating business deals with customers, thereby emphasising the importance and use of Ubuntu-driven service delivery in business in fostering trust and customer relationships. These observations underscore that Ubuntu is central to business dealings and transactions at PrivateOrg2.

Customer service attendants at PrivateOrg2 have applied and implemented Ubuntu ethics as part of their approach to engaging customers and promoting company services. They have used Ubuntu values, including compassion and care, to connect deeply with customers. Often customer service personnel express gratitude and reinforce the company commitment to compassion by uttering the following remarks after attending to a customer: “Thank you for insuring with (company name) and insuring and serving you with compassion.” In addition, whenever customers came to PrivateOrg2, the marketing manager leveraged Ubuntu principles to cross-sell the services to customers with a promise of conducting business with Ubuntu kindness by stating, “Insure with (company name), and experience business with kindness.”

This demonstrates how the ethics of Ubuntu are integrated into marketing and customer service practices at PrivateOrg2 to foster a culture-driven business strategic advantage.

Customer service at PrivateOrg2 demonstrates compassion by practicing kindness, understanding, and empathy toward customers facing challenges in meeting insurance payment deadlines. While late payments technically violate contractual agreements, customer services still uphold Ubuntu principles of compassion by showing flexibility and understanding. This approach fosters customer retention and loyalty and aligns with the company's broader business strategy.

The practice of compassion through kindness and understanding towards customers has significantly benefited PrivateOrg2, attracting repeat business and customers. Due to their positive experiences with PrivateOrg2's compassionate service, existing customers frequently endorse the company and recommend it to others. This is evident from customer feedback on the company's service website, as well as new customers who mention being referred by satisfied clients. Consequently, the integration of Ubuntu values, particularly compassion and kindness has emerged as an effective business strategy, fostering sustained customer retention and enhanced brand advocacy in the market.

Based on the organisation manual for PrivateOrg2, the organisation is committed to complying with ethical principles and applicable legislative regulations to attain stakeholder trust and set the foundation for business. The organisation manual for PrivateOrg2 indicates that the core ethical values (serving with compassion and conducting business with kindness) that also align with Ubuntu are the essential drivers to business and organisation prosperity.

PrivateOrg2 maintains high ethical standards that are non-negotiable since the company reputation is perceived to be shaped by the ethical behaviour of its people which in turn determines the business success, through the trust that comes with it from stakeholders and customers.

Participants at PrivateOrg2 further elaborated and expanded this point by explaining how Ubuntu attracts positive attention from customers through the enhanced integrity and strong company reputation it fosters. Thus, Ubuntu serves as a defining aspect of the brand image, reinforcing PrivateOrg2's business reputation. The organisation has maintained an exemplary standing in the market, largely due to its consistent application of Ubuntu culture.

“Our company has a strong brand image in such a way that it keeps attracting customers because of Ubuntu, we have long term customers that come and buy insurance from us for many years – it is all because Ubuntu is our strategy” M7R44 – Managing Director PrivateOrg2.

“Ubuntu is the basis for our outperformance in this industry, we have been exceptional by having a strong connection with our stakeholders by being friendly to them, accommodative, kind and as caring as possible to them” M8R45- HR Manager PrivateOrg2.

“Running business with Ubuntu is our biggest strength and brand image- we have zero tolerance to inhuman, corrupt, and immoral conduct- this has always kept a high reputation for our organisation, we have retained a large customer base and market share because of our ethical conduct” A10R46- Branch Secretary- PrivateOrg2.

It was also highlighted that without Ubuntu strategy, PrivateOrg2 would have a challenge to function or operate successfully, and effectively in a culturally sensitive and diverse context like Zambia. Ubuntu was said to be the reason why PrivateOrg2 has managed to diversify its business and expand its geographic presence in several African countries beyond South Africa, its country business headquarters. “I don’t think our company would have managed to operate here in Zambia or Tanzania and even other countries here in Africa where cultural beliefs are taken very seriously, I don’t think we could have even managed to successfully diversify our business in several unites, our strategy of Ubuntu has been a match with our demographic and geographic market targets that are more culturally centred and sensitive” M8R44. Managing Director PrivateOrg2.

9.2.1.2 Enhanced employee motivation

The application of the Ubuntu philosophy in HRM at PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2 has yielded notable organisational benefits, particularly by enhancing employee motivation. This improvement stems from the cultivation of an inclusive, supportive, and ethically grounded workplace rooted in Ubuntu values. HRM systems that incorporate Ubuntu’s core principle of compassion manifested through care, empathy, and interpersonal support have been found to significantly boost employee motivation. In turn, this contributes to both individual well-being and the achievement of sustainable organisational outcomes. These dynamics are explored in greater detail in the following case discussions

❖ **PublicOrg**

Firstly, Interviews with various employees and managers at the PublicOrg reveal that Ubuntu has cultivated a strong sense of belonging and mutual respect, which motivates employees to contribute more effectively to both team and organisation goals. The sense of collective responsibility and shared purpose encourages employees to invest greater efforts In their work, ultimately enhancing team and organisation performance. The following accounts provide detail into ways by which Ubuntu facilitates motivation for performance.

"Ubuntu has created a sense of belonging among our employees, the respect and kindness we show towards them encourages them to work harder, bring in the best to the table and perform better" M3R3- HR Manager – PublicOrg.

“With Ubuntu ethics, employees feel that they are part of a supportive workplace, this drives them to perform better. To be more specific, the spirit of support, care, kindness from Ubuntu makes employees more invested in their work and committed to achieving high performance" H5R8 -HR officer- PublicOrg.

"Our approach to Ubuntu means that every team member feels valued, which is a huge enabler of motivation. People perform better when they know their efforts matter and contribute to the greater good. It’s been incredible to see how motivated our teams are to achieve both individual and organisation success” M1R1- Provincial Director- PublicOrg.

“Ubuntu has instilled respect and responsibility in the workplace; respect motivates me to perform at my highest level. I want to succeed, not just for myself, but because I know my actions directly impact my colleagues and the organisation. So, the shared sense of responsibility pushes me to work harder”. E2R24- Receptionist - PublicOrg

"This shared sense of purpose in Ubuntu energizes everyone to bring their best to the table.”M2R2- HR Director – PublicOrg

❖ **Private Org2**

Ubuntu’s compassion-driven management practices at PrivateOrg2 have proven effective in optimizing employee performance. At PrivateOrg2, Ubuntu was observed to be used as a solution to challenges of poor work performance. For example, the receptionist for PrivateOrg 2 would repeatedly report late for work, with several excuses of traffic, having a flat tyre and her input at work was not to the expected standard as she was also failing to efficiently perform her roles. Despite her poor attitude towards work. It was observed that management kept on

encouraging the receptionist, to an extent of arranging a motivational session for her where the HR manager gave her a chat giving an example of how she can rise to a better position just like the HR manager rose from the position of HR assistant. The HR manager expressed understanding, listening and respect of the receptionist's situation, which is a practice of Ubuntu compassion. After the motivational chat that the HR manager gave to the receptionist it was observed that the receptionist attitude towards work improved drastically. The receptionist was encouraged to perform better because of Ubuntu compassion, respect shown to her by management which also gave her inspiration to become more committed to work.

The PrivateOrg 2 senior management explained how the organisation has successfully addressed and navigated through challenges of performance by displaying compassion, understanding and a listening ear to workers to help steer employee enthusiasm towards work.

“Ubuntu has been the answer to challenges of employee poor performance, when we show care and listen to employees they also care to perform better” M7R44. Managing Director PrivateOrg 2.

“anytime we notice that the performance of our staff goes down, we show more care to them, by the time we realise it they are back on track, It is like a psychology, if employees develop a habit of coming to work late, we are not aggressive, we respectfully ask them if they have any personal challenges that we as management can help, in doing so you find that employees repent and get back to normal behaviour” M8R45. HR Manager- PrivateOrg 2.

Based on these statements, compassionate management practices not only address performance issues but also reinforce the organisation's ethical commitment to its employees. This reciprocal relationship fosters an environment where employees are motivated to perform at their best, knowing that their well-being is a priority for the organization.

9.3.2 Employee gains from Ubuntu integration in HRM PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2 with African historical and cultural legacies

9.3.2.1 Personal growth and development

Ubuntu has been conceptualised as a cultural framework that facilitates individual development through a progression from survival and solidarity (Nzimakwe, 2014; Sigger et al., 2010). Central to this framework is the notion that individual advancement is intrinsically linked to group support and communal interdependence (Molose et al., 2019). This dynamic was evident in both Private Organisation 2 and Public Organisation 2, where organisational practices reflect underlying African cultural and historical legacies that continue to shape approaches to human development and workplace relations.

❖ **PrivateOrg2**

Observations at PrivateOrg 2 revealed compelling insights into how Ubuntu solidarity, which fosters collaboration and support among employees, facilitates a culture of continuous learning, growth, and self-improvement. Through active knowledge sharing and mentorship at PrivateOrg2, employees engaged in learning and teaching among themselves. Employees with more expertise and experience in specific tasks, such as IT, would impart knowledge to fellow staff through teaching and mentoring, with a belief in showing interest in the weaknesses of others in the organisation (Broodryk, 2006; Brubaker, 2013) and a spirit of relying on each other (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019) for knowledge acquisition. This enriches the knowledge base and empowers employees to acquire new skills and knowledge, hence contributing to personal growth. The dedication to mutual support and upliftment of one another at PrivateOrg2 has created a workforce where staff members are not just colleagues but also motivators and facilitators of each other's educational journeys as they learn from each other's experiences.

Interviews at PrivateOrg2 further revealed that Ubuntu plays a useful role in fostering self-improvement by gaining insights and lessons from an Ubuntu culture of knowledge sharing among employees. This was explicit in the following comment. "Our workers learn skills from each other; we encourage our workers to exchange knowledge because of caring for one another and in so doing employees grow their personal knowledge and become better" M7R44- Managing Director – PrivateOrg2.

. “Personally, the support that is shown from a heart of Ubuntu, is a base for self-improvement because from the guidance that is provided in the form of support, I am able to improve myself and develop from that” A11R47- Insurance Officer – PrivateOrg2.

“I have become more competent in my work because of Ubuntu, my supervisor has been very caring to me by mentoring me in my work, this has given me an opportunity to become better and enhance my knowledge of work A10R46- Secretary- PrivateOrg2.

This highlights the importance of Ubuntu as a social resource that promotes employee development in a workplace founded on solidarity, where team members enhance one another's skills through their individual knowledge (Sigger et al., 2010).

When questioned about the significance of Ubuntu for individual well-being at work, a participant from PrivateOrg2 proudly shared her experience of enhancing her personal HR skills through the mentoring provided by the HR manager. This support contributed to her personal advantage by helping her secure a better job with another organisation. This was expressed in the following statement “personally, Ubuntu has helped me in many ways even just from the guide and support I have from my workmates about work, it has helped me grow my knowledge even in HR, since I learnt HR work, I put it on my personal profile on linked in and applied for an HR position in another organisation and I have been successful, but had I not learned about HR, I could not have secured a new job” (E14R50- Receptionist- PrivateOrg2.

Ubuntu's compassion is said to motivate senior management to take ownership and demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that employees experience personal growth (Brubaker, 2013). Such growth is achieved by providing each employee with an equal opportunity to learn new skills and pursue potential promotions, embodying the spirit of Ubuntu to support the improvement of others.

“I think Ubuntu has being very helpful in making sure that we witness development as we continue to work here, it is evident in the way management have taken it upon themselves to see that each one of us has a fair share of development even in the smallest way such as say moving from an assistant receptionist to a receptionist, you know just the little things that make us feel recognised because they believe in showing us that they care for us” (E14R50- Receptionist- PrivateOrg2

Ubuntu also motivates PrivateOrg2 to invest in training employees based on the notion of Ubuntu to keep everyone developed (Mbigi, 1997), hence allowing employees to benefit from such by facilitating personal growth and development. This is also based on PrivateOrg2's policy of caring for employee growth through promotions and training and development.

- “the organisation is dedicated to employee growth through various development and training opportunities, driven by the organisation culture of people development”- PrivateOrg2 people development handbook, 2016). Aside from that, such information was revealed through interview statements.

Ubuntu is important to provide employees with development prospects such as promotions, out of concern and care for the growth of workers, this is the case for our company where employees are subject to promotions at the time of contract renewal every after three years, this has been made possible because of our company policy of caring for growth of workers” A11R47-Insurance Officer- PrivateOrg2.

“Seen that Ubuntu is in our company ethics, our company has a policy of reviewing promotions for workers when renewing contracts, this is mainly because the company is so concerned about workers growth” (A10R46- Secretary - PrivateOrg2.

In addition, Ubuntu was described to be a culture that naturally brings growth for people because of its prioritising people's needs in the process of caring for them (Nzimakwe,2014). “Ubuntu values are a natural remedy for supporting the growth of people because of their pervasive soft qualities of human care that strengthen social relations and give chance for people to become better with help of others” A10R46-Secretary- PrivateOrg2

❖ **PublicOrg**

On the other hand, Ubuntu was also cited as a key factor in facilitating the continuous development of personal social skills such as relationship building, problem solving and general social knowledge in the PublicOrg. The analysis shows that Ubuntu brings in learning through teamwork, shared knowledge and collaborative problem solving. This is illustrated in the interview statements from employees who were asked about the benefit they experience from practice of Ubuntu in HRM within their workplace at the PublicOrg.

"In an environment where formal training can be scarce, the Ubuntu culture acts as a bridge to learning. I've gained so much from the shared knowledge among my peers, particularly around teamwork and adapting to different personalities. It's a personal development journey for me

because the insights I gain here don't just help me with my work but also in how I manage relationships outside of the office" A8R22-Administrative Officer- PublicOrg.

" Ubuntu has being beneficial to me since I just came from University, my goal has been to develop myself better to prepare myself for my dream career, so far I have learnt so many things from people that have voluntarily taught me many skills, I have also learnt people management skills on how best to work with people, Ubuntu has taught me to be an attentive listener and understanding as I pursue growth because I have noticed that working with people requires these two things, I feel like a better and happier person each day because I am developing from Ubuntu culture" H7R10-HR Officer – PublicOrg.

"Here in the public sector, we don't get much of trainings, but through my colleagues, I have learnt a couple of things that have enhanced my personal capabilities and ability, it makes me feel so proud knowing that I am getting better" A4R18 IT Officer- PubliOrg.

"Working in an Ubuntu-cantered workplace has empowered me to enhance my interpersonal skills. I've learned how to navigate complex situations through collaborative problem-solving and have become more emotionally intelligent, and this has transformed my overall work experience into a learning platform."E2R24- Receptionist – PublicOrg.

The four statements collectively illustrate that Ubuntu culture acts as a catalyst for employee development. Through Ubuntu, employees continuously improve both professionally and personally. What is particularly striking is the emotional and psychological benefits Ubuntu brings. Employees frequently mention feeling happier, more empowered, and proud of their progress, indicating that Ubuntu nurtures not only skills but also emotional well-being and self-worth. In the context of PublicOrg, where structured training is lacking, Ubuntu plays a critical role in ensuring that employees continue to develop, both in their careers and as individuals. Thus, Ubuntu culture serves as a powerful learning mechanism that facilitates ongoing personal growth, skill enhancement, and a deepened sense of belonging.

9.3.2.2 Comfort and reduced stress

It has been found that "Ubuntu directs the sharing of plights in hard times, as this diminishes suffering and pain (Mangaliso, 2001). This study demonstrates that Ubuntu compassion alleviates employees' pain during difficult times.

"During the time I lost a close family member, my colleagues rallied around me, not just with words but by actively supporting me. They visited my home, helped with funeral arrangements, and even provided financial assistance. This compassion from my coworkers really eased the emotional burden I was carrying. Knowing that I wasn't alone in such a difficult moment brought me a sense of comfort and relief. It's this sense of care that helped me cope with my grief; It significantly reduced the stress I was going through." – A1R15, - Administrative Officer - PublicOrg.

Ubuntu is cited to be useful to employee gain by enabling an experience of positive emotions through comfort from care and compassion that comes from supportive workplace relations (Sigger et al,2010), which ultimately helps to reduce stress and enhance emotional well-being for employees.

It was noted that employees at PublicOrg were able to support, encourage, and assist one another during challenging times, hardships, and moments of celebration, both within and outside the workplace because of the belief in Ubuntu solidarity and survival. This camaraderie was found to be advantageous for employees, enhancing their resilience and overall well-being.

For instance, when an employee experienced the loss of a loved one, colleagues at PublicOrg came together to offer support by visiting the funeral home. They assisted with housework, including cleaning and meal preparation, and even engaged in singing songs of praise and worship. This collective effort helped ease the burden of grief, providing comfort and emotional relief during a difficult time. Additionally, these visits helped alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation that often accompany the loss of a loved one. Employees who received this support expressed that the presence and care of their colleagues provided a sense of reassurance, reducing their sense of isolation and fostering emotional well-being. Social relations helped individuals in grief to cope because they were reminded that they are not alone in their grief since people were there assisting them throughout the time of grief. The employees of the public organisation also provided support by offering transportation and financial resources at the funeral home of a colleague who had lost a loved one. The help and support during misfortune were found to help individuals alleviate emotional burdens and recover from adversity because of the encouragement and companionship received from colleagues at work.

Furthermore, during interviews, Ubuntu was suggested to be important in facilitating comfort through social relations that are concerned about the welfare of others in work practices (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019). The emphasis was on how Ubuntu alleviates pain and provides comfort to individuals during times of hardship, misfortune, and adversity. The PublicOrg2 experiences Ubuntu's solidarity, care, and support, which are further elaborated in the subsequent statements.

The laughter we get from friends and relations during our ups and downs assists us to feel better, it boosts the feeling of comfort and happiness and makes us to feel that we truly belong to a family, because of this kind Ubuntu gesture we feel fulfilled” (A8R22- Administrative Officer- PublicOrg.

“Ubuntu facilitates personal well-being because in difficult times like the time I lost my mother, i was able to share my grief with workmates, this brought me comfort and reduced the feeling of sadness” A6R20- District Operations Officer- PublicOrg.

“With Ubuntu, we are concerned and worried about others, and since others are also concerned about me, I am able receive help from colleagues, in this way I am strengthened and encouraged in my lowest moments of life” E5R27- Cleaner-PubliOrg.

Ubuntu is praised for its use in facilitating mutual individual assistance among individuals in the workplace, for example in addressing personal financial burdens like substantial debts. Such acts in the workplace qualify Ubuntu as a crucial contributor to individual well-being in organisation context. Ubuntu fosters the capacity for collective support networks that transcend organisation benefit but enhance individual well-being of employees.

“Ubuntu helps me, I don’t feel stressed with my colleagues around even when I am broke, I am able to borrow from my friends here at work, the burden is less” H1R4 HR Officer- PublicOrg.

Ubuntu was also suggested to combat worry about personal challenges that individuals encounter through the individual support they receive from colleagues including words of encouragement.

“Ubuntu helps me not to worry much about the difficulties I face, I know I’m not alone in my difficulties, people at work are here for and with me even through words of encouragement, we are a family” E1R23- provincial secretary-PublicOrg.

Nonetheless, it was further observed that the PublicOrg staff sacrifice financial resources for fellow employees in their time of need, an act of Ubuntu which was found to contribute to personal well-being. For example, one employee at the PublicOrg was on unpaid suspension for one full month, through management request, staff members put money together to help him settle his rent bills for personal benefit. This significantly alleviated a sense of financial strain on the employee and engendered a feeling of ease, relief, and comfort, consequently contributing to personal well-being.

❖ **PrivateOrg2**

The application of Ubuntu philosophy within HRM at PrivateOrg2 has a profound impact on employee gain. By promoting connection, collaboration, open communication, and trust, Ubuntu was found to mitigate stress and reduce the feelings of isolation and burnout that are common in high-pressure business work environments like PrivateOrg2. Employees feel supported by their colleagues, which creates a more manageable and less overwhelming workload. Ultimately, Ubuntu fosters a culture where employees are empowered to thrive both individually and as part of a collective. Employees at PrivateOrg2, provided insightful testimonials on how Ubuntu benefits them by reducing stress thus impacting their overall well-being.

Ubuntu provides a unique kind of relations, people that stand by you, but knowing you have people around that empathise with you, understand your struggles and listen to your cry in your misfortune is comforting, uplifting and strengthening enough to support well-being” (E15R50-Receptionist- PrivateOrg2.

"The Ubuntu spirit brings a sense of connection on all of us, this lessens feelings of isolation, anxiety, and even burnout. We're all in it together, which makes work feel less overwhelming” E14R50 -Receptionist – PrivateOrg2

“Because of the company belief in Ubuntu, we collaborate as employees in the work we do, and When we collaborate, the stress of meeting deadlines or solving problems becomes manageable because we're not handling everything separately by as a whole group” A13R49-Insurance Officer – PrivateOrg2.

"Since Ubuntu encourages open communication and mutual understanding, employee are able to share their challenges. Being able to openly share challenges without fear of judgment means stress doesn't build up. When you trust your colleagues to help you when you're struggling, it's easier to manage stress." A10R46- Branch Secretary – PrivateOrg2.

This analysis has illustrated how Ubuntu transforms individual work experiences into a more cohesive, supportive environment that benefits employees.

9.4 Absence of Employer and Employee gains in PrivateOrg1 with Western Historical/Cultural legacies

In stark contrast to PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2, PrivateOrg1, which operates within a Western cultural framework, experiences no mutual gain from Ubuntu. PrivateOrg1's organisational context, characterised by Western values of profit-driven strategies, does not support a conducive environment for Ubuntu to thrive. Ubuntu's relational and communal principles clash with the efficiency-focused HRM practices prevalent in PrivateOrg1, as further indicated in the organisational policy statement.

“the organisation shall remain committed to business growth through enhanced performance and commitment to conduct of business with due skill and innovation to minimise poor performance”. Policy Statement -Organisation Handbook. PrivateOrg1

As a result, neither employers nor employees in PrivateOrg1 reported benefits or gains from Ubuntu. Management viewed Ubuntu values as irrelevant or impractical, especially in a competitive business that prioritises quick decision-making and individual performance.

“While Ubuntu might work well in other organisations, it doesn't bring tangible benefits to our organisation.” Because In our business, success is measured by output and profitability. Ubuntu's focus on the community doesn't contribute much to these goals. We ensure that employees meet their performance targets and that our operations run smoothly. – M4R29-CEO, PrivateOrg1.

Ubuntu is a good concept, but in our business model, we focus on performance and efficiency above all. Our industry is highly competitive, so we focus on delivering results effectively and as quickly as possible. There is little room for the slow, relationship-driven approach that Ubuntu encourages" – M6R31-Debt Collections Manager, PrivateOrg1.

Employees, too, did not perceive the same level of emotional support, personal development, or sense of belonging as those in PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2. In this case, the Western organisational context of PrivateOrg1 resulted in a failure to realise the potential gains that Ubuntu could offer to employees. Instead, employees in PrivateOrg 1 mainly complained of

loss or lack of gain from lack of Ubuntu in the organisation. Instead, participants elaborated on the challenges faced due to a lack of Ubuntu in their work practices.

The situation at PrivateOrg1 highlights a challenge emanating from a lack of Ubuntu within the workplace, where a lack of respect, empathy, and human-centered practices has led to feelings of emotional distress and belittlement among employees. The issue stems from a workplace culture where employees are subjected to disrespect with bullying, being yelled at, and exposed to unwelcome or demeaning remarks from their superiors. These behaviours reflect an absence of Ubuntu centred on human respect, and compassion.

“ As employees we are at a loss from lack of Ubuntu, there is no respect for workers here I am always yelled at, not even a child deserves to be yelled at in the manner my boss does - I feel psychologically bullied and abused by the yelling such that I find it a challenge to come to work -I don't even look forward to it because all I get from the boss is yelling and ranting, I feel vulnerable and less protected from such bullying acts” E8R38- Secretary to CEO- PrivateOrg1.

In addition, there was a complaint of lack of gain from the unfriendly and intolerant culture due to lack of Ubuntu at PrivateOrg1, to an extent of employees being afraid or timid to rise a complaint about working excessively.

“we don't gain anything from lack of Ubuntu, instead we suffer from the unfriendly culture, we work in fear, i can't even complain about the work problems we face - once i complain i am threatened of being dismissed, maybe Ubuntu can help in encouraging and welcoming voices in our company” E11R41- Cleaner- PrivateOrg1.

9.5 Chapter conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates how Ubuntu values contribute to mutual gains, particularly within organisations with African cultural and historical legacies whose values are culturally attuned with Ubuntu principles. In both of these organisations (PrivateOrg2 and PublicOrg), Ubuntu brings gains to both the employer and the employee. For the employer, Ubuntu enhances organisational reputation, drives strategic advantage, and motivates employees to perform better. For employees, Ubuntu facilitates personal growth and development by promoting a culture of solidarity, learning, and support. For employees, Ubuntu further fosters a sense of belonging and reduces stress through compassionate support. Conversely, the chapter has shown that there can be a lack of gains for the employer and employee within organisations with Western historical and cultural legacies whose values are misaligned with Ubuntu principles. The chapter has shown an absence of gain for both employer and employee in PrivateOrg1 with a Westernised organisational context. Ultimately, the chapter emphasises the significance of organisational context in realising the benefits of Ubuntu in HR practices.

The next chapter will discuss how the findings contribute to the research and will provide a conclusion.

Chapter 10: Conclusions- Research Contribution, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

10.0 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the key findings of the study, integrating their theoretical and practical contributions while contextualising their significance within academic discourse and real-world HRM practices. At its core, this study sought to investigate how HRM practices, guided by the African philosophy of Ubuntu, can simultaneously enhance employee well-being and organisational success, aligning with the mutual gains' perspective (Guest, 2017). To achieve this, four interwoven research objectives were strategically developed to explore Ubuntu's role in shaping HRM practices, its integration across different organisational contexts, and its broader impact on employees and employers. Consequentially, the study findings, and contributions are framed around the research objectives, facilitating a structured and systematic analysis of the study's conclusions and establishing links among the findings, theoretical contributions, insights, and practical implications. This chapter further recognises the study's limitations, assesses their influence on the findings, and also establishes a foundation for further academic inquiry and practical application.

10.1 Summary of key findings

The first key finding relates to Research Objective 1, which examines how Ubuntu shapes individual well-being. Findings on RO1, have differentiated the contribution of Ubuntu five fingers' values to well-being in different well-being dimensions of sense of purpose, sense of meaning, sense of fulfilment conceptualised withing eudaimonic well-being perspective (Deci & Ryan, 2001; Huta, Turban & Yan, 2016). Essentially, this suggests that Ubuntu five fingers' values have differential impacts of well-being on individuals depending on individual subjectivities experiences.

In particular, Ubuntu is found to shape individual well-being by fostering a sense of purpose and meaning through its core principles of solidarity and respect both of which are highlighted as fundamental to well-being by participants. It is revealed that relatedness from solidarity within Ubuntu creates a deep sense of belonging essential for cultivating a meaningful and purpose-driven life. Additionally, respect within Ubuntu plays a crucial role in enhancing dignity, self-worth, and social recognition, further enriching individual's sense of meaning and

connection to others. Ubuntu also contributes to individual well-being by promoting a sense of fulfilment through its value of compassion that translates into kindness and generosity. Acts of kindness and generosity in Ubuntu are revealed to reduce stress, cultivate resilience, hope and promote harmony, ultimately leading to a greater sense of fulfilment. A summary of findings for RO1 are depicted table 15 showing how Ubuntu five fingers' values are not universally experienced, thus translating into well-being differently according to individual experiences.

Table 15 Summary of Findings RO1: Ubuntu values and contribution to well-being

Ubuntu Value	Definition / Practice	Shaped Well-being Experience	Expanded Meaning of Well-being Outcome
Solidarity & Survival	Strong relationships, brotherly love, belongingness	Sense of Purpose	Feeling connected and wanted to a broader social setting, hence feeling that oneself is meaningful and of purpose to the community,
Respect	Being valued and appreciated	Sense of Meaning	Feeling valued and significant; perceiving one's role and self-identity as respected and worthwhile.
Compassion	Kindness, helping others, concern for others, generosity, caring for others	Sense of Fulfilment	Experiencing emotional richness, inner satisfaction from helping others; inner peace through harmony, generosity.

Nevertheless, the study's results significantly contest predominant or uniform interpretations of well-being. Although Ubuntu offers a consistent normative framework for conceptions of well-being, the research indicates that individuals perceive, interpret, and prioritise these Ubuntu values differently, influenced by their distinct life experiences. This nuanced perspective provides a significant finding to Ubuntu cultural impact on well-being.

The second key finding relates to Research Objective 2, highlighting Ubuntu's role as a resource in HRM practices at different organisational levels. Under this objective Ubuntu has emerged as a useful resource within HRM practices. Firstly, at the organisational level, Ubuntu served as a cornerstone for developing ethical HRM policies and organisational values, as exemplified by its application in PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2. By emphasising respect, kindness, and fairness in workplace policies, Ubuntu fosters an ethical organisational climate conducive to both the employer and its employees. At job/task level, Ubuntu served several

functions within HRM. At PrivateOrg2, and PublicOrg Initially, Ubuntu solidarity was invariably linked to a profound sense of belonging and social integration. Participants characterised workplace contexts marked by solidarity as settings where they had a sense of belonging, warmth, and psychological safety. This relational foundation established an environment in which employees felt empowered to operate autonomously within a unified collective. In this context, belonging functioned as a prelude to autonomy, as a stable social base empowered individuals to use choice and initiative in their work approaches. This dynamic illustrates what several scholars denote as relational autonomy—a kind of self-direction that is integrated with and bolstered by social interactions, rather than being detached from them (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Secondly, Ubuntu respect fostered autonomy by acknowledging the dignity, voice, and competence of employees. In this context, respect transcended mere courtesy; it entailed acknowledging the validity of employees' viewpoints and appreciating their contributions to decision-making processes. When employees perceived respect from supervisors and colleagues, they were more inclined to have a sense of ownership and autonomy over their responsibilities, as their judgement was valued and their agency recognised. This acknowledgement served as a kind of empowerment, fostering proactive behaviour, inventiveness, and self-regulation. Ubuntu further enhances HRM practices by fostering constructive feedback, emphasising the importance of respecting employees, valuing their perspectives, and affirming their worth. This approach guarantees that feedback processes are growth-oriented and supportive, fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding. Ubuntu significantly contributes to the enhancement of social support within human resource management by promoting values of solidarity and survival. At the individual level, Ubuntu plays a crucial role in aligning HRM practices with employees' personal beliefs, which enhances well-being and fosters a sense of purpose. Table 16 presents a summary of the key findings related to Research Objective 2 (RO2), highlighting the central insights that emerged from the analysis

Table 16; RO2 Summary of findings; Reflection of Ubuntu values as resources in HRM at multiple levels

Organisation level	Job/task level	Individual employee level
Fostering Ethical policies Respect: bringing about policies that value and work in the interest of workers.	Autonomy Solidarity making employees to be free out of belongingness. Respect making employers to value the choices of employees.	Support for individual beliefs. Respect: Making employers to show regard for individual beliefs of employees.
	Social support Solidarity, survival encouraging the workforce to support each other in carrying out work.	
	Constructive feedback Respect: compelling management to show understanding, consideration and give a listening ear to employee perspectives during performance feedback. Compassion compelling management to show concern and kindness to employees during their performance appraisals.	

Another key finding relates to Research Objective 3, where organisational factors influencing use of Ubuntu in HRM are explored and identified. Here the application of Ubuntu values in HRM is found to be shaped by both external and internal organisational contexts. Organisations with historical background from African contexts, where Ubuntu principles are integral to social and cultural norms, integrate Ubuntu into HRM practices. For instance, PrivateOrg2 and PublicOrg, founded in South Africa and Zambia respectively, possess a historical alignment with Ubuntu values. Conversely, organisations such as PrivateOrg1, with Western origins, face challenges in integrating Ubuntu values due to conflicting cultural paradigms. In addition, sectoral characteristics, particularly the dichotomy between public and private sectors, further influence Ubuntu's application in HRM. For instance, PublicOrg's adherence to organisation values of impartiality and loyalty promotes Ubuntu within workplace practices. In contrast, private sector organisations vary widely based on their founding ethos. PrivateOrg2, operating in a post-apartheid South African context, demonstrates a strong commitment to Ubuntu through ethical organisational values of compassion and respect for

employees, thus promoting the practice of Ubuntu in HRM. On the other hand, PrivateOrg1 prioritises performance and innovation in its organisation policies, limiting the application or use of Ubuntu within its HRM practices. Furthermore, management through their leadership style act as cultural gatekeepers, shaping organisational HRM practices through their actions and behaviours. At PublicOrg, management actively promotes Ubuntu's application in HRM practices by modelling respect, solidarity, and compassion in their practices. Initiatives like mandatory ethics training and welfare checks foster an environment reflecting Ubuntu values. Similarly, management at PrivateOrg2 reinforce Ubuntu through collectiveness and empathetic engagement with employees, cultivating a culture of collaboration and care. In contrast, PrivateOrg1's authoritarian leadership style inhibits the adoption of Ubuntu in HRM practices, as it does not exemplify the principles of Ubuntu.

Finally, a key finding relates to Research Objective 4, where the contribution of HRM practices informed by Ubuntu to mutual gains is identified. It is revealed that incorporating Ubuntu within HRM practices promotes reciprocal benefits for both employers and employees. However, the extent of these benefits varies according to organisational context factors. Specifically, organisations aligned with Ubuntu's principles, such as PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2, exemplify how Ubuntu can serve as a foundational framework for achieving mutual gains. Conversely, in organisations including PrivateOrg1 which are culturally misaligned with Ubuntu, the potential benefits for both employees and employers from Ubuntu values remains unrealised. This underscores the pivotal influence of cultural and historical legacies in effectively harnessing the advantages of Ubuntu in HRM.

Nonetheless, the study identifies two principal areas of employer gain from Ubuntu in HRM. Ubuntu five fingers' values, including respect and compassion enhance organisational reputation both internally and externally, ultimately contributing to organisation success. PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2 have successfully leveraged Ubuntu values to build trust, foster community partnerships, and enhance their reputation. Ethical conduct, driven by Ubuntu, not only attracts and retains customers but also strengthens the organisation's brand image and identity. PrivateOrg2's marketing strategies, which emphasise compassion and respect, have cultivated customer loyalty, further reinforcing its strategic advantage to the organisation, this generates tangible benefits to the broader organisation. Also, Ubuntu promotes a supportive and inclusive workplace, which enhances employee motivation, ultimately benefiting the employer. PublicOrg's commitment to Ubuntu ethics, such as mutual respect and shared

responsibility, creates a strong sense of belonging among employees. This in turn enhances employee commitment and contributes to organisational overall organisational gain. Similarly, PrivateOrg2's compassionate management approach, fosters a motivated workforce that leads to increased productivity which has a benefit on the organisation. It is also revealed that employees in organisations influenced by African cultural and historical legacies, such as PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2, gain notable advantages from the integration of Ubuntu principles into HRM practices. This study identifies two key areas of employee benefit from Ubuntu in HRM. Ubuntu solidarity fosters mutual support, creating an environment conducive to continuous learning and skill development. At PrivateOrg2, employees actively engage in collaborative knowledge sharing and mentorship, driven by the Ubuntu principle of support, which encourages peer-driven improvement. Similarly, PublicOrg's Ubuntu inspired culture compensates for limited formal training opportunities by facilitating peer learning, hence empowering employees to have personal growth through knowledge acquired from peers. These practices not only enhance employee competencies but also contribute to overall well-being. Furthermore, the Ubuntu ethic of compassion diminishes employee stress by providing social support during challenging times. Employees in PublicOrg and PrivateOrg2 benefit from a compassionate workplace where colleagues rally to offer emotional and practical assistance during hardships. Such Ubuntu culture of compassion and solidarity reduces workplace stress and enhances overall well-being on employees, thus offering a gain on employees. Notably, organisations shaped by Western cultural influences, like PrivateOrg1, the principles of Ubuntu are not typically implemented in HRM. This undermines the mutual gains benefits that are realised from Ubuntu. A summary of findings for RO4 are detailed in table 17 below.

Table 17: RO4 summary of findings; Ways in which Ubuntu use in HRM contributes to mutual gain

Employer gains	Ubuntu values fostering employer gains
Enhanced organisation business reputation	Emanating from acts of Ubuntu respect for and compassion- putting a positive reputation to customers.
Strategic advantage	Emanating from acts of Ubuntu respect and compassion- gaining an advantage on customer perceptions towards the organisation
Employee motivation	Emanating from management acts of respect, compassion on employees and employees gaining motivation to work.
Employee gains	Ubuntu values causing employee gains
Personal growth and development	Ubuntu solidarity causing a spirit of support, where the workforce supports each other with development and growth through knowledge sharing.
Reduced stress and employee comfort	Ubuntu solidarity and survival causing the workforce to support each other both inside and outside work- putting less burden on workers and bringing a sense of comfort.

10.2 Theoretical contribution

This study significantly contributes to the area of HRM by providing a culturally contextualised and ethically grounded alternative to prevailing Western-centric models of HRM and theorisation of employee well-being. The Western-centric HRM, including high-performance models, fail to capture the cultural realities of non-Western contexts, like Africa. This study offers a systematically designed HRM framework based on the African Ubuntu five fingers framework. It redefines HRM not merely as a performance management tool but as an ethical and relational practice grounded in mutual respect between employer and employee, as well as compassion, solidarity and survival in workplace relationships. These contributions manifest across five interconnected theoretical domains: (1) Challenging Western informed HRM theorisation (2) enhancing contextual cultural sensitivity in well-being theorisation (3) mutual gains through contextual culture and (4) enhancing the JD-R model with a contextually sensitive perspective. A summary of contributions is included in Table 18 before a thorough analysis of the study's theoretical contributions is given. This summary outlines the main

theoretical ideas from the research, showing how the findings add to, improve, or challenge existing theories, thereby contributing to the field of theory.

Table 18: summary of contributions to research

Contribution Area	Summary
Challenging of western informed HRM theorisation.	Replaces Western individualist HRM paradigms with a relational, Ubuntu-informed model.
Enhancing contextual culture sensitivity in well-being theorisation.	Positions Ubuntu as a foundation for relational well-being - experienced differently based on individual experiences
Mutual gains through contextual culture.	Develops a culturally embedded mutual gains HRM model based on mutual respect.
JD-R model expansion with contextually sensitive perspective.	Enriches the JD-R model with cultural-ethical Ubuntu values as context-specific job resources.

1) Challenging western informed HRM theorisation

A central theoretical contribution lies in the introduction of African epistemologies of Ubuntu (solidarity, survival, respect, compassion) as foundational values within an HRM framework. Thereby challenging the Western-centric HRM discourse premised in Western realities of individualism. Contrary to such models, Ubuntu's emphasis on solidarity (relatedness and collectivism) provides a fundamentally different epistemological foundation for theorising HRM within the workplace. This addresses a critical gap within HRM, particularly the lack of contextual culture within broader HRM frameworks. This retheorisation of HRM is not only a cultural orientation but also a contribution to the broader decolonisation of management thought system particularly HRM. It challenges the presumption that effective HRM must adhere to universalist theories but instead promotes a contextualised and culturally anchored HRM paradigm. This approach corresponds with and enhances demands for theories in HRM and cross-cultural management that accurately represent the lived realities in non-Western contexts (Jackson, 2004; Horwitz & Budhwar, 2015). In this context, Ubuntu serves as a pertinent philosophical and theoretical foundation that establishes non-Western HRM practices as both culturally legitimate and theoretically sound.

Thus, the study contributes to the decolonisation of HRM theory by recognising and positioning the African epistemologies of Ubuntu as valuable sources of supportive and inclusive HRM practices. The field of HRM is primarily characterised by Western-centric

practices. Although these theoretical frameworks are influential, they often overlook the cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts of non-Western societies. Therefore, by introducing Ubuntu as a contextually grounded approach to HRM, this study actively shifts the theoretical lens from a Western perspective to one that emphasises human dignity, mutual care, and communal responsibility. In doing so, this research expands the conceptual foundations of HRM and illustrates the potential for non-Western knowledge systems in influencing HRM practices and theories. It addresses longstanding critiques regarding the excessive reliance on Western models in HRM and presents innovative, culturally resonant approaches to people management that are both ethically grounded and strategically relevant to the context of Africa

2) Enhancing contextual cultural sensitivity in well-being theorisation

Another significant theoretical contribution of this study is the advancement of contextual cultural relevance and sensitivity in the theorisation of well-being within a management framework of HRM. While existing cross-cultural research has acknowledged variations in well-being across cultures, much of the prevailing theorisation remains anchored in Eurocentric constructs that often overlook or marginalise the lived realities and value systems of non-Western societies (Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Joshanloo, 2014). This study makes such a contribution to this gap by positioning Ubuntu not merely as a cultural backdrop, but as an active ethical and relational framework that informs how well-being is perceived, experienced, and enacted by employees in African organisational contexts. Importantly, the study does not regard Ubuntu as a singular or universally applicable value system in the theorisation of well-being within the African organisation context. Rather, it presents a more nuanced theoretical influence and impact of Ubuntu on well-being as a subjectively perceived phenomena, shaping well-being differently due to the varied lived experiences of Ubuntu across workers as individuals. Such variety is theoretically grounded in the five fingers framework, which highlights the different ways in which Ubuntu is enacted. Consequently, as theorised in the conceptual framework, some individuals may find well-being through solidarity and survival, while others might find it through compassion or respect, which may affect their well-being differently including providing purpose, meaning or fulfilment depending on how they see things.

Such a theorisation of well-being within an HRM framework, offers a novel contribution to HRM theory and on employee well-being studies. It presents a culturally rooted yet interpretively adaptable model that questions both universalist well-being paradigms and

notions regarding African broader view of Ubuntu's influence on well-being. Thus, enhancing theoretical precision of Ubuntu's contribution to well-being. Unlike the broader prepositions that have assumed Ubuntu as influencing well-being without particularisation (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Nzimakwe, 2014; Chetty & Price, 2024). This work reframes well-being from a generalised Western perspective to a culturally nuanced and customised understanding based on employees' experiences in Africa. Underscoring well-being as a relational and context-dependent concept, influenced not just by collective cultural norms but also by the distinct lived experiences of individual workers. This expands the theoretical scope of employee well-being research, providing a more inclusive, pluralistic, and contextually placed understanding within various organisational and cultural contexts.

3) Realisation of mutual gains through contextual culture

This, this study provides a novel and substantial contribution to the mutual gains discourse in HRM by demonstrating how Ubuntu-informed HRM practices can harmonise employee well-being with organisational outcomes. This research challenges the traditional distinction in HRM literature between "hard" (performance-oriented) and "soft" (employee-centric) approaches (Kochan & Osterman, 1994; Van De Voorde et al., 2012). The study offers a theoretical grounding that contradicts traditional HRM theories, which typically propose a trade-off between employee well-being and organisational outcomes, suggesting that organisational goal initiatives may compromise employee well-being (Boxall & Macky, 2009; Peccei, 2004). But quite the contrary the study, indicate that integrating five fingers Ubuntu's values into HRM practices yields dual benefits- promoting employee well-being (such as diminished stress, heightened comfort, and personal development) and concurrently improving organisational outcomes (including employee motivation, enhanced employer reputation, and long-term sustainability). These insights address and expand upon critiques in the literature that contend HRM practices aimed at enhancing well-being may not consistently yield positive organisational outcomes and may even be perceived as incompatible with systems focused on organisational results that enhance performance including motivation (Van De Voorde et al., 2012; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). However, this study has introduced a dual-process theoretical framework that integrates both employee well-being and employer outcomes of motivation within a single coherent HRM system influenced by Ubuntu five fingers. Unlike conventional HRM models that typically consider organisational motivation and employee well-being as independent goals within an HRM theory. The Ubuntu-HRM framework

transcends this by demonstrating that both goals can be achieved simultaneously in a mutually reinforcing manner through an integrative and inclusive approach to HRM, unifying well-being and motivation into a single strategic HRM instead of treating them as competing objectives that need to be traded off. Ultimately, this study's theoretical framework redefines the employment relationship not as an economic exchange but as a relational and culturally attuned perspective grounded in ethical responsibility and mutual respect, emphasising that organisational goals and employee well-being are linked and mutually reinforcing, facilitated by culturally relevant values and practices (Chetty & Price, 2024).

4) Enhancing the JD-R model with a contextually sensitive perspective of Ubuntu

Finally, this research contributes to the JD-R model by introducing Ubuntu values as social cultural resources that mitigate stress, promote autonomy, social support, and constructive feedback. Thus, contributing to the discourse within the JD-R model, which traditionally encompasses autonomy, social support, and feedback as resources of well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). However, by demonstrating the distinct operational impacts and influence of Ubuntu-based values across job, task, and organisational levels to foster autonomy, social support, constructive feedback and consequently enhance well-being. This makes relevance to the JD-R framework, enhancing the understanding of the workplace as an ethical and relational setting, thereby enriching theoretical perspectives on workplace resources that foster motivation and well-being. Moreover, the JD-R although being a widely adopted well-being /stress framework- owing to is resources that have influential effects on employee well-being across different occupations (Schaufeli, 2017). The JD-R lacks specificity on the means through which the said resources within it come about. But this research has introduced the social values of Ubuntu as the means through which the same resources in the JD-R can come about. This study presents a model illustrating how Ubuntu values take shape to bring about the resources of autonomy, social support and constructive in the workplace. Thus, providing an Afrocentric contribution to the JD-R model. By providing theoretical evidence of how Ubuntu values initiate resources reflected in the JD-R model, the study offers a theoretically grounded explanation of how Ubuntu operates within a workplace setting to enhance well-being and organisational outcomes.

10.3 Contribution to knowledge and literature

This study enhances the body of knowledge in HRM by highlighting Ubuntu philosophy as a cultural framework for re-evaluating HRM practices within an African context. In particular, it conceptualises Ubuntu not merely as a cultural value but also as a strategic HR tool aimed at improving employee well-being and fostering organisational motivation. The study further contributes to knowledge by illustrating how Ubuntu-aligned HRM practices reduce workplace stress and promote both personal and professional growth among employees. These findings broaden the existing literature-based understanding of HRM by reinforcing its potential role in enhancing motivation, meeting employee needs, fostering resilience, and supporting psychological well-being. By demonstrating that HRM extends beyond merely measuring performance to include caring for people and addressing ethical issues, the study offers a clearer understanding of sustainable and people-focused HRM.

Additionally, this study enhances knowledge and understanding withing employee well-being literature by elaborating how employee well-being is experienced and constructed within the workplace. It shows how employees' cultural beliefs and values affect their well-being based on their experiences and the importance of cultural values to them. This perspective deepens our understanding of employee well-being in HRM by demonstrating the crucial role that contextual culture plays in influencing well-being in everyday workplace situations. The viewpoint contrasts with general employee well-being studies, which often overlook these cultural nuances.

A further contribution to the literature lies in this study's indication of how organisational context, sectoral dynamics, and leadership orientation influence the application and perception of Ubuntu in human resources management (HRM). Existing literature often considers cultural values as static or universally applicable; however, this study demonstrates that the interpretation and operationalisation of Ubuntu in HRM is context-sensitive and varies meaningfully between public and private sector organisations. This nuance enhances our understanding of how organisational histories, cultural legacies, and institutional logic shape the implementation of HRM values in practice. It provides insights into how Ubuntu is filtered by sector-specific leadership norms, resource constraints, and organisational values.

10.4 Practical and policy implications

The findings of this thesis offer valuable practical and policy implication to HRM practitioners, organisations, policymakers, and the broader academic discourse in relation to mutual gains HRM approaches. By advancing the significance of contextual culture within HRM practices, the thesis offers actionable strategies for organisations to enhance both employee well-being and motivation especially in the context of Africa. The thesis makes an implication by informing HRM practitioners on HRM approaches that align employee needs with organisation goals and interests. In this study context Ubuntu has emerged as tool for generating mutual gains, this makes substantial implication in the ongoing heated debate on practical ways to attain mutual gains in the mainstream HRM practices (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020).

Besides that, the literature on Ubuntu as a management concept and theory is condemned to be dogmatic and lacking empirical substantive evidence to support its practical implication within HRM and organisations alike (Swatz & Davies, 1997; Sigger et al., 2010; Molose et al., 2019; Tautsile, 2021). Nonetheless, this study saliences on the tangible implication of Ubuntu in HRM practices at three workplace levels. At organisational level, implementing ethical policies of Ubuntu principles can foster ethical HR policies grounded in integrity, justice, and fairness. For practitioners, this means designing HR practices that prioritise these values, leading to a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture. At the task level, Ubuntu can help in managing people effectively, by encouraging HR practitioners to promote autonomy, provide constructive feedback, and enhance social support among employees. This approach has an implication on HR practice as it can lead to improved employee morale, productivity, and overall organisational effectiveness. Furthermore, at an individual level practice of Ubuntu can enable HRM practitioners to acknowledge diverse beliefs within the workplace, making employees to feel part of the organisation goals and consequently contributing towards employee well-being.

This study also has business implication by demonstrating how Ubuntu respect and compassion towards stakeholders, including customers, enhance loyalty and create a strategic advantage that build a strong business image. In practice organisations can make use of Ubuntu principles to strengthen customer relationships and drive long-term loyalty as part of their business strategy. Overall, this study positions Ubuntu a valuable tool for business strategy enhancing business success by attracting and retaining customers. In doing so, it makes a meaningful

implication to policy makers to include contextual cultural values in their business strategies and practices for sustainability.

10.5 Limitations of study

The study was geographically limited to the country of Zambia, in the Sub-Saharan Africa. None the less, the context of Zambia was still appropriate for the study considering its historical and cultural legacies that reflect Ubuntu (Posner, 2003), thus making relevance to the study. The context of Zambia having national cultural values of Ubuntu including survival, solidarity, respect (Zambia culture, 2003; Cheyeka, 2022) was appropriate for such a study because the study applied these principles of Ubuntu to understand the participants experiences and perceptions of Ubuntu in the workplace. Moreover, context limitation also comes timely and intentional to address the gap in HRM on lack of cultural informed HRM mutual gains frameworks. So having a case in the context of Africa addresses the lack of reflection of cultural realities within HRM in non-Western contexts. Therefore, whilst this can be seen as a limitation it is also an opportunity to address a critical research gap.

Furthermore, despite having in-depth information on the social phenomenon of Ubuntu from a qualitative study. Qualitative study faces a limitation of lack of generalizability (Saunders et al, 2019). However, in this study the concerns of generalizability were addressed through use of data triangulation by collecting data from diverse group settings using multi- case study (public and private sectors) each with origins from different countries including South Africa, Zambia itself and France, this revealed patterns across diverse contexts. Thus, strengthening the application of findings to other contexts, settings or populations. Further methodological triangulation helped to address the concern of lack of generalisability in this study through a multi method qualitative data collection including observations, document analysis and interviews. The use of purposive sampling further enhanced the transferability of findings by ensuring a diverse range of perspectives from participants in HRM, senior management, and lower-level employee positions, thereby capturing experiences across different job profiles. Furthermore, linking the study findings to existing theoretical frameworks, such as the JDR model, facilitated the application of insights to different workplace environments. This theoretical grounding provides a basis for extending the study's conclusions beyond the specific research setting. Moreover, whilst my study may not offer statistical generalizability it offers theoretical generalizability through the Ubuntu-HRM model that can be extended to other similar contexts.

The study also faced logistical challenges due to external disruptions. Data collection was initially planned with four pre-arranged case study organisations in October 2020. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to significant business disruptions, including employee layoffs. As a result, the pre-arranged case study organizations experienced workforce reductions, including the departure of senior management personnel who were crucial in granting research access. Consequently, fresh arrangements had to be made with new organisations. By later 2021, when access was secured, Zambia underwent general elections, resulting in a change of government and subsequent management restructuring. This political transition led to further disruptions, as many of the initial contacts in the targeted organisations retired or were replaced. As a result, fresher arrangements had to be made for fieldwork in early 2022, leading to access to three other case study organisations, one in the public sector and two in the private sector, rather than the initially planned two public sector organisations and two private sector organisations. None the less, despite such limitations and challenges I successfully gained access to the newly arranged organisations and succeeded with my data collection.

During fieldwork in April 2022, additional limitations emerged. Data collection required my physical presence in three different organisations from Monday to Friday over a three-month period, which was physically demanding, time-consuming, and financially burdensome due to transportation costs in different locations. Despite these challenges, data collection was successfully completed.

In addition, data collection was originally planned for five months, however fieldwork had to be reduced to four months due to logistical constraints, including flight cancellations. However, this adjustment did not affect the quality of data collection, as over three months of fieldwork had already been completed, ensuring robustness of data collected.

10.6 Directions for future research

Future research should extend the scope of study to the Western context. This will give a wider perspective on the applicability of Ubuntu in HRM beyond an African setting. Extending this study to a Western context will broaden the understanding on the effectiveness of Ubuntu in fostering mutual gains within HRM in other contexts with contrasting cultural underpinnings. Such an exploration will help determine whether Ubuntu's philosophical principles hold value in workplaces with differing cultural values from its indigenous African origins.

In addition to geographical extension, future research should also methodologically deepen the investigation of Ubuntu's role in shaping employee experiences of well-being. By considering adopting a positivist research philosophy and incorporate quantitative methodologies that can offer measurable and generalisable insights of Ubuntu's impact. Such an approach would allow researchers to assess the statistical relationship between Ubuntu informed HRM practices and well-being outcomes. Positivist research approach grounded in empirical observation and statistical analysis will enable future researchers to test hypothesis on the relationship between Ubuntu informed HRM practices and employee well-being outcomes using quantifiable data. Such a philosophical enquiry or orientation will not only support more systematic investigation but also generate quantifiable and measurable evidence that strengthens theoretical and practical claims of Ubuntu in workplace contexts. Thereby advancing the empirical robustness of the field of inquiry.

Moreover, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches, for example, through mixed methods design would enable a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. While the qualitative and constructivist approach in this study has captured the subjective, in-depth insights of real-life lived experiences. Quantitative data will reveal patterns and correlations across larger populations. Application of mixed methods will provide measurable insights into perceived significance of Ubuntu through HRM, allowing statistical generalisability as well as enhancing theoretical contributions for future studies.

10.4 Conclusion

This research concludes by determining that culturally oriented HRM practices offer means to attaining employer and employee objectives and success, emphasising the notion that ethical, human-centered management practices create mutual benefits. Ubuntu principles of compassion, solidarity, respect, and interconnectedness not only enhance employees' sense of purpose and fulfilment but also contribute to organisational strategic advantage. The findings affirm that organisations embracing Ubuntu can cultivate a supportive, respectful and caring workplace, which fosters employee well-being and organisation performance. By focusing on a contextually sensitive approach to HRM, this study reinforces the significance of Ubuntu in reshaping HRM approaches that are favourable to employees and the employer. However, the study also establishes that the mutual benefits of Ubuntu in HRM are not universal but are contingent on organisational contextual factors. This underscores the significance of organisational contextual alignment with Ubuntu values to maximise its benefits within HRM. Another key conclusion drawn from this study is that Ubuntu transcends mere cultural ideology and functions as a practical strategic HRM tool that is useful at multiple workplace levels including organisational, job/task, and individual levels, thus contributing meaningfully to organisation effectiveness. Ultimately, the study asserts that HRM must transcend the one size fits-all Western models and embrace the richness of diverse cultural perspectives. Given that HRM inherently involves managing individuals from varied cultural backgrounds, it is necessary to contextualise HRM practices to align with the local beliefs, values and lived experiences of employees. By doing so, organisations can achieve mutual gains, as exemplified in this study, ensuring that approaches are not only effective in meeting the aspirations of the organisation but also responsive to those of employees.

Given that the study finds Ubuntu to be most effective in contexts where organisational values are culturally aligned with its principles, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of its universal applicability. Therefore, for African organisations that are multicultural or operate under predominantly Western management models, the findings suggest that Ubuntu's impact on mutual gains may be constrained by cultural misalignment. This echoes insights from cross-cultural management studies, which have shown that HRM practices rooted in relational, or collectivist logics often encounter challenges when applied in settings dominated by individualistic norms, as values and expectations about work relationships differ significantly (Hofstede, 1994)

However, this does not render Ubuntu irrelevant in such settings. Instead, organisations can adopt an adaptive integration approach, selectively embedding Ubuntu values such as respect, compassion, solidarity into existing HRM practices in ways that complement rather than replace established systems.

Furthermore, in multicultural environments, HR should consider fostering intercultural dialogue that surfaces shared values across cultural traditions, identifying points of convergence between Ubuntu and other cultural values already in place. Besides, research on multicultural organisations in Africa suggest that value alignment can be improved when HRM frameworks incorporate both indigenous and global perspectives. For instance, studies conducted in South African firms have revealed that the integration of Ubuntu-based leadership principles with formal performance management systems has fostered greater trust and cooperation among employees (Mangaliso, 2001; Karsten & Illa, 2005). Moreover, training initiatives can help bridge cultural gaps, enabling employees from diverse backgrounds to engage meaningfully with Ubuntu-inspired practices. Rather than pursuing full cultural transformation, African organisations can enhance the relevance of Ubuntu by positioning it as a guiding ethic shaping HRM practices, behaviours and overall workplace climate. Framed in this way Ubuntu becomes a unifying value orientation that complements existing systems while fostering inclusivity. In turn, organisations can create space for Ubuntu values to make tangible contributions to employee well-being and organisational outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1-Interview questions for management.

General Introduction

- Explanation of aim and purpose of research to participants.
- Explanation of participants rights to either consent or not consent to participate in the research.
- Reading and signing of consent form provided by University of Strathclyde (Work, Employment and Organisation department).
- Explanation of interview recording on either audio or written- and that participants have the right to choose whether to be audio recorded or not audio recorded.
- Explanation that this research is for academic purposes and participants remain anonymous.

Part A; Introduction to Ubuntu values

1. Please tell me what you understand by the word Ubuntu, what it means to you and how important it is to your life.
2. Please tell me what you know are the values of Ubuntu and how relevant these values are to your life.
3. In what ways do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values of solidarity, survival, compassion, respect, and dignity to be of importance to your experience and sense of – well-being, such as sense of purpose, meaning and fulfilment please explain why.

Part B; Ubuntu values in working life.

1. Please tell me what the values of Ubuntu mean to you in the workplace setting and how relevant the same values are to you in the workplace.
2. Do you consider Ubuntu values to be important to the organisation? Please explain how?
3. Please tell me the importance and use of Ubuntu values to you in your management practices.
4. As management do you consider yourself to be making sacrifices for the benefit of employees in the workplace, please explain in what way?
5. In what ways are you as management available to support employees in their good and hard times?

6. Do you as management show an understanding for the needs of employees in the organisation? in what way please explain.
7. In what ways does you as management show respect and dignity to employees?
8. In your own opinion as management, do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values to hinder or facilitate the sense of well-being for employees in the workplace, in what way please explain?
9. In what ways do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values of solidarity, survival, compassion, respect and dignity to be of relevance to employee experience and sense of – well-being in the workplace?
10. In what ways do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values of solidarity, survival, compassion, respect, and dignity to be of relevance to employee experience and sense of – fulfilment in the workplace?

Part E; Ubuntu in Organisation HRM policies and practices

1. As an individual in management, do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values of survival, solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity to have a role to play in the construction and shaping of management policies, and practices in your organisation and if so, in what way, what is that role?
2. In what ways is Ubuntu reflected or implemented in your organisation HRM policies and practices?
3. As management, what factors do you consider influencing the reflection or implementation of Ubuntu in management policies and practices?
4. In what ways do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values to be of importance to HRM practices of your organisation?
5. As management what do you consider as the benefits of using Ubuntu in HRM practices to the employer on policies, job /task design?

Conclusion/ Closing remarks

- Thank you for participating in the interview, do you have any questions or comments you would like to add on?
- Please be rest assured that this feedback from you remains anonymous, data will be handled with the highest level of confidentiality. As I adhere to research ethics of the University of Strathclyde.

Appendix 2- Interview questions for employees

General Introduction

- Explanation of aim and purpose of research to participants.
- Explanation of participants rights to either consent or not consent to participate in the research.
- Reading and signing of consent form provided by University of Strathclyde (Work, Employment and Organisation department).
- Explanation of interview recording on either audio- and that participants have the right to choose whether to be audio recorded or not audio recorded.
- Explanation that this research is for academic purposes and participants remain anonymous.

Part A; Introduction to Ubuntu values

4. Please tell me what you understand by the word Ubuntu, what it means to you and how important it is to your life.
5. Please tell me what you know are the values of Ubuntu and how relevant these values are to your life.
6. In what ways do you consider the Ubuntu cultural values of solidarity, survival, compassion, respect, and dignity to be of importance to your experience and sense of – well-being , such as sense of purpose, meaning and fulfilment please explain why.

Part B; Ubuntu values in working life and well-being .

1. Please tell me what the values of Ubuntu mean to you in the workplace setting and how relevant the same values are to your well-being in the workplace.
2. Do you and other employees in the workplace make sacrifices for the benefit of others? in what ways please can you tell me how you have encountered this?
3. Do you rely on co-workers for support on work-related and non-work-related things? in what way please explain how and in what situations?
4. Does your organisation show care for the well-being of others? Please explain in what way
5. Does your organisation show understanding in the challenges, problems or hardships of employees and is there willingness to help out? Please explain in what way and how
6. Does your organisation show empathy to you and others in the workplace? Please explain in what way and how?

7. Does your organisation have a spirit of oneness or togetherness? Please explain how this is experienced in the organisation activities and or practices.
8. Does your organisation show value for the worth of others or its employees? Please explain how and in what ways.
9. Does your organisation treat you with respect and dignity? In what way please explain
10. Does your organisation listen and value the voice of its employees? Please explain how and in what ways.
11. In your own opinion, do you feel that that the organisation respects your personal beliefs? Please explain how.
12. In your own opinion do you consider Ubuntu values to hinder or facilitate your sense of happiness and well-being in the workplace, in what ways please explain?

Part C: HRM

1. Which of the Ubuntu cultural values that is survival, compassion, solidarity, respect, and dignity do you consider to be reflected in the HRM practices or policies of your organisation? In what way, please explain.
2. Based on your experience, how is the concept of Ubuntu usually applied in HRM within your workplace?
3. Based on your experience and understanding, please tell me the usefulness and importance of Ubuntu to HRM and how these impacts on your well-being as an individual at work?
4. As an employee what benefits do you experience as an individual from use of Ubuntu in management practices such as HRM?

Conclusion/ Closing remarks

- Thank you for participating in the interview, do you have any questions or comments you would like to add on?
- Please be rest assured that this feedback from you remains anonymous, data will be handled with the highest level of confidentiality. As I adhere to research ethics of the University of Strathclyde.

Appendix 3 -Participant demographic information

1. What is your gender?

Female	Male

2. What is your marital status?

Single	Married	Civil partnership	Divorced	Widowed

3. What is your age group?

18 to 20yrs	21 to 30 yrs	31 to 40yrs	41 to 50 yrs	51 to 61 yrs	61 and above

4. Please indicate your ethnicity

Black- African/American	
White-Caucasian	
Asian/pacific islander	
Native American/American Indian	
Hispanic Latino	

5. What is your highest educational qualification?

High school certificate	Certificate	Diploma	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctorate/PhD

6. What type of organisation do you work for?

Private sector	Public sector

7. How long have you worked for this organisation?

Less than 1 yr.	1 to 2 yrs	3 to 5ys	6 to 10 yrs	11 and above years

8. What is your position at your workplace?

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Appendix 4- Respondents codes by case organisation

Public Org 1 (Respondent codes- their position, gender, and total numbers)	
M1R1	Provincial Director Male *1
M2R2	HR Director -Female* 1
M3R3	HR Manager -Male *1
H1R4, H2R5, H3R6, H4R7	HR Officers -Males *4
H5R8, H6R9, H7R10	HR Officers- Females* 3
H8R11, H9R12	HR Clerks - Males*2
H10R13, H11R14	HR Clerks -female*2
A1R15,	Administrative officer - Female*1
A2R16, A3R17, A4R18	IT Officers -Males*3
A5R19,	District operation officer -Male*1
A6R20	District operations officer -female*1
A7R21, A8R22	Administrative Officers -Males*2
E1R23	Provincial secretary -Female*1
E2R24	Receptionist -Female*1
E5R27, E4R26, E3R25	Cleaners -Females*3
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Private org 1 (Respondent codes- their positions, gender, and total numbers)	
M4R29	CEO - Male*1
M5R30	HR Manager-Female*1
M6R31	Debt collections manager- Male *1
H13R32, H14R33, H15R34, H16R35	HR Officers *Males 4
A9R36,	Administrative Officer -Female*1
E7R37	Receptionist -Female*1
E8R38	Secretary to CEO*Female*1
E9R39, E10R40	Administrative clerk -Male *2
E11R41, E12R42	Cleaner -Female*2
E13R43	Accounts clerk - Male *1
	15

Private Org 2 (Respondent codes-their positions, gender and total numbers)	
M7R44	Managing Director *Male*1
M8R45	HR manager -Female*1
A10R46	Branch Secretary-Female*1
A11R47, A12R 48, A13R49	Insurance officer -Male*3
E14R50	Receptionist-Female *1

E14R51	Cleaner Male*1
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